

Operant Subjectivity

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Rationality vs. Rationale Among Trump Voters in 2016: What Were They Thinking?

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Abstract: Rational-choice models, imported from economics, represent the most persistent theoretical influence affecting research on voting behavior in an American context. A theory posited by Anthony Downs (1957) made the claim that voters act in their own economic self-interest. Indeed, the specter of an electorate inclined to vote in a manner sabotaging its economic self-interest has recently received renewed interest as a result of Donald Trump's unexpected victory over Hillary Clinton in 2016. Though Clinton compiled nearly three million more popular votes nationwide than Trump, the latter won the electoral-college vote thanks to the defection of white working-class voters, a demographic normally considered a reliable affiliate of the Democratic party, in the key states from Pennsylvania westward through Michigan and Wisconsin; in fact, estimates claim as many as eight million members of this bloc switched to Trump after having voted in 2012 for Barack Obama. In this research, we examine Trump voters themselves, drawing upon a concourse supplied principally by the voters responding to an invitation to share their reasoning with *The Washington Post*. An investigation of 30 Trump voters revealed four orientations underlying the Trump vote: (1) Traditional Republicans; (2) Drain the Swamps; (3) Art of the Dealers; and (4) Never-Hillary Culture Warriors/Fix the System. A concluding discussion offers an alternative to Downsian conceptions of electoral choice, featuring "deep-storied, bounded-rationality subjectivity" brought to light by UC-Berkeley sociologist Arlie Hochschild and University of Pennsylvania political scientist Diana Mutz, among others.

Keywords: bounded rationality, Q methodology, rational voting, Trump voters

Introduction

The porous boundaries between political science as a scholarly discipline and formally different academic fields are perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the study of electoral behavior. Among the many influences in this regard, rational-choice models imported from economics represent the most persistent theoretical influence affecting research on voting behavior in an American context. The intellectual roots of virtually all such models can be traced to economist Anthony Downs (1957), whose now-60-year-old classic, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, begins with the assertion,

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considered axiomatic to the volume's core argument, that "citizens act rationally in politics" (p. 14). Accordingly, a rational voter "approaches every situation with one eye on the gains to be had, the other eye on costs, a delicate ability to balance them and a strong desire to follow wherever rationality leads him" (pp. 7-8). The precise calculus whereby Downs's rational citizen is alleged to operate in the electoral field is well captured by Brown's (1994) brief explication:

. . . In determining which party to vote for, rational political man compares the utilities (benefits) he expects from parties A and B, the difference being his expected party differential: $E[U_a(t+1)] - E[U_b(t+1)]$, where $E(U_a)$ and $E(U_b)$ are the expected utilities of the incumbent and opposition parties, respectively, and $t+1$ specifies the period following the next election (Downs, 1957, pp. 38-39). Crucial to the voter's calculations is the current party differential: $U_a(t) - E[U_b(t)]$, i.e., the difference between the gains actually received in period t (up to election day) from the party in power compared to the gains expected had party B been in power during the same period (p. 40). Among other ways, party A's performance judged against the voter's conception of an ideal government: $U_i(t) / U_a(t)$ (p. 43). Downs expresses these and other of his ideas as ratios, but acknowledges that "any other mathematical measure which allows relative comparisons can be substituted without changing the argument" (p. 43n). (Brown, 1994, p. 32)

While Brown views Downs's theory as "paradigmatic of objective studies" (p. 32), he is quick to point out that this approach does not preclude a role for subjectivity. Indeed, the very notion of *utility* constitutes "a measure of benefits *in a citizen's mind* which he uses to decide among alternative courses of action" (Downs, p. 36; cited by Brown, p. 33, emphasis added). Research based on Downs's portrait of voters as utility maximizers, based primarily on large-sample survey data, has nonetheless proceeded on the presumption that a common objective surrogate (e.g., annual disposable income, tax liability and the like) can serve as a suitable metric for large aggregates of individual voters. Results from such studies have invariably fallen short of confirming expectations drawn from Downs's theorizing. To be sure, income and class have been shown to bear significant relationships to partisan preference and voting generally in American elections (Bartels, 2016). However reliable, though, this finding is, to an appreciable degree, an artifact — that is, a statistical function of large sample sizes that are employed in most voting studies. And when researchers introduce subjectivity into the equation by asking respondents whether economic growth in the previous year was valued more for the increase in one's own financial status (the so-called "pocketbook" model) or for the aggregate macroeconomic growth (the "sociotropic" model), the latter consistently outperforms the former, thus leaving the impression that voters may not be the self-serving utility maximizers one would expect from Downs's theory (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1979). Finally, a series of voting studies by Abramson, Aldrich and Rohde (2011) and Abramson, Aldrich, Gomez and Rohde (2015), in which voters are asked to place candidates on the same policy-issue scales on which they record their own preferences, do little to salvage the notion that voters are driven principally in their electoral choices by policy considerations, casting further doubt on their capacities as rational utility maximizers.

Such findings come as no great surprise to Downs's critics, chief among whom is the late Herbert Simon (1985, 1995). Simon has challenged the viability of Downs's neoclassical economic conceptualization and is perhaps most well-known for advancing

the alternative formulation of “bounded rationality” as more compatible with contemporary cognitive psychology and the way in which the mind actually works. Moreover, as Brown (1994) notes, Simon questioned the wisdom of conducting research on the complexities of individual decision-making with recourse to large numbers of cases. Proceeding in this fashion, according to Simon (1985), inevitably privileges the analyst’s use of surrogates for subjectivity that is best revealed directly when researchers turn their attention to the study of “individual actors at the microscopic face-to-face level of the interview and the poll” (p. 301). When the researcher is able to glean “where the frame of reference for the actor’s thinking comes from – and how it is evoked” (p. 302), he or she should not be surprised by the degree to which passion and even pathology intervene to render models of humans as machine-like utility-maximizers utterly incredible.

