

Trumped: The Unsurprising Election of Donald Trump and Our Unequal Opportunity--and Lack of Plausible Visions--for New Governance Design

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At this point of writing, it is not possible to be certain how the values and behaviors that Donald Trump espoused and embodied during the 2016 election campaign and initial appointments of his administration will be manifested in what the US federal government does or does not do over the subsequent months and years. But if Trump does what he frequently said he would do, and if Congress and the Courts support it, the results may so thoroughly destroy governing forms, processes, and mores of the last 50—and perhaps 200 plus—years that those of us who have yearned for a chance to create new forms of governance will have an opportunity unequalled since 1789.

Our situation, however, may be roughly similar to that facing citizens in communist countries after the collapse of communism in the early 1990s, especially the fact that we seem to be as unprepared to proffer, much less create, new forms of viable and preferable governments now as they were then.

True, some of us, inspired by Prof. Fred Riggs and his Committee for Viable Constitutionalism, vainly attempted to prevent the successors to the Soviet Bloc from adopting American-style presidentialist governments because, as Riggs showed, all countries with divided governments like that of the United States eventually ended up as military dictatorships—except, so far, the US. But the only alternative structure of governance we had to offer at the time was parliamentary which Riggs' research showed was far less likely to succumb to deadlock between the legislative and executive branches, and thus less likely to provoke a military coup (Riggs, 1986, 1994, 1997).

Unfortunately, all of the formerly-communists governments adopted a version of the presidentialist form, featuring a strong president vs. a comparatively weak legislature, with restricted courts and an elite bureaucracy, so that almost all are now military dictatorships.

It May be Our Turn Next

The only form of government most of us have to offer now as potentially superior to either parliamentary or presidentialist is electronic direct democracy, but few of us find it in our hearts to support that with the enthusiasm we once did—given, in part, the success of the populist Donald Trump and people like him gaining power worldwide.

On the other hand, it behooves those of us interested in new governance design to pay close attention to Trump's use of social media not only during his campaign but especially while he is president. While no technology is neutral, we should not assume that evolving communication technologies are only instruments of the devil now—any more than we were justified in believing, once upon a time, that they inevitably led to continuously-progressive interactive citizen participation in all aspects of governance.

Nonetheless if Trump is able to implement the political and economic policies he touted during the election as fully as his rhetoric proclaimed he would, the resulting social, political, economic, and environmental chaos will require some very creative and heroic governance designs. Whether we are capable of producing any that are viable or not is another question.

How did this Extraordinary Opportunity for Governance Design Come About?

Hillary Clinton won the popular vote but lost the election not because a majority of Americans rejected her policy proposals, but because of multiple structural features enshrined in the US Constitution that grossly over-represent rural areas whose experiences and preferences differ significantly from those of the majority of voters, especially those who live in urban areas. Thus, in spite of Trump's victory, we should not assume that most voters specifically rejected the old policies of the Democrats, much less that they either understood or favored Trump's alternatives. Many Trump voters said they really did not believe Trump meant what he said, but loved the audacious, militant fervor of it.

Compared to any president or presidential candidate since Richard Nixon, Trump presented himself as exuberantly narrow-minded, ultra-nationalistic, ignorant, intolerant, and politically-incorrect on every dimension—ethnicity, class, gender, sexual preference, disability, identity, educational attainment.... He publically relished what he called the “locker room talk” of sexual innuendo and bravado.

Nonetheless, according to most sources, many people who voted for Trump insist they are not bigots. They say that they voted for Obama twice; that they only wanted fundamental change that Clinton would not provide but that Trump spectacularly said he would; that even though the policies of Trump clearly will further grossly exacerbate income inequality, reverse the slight but important gains made in America's health care, and drastically erode America's international power and prestige—that is, that even though Trump's professed policies, if implemented, would be against their own most basic self-interest in income and security—they voted for him in order to get real change—for a change—they say.

Such claims are not credible, in my opinion. There were two other options on the ballot who could have brought substantial change without accompanying chaos—Gary Johnson of the Libertarian Party and Jill Stein of the Green Party, neither of whom portrayed themselves as flaming racists, bigots, and narcissistic psychopaths.

Of course, there may be some people who are so fully Republican that they would vote for a mossy stump if one were nominated by their Party. But the only credible policy reason most people voted for Trump is because they either share or uncomplainingly accept his racists, sexist, chauvinistic, simplistic, and/or psychotic outbursts. If it was really “change” they wanted—if what they wanted was simply to “shake up the establishment” or “skewer the elite”—and were otherwise nice, tolerant Americans who didn't like Clinton, then they would have supported Stein or Gill, and not voted for Trump. To vote for Trump can only mean you are either a bigot who actively shares Trump's bigotry, or simply don't care that a vote for Trump will further it.

It seems that Trump turned out many people to vote who had never voted before, and who either were not polled or refused to reveal their true intentions before the election. Trump was probably able to do this because he was the first major presidential candidate in recent times to use reality TV experiences to articulate, celebrate, and unleash the discontent of millions of Americans via racist, misogynistic, and populist rhetoric and gestures that spoke to and inspired them.

