

No, Hillary Clinton is not less Evil than Trump: “One has Funny Hair, the Other Wears Trouser-suits”

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Tomorrow Americans get the chance to vote for a system – resource-hungry, war-peddling corporate capitalism – in two iterations: one has funny hair and a permatan, the other wears lipstick and trouser-suits.

Yes, there are some policy differences too, or rather emphases – and Hillary Clinton’s supporters are desperately exploiting them to try to persuade those who have grown deeply disillusioned with the system that a vote for Clinton matters. After all, Clinton is not going to make it into the Oval Office unless she can secure the votes of those who backed the far-more progressive Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries.

Clinton’s camp have wielded various sticks to beat these voters into submission. Not least they have claimed that a refusal to vote for Clinton is an indication of one’s [misogyny](#). But it has not been an easy task. Actor Susan Sarandon, for example, has [stated](#) that she is not going to “vote with my vagina”. As she notes, if the issue is simply about proving one is not anti-women, there is a much worthier candidate for president who also happens to be female:

Jill Stein, of the Green Party.

Sarandon, who supported Sanders in the primaries, spoke for a vast swath of voters excluded by the two-party system when she told BBC Newsnight:

I am worried about the wars, I am worried about Syria, I am worried about all of these things that actually exist. TTP [Trans-Pacific Partnership] and I’m worried about fracking. I’m worrying about the environment. No matter who gets in they don’t address these things because money has taken over our system.

Given that both Donald Trump and Clinton represent big money – and big money only – Clinton’s supporters have been forced to find another stick. And that has been the “lesser evil” argument. Clinton may be bad, but Trump would be far worse. Voting for a non-evil candidate like Jill Stein – who has no hope of winning – would split the progressive camp and ensure Trump, the more evil candidate, triumphs. Therefore, there is a moral obligation on progressive voters to back Clinton, however bad her track record as a senator and as secretary of state.

There is nothing new about this argument. It had been around for decades, and has been corraling progressives into voting for Democratic presidents who have still advanced US neoconservative policy goals abroad and neoliberal ones at home.

America's pseudo-democracy

So is it true that Clinton is the lesser-evil candidate? To answer that question, we need to examine those “policy differences” with Trump.

On the negative side, Trump's platform poses a genuine threat to civil liberties. His bigoted, “blame the immigrants” style of politics will harm many families in the US in very tangible ways. Even if the inertia of the political system reins in his worst excesses, as is almost certain, his inflammatory rhetoric is sure to damage the façade of democratic discourse in the US – a development not to be dismissed lightly. Americans may be living in a pseudo-democracy, one run more like a plutocracy, but destroying the politics of respect, and civil discourse, could quickly result in the normalisation of political violence and intimidation.

On the plus side, Trump is an isolationist, with little appetite for foreign entanglements. Again, the Washington policy elites may force him to engage abroad in ways he would prefer not to, but his instincts to limit the projection of US military power on the international stage are likely to be an overall good for the world's population outside the US. Any diminishment of US imperialism is going to have real practical benefits for billions of people around the globe. His refusal to demonise Vladimir Putin, for example, may be significant enough to halt the gradual slide towards a nuclear confrontation with Russia, either in Ukraine or in the Middle East.

Clinton is the mirror image of Trump. Domestically, she largely abides by the rules of civil politics – not least because respectful discourse benefits her as the candidate with plenty of political experience. The US is likely to be a more stable, more predictable place under a Clinton presidency, even as the plutocratic elite entrenches its power and the wealth gap grows relentlessly.

Abroad, however, the picture looks worse under Clinton. She has been an enthusiastic supporter of all the many recent wars of aggression launched by the US, some declared and some covert. Personally, as secretary of state, she helped engineer the overthrow of Col Muammar Gaddafi. That policy led to an outcome – one that was entirely foreseeable – of Libya's reinvention as a failed state, with jihadists of every stripe sucked into the resulting vacuum. Large parts of Gaddafi's arsenal followed the jihadists as they exported their struggles across the Middle East, creating more bloodshed and heightening the refugee crisis. Now Clinton wants to intensify US involvement in Syria, including by imposing a no-fly zone – or rather, a US and allies-only fly zone – that would thrust the US into a direct confrontation with another nuclear-armed power, Russia.

In the cost-benefit calculus of who to vote for in a two-party contest, the answer seems to be: vote for Clinton if you are interested only in what happens in the narrow sphere of US domestic politics (assuming Clinton does not push the US into a nuclear war); while if you are a global citizen worried about the future of the planet, Trump may be the marginally better of two terribly evil choices. (Neither, of course, cares a jot about the most pressing problem facing mankind: runaway climate change.)

So even on the extremely blinkered logic of Clinton's supporters, Clinton might not be the winner in a lesser-evil presidential contest.

Mounting disillusion

But there is a second, more important reason to reject the lesser-evil argument as grounds for voting for Clinton.

Trump's popularity is a direct consequence of several decades of American progressives voting for the lesser-evil candidate. Most Americans have never heard of Jill Stein, or the other three candidates who are not running on behalf of the Republican and Democratic parties. These candidates have received no mainstream media coverage – or the chance to appear in the candidate debates – because their share of the vote is so minuscule. It remains minuscule precisely because progressives have spent decades voting for the lesser-evil candidate. And nothing is going to change so long as progressives keep responding to the electoral dog-whistle that they have to keep the Republican candidate out at all costs, even at the price of their own consciences.

Growing numbers of Americans understand that their country was “stolen from them”, to use a popular slogan. They sense that the US no longer even aspires to its founding ideals, that it has become a society run for the exclusive benefit of a tiny wealthy elite. Many are looking for someone to articulate their frustration, their powerlessness, their hopelessness.

Two opposed antidotes for the mounting disillusionment with “normal politics” emerged during the presidential race: a progressive one, in the form of Sanders, who suggested he was ready to hold the plutocrats to account; and a populist one, in the form of Trump, determined to deflect anger away from the plutocrats towards easy targets like immigrants. As we now know from Wikileaks' release of Clinton campaign chair John Podesta's emails, the Democrats worked hard to rig their own primaries to make sure the progressive option, Sanders, was eliminated. The Republicans, by contrast, were overwhelmed by the insurrection within their own party.

The wave of disaffection Sanders and Trump have been riding is not going away. In fact, a President Clinton, the embodiment of the self-serving, self-aggrandising politics of the plutocrats, will only fuel the disenchantment. The fixing of the Democratic primaries did not strengthen Clinton's moral authority, it fuelled the kind of doubts about the system that bolster Trump. Trump's accusations of a corrupt elite and a rigged political and media system are not merely figments of his imagination; they are rooted in the realities of US politics.

Trump, however, is not the man to offer solutions. His interests are too close aligned to those of the plutocrats for him to make meaningful changes.

Trump may lose this time, but someone like him will do better next time – unless ordinary Americans are exposed to a different kind of politician, one who can articulate progressive, rather regressive, remedies for the necrosis that is rotting the US body politic. Sanders began that process, but a progressive challenge to “politics as normal” has to be sustained and extended if Trump and his ilk are not to triumph eventually.

The battle cannot be delayed another few years, on the basis that one day a genuinely non-evil candidate will emerge from nowhere to fix this rotten system. It won't happen of its own. Unless progressive Americans show they are prepared to vote out of conviction, not out of necessity, the Democratic party will never have to take account of their views. It will keep throwing up leaders – in different colours and different sexes – to front the tiny elite

that runs the US and seeks to rule the world.

It is time to say no - loudly - to Clinton, whether she is the slightly lesser-evil candidate or not.

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