For his part, Brown examines the theoretical issues at hand by using a Q sample of policy measures spanning a variety of issues rank ordered in terms of preference by a single individual according to some two dozen conditions of instruction. The latter ranged from simulations of Downsian prescriptions (e.g., from those at the positive end of the opinion continuum from which, if implemented, would increase personal gains to those which would impose maximum costs) to partisan patterns (those most like a Democrat or a Republican would rank the policies) to more idealized conditions deriving from the imagined preferences of a justice-seeking democratic citizen. Duly factored, this participant’s data operantly underscored the nature of her frames of reference and the minimal role played by the Downsian notions of rational, utility maximizing in navigating the world of competing policy preferences. At a minimum, this research documents the deeply ambiguous, robustly subjective character of expected utility. As such, Brown’s analysis raises the distinct possibility that voters generally may well be judging candidates as able to deliver on promises to maximize utility in certain citizens’ minds that, when examined from an alternative frame of reference, is seen as embodying “bounded rationality” at best and even unmitigated irrationality at worst. This, in fact, is close to the situation in which we find ourselves in the wake of Donald Trump’s unexpected electoral-college victory in the 2016 presidential election. Indeed, the Trump election has inspired considerable conjecture to the effect that critical portions of the 2016 electorate in fact cast ballots that sabotaged their economic self-interest.

Despite the fact that Democrat Hillary Clinton compiled nearly three million more popular votes nationwide than Trump, the latter won the electoral-college vote thanks to the defection of white working-class voters, a demographic normally considered a reliable affiliate of the Democratic party, in the key states from Pennsylvania westward through Michigan and Wisconsin. In fact, eight million members of this bloc are estimated to have switched to Trump after having voted in 2012 for Barack Obama (Skelley, 2017). In this research, we examine Trump voters themselves, drawing upon a concourse supplied principally by the voters responding to an invitation to share their reasoning with *The Washington Post*.

Context, Concourse and Q-sample Design

A voter’s choice for a candidate is a subjective decision reflecting partisan, ideological, religious and other factors aside from – or alongside – considerations of expected personal costs and benefits. Curiosity about such complexities, their interaction and ultimate effect on the vote is elevated in the wake of Donald Trump’s unexpected victory in 2016. Reflecting this state of affairs, *The Washington Post* (2016) invited

Trump voters among its readership to record in open-ended form the nature of their reasoning in choosing to vote for Trump. The hundreds of comments, published in the *Post* in installments, thus readily assume the collective, literal character of a concourse (Stephenson, 1978) insofar as this research is concerned. A sense of the diverse subjectivity at issue can be gleaned from a handful of the statements shared by Trump voters responding to the *Post*'s invitation:

So, in the end, I voted for the economy, against Obamacare and against a corrupt government, just as I was planning to for [Gary] Johnson. But I also voted for the people, because Trump was the clear choice of the silent majority I eventually became a part of.

I voted for Donald Trump because he will deport illegal immigrants more than Clinton. As a legal immigrant who had to wait 13 years for an immigration visa approval and pass two health screens and an English language proficiency exam prior to entering the United States, I consider it an insult to cater to criminals who disobeyed immigration laws and cut in front of all law-abiding immigration applicants waiting patiently to be approved.

I am white, I am a woman, I am pro-choice, I am educated, and I voted for Donald Trump. The government needs to be run like a corporation, simple as that. Of course humanitarian issues are of concern to me, as they are to every American. His degrading language toward women bothers me, and his views on global warming are a problem for me. I do not 100 percent love Trump, but I am convinced he can lead this nation. I was part of the silent majority.

My vote was my only way to say: I am here and I count. I wish President-elect Trump all the best and have hope that Washington will, in the next four years, actually work for all Americans.

I voted for Donald Trump because the media was so incredibly biased. They were unhinged in their obvious role as the Clinton campaign propaganda machine. The collusion was just too much.

I voted for Donald Trump based on my Christian values. I didn't know a lot about Trump but I knew too much about the Clintons. This country needs to get back on track with God, to give God praise, honor and glory each and every passing day.

Taking into account theoretical matters involved, this concourse was sampled with the application of a heuristic design incorporating salient features of Downs's notion of rationality in concert with Simon's bounded rationality. The primary vehicle for doing so was Murray Edelman's (1967) classic, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, in which the distinction is drawn between two fundamental functional modes by which ordinary citizens apprehend and respond to political stimuli. The first such mode, according to Edelman, bears similarity to Downsian rationality and is termed *instrumental*. In this instance, the individual voter pays close attention to the policy positions of candidates and, assuming adequate information and the candidate's capacity and likelihood of delivering on policy promises, votes for that candidate under whose policies the voter

would see either a clear reduction in personal costs (e.g., tax rates) and/or an increase in benefits (e.g., added disposable income).

The alternative orientation toward political life, though not an exact analogue to bounded rationality, is what Edelman terms the *expressive* mode. In this case, a voter's electoral choice is less governed by considerations of, "What can you do for me materially?" than by, "What kind of person am I if I vote for candidate X instead of Y?" As Brown (1994) shows, expressive voting need not run counter to one's instrumental self-interest; indeed, the example from his analysis reveals behavior that can be considered utility-maximizing – by being driven by notions of Mrs. X's sense of justice – at the same time that it falls short of minimizing material costs while maximizing pecuniary benefits. Subjectivity is implicated in both instrumental and expressive orientations toward politics; however, in the latter case it is more likely to be affected by what Hochschild (2016) refers to as "deep stories" – that is, constellations of subjectivity that often create the impression that voters under their influence consistently vote in ways that subvert rational self-interests.

Translating such possibilities into a suitable heuristic for sampling from the Trump voter concourse, we employed the following 2 X 3 factorial design:

- I: Primary Orientation: (a) instrumental, (b) expressive
- II: Topical Focus: (c) policy, (d) symbolic pro-Trump, (e) symbolic anti-Clinton

The final 40-item Q sample fits each of the six theoretical categories with either six or seven items and recognizes that the preliminary categorization of items cannot – and in no way is intended to – obviate ambiguity or argument about whether item X is exclusively an instrumental-policy (ac) statement as opposed to an expressive-pro-Trump (bd) rationale only. The heuristic for sampling statements, it bears emphasis, is not being "tested" here. Rather, its utility lies solely in the confidence it engenders that the Q sample administered to Trump voters in the wake of the 2016 election adequately represents the kind of thinking that led them to cast their vote for the Republican standard bearer. Finally, in typical Q-sort fashion – in an opinion continuum running from +5 (most agree) to -5 (least agree) – 30 Trump voters from across the country registered their opinions with these items. Q sorts were analyzed using PQMethod.

