

Incompetent Elites Make Trump Look Appealing

His supporters don't love everything about him but are sick of being disdained and misgoverned.

By
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Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally in Las Vegas, Jan. 27. PHOTO: RONDA CHURCHILL/REUTERS

Democrats and traditional Republicans are flummoxed. How are 4 in 10 of our fellow citizens ready to vote for [Donald Trump](#)? Democrats deplore Trump supporters as racists who must be saved from their ignorance. Traditional Republicans dream that some policy plan or another attack on Mr. Trump's character might sway his voters.

We ought to listen instead. What motivates Trump supporters? Simple: They want their country back.

They might have lost a loved one in Iraq or Afghanistan. What was the sacrifice for? In the botched peace and withdrawal, they concluded that the foreign-policy elite don't know what they're doing. They are hesitant about Ukraine, Iran and Taiwan because the same crew is in charge. They'll back an America that fights to win, but they don't want their sons and daughters to die for America only to lose slowly.

In the 2007-08 financial crisis, they lost a house, a job or a business. They learned that the people in charge of the financial system don't know what they're doing. ObamaCare sent them a health-insurance card that doesn't work well when they get sick. They wonder: Do any of the policy wonks who promote this stuff actually use it themselves? They looked at Hillary Clinton and saw her insincerity, her nonprofit collecting millions, the way she said Trump supporters belong in a "[basket of deplorables](#)." They gambled on Mr. Trump.

Then the establishment blew up. They saw the Federal Bureau of Investigation harass Mr. Trump's appointees, much of official Washington fashion itself "the resistance," the Russia-collusion hoax, years of pointless investigations.

In 2020 Covid hit. Trump supporters initially went along, trusting institutions. But the pandemic soon exposed the politicized incompetence of the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the scientific establishment. Lockdowns destroyed lives. Officials made up rules and ramped up censorship. Inquiries about whether the virus came from a lab leak, or anything negative about masks or vaccines, became "misinformation" subject to censorship. Trump supporters saw media, tech companies and national-security bigwigs suppress the news of the Hunter Biden laptop just in time for the election.

When schools went remote, parents found out what was actually going on inside the classrooms. Teachers were coaching students to hate themselves, their country and their religious traditions and sexualizing young children. The FBI treated angry parents as domestic terrorists. After Oct. 7, Trump supporters learned that universities are incompetent and politicized and disdain people like them. They saw that once-trusted mainstream-media outlets had become political advocates long ago.

Voters see the chaos of a dysfunctional immigration system spill into their neighborhoods. They see crime overwhelming and shutting down cities where officials refuse to enforce laws. They see the homeless invading public spaces.

They aren't proud of Mr. Trump's actions after the 2020 election. But [91 felony counts](#), some brought by prosecutors who campaigned on a promise to get Mr. Trump, and most

unrelated to the election? Bonnie and Clyde didn't have this much legal trouble! And now disqualifying Mr. Trump [from the ballot](#)? "Destroy democracy to save democracy" is no longer a joke. The existence of the deep state seems to be confirmed with every outrage.

Why aren't Trump supporters properly grateful for Bidenomics? They understand the economy is just recovering to something like normal after the pandemic. They are smart enough to know that big spending programs will go down a rat hole into someone's pocket. They know that a mountain of debt must end badly. They see the river of wasted money and the surge of inflation, more evidence that macroeconomic elites don't know what they're doing. They don't want to be force-fed electric cars and trucks. They're sick of washers that don't wash, toilets that don't flush, showers that don't clean.

Why are these voters inclined toward Mr. Trump? Well, there is no better way to stick it to the elites than to vote for the man who drives them most crazy.

This election isn't about employment, spending promises or 12-point policy plans. Voters everywhere want the basic institutions of American society and government to return to a semblance of apolitical competence. Warren Harding's "return to normalcy" after the first Progressive Era might be a good slogan.

What should [Nikki Haley](#) do? Show that she understands this deep frustration. Explain how she will fix the country's institutions and why Mr. Trump won't or can't. What should Mr. Trump do? Understand that this election isn't about him. He is but the vessel for these voters' hopes for their country. His personal vendettas will keep him from office.

What should Democrats do? Listen. Stop screaming your talking points and hyperventilating that Mr. Trump is a dictator in waiting. Stop falling into the obvious trap. Mr. Trump is gifted at provoking ridiculous overreaction from his opponents. You promised moderation, openness, conciliation and simple competence. You delivered the opposite. It is still possible to acknowledge, listen and pivot.

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