In addition, in terms of policy, Clinton was unappealing to many loyal Democratic voters. Just as her husband before her, she is a globalizing neoliberal hawk, and ran as one. She appeared

unconcerned with the impact of structural unemployment domestically and eager to seek military solutions internationally. Why should any blue collar worker or young Millennial vote for her from a policy point of view? The ideals that Bernie Sanders enunciated resonated much more deeply with them, though it is likely that he would have proven even less able to defeat Trump. Enough Americans may be aroused by a titillating trash-talking bigot to elect him, but I doubt enough would vote for a old “socialist”, however grandfatherly he might be, or how much they may actually like his policies.

I, and many others, voted for Clinton because she was a woman, wasn’t Trump, and had, we thought, a chance to win.

I should also add that had Clinton somehow won, we might well be facing a situation at least as dire as that which we face with her defeat. Trump repeatedly said he was prepared to contest her election as rigged. If that failed, Republican opposition to her and her policies would almost certainly be even more total than they had been against Obama. Either way, the resulting intensified stalemate could very well bring on the civil unrest and military coup that Riggs warned us about thirty years ago.

To the extent one can divine actual policy positions from Trump’s words and behavior, they at least spoke to the anxieties of blue collar white families, in addition to legitimizing their racists, sexist and other identity fears. However if he really believes that abundant, well-paid blue collar jobs vanished because of outsourcing, immigrants, and global trade policies, and that he can enact policies to restore those jobs, then I believe he is profoundly mistaken. A key reason for permanent job loss is automation and artificial intelligence. He cannot restore good old jobs by fiat, in my opinion. Very different policies aimed at peacefully and fairly heading towards full unemployment seem more realistic and humane to me. So if and when his policies fail to achieve what his voters expected, what might happen? Trump will almost certainly blame the failure on Others, not himself, and so might well be re-elected just as Bush was in spite of the disaster of the Iraq invasion. On the other hand, tensions might well rise to an intolerable boiling point.

Trump’s election was possible not because the views of so many Americans changed. To the contrary, those views have underlain American politics all my life. I grew up in the unreconstructed South and daily witnessed actions based on similar sentiments all around me. The once-Solid South of my youth (solidly racist and Democratic, that is) vanished and became Republican with Nixon’s Southern Strategy onward. I will never forget the shock I felt when Newt Gingrich (who I knew from our association with Alvin Toffler’s advocacy of Anticipatory Democracy) was first elected as a Republican Representative from Georgia. “A Republican from Georgia” was not a thought that had ever entered my head, except during the postbellum Reconstruction period. Yet it was Representative Gingrich who was primarily responsible for articulating in 1980 the plan that eventually did indeed “Turn the Republican Party into the Majority Party for the rest of my life”, as he prophesized (By chance, Clem Bezold and myself happened to visit Gingrich in his office the day before he presented his plan to newly-elected President Reagan in the White House. He practiced his presentation on us, and we were stunned by its audacity. But he proved himself to be the better futurist than either of us, both transforming the Republican Party and becoming Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1994).

No, the sentiments Trump aroused have always been there, and in both/all political parties. What was new in 2016 was the existence of a Republican candidate who knew how to express them so well, and did so with gusto, to the horror of the dwindling Establishment wing of the party. No matter how badly Trump’s policies may actually work out, the US (and much of the western world) will not soon reject the underlying sentiments since they are so deeply entrained from decades of reinforcement, unless they are thoroughly discredited by their total failure and the ultimate social implosion.

For one historical example among many I could provide, the following is a relevant excerpt of a

talk I gave in 2003 to a group of mortgage bankers in Hawaii, and published as (Dator, 2004).

...the continued dominance of neoliberal globalization is by no means guaranteed--nothing about the policies and pronouncements of the Bush W administration suggests a continuation of either process (neither neoliberalism nor globalization).

Dubya has been populist in rhetoric, protectionist in economic policy, imperialist in foreign and military affairs, and authoritarian in civil rights. None of that is in accordance with neoliberal philosophies. If W runs and wins again, as he may, then neoliberal globalization is probably over--or at least postponed for the foreseeable future.

If W does not run and win, and if a Democrat does, then one possible future is the return of neoliberal/globalization. Neoliberal/globalization is generally supported by the mainstream of the Democratic Party. There is great opposition to neoliberal/globalization in the US, but not from the Democrats. Most opposition is within the Republican Party itself--the Religious Right, the Patriots, Militia, and Minutemen, and throughout much of Middle America which fears continued loss of jobs overseas and wants only to Buy America. It is only the East Coast Bankers and their corporate fellow travelers--you perhaps--within the Republican Party who truly favor neoliberal/globalization.

There is of course considerable opposition to neoliberal/globalization in the dwindling labor union portion of the Democratic Party, but they are indeed too few to matter alone. The few remaining progressives within the Democratic Party support globalization over narrow nationalism, as well as the truly free-market aspects of neoliberalism, though guided by public policy. Unlike populists, progressives are not afraid of bigness per se, and the globe is truly big.