Results

The 40-item Q-sample was administered to 30 self-identified Trump voters (18 men and 12 women), ranging in age from 18-year-old high school students to a 72-year-old retired college professor. The sorters had various educational levels (from in high school to Ph.D.), and those who were currently employed held positions as varied as teacher, lawyer, railroad worker, nurse, business manager, missionary educator and stay-at-home mom. Ideologically, the sorters ran the gamut from moderate to very conservative, and while most self-identified as Republican, many indicated they were Independents. Finally, the p-set had some geographical diversity, as sorters came from the following states: Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas. Data were analyzed using principal components analysis and Varimax rotation via PQMethod 2.35 (Atkinson & Schmolck, 2014); four factors were selected for examination. The four-factor solution's adequacy is demonstrated by the usual criteria: 26 of the 30 sorters were "pure loaders" on one of the four factors, while only three sorters had mixed loadings, and one sorter did not

load significantly on any of the four factors. Table 1 shows the factor loadings and demographic data for the Trump study sorters.

TABLE 1. Factor Loadings and Demographic Information for Each Participant

Sex	Age	ST	Job	Education	Party	Ideology	A	B	C	D
M	41	PA	Pharmaceuticals	Ph.D.	GOP	Conserv	.73X	.09	.23	-.10
F	18	IA	Student	In High Sc	GOP	Conserv	.43X	-.05	-.21	.13
F	33	AL		B.A.	GOP	Conserv	.59X	.26	.36	.28
M	60	MO	Missionary Edu	Ph.D.	Ind		.41X	-.01	.28	.29
F	40	AL	Customer Service	High Sch	GOP	Moderate	.48X	.13	.28	.21
F	69	CO	Retired Business	High Sch	Strng GOP	Very Cons	.77X	.01	.05	.08
F	47	NV	Stay Home Mom	B.A.	Strng GOP	Very Cons	.37	.46X	.26	.31
F	20	PA	Student	Some Coll	Strng GOP	Very Cons	-.15	.61X	.25	.20
F	18	IA	Student	In High Sch	GOP	Moderate	.30	.58X	.02	-.02
M	20	IA	Student/ Clerical	Some Coll	Ind	Conserv	.36	.44X	-.04	.26
M	19	PA	Student	Some Coll	GOP	Moderate	.00	.50X	.40	.37
M	18	IA	Student	In High Sch	GOP	Moderate	-.31	.74X	.18	-.04
M	63	AL		B.A.	GOP	Conserv	.38	.70X	.07	.09
F	20	PA	Student	Some Coll	Strng GOP	Very Cons	.22	.47X	.22	-.04
M	33	FL	Railroader	High Sch	GOP	Conserv	.04	.50X	-.01	.23
M	39	OK	College Instructor	M.Ed.	Ind		-.12	.05	.72X	-.02
M	62	AL		Some Coll			.24	.34	.52X	.09
M	54	SC	Management	M.B.A.	Ind	Conserv	.35	.34	.61X	.27
M	48	FL	Management	M.B.A.	Strng GOP	Conserv	.24	.07	.79X	-.13
F	48	AL	Customer Service	Some Coll	Ind	Moderate	-.01	.09	.86X	.11
M	20	OH	Student	Some Coll	Ind	Conserv	.11	.29	.13	.74X
M	19	PA	Student	Some Coll	Strng GOP	Very Cons	.40	.33	-.15	.53X
F	44	FL	Nurse	M.S.N.	Ind	Moderate	.16	.18	.32	-.68X
M	33	IA	Teacher	B.A.	Tea Party	Very Cons	.22	.38	.28	.51X
M	66	OH	Educator	M.B.A.	GOP	Conserv	.04	.04	.35	.77X
F	19	IA	Student	In High Sch	GOP	Very Cons	-.23	.40	.06	.49X
M	21	IA	Student	Some Coll	Libertarian	Libertarian	.29	-.34	.17	.03
M	72	PA	Retired Prof	Ph.D.	Strng GOP	Conserv	.51	.10	-.05	.50
M	24	IA	Public Affairs	B.A.	GOP	Moderate	.51	.14	.47	-.05
M	44	TX	Lawyer	J.D.	GOP	Conserv	.27	-.08	.60	.44

Note: Factor loadings in red are statistically significant “pure” loaders at the .01 level

Factor A: Traditional Republicans

Factor A revolves around themes consistent with a Republican establishment view focused on putting another conservative on the Supreme Court (after Senate Republicans denied President Obama the opportunity to replace the deceased Justice Antonin Scalia) as well as expressing hope that Trump’s candidacy will send a message to political elites. Factor A thought that Trump’s central campaign message of “Make America Great Again” was a clever slogan to use against an incumbent Democratic Party. Although Factor A didn’t expect Trump to actually win the election, they were confident that he was up to the job and were hopeful that he could deliver on job growth. Furthermore, Factor A believed that their vote for Trump was a vehicle to let the system know that voters like them were out there and needed to be heard. Below are the statements that received the highest scores (+5 and +4) in Factor A:

8. My primary consideration was the vacancy on the Supreme Court. If people want to permit gay marriage or abortion for any reason, then make both legal through the legislature, not via an unelected oligarchy rewriting the Constitution. (+5)

38. I didn't vote for Trump based on the issues, though I am hopeful he can deliver on jobs. I voted for Trump to send a strong message: our system is – and has been – broken and it can't be fixed by just tweaking a little here and there. (+5)

35. Trump's slogan – “Make America Great Again” – put Democrats in a tough position. They found themselves insisting that America was already great, but voters struggling to make ends meet for decades saw that for what it was: a case based on lowered standards. (+4)

34. I voted for Donald Trump for many reasons, and I'm confident he's up to the job. But, in all honesty, I didn't really think he'd win. (+4)

12. My vote was the only way to say: I am here, and I count. (+4)

Turning to the statements Factor A most disagreed with, it is noteworthy how little Trump's campaign issues meant to these voters. Factor A denies that Trump's plan to build a wall on the nation's southern border and/or his promises to deport millions of illegal immigrants were motivating factors in their decision to vote for the New York businessman. Factor A voters were also unmoved by Director Comey's decision, in late October 2016, to re-open the Clinton email investigation. Their vote for Trump was not a protest against the “biased” media, and they were uncomfortable by the candidate's use of Twitter to lash out against his political opponents. Below are the statements Factor A most disagreed with:

