

The Case for Clinton – and Against Trump

A talk I gave to my students the day before the election

November 7, 2016

It is unusual for me to say anything about a political race. My general approach is to work on the analytical skills that we are supposed to learn in school, be exposed to various academic ideas about policy, and let you come to your own conclusions as informed by your own values. But this year I am making an exception, in part because we have been discussing this so intensively, and because I think the situation this year is so unusual, and so beyond the norm that I wanted to say something. It is also a good opportunity for us to work on our reason giving skills, and ability to make argument based on fact and evidence.

In politics, most of us are tribal. We vote for whatever person is at the head of the political party that we have traditionally supported, or who is supported by our families and members of our communities and civic associations that we participate in. So it is very hard and rare for us to change those patterns. To let the rational side of our brains speak to the more emotional. It is for that reason that most of us would vote for a platypus if it were chosen by the political conventions of a given party to which we have affiliation. I am as guilty of that as anyone else, but I struggle hard to force myself to provide rational reasons to myself and others for my political choices.

So it is in that spirit that there are two ways I want to discuss why I support Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump. First, I'd like to focus on policy issues, which have been largely ignored in this race. And second, I'll address the personal assessments, ideology, and more subjective issues.

I'd like to discuss a small number of policy issues (I could go on for much longer) that I think are critical for me, for the country, and for the planet.

1. Economics – I see at least two major cleavages between Trump and Clinton:
Trade and tax policy. Clinton would both do a better job growing the economy, and addressing the problems of inequality that threaten the stability of the political system.
 - a. Trade. The United states is a regulated capitalist economy. One reason for its economic success has been its ability to balance the growth and dynamic benefits of free market capitalism, with a robust regulatory system that can address market failures, and promote various policy goals that address policy issues that free market capitalism gives rise to. One of the most significant policy conflicts in recent decades that is in this vein is the free market ideal of free trade and light touch regulation, juxtaposed with the political and policy problems of job dislocation and inequality that can arise out of such a regime. The US has done a bad job of addressing this. Free trade only really makes sense and is sustainable economically and politically if it is accompanied by compensation to those who have suffered from it. We haven't done that. Clinton would address this not by cutting down free trade and raising tariffs setting off a global trade war and creating global political instability, but by rationally re-thinking our trade policy and increasing support for those who have lost because of trade.
 - b. Trump: His views are not totally clear, but he has suggested a 45% tariff on china¹

¹ <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-navarro-trump-trade-china-tariffs-20160721-snap-story.html>

Tax Policy. The second economic issue is tax policy. Trump’s approach is an intellectually dismissed supply side plan to quite radically cut tax rates across the board, which would in effect meaning the most tax savings to the highest income tax payers. The Tax Policy Center estimates that Trump’s plan would create about a \$7.2 billion deficit in the next 10 years, and would significantly raise taxes “But despite its enormous price tag, his plan would actually significantly raise taxes for millions of low- and middle-income families with children, with especially large tax increases for working single parents.”²

Hillary Clinton’s plan on the other hand “would raise taxes on high-income taxpayers, increase the child tax credit, modify taxation of multinational corporations, reform capital gains taxes, and increase estate and gift taxes. Nearly all of the tax increases would fall on the highest-income 1 percent; on average, low- and middle-income households would see small increases in after-tax income. Marginal tax rates would increase for high-income filers, reducing incentives to work, save, and invest, and the tax code would become more complex. Her proposals would increase revenue by \$1.4 trillion over the next decade, before accounting for reduced interest costs and macroeconomic effects. Including those factors, the federal debt would be reduced by at least \$1.5 trillion over the first decade and by at least \$5.4 trillion by 2036”³

According to the Tax Policy Center, Hillary [Clinton’s tax increases](#) would slow the economy in the short term, and Donald [Trump’s tax cuts](#) would stimulate it. The long term effects would be quite different, however. According to the Center, “Trump’s tax plan would slow the economy by increasing deficits and driving up interest rates while Clinton’s would reduce the deficit, which would lower interest rates and boost

² <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000983-Families-Facing-Tax-Increases-Under-Trumps-Plan.pdf>, Tax policy Center

³ <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000922-An-Updated-Analysis-of-Hillary-Clintons-Tax-Proposals.pdf>

growth.”⁴ What’s more, the Center goes on to note, “his overall tax-and-spending plan would...significantly harm the economy over the long run by driving up deficits that would crowd out private investment.”⁵

2. Climate

The most pressing issue for the world right now is potential climate disaster that according to NASA “Multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals¹ show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities.”⁶ The effects on regions around the US will be severe, and even worse to many low lying developing countries around the world, creating massive political and social instability. Our children are implicated here significantly.

