

# 10 Reasons to Doubt the Racial Explanation for Trump's Success

"White Supremacist America!" [yells](#) Counterpunch. "White Supremacists Bolstering Trump," [says](#) AlterNet. This really is a "White Riot," [says](#) Vox. That's the opinion of the left for why Trump not only won the Republican nomination, but also seems poised to win the presidency.

For years, the left has imagined the dominant swath of bourgeois culture to be motivated mainly by racial loathing and hate.

Meanwhile, the alt-right is deeply flattered by this claim, and readily agrees. "All Americans Are Racist, but Trump Supporters are the Most Racist," [says](#) the white nationalist *American Renaissance*, with great approval. We could include another thousand links of the same sort.

So here we have the emerging narrative for why Trump has done so well in this campaign, one pushed by both the left and the alternative right. It posits that the white population is really a seething mass of racial discontent that explodes in support of the candidate who has, admittedly, blown more dog whistles than anyone in many decades.

It's a simple point, one that sticks for its sheer power to shock. It's an easy-to-embrace theory given the controversies and riots in many cities over police shootings of citizens.

And, yes, there is evidence of a racial factor. There's no question that Trump is the chosen candidate of the Internet's

subculture of rightest meme makers who imagine themselves in a cultural war against the social justice warriors and between the races. The [alt-right](#)'s existence feeds the biggest fears of that left, namely that the dominant swath of bourgeois culture is motivated mainly by racial loathing and hate – all the more reason why government needs to keep a firm hand on the population to prevent lynchings and pogroms.

But before we declare the rise of white supremacy as the official story of the 2016 presidential campaign, it is a good idea to consider the possibility that there are actually other reasons that Trump has been the most unexpected political surprise of our lifetimes.

After all, politics can be... complicated.

Here are some other possible factors:

**1. Funding His Campaign** – One of Trump's earliest and greatest applause lines in the campaign was that he was spending his own money and would therefore not be beholden to anyone. This seemed like a promising alternative to the perceived problem of politicians who seem always wholly owned by special interests. Why not try something different? Like many other aspects of his appeal, the merit here is superficial: do we really want politicians who are powerful but accountable to absolutely no one? That could create the worst of all worlds. As it turns out, however, Trump has in fact taken in \$325 million in outside donations from many special interests, among which include real estate, general contractors, health care, securities, lawyers, and agriculture, and spent vast sums on renting his own facilities for campaign work – a nice gig if you can get it.

**2. Americans Admire Wealth** – There is a strange presumption on

the American left that the average person despises wealthy people. Not so. Americans admire business success. This is well-documented and runs deep in our history. Crony capitalist or not, the least objectionable characteristic of Trump is his business acumen. His wealth is widely seen among regular people as a sign of his competence, not his self-evident evil. Better a businessperson than a professional politician with a legal background, people presume.

**3. No Prescribed Political Narrative** – Politics has long ago been taken over by consultants from previous campaigns, who seem to take over like the Borg anyone with a modicum of winning prospects. The consultants carefully script every press conference, speech, and debate answer. As a result, the typical pol can come across as robotic and brazenly manipulative. In this respect, Trump has been a welcome relief. He followed no one's plan and has seemed to speak from the heart. His very presence on the debate stage had the effect of exposing and destroying the over-professionalization of modern political life. It's fun to see settled systems of propaganda smashed, even if they are replaced by new ones (even [worse](#) ones).

**4. Economic Stagnation** – For nearly eight years now, we've been told how economic recovery is just around the corner. And yet growth rates are truly terrible, drifting around one and two percent in a time of rising population and explosive technological change. This is not the Great Depression much less Weimar, but perception is everything: among many classes of people, social progress in one generation no longer seems possible. That's a gigantic cultural change and one destined to result in the kind of political panic that would-be strongmen can use to obtain power. That can involve scapegoating – and result in dangerous policies like protectionism and nativist demographic planning – but the root here is not racial but economic.

**5. ObamaCare** – Have you noticed that President Obama no longer brags about his health-care reform? That's because it has been a disaster, the largest and fastest failure of any large-scale government program in history. Obamacare took a deeply flawed system of insurance and made it vastly worse – unsustainably worse. The vast gulf between the promise and the result has enraged multitudes. More than anyone else, Trump proved effective at exploiting this failure to his personal benefit, promising that only he, with a proven record of business success, could fix it.

**6. Opposition Was and Is Awful** – By comparison to Trump, his opponents in the primary seemed canned, overly scripted, and incompetent by comparison. Trump managed to get far more airtime than the others, if only because he was far more interesting, and he had a clean and relentless message. The others seemed to be tossing out bon mots to constituent groups and lacked courage of their convictions. And during the general election, it is hard to imagine a weaker opponent than Hillary Clinton: un compelling, wedded to failed policies, personally embroiled in dozens of sketchy dealings, and a terrible record in public service to boot. Again, this has nothing to do with race; it's all about his comparative advantage relative to those who are set against him in the contest.

**7. Sick of the Media** – The long pattern of establishment media culture is uniformly predictable: cheering the good-government Democrats over the reactionary Republicans. This has been going on since at least the New Deal and it's tremendously annoying. In a time of democratized information flows, why do we need high priests telling people what to think and curating so carefully what is and isn't news? We have algorithms for that now. Trump stood up against their hegemony using alternative means of communication. His fearless and relentless denunciations of the overly pious press has been a

non-stop delight to free-thinking Americans.

**8. Celebrity Culture** – Many people long ago gave up their high expectation for politics and public affairs managed by the political class. What's it been good for? What's it done for us since, say, we landed a man on the moon? Given the shoddy record, so much of modern politics has collapsed into pure popular entertainment like sports, movies, and music. It is a cultural phenom and nothing more. Trump, more than anyone else, has mastered this art, treating politics as a variant of celebrity culture, and here he has vastly more experience than his competitors.

**9. Growing Tamer** – You could have made a case for the primacy of race in the earliest part of his campaign, but it is possible that his seeming dalliance with the alt-right was inadvertent (still inevitable). After all, once he had sewn up the primary, he quickly tacked left on all cultural matters. No Republican nominated for office has ever given such an overt plea for the rights of the LGBTQ community, and even his somewhat ham-handed appeal for black votes defies the narrative. Daily his campaign posts appeals using all the approved buzzwords: social justice, equality, fairness, and so on. It seems he was genuinely stung by the attempt to link him to the politics of hate and now bends the other direction in order to avoid the taint. In other words, he finds political benefit in seeming not to cater to white racialism, and this has actually helped him gain popularity.

**10. Safety** – In the last two years, global terrorism has taken a new direction, from hitting far-flung government targets to embedding itself in civilian life in major cities. And it seems to be getting worse with bombs randomly appearing in urban settings. The protests against police abuse in major cities contribute to a general feeling of insecurity. In contrast, Trump offers not only an explanation (bad policy)

but a classic appeal to law, order, and safety, society managed by police authority. Tragically for those who love liberty, the appeal of that pitch never loses its strength to persuade.

When you consider all these points, abstracted entirely from the “white riot” theory, you have the makings of a surprisingly successful political campaign and candidate. You don’t need a template of racial obsession to account for it.

The politics of revolt has been gaining steam since 2008, whether we are talking [Tea Party](#), [Occupy](#), [Black Lives Matter](#), or the Trump movement. They all represent a roiling impatience with the status quo that goes beyond racial divisions. Trump, Clinton, and the status quo are equally unpopular, and that creates a combustible political environment. Fascism doesn’t necessarily need racism to be a winning strategy for political control.

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