40. The critical issue for me was The Wall. It signified the threat this country is under from foreign threats, whether they are neighbors or ISIS terrorists. It's an important symbol of Trump's promise to put “America First.” (-5)

31. I was undecided until the very end of the campaign. But when FBI Director Comey stated that Anthony Weiner's computer had possibly incriminating evidence bearing on Hillary's email fiasco, I knew I couldn't tolerate four more years of Clinton scandal stories. (-5)

1. I voted for Trump because the media was so biased. (-4)

2. I voted for Trump because he will deport illegal immigrants. It boils my blood to witness undocumented aliens gaming the system. (-4)

24. It doesn't bother me that Trump takes to Twitter to battle his detractors in public. You can't be a real leader at this level unless you can throw – as well as take – a punch. He's a self-described “counter-puncher” and that proves he has a spine. (-4)

Factor A should be familiar to those who followed the 2016 presidential campaign. These are Republican voters who were uncomfortable with Trump on some levels, but were looking for a return to power after the Obama years. They were confident that Trump could do the job and were hopeful that party leaders would take note that “business as usual” had not been successful. The vacancy on the Supreme Court was a prime motivating factor for these voters. This factor seems to have a Hugh Hewitt

quality to it. Hewitt, the conservative radio host, was not a Trump supporter early on, but was also never in the “Never Trump” camp. After the nomination, he was fully aboard the Trump train as he saw the election in binary terms and wanted a Republican to appoint Scalia’s successor.

Factor B: Drain the Swampers

Factor B voters were similarly motivated by the prospect of filling the vacancy on the Supreme Court. However, they were also supportive of Trump because of the issue of job loss and how the candidate tied that to bad trade deals and undocumented immigration. Trump’s outsider status was viewed positively by Factor B, as they believed that only someone outside the system can “clean the swamp” of politicians who have been unresponsive to the needs of the public. They also reject what they believe is the form of identity politics as practiced by the Democrats. Below are the statements Factor B most agreed with (+5, +4):

6. Three words capture the basis of my vote: Jobs, jobs, jobs. Trump is a better bet in delivering on jobs lost to bad trade deals and undocumented workers willing to work for low wages. (+5)

8. My primary consideration was the vacancy on the Supreme Court. If people want to permit gay marriage or abortion for any reason, then make both legal through the legislature, not via an unelected oligarchy rewriting the Constitution. (+5)

14. The Democrats seem to fall over themselves pandering to elements of their base – gays, African-Americans, Latinos – while forgetting the blue-collar working families that formed the core of the original New Deal coalition. (+4)

21. In my opinion, only someone like Trump, with no prior political experience, can “clean the swamp” of the do-nothing politicians who waste our tax dollars while pretending to care about the American people. (+4)

27. I voted for Trump because I am tired of watching politicians screw up this country. (+4)

Factor B voters would not have voted for Sanders instead of Clinton, and the Comey letter didn’t motivate them to vote against Clinton, as that was likely never an option for them. They did believe that Trump would bring needed change to Washington, D.C. and had little doubt that he was the right man for the job. Despite wanting Trump to change the system, “drain the swamp” and tackle issues that had long been ignored, Factor B voters did not see their vote for Trump as signaling that folks like them were out there and needed to be recognized. The following are statements Factor B most disagreed with (-5, -4):

15. My vote may have been different had Bernie Sanders been the Democratic nominee instead of Hillary. (-5)

31. I was undecided until the very end of the campaign. But when FBI Director Comey stated that Anthony Weiner’s computer had possibly incriminating evidence bearing on Hillary’s email fiasco, I knew I couldn’t tolerate four more years of Clinton scandal stories. (-5)

17. I am not sure a Trump presidency will deliver the right type of change, but I am hoping that the politicians who have failed time and time again to deliver on empty promises got the message. (-4)

20. Any reservations I might have had about Trump were put to rest when he said he did not support privatizing Social Security or Medicare. (-4)

12. My vote was the only way to say: I am here, and I count. (-4)

Factor C: Art of the Dealers

Factor C voters responded to Trump's credentials as a successful businessman. They believed Trump would bring his business savvy to the White House and that the country would be the better for it. Factor C believes government should be run like a business and that Trump's business experience would lead to an expanding economy. Indeed, they criticize "politicians" for having "screwed up the country." Factor C voters see the Democrats as wrapped up in identity politics and ignoring economic issues, even those felt most acutely by the working class. Additionally, they were unconcerned by Trump's behavior during the campaign, suggesting that "toughness" might be necessary to right the ship. Below are the statements Factor C most agreed with (+5 and +4):

3. The government needs to be run like a business. The basic reason for my vote is as simple as that. (+5)

32. Trump knows from his own business experience how high tax rates discourage private investment and risk-taking – strategies that spur growth and produce high-paying jobs – and this is good news for keeping American businesses from relocating elsewhere. (+5)

27. I voted for Trump because I am tired of watching politicians screw up this country. (+4)

28. I look at my vote as if I were hiring someone to run the federal government. I don't need to be friends with my president; in fact, I don't care if he is a nasty SOB if he's a competent executive. I need him or her to solve our problems and make a stronger and greater United States. (+4)

14. The Democrats seem to fall over themselves pandering to elements of their base – gays, African-Americans, Latinos – while forgetting the blue-collar working families that formed the core of the original New Deal coalition. (+4)

In examining the statements Factor C most disagreed with, it is clear that the Clinton scandal did not serve as motivation for Factor C to vote for Trump. Trump's promise made during the televised debates to appoint a special prosecutor to look into Clinton's email troubles was not important to Factor C voters, nor was the Comey letter. These voters would not have supported Bernie Sanders had he been the Democratic Party nominee, and Trump's promise to deport millions of illegal immigrants also provoked little support. Factor C also didn't consider their vote for Trump a means to convey a message that they "count" in our political system. Below are the statements Factor C most disagreed with (-5 and -4):

15. My vote may have been different had Bernie Sanders been the Democratic nominee instead of Hillary. (-5)

39. My vote for Trump was strongly influenced by his promise to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate Clinton's use of a private server for her emails as Secretary of State. It was an important reminder that no one is above the law, and I'm very disappointed that he has decided not to keep this promise. (-5)

2. I voted for Trump because he will deport illegal immigrants. It boils my blood to witness undocumented aliens gaming the system. (-4)

31. I was undecided until the very end of the campaign. But when FBI Director Comey stated that Anthony Weiner's computer had possibly incriminating evidence bearing on Hillary's email fiasco, I knew I couldn't tolerate four more years of Clinton scandal stories. (-4)

12. My vote was the only way to say: I am here, and I count. (-4)

Factor C saw the election through an economic prism and believed it was high time that we had a businessman in the Oval Office. They saw the billionaire real-estate magnate as someone who could bring those business skills to bear on government. This view is consistent with a corporate Republican view and is largely macroeconomic in nature. The disagreement with statement #12 likely lies in the fact that these voters don't feel alienated from the political system on a personal level but think a better relationship between business and government would strengthen the economy.