According to the Annenberg Center on Public Policy, Trump’s stance is that climate change is largely a hoax,⁷ and has promised to cancel the Paris accord, which is the most important and far reaching accord to date. He says nothing about climate change on his website. Clinton has promised to respect the accord and decrease CO2 emissions by 30 % in next decade.⁸

3. Supreme Court – There is no guarantee of who Trump will appoint, but the SC is an institution that relies heavily on intellectual merit and ability. Two traits that

⁴ <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/taxvox/how-would-candidates-spending-plans-affect-our-gdp-projections>

⁵ <http://www.taxpolicycenter.org/taxvox/how-would-candidates-spending-plans-affect-our-gdp-projections>

⁶ <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/>

⁷ <https://www.factcheck.org/2016/11/the-candidates-on-climate-change/>

⁸ “will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 30 percent in 2025 relative to 2005 levels and put the country on a path to cut emissions more than 80 percent by 2050.”

Trump does not strike me as particularly concerned about. Clinton is far more likely to appoint highly qualified jurists that will have the intellectual respect of the legal community, but that will also be tuned into the social facts of our day and balance the needs of a vibrant political system through checks on campaign spending, and respecting core fundamental rights.

4. Foreign Policy

- a. Trump seems to have little knowledge of foreign policy. But he primarily is espousing an isolationist nationalism. He is skeptical and critical of NATO, and thinks that negotiating international treaties is basically similar to him negotiating real estate deals. It's about his intuitions, relationship, and genius, and that career diplomats don't know what they are doing.⁹ He refuses to critique Russia for its hacking of US political institutions and figures,¹⁰ and praises Vladimir Putin, an oppressive autocrat strongman that invaded Crimea, indiscriminately bombs civilians in Syria, and seeks to recover Russia's greatness and empire.

5. Personal Ideology and Personal Attributes

- a. It is very hard to discuss these traits, because it is these that bring out the most emotion in people. In the past, I have felt that certain candidates were intellectually underqualified to be president of the most powerful nation on earth, but never did I fear that the candidate was so woefully and gleefully uninformed and uneducated, so ignorant, and that subscribed to a political philosophy, intentionally or not, that is so deeply at odds with my own political commitments. Essentially, I believe Trump is not an outright fascist, but expresses views and engages in demagoguery that is very close to it. His appeals to xenophobia and nationalism, his coded anger to "the

⁹ http://www.ontheissues.org/2016/Donald_Trump_Foreign_Policy.htm

¹⁰ <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trump-and-putin-a-love-story>

- other,” his appeals to violence and questioning of the integrity of the political and voting system without any evidence is extremely troubling. His boasting about sexual assault and the fact that a large number of women have made claims that he has sexually harassed or assaulted them. And as a son of an immigrant from Austria who was a refugee from Hitler’s xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and demagogic fascism, this language and attitude cuts very close to home. Indeed, I found that one of Trump’s most recent ads went a step further and consciously or not, contained images and themes that play into a long history of anti-Jewish ideology.
- b. His integrity is also completely in question. Politifact, which is a nonpartisan organization, has determined that 70% of what Trump has said is false or mostly false, and 17% so false that it’s given it’s “pants on fire rating.” Another 15% are half true, which can be even worse because the statements are very misleading. Only 15% of what he has said is either true or mostly true.
 - c. 26% of what Clinton has said in contrast has been false or mostly false, 24% half true (which is all bad, but only John Kasich and Bernie Sanders were in the same ballpark among the other candidates), and 51% True or mostly true. This is a material difference from Trump. The problem, is that I’m not even sure Trump is intentionally lying much of the time – I think he’s simply totally ignorant and has no problem making up his own reality.
 - d. It is for this reason that “among the top 100 largest newspapers in America, just two -- the Las Vegas Review-Journal and the Florida Times Union in Jacksonville -- endorsed Trump. The Review-Journal is owned by Sheldon Adelson, the casino magnate who has spent millions trying to elect Trump.”¹¹

¹¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/final-newspaper-endorsement-count-clinton-57-trump-2/ar-AAjYKQ>

At least one other small paper has endorsed him, however – The Crusader, which is the Ku Klux Klan’s newspaper.¹²

¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2016/11/01/the-kkks-official-newspaper-has-endorsed-donald-trump-for-president/>