Those people who are opposed to globalization and neoliberalism for environmental reasons, or out of concern for the plight of the poor, once were Democrats but now are either Greens or nothing. Nothing, since they find no support for their concerns within the Democratic Party, and know that Greens can never win in our rigged two party-system. So they have abandoned all hope of working within the system, and are content with hugging trees, blowing up SUVs, or text-messaging droll Bush and Schwarzenegger jokes to one another while eating homemade tofu-burgers.

The Neocons within the Republican Party who currently rule the US are certainly not in favor of neoliberal globalization. Instead they have taken us very well down the road to creating the New American Global Empire they envisioned and had been working on for many years (through the Project for a New American Century among other platforms) during the time the neoliberal Democrats such as Clinton temporarily were in control. While 9/11 made it possible for the Neocons more easily and quickly to make more of the dramatic policy changes they had long desired, the terrorist attacks of that day were certainly not the cause of the policy changes. Many of the policies were already well under way from the moment W took office, well before the 9/11 attacks. Almost all of W's advisors-- Gen. Powell being the most prominent exception--were chosen by Vice President Cheney (who was in charge of the presidential transition team) from the list of people who had signed the New American Century manifesto in June 1997 and/or the document called Rebuilding America's Defenses, in September 2000, thus demonstrating their long-standing commitment to creating the New American Empire during W's reign. Thus, the New American Global Empire presents the US and the world with an entirely new and largely unanticipated future--a major challenge for you and all members of the larger economic community--since Neocons wish to project complete and unilateral military control of the world according to certain narrowly-defined American interests

while at the same time cutting taxes, raising public debt, and thus paring down all governments—federal, state, and local—to, well, to absolutely nothing—not even defense or justice, both of which (like all government functions) can and should be done on the cheapest, private, contractual basis, perhaps overseas in India where wages are low, skills are high, and loyalty to the American Empire assured, according to the Neocon ideology.

Since our entire global economy floats on a vast and rising flood of debt, private as well as corporate and public, it is not clear to me how the New American Empire will function in the absence of any responsible public sector at all, which is what the Neocons desire.

Thus, the time may be ripe for a major restructuring of the American political party system. (End of excerpt of my 2003 talk/paper)

I don't need to remind you that in spite of the needless killing and chaos brought on by his outrageous invasion of Iraq, a majority of American voters saw fit to re-elect W. What finally brought down W and his dreams of an American global empire, and enabled the victory of Obama, was the anticipated near-total collapse of the global economy in 2007—and the fact that the Constitution limits a president to two terms of office. Otherwise, America might well have segued directly from W to a contract of no-trump, no-spades, with deuces wild. Moreover, we will never know what an Obama presidency might have been like since the Tea Partyish Republicans who controlled Congress and the Supreme Court, on the one hand, and the Clinton Establishmentarians who favored economic globalization, on the other, squelched whatever policies for liberal Hope he might actually have wanted to implement.

So whatever might have been, the Obama years continued the neoliberal global agenda that some Americans said they intend to finally get rid of by voting for Trump, but which Trump may or may not in fact try to end. At present, it does appear he wants to create (in place of global neoliberalism) a nationalistic, unilateral American Empire similar to what W initially intended to create before 9/11 diverted him. But who knows what Trump really wants other than unbridled power and adoration?

Indeed, one of the strangest—if not unique—aspects of the appeal of Trump is that it is wholly without any kind of a philosophical—much less ideological—basis, save for that in the minds of a few Libertarians. In spite of several books by and about Trump, there is no *Das Kapital* or *Mein Kampf* among them. His publications are all simply variations on *The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. Moreover, while his appeal is manifest as superstar adoration of the exercise of raw power, it does not even have the defining features of a Cult of the Personality typical of authoritarian regimes. In spite of winning the election, Trump remains quite unpopular, even among many of the people who voted for him. This may change once he has the instruments of power and persuasion fully in his hands, but so far, these are yet other curious facets of Trump's conquest.

I must add that the US situation I have been discussing is simply our variation of pressures towards populist neo-nationalism that have been building in almost every part of the world for many years—in Brexit, France, Russia, India, Japan, the Philippines, and elsewhere—which will be vastly encouraged by Trump's victory. Thus it is not just America that urgently needs new plausible designs for governance. It is a global need.

It is highly unlikely that radically new forms of governance, based on the best communication and other technologies, and informed by the best social and biological science available, can be implemented until current systems collapse and are discredited. But the men who created new governments in Europe and America at the end of the 18th Century were prepared with plausible, tested ideas about new governance design, ready to be put into service when the opportunity for new forms emerged.

We must follow their example and prepare ourselves now through rigorous research, testing, and widespread discussion to implement new forms and processes of governance when the chance comes to us. In the meantime, our thanks to Trump and his supporters, and their counterparts worldwide, for making the opportunity imminent.

Now it is our duty to prepare for the auspicious moment.

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