Factor D: Never-Hillary Culture Warriors/Fix the System

Factor D is bipolar, defined at one end (Factor D+) by sorters who expressed hostility toward the idea of a Hillary Clinton presidency, as well as a strain of conservative cultural values. These voters blamed Clinton for her response to the Benghazi attack, her email scandal and her description of some of Trump's supporters as "deplorables." They saw Trump as better embodying their Christian values than Clinton. Factor D+ decried being labeled a redneck or bigot and believed that a Trump presidency would create a political climate that would be better for those who held their views. Below are the statements Factor D+ most agreed with (+5 and +4):

25. Donald Trump got my vote because of my Christian values. For me and other Americans of faith, the Clintons were simply unacceptable based on their policies and their long history of personal misconduct. (+5)

5. I am not a deplorable redneck, and I resented Hillary's out-of-touch insinuation that anyone who preferred Trump was a jerk. Truth is, if any candidate was a jerk, it was Mrs. Clinton! (+5)

26. I could never get past the email scandal and Benghazi with Hillary Clinton. That turned me off for good. My choice then became between not voting and casting a ballot for Trump. (+4)

9. I voted against Hillary Clinton, and for Donald Trump, because Clinton

compromised our national security by putting classified information on a personal email account and allowed people without security clearances to access that information. (+4)

30. Is it now okay to say “All lives matter” without being called a bigot by the PC police? It’s a helluva lot safer (and saner) now than it was before the election! (+4)

Factor D+ voters reject the notion that their vote was to send a message to the political system. They did not cast ballots for Trump on Social Security or Medicare, but do claim to have voted for Trump based on “the issues.” Factor D+ are not in the mood to compromise and are not weary of the bickering between the parties. And, despite their antipathy to Hillary Clinton, they did not see Bernie Sanders as an acceptable alternative. Below are the statements most disagreed with (-5 and -4) by Factor D+ voters:

12. My vote was the only way to say: I am here, and I count. (-5)

15. My vote may have been different had Bernie Sanders been the Democratic nominee instead of Hillary. (-5)

20. Any reservations I might have had about Trump were put to rest when he said he did not support privatizing Social Security or Medicare. (-4)

13. Like others in the middle politically, I am weary of all the partisan bickering. I voted for Trump because he alone of the candidates appears willing and able to compromise. (-4)

38. I didn’t vote for Trump based on the issues, though I am hopeful he can deliver on jobs. I voted for Trump to send a strong message: our system is – and has been – broken and it can’t be fixed by just tweaking a little here and there. (-4)

The one sorter that defines factor D- is tired of the party polarization in Washington, D.C. She hoped that Trump, as a political novice and outsider, could break through that interparty conflict. She was reassured when Trump promised not to cut Social Security or Medicare benefits, and though she rejected most of the strident anti-Clinton statements, she agreed that had Sanders been the nominee, she might well have voted for him rather than Trump. It is clear that her support of Trump was premised on sending a loud message to the political establishment to start working together on behalf of people like her.

Consensus Statements

An examination of consensus statements among the factors, as well as a few distinguishing statements, helps to clarify the subjective structure of the various viewpoints. All of the factors rejected strongly the notion that had Bernie Sanders been the Democratic nominee, they would have supported him over Trump. They also rejected that the Comey letter was influential in their decision to reject Clinton’s candidacy – no doubt as she was never seen as a viable option for these voters. These voters either had no “reservations” about Trump as a potential president or were not motivated by his promise to not cut Social Security or Medicare benefits. All four factors

endorsed the idea that the Democrats were not serving working-class voters by focusing on identity politics and saw Trump as the one candidate who could break through the “political correctness garbage.” Below are the consensus statements:

15. My vote may have been different had Bernie Sanders been the Democratic nominee instead of Hillary. (-3, -5, -5, -5)

20. Any reservations I may have had about Trump were put to rest when he said he did not support privatizing Social Security or Medicare. (-3, -4, -2, -3)

31. I was undecided until the very end of the campaign. But when FBI Director Comey stated that Anthony Weiner’s computer had possibly incriminating evidence bearing on Hillary’s email fiasco, I knew I couldn’t tolerate four more years of Clinton scandal stories. (-5, -5, -4, -2)

6. It took Trump to break through all this PC-garbage keeping people from saying what they felt. Finally, we get a president who won’t pander like almost all politicians do. (+1, +3, +2, +2)

14. The Democrats seem to fall over themselves pandering to elements of their base – gays, African-Americans, Latinos – while forgetting the blue-collar working families that formed the core of the original New Deal coalition. (+1, +4, +4, +3)

To one degree or another, all four factors saw Trump as stronger on the economy and good for jobs. He was seen as the candidate who could reverse the trend toward “socialism,” in their view. They all rejected the notion that, now that Republicans control all the levers of national government, we can hold them accountable for governing – perhaps it is not surprising that they would be wary of setting up their party for potential failure if expectations are not met.

6. Three words capture the basis of my vote: Jobs, jobs, jobs. Trump is a better bet on delivering on jobs lost to bad trade deals and undocumented workers willing to work for low wages. (+2, +1, +5, +3)

7. It was time we had a businessman with strong executive skills leading our nation back to capitalism. We must reverse the trend toward socialism, and who better to make that change than a capitalist. (+2, +2, +3, +1)

33. Since Republicans now control the House, Senate and the White House, as well as most states, we will finally be able to hold a single party accountable, freed from the blame-game bickering of divided government. (-3, -2, -1, -1)

Distinguishing Statements

Statements #12 and #38 most separated Factor A, the Traditional Republicans, from voters on the other three factors. Interestingly, these voters were most interested in voting for Trump to send a message that our system was broken, presumably by party polarization. They hoped that Trump could break through this morass and return us to a time when the parties could work together. Statement #34 also indicated that of the

four factors, Factor A was least certain of a Trump victory. Finally, Factor A was the only group to endorse the strategic significance of Trump's campaign slogan.

12. My vote was the only way to say: I am here, and I count. **(+4, -4, -4, -5)**

38. I didn't vote for Trump based on the issues, though I am hopeful he can deliver on jobs. I voted for Trump to send a strong message: our system is – and has been – broken and it can't be fixed by just tweaking a little here and there. **(+5, -3, 0, -4)**

34. I voted for Donald Trump for many reasons, and I'm confident he's up to the job. But, in all honesty, I didn't really think he'd win. **(+4, +1, +1, -2)**

35. Trump's slogan – “Make America Great Again” – put Democrats in a tough position. They found themselves insisting that America was already great, but voters struggling to make ends meet for decades saw that for what it was: a case based on lowered standards. **(+4, -1, -1, 0)**

The statements that most distinguished Factor B, the Drain the Swampers, were those characterized by making sweeping changes to long-standing practices that these voters saw as counterproductive. There is also a strain of “America First” in these statements – another of Trump's campaign themes. Factor B voters also did not agree that Clinton's focus on Trump's temperament backfired on her.

19. I think it's long past time that we demanded from our allies in NATO and elsewhere that they start paying their fair share for the protection our armed forces have provided them for decades. Trump's critics on this score are just flat wrong! **(0, +3, 0, -2)**

21. In my opinion, only someone like Trump with no prior political experience, can “clean the swamp” of the do-nothing politicians who waste our tax dollars while pretending to care about the American people. **(-1, +4, -2, -3)**

36. Hillary's emphasis on Trump's temperament and fitness for office, coupled with a lack of clarity on her policy preferences, probably backfired by unintentionally raising questions about her own trustworthiness, not her strong suit by any means. **(0, -3, 0, 0)**

The statements that were most distinguishing for Factor C, the Art of the Dealers, were statements #3 and #39. Unsurprisingly, statement #3 dealt with running the government as a business. Statement #39 dealt with Trump's campaign promise to appoint a special prosecutor in the Clinton email scandal. These voters were by no means pro-Hillary, but they were not in the “lock her up” crowd either.

3. The government needs to be run like a business. The basic reason for my vote is as simple as that. **(-1, -2, +5, -1)**

39. My vote for Trump was strongly influenced by his promise to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate Clinton's use of a private server for her emails as

Secretary of State. It was an important reminder that no one is above the law, and I am very disappointed that he has decided not to keep this promise. (-2, -1, -5, 0)

The distinguishing statements for Factor D+ reinforced the theme of the Never-Hillary Culture Warriors. These voters object to the media and “political correctness,” and they see Clinton as antithetical to their Christian values. Though they don’t see Trump as necessarily a conservative ideologue, they do say he “checks the boxes” on the social and cultural issues that matter most to them.

1. I voted for Trump because the media was so biased. (-4, -3, 0, +2)

5. I am not a deplorable redneck, and I resented Hillary’s out-of-touch insinuation that anyone who preferred Trump was a jerk. Truth is, if any candidate was a Jerk, it was Mrs. Clinton. (+2, 0, +1, +5)

23. Trump is no ideologue: he was a Democrat before he was a Republican. But he checks the boxes important to me (pro-life, defender of the Second Amendment, supporting our vets) and he knows how to get things done. (-1, 0, -2, +2)

25. Donald Trump got my vote because of my Christian values. For me and other Americans of my faith, the Clintons were simply unacceptable based on their policies and their long history of personal misconduct. (0, +1, -3, +5)

30. Is it now okay to say, “All lives matter” without being called a bigot by the PC police? It’s a helluva lot safer (and saner) now than it was before the election. (-2, -1, 0, +4)

Discussion

What, if anything, do these factors say or imply about the question of voter rationality posed at the outset? While it might be fair to say that each of these accounts of electoral preference is anchored by clear *rationale* – that is, each has an idea that a vote for Donald Trump on November 8, 2016, held “utility” for the person so casting his or her ballot – it is not at all clear that *any* of these four orientations would meet Downsian standards of *rationality*. In part this stems from the fact that utility itself, when expressed in such disparate “micro” terms, challenges the very premise that a singular, objective “standard” of rationality exists, let alone is realized by the four contenders, viewed collectively. Such a perspective, we concede, does differ from the Downsian view that rationality is a matter of *individual* — hence, “micro” – significance. At the same time, however, it is worth remembering in this context that the very notion of utility is the core principle of *utilitarianism*, the school of sociopolitical thought that equates rationality with the “greatest good for the greatest number.” Granted, representatives from each of these four factors would likely insist that *their perspective* provides the best approximation of the classical utilitarian ideal; but, in so doing, advocates of each assume an enormous burden of proof that the inherently ambiguous standards of “greatest good” and “greatest number” are best realized by the subjective constructions contained in these four factors.

Thus it warrants underscoring that the nature of rationality that Downs adopts is based not on the macro-level ethical concerns embodied by utilitarianism, but on micro-level concerns pertaining to the capacity of individual voters to accurately appraise their own costs and benefits along with an accurate understanding of how each would

be affected by candidate X or Y's election. Utility, then, need not preclude competing calculations; indeed, utility-maximizing voting in the Downsian sense virtually assumes multiplicity in the calculation of voters' costs and gains precisely because elections are vehicles for translating *competing* interests and, hence, utility into programmatic alternatives suitable for electoral resolution. In practical terms, the theoretical presumption of "perfect information" Downs's neoclassical theory demands on the part of rational voters virtually defies documentation (Abramson, Aldrich & Rohde, 2011). If this criterion *were* satisfied, the mounting evidence on partisan-driven media preferences and contention over what constitute undebatable facts – a prominent feature of partisan polarization plaguing American politics – would be far less pervasive and problematic. The chasm separating Republicans from Democrats on the question of former President Obama's actual religious affiliation – 43% of Republicans believe Obama is Muslim (CNN, 2015) – is a familiar if lamentable case in point.

In the mainstream press, questions about the electorate's rationality are typically framed in terms of the consistency (or lack thereof) between one's economic status and partisan preference. And while at the aggregate level surveys confirm that well-educated and well-off white voters are reliably Republican partisans, whereas "blue collar" or lower class voters are mainstays of the Democratic coalition (Bartels, 2016), there are notable exceptions to this pattern. Urban-dwelling Northerners with advanced graduate degrees tend to vote disproportionately Democratic. Conversely, non-college-educated white voters from the rural South who are struggling economically are found among the ranks of Republican voters to a degree greater than class-based calculations of utility alone would predict (Hochschild, 2016). The fact that Trump's unexpected victory derived from the defections of white Democratic voters in the "blue wall" northern states of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin – which, according to pre-election polls, would remain in the Clinton camp – underscores the salience of the second aforementioned deviation from a class-based version of American electoral behavior consistent with Downs's theory. Moreover, in a survey study conducted after the present research was completed, Diana Mutz (2018) draws upon a national probability panel study of respondents in 2012 and 2016 to show that it is not economic hardship *per se*, which she terms the "left behind" version of pocketbook voting, that best explains the Trump-Clinton results, but the "threat of losing status" defined more broadly than in strictly economic terms that best accounts for the 2016 outcome. More speculative accounts of the 2016 results are offered by Stephen Brill (2018), who deems the Trump victory as a "revolt [by voters] against meritocracy," and by former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper as the decisive consequence of Russian cyber-attacks on platforms such as Facebook (Clapper & Brown, 2018).

Based on our findings, arguably the most pertinent and compelling contravention of Downsian notions of rational, economic-based voting is uncovered by University of California-Berkeley sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2016) and labeled as "the great American paradox." Professor Hochschild's own investigation of the roots of this paradox, based on in-depth interviews with working-class Republicans in Louisiana, points to the powerful subjective effects of the "deep stories" her interviewees bring to their understanding of partisan differences in the South. By her account, Louisiana's "working-class Tories" derive subjective political-cultural utility – if not an advantageous balance of economic benefits and costs – from application of such prismatic narratives in navigating their place in an often-hostile political economy. A common feature of these narratives is that the Democratic party's practice of "identity politics" has unfairly privileged nonwhites (especially Blacks and Latinos) as clientele

for policy pay-offs while neglecting the economic vulnerability of nonprofessional white voters in the decades since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. (Hochschild's actual presentation, it bears noting, is void of explicit reference to race as a factor in the paradox, relying on a metaphor in which aggrieved white voters have deserted the Democratic party due to its alleged allowance of and deference to "line cutters" in the queue of citizens awaiting needed government assistance in policy benefits. It is undeniable, however, that the aggrieved and neglected, on the one hand, and the so-called "line cutters," on the other, differ by the objective reality of skin color as well as subjective adherence to contrasting deep stories vis-à-vis the two political parties.)

Scanning our factors for evidence of this, we can see subjectivity supporting – and in some ways further deepening – Hochschild's analysis. Trump voters across the four factors, but most manifestly in the cases of the Drain the Swampers (Factor B) and the Anti-Hillary Cultural Warriors (Factor D+), do not hesitate to express their disdain for the Democratic party's alleged practice of pandering to nonwhite elements in the electorate, albeit under the euphemistic guise of "identity politics." Worth reiterating in this regard is the attention given above to consensus items across the factors, particularly the strongly positive scores assigned to statements #14 and #4, the former decrying Democratic favoritism toward minorities, the latter saluting Trump's willingness to forego political correctness and "tell it like it is" on issues long regarded by professional politicians as too sensitive to address in openly combative and potentially divisive terms. It is difficult to claim that the existence of such rationales, despite their uniquely utility-serving quality for the groups espousing them, is tantamount to rational. Granted, this kind of blame-driven politics may well motivate disgruntled voters and improve electoral prospects. Indeed, it is worth noting what Donald Trump's former chief strategist Steve Bannon said after the clash between white supremacists and counter-protestors in Charlottesville, Virginia, that left three people dead, followed by widespread condemnation of the President for his failure to hold the Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups responsible for the violence: In an interview with *American Prospect* editor Robert Kuttner, Bannon quipped, "The longer they [Trump's Democratic critics] talk about identity politics, I got 'em, I want them to talk about racism every day. If the left is focused on race and identity, and we go with economic nationalism, we can crush the Democrats" (Kuttner, 2017). Such thinking may well be anchored in an electoral rationale, but it would be utter nonsense to equate a political leader's failure to denounce neo-Nazis, the KKK and David Duke, along with white ethno-nationalists, with rationality. Such is the paradox uncovered by our own examination of "the great American paradox," coined by Arlie Hochschild. As our study of 30 Trump voters reveals, the 2016 election testifies to a worrisome tendency, long recognized by scholars familiar with the ideas of Harold Lasswell (1930): What passes as short-term or expedient political rationale is often more accurately appraised as rationalizations defending darker human motives than as rationality befitting our better angels.

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Appendix: Factor Arrays

No.	Statement	Factor			
		A	B	C	D
1.	I voted for Trump because the media was so biased.	-4	-3	0	+2
2.	I voted for Trump because he will deport illegal immigrants. It boils my blood to witness undocumented aliens gaming the system.	-4	+1	-4	+1
3.	The government needs to be run like a business. The basic reason for my vote is as simple as that.	-1	-2	+5	-1
4.	It took Trump to break through all this PC-garbage keeping people from saying what they felt. Finally, we get	+1	+3	-2	+2

No.	Statement	Factor			
		A	B	C	D
	a president who won't pander like almost all politicians do.				
5.	I am not a deplorable redneck, and I resented Hillary's out-of-touch insinuation that anyone who preferred Trump was a jerk. Truth is, if any candidate was a jerk, it was Mrs. Clinton.	+2	0	+1	+5
6.	Three words capture the basis of my vote: Jobs, jobs, jobs. Trump is a better bet in delivering on jobs lost to bad trade deals and undocumented workers willing to work for low wages.	+2	+5	+1	+3
7.	It was time we had a businessman with strong executive skills leading our nation back to capitalism. We must reverse the trend toward socialism, and who better to make that change than a capitalist.	+2	+2	+3	+1
8.	My primary consideration was the vacancy on the Supreme Court. If people want to permit gay marriage or abortion for any reason, then make both legal through the legislature, not via an unelected oligarchy rewriting the Constitution.	+5	+5	-1	+2
9.	I voted against Hillary Clinton, and for Donald Trump, because Clinton compromised our national security by putting classified information on a personal email account and allowed people without security clearances to access that information.	+2	0	+3	+4
10.	Although Obama wasn't on the ballot himself, Hillary was running as his surrogate for a "third term." I voted for Trump to block the possibility of four more years of Obama's policies.	+3	0	+2	+3
11.	I actually didn't know too much about Trump before the election. But I knew too much about the Clintons to vote for Hillary.	+4	-4	-4	-5
12.	My vote was the only way to say: I am here and I count.	+4	-4	-4	-5
13.	Like others in the middle politically, I am weary of all the partisan bickering. I voted for Trump because he alone of the candidates appears willing and able to compromise.	-2	-2	0	-4
14.	The Democrats seem to fall over themselves pandering to elements of their base – gays, African-Americans, Latinos – while forgetting the blue-collar working families that formed the core of the original New Deal coalition.	+1	+4	+4	+3
15.	My vote may have been different had Bernie Sanders been the Democratic nominee instead of Hillary.	-3	-5	-5	-5
16.	I simply figured that it was time for a change! And there was only one candidate who was willing to defy political correctness and run on the promise of putting "America first."	+1	+1	+3	+1
17.	I am not sure a Trump presidency will deliver the right	+1	-4	+2	-3

No.	Statement	Factor			
		A	B	C	D
	type of change, but I am hoping that the politicians who have failed time and time again to deliver on empty promises get the message.				
18.	Trump is definitely a “high energy” leader. Though he’s the eldest president-elect in US history, he has the drive and ambition of someone half his age.	+1	+2	+2	-1
19.	I think it’s long past time that we demanded from our allies in NATO and elsewhere that they start paying their fair share for the protection our armed forces have provided them for decades. Trump’s critics on this score are just flat wrong!	0	+3	0	-2
20.	Any reservations I might have had about Trump were put to rest when he said he did not support privatizing Social Security or Medicare.	-3	-4	-2	-4
21.	In my opinion, only someone like Trump, with no prior political experience can “clean the swamp” of the do-nothing politicians who waste our tax dollars while pretending to care about the American people.	-1	+4	-2	-3
22.	It thrills me to no end that pollsters and pundits proved to be so wrong this time. I’m glad that Trump voters in the heartland weren’t so gullible to believe that Hillary had it in the bag and casting a ballot for Trump was a waste of time.	0	+2	+1	-2
23.	Trump is no ideologue: he was a Democrat before he was a Republican. But he checks the boxes important to me (pro-life, defender of the Second Amendment, supporting our vets) and he knows how to get things done.	-1	0	-2	+2
24.	It doesn’t bother me that Trump takes to Twitter to battle his detractors in public. You can’t be a real leader at this level unless you can throw – as well as take – a punch. He’s a self-described “counter-puncher” and that proves he has a spine.	-4	0	-2	0
25.	Donald Trump got my vote because of my Christian values. For me and other Americans of faith, the Clintons were simply unacceptable based on their policies and their long history of personal misconduct.	0	+1	-3	+5
26.	I could never get past the email scandal and Benghazi with Hillary Clinton. That turned me off for good. My choice then became not voting and casting a ballot for Trump.	+3	-1	-1	+4
27.	I voted for Trump because I am tired of watching politicians screw up this country.	0	+4	+4	-1
28.	I looked at my vote as if I were hiring someone to run the federal government. I don’t need to be friends with my president; in fact, I don’t care if he is a nasty SOB if he’s a competent executive. I need him or her to solve our	-2	+2	+4	+1

No.	Statement	Factor			
		A	B	C	D
	problems and make a stronger and greater United States.				
29.	My vote was the only way to get the attention of Washington politicians who get elected repeated without doing a thing to improve the quality of life of those they claim to represent.	-1	0	+1	-3
30.	Is it now okay to say, "All lives matter" without being called a bigot by the PC police? It's a helluva lot safer (and saner) now than it was before the election	-2	-1	0	+4
31.	I was undecided until the very end of the campaign. But when FBI Director Comey stated that Anthony Weiner's computer had possibly incriminating evidence bearing on Hillary's email fiasco, I knew I couldn't tolerate four more years of Clinton scandal stories.	-5	-5	-4	-2
32.	Trump knows from his own business experience how high tax rates discourage private investment and risk-taking – strategies that spur growth and produce high-paying jobs – and this is good news for keeping American businesses from relocating elsewhere.	0	+3	+5	0
33.	Since Republicans now control the House, Senate, and the White House, as well as most states, we will finally be able to hold a single-party accountable, freed from the blame-game bickering of divided government.	-3	-2	-1	-1
34.	I voted for Donald Trump for many reasons, and I'm confident he's up to the job. But, in all honesty, I didn't really think he'd win.	+4	+1	+1	-2
35.	Trump's slogan – "Make America Great Again" – put Democrats in a tough position. They found themselves insisting that America was already great, but voters struggling to make ends meet for decades saw that for what it was: a case based on lowered standards.	+4	-1	-1	0
36.	Hillary's emphasis on Trump's temperament and fitness for office, coupled with a lack of clarity on her policy preferences, probably backfired by unintentionally raising questions about her own trustworthiness, not her strong suit by any means.	0	-3	0	0
37.	Even the press, clearly no friend of Mr. Trump's, concedes that loyalty on the part of co-workers is of utmost importance to the president-elect. In our culture today, loyalty is sadly no longer as important as it once was – and will be again when we regain our national greatness.	-1	-2	-1	0
38.	I didn't vote for Trump based on the issues, though I am hopeful he can deliver on jobs. I voted for Trump to send a strong message: our system is – and has been – broken and it can't be fixed by just tweaking a little here and there.	+5	-3	0	-4
39.	My vote for Trump was strongly influenced by his	-2	-1	-5	0

No.	Statement	Factor			
		A	B	C	D
	promise to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate Clinton's use of a private server for her emails as Secretary of State. It was an important reminder that no one is above the law, and I'm very disappointed that he has decided not to keep this promise.				
40.	The critical issue for me was The Wall. It signified the threat this country is under from foreign threats, whether they are neighbors or ISIS terrorists. It's an important symbol of Trump's promise to put "America First."	-5	+1	-3	-1