

# BOOK REVIEWS

## Review 1

**Title:** *Why Irrational Politics Appeals: Understanding the Allure of Trump*. By Mari Fitzduff (2017). 238 p. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC. ISBN: 9781440855146

**Reviewed by:** Charlotte Schaalje (University of Antwerp)

“*Why Irrational Politics Appeals: Understanding the Allure of Trump*”, brings together experts from different fields of psychology and political science, to determine why millions of people chose to follow Trump. The book aims to demonstrate readers what a little role rationality plays in political choices, and why Trump’s divisive tactics appeal to so many voters. It is an important book for anyone who is interested in politics and psychology. I highly recommend it. It reads very well and it is accessible to both beginner and advanced level readers with an interest in political science or political psychology. Lots of interesting perspectives on Trump’s appeal can be found in this book, from an evolutionary perspective to theatrical insights and mindfulness. The interdisciplinary nature of this book provides us with a detailed explanation for Trump’s appeal to certain voter groups. Around the world populism is gaining ground and this book does a great job at clarifying how and when populist leaders appeal to the masses. Most chapters raise important questions concerning the consequences of Trump’s election for the future of American politics. The questions, raised in this book and the explanations that are offered, are very relevant to the current political situation both in the United States and Europe. Although the book provides us with excellent explanations as to why Trump appealed to millions of voters, it fails to use these findings in predicting what we can expect from his presidency. Related titles include: “*Counting the Votes: A New Way to Analyze America’s Presidential Elections*” by G. Scott Thomas and the “*Praeger Handbook of Political Campaigning in The United States*” by William L. Benoit.

In chapter one, “*All too Human: The Allure of Donald Trump*”, Mari Fitzduff introduces the other chapters in a short overview. During Summer 2016, Trump’s campaign started gathering a lot of attention and many found it hard to believe that such an outrageous personality, without any governance experience, would become the Republican candidate. This inspired Fitzduff to edit this book about Trump’s appeal to voters. In this book, several experts reflect on the so-called “Trump phenomenon”. One of the main goals of this book is to gain insight in Trump’s following. Fitzduff warns that if we fail to understand Trump’s supporters, we might not take notice of the very serious questions that their support for Trump raises for our future.

The second chapter, “The politics of Hope: Donald Trump as an entrepreneur of identity”, is written by Stephen Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam. This is a very compelling, well-written chapter about the role of identity in politics, and it has a strong focus on learning from Trump’s victory. The authors start their chapter by clarifying the title of the book. They note that it would be too easy to dismiss those whose political positions we disagree with as irrational. The goal of this chapter is to make sense of what does not make sense to us. The notion that Trump’s supporters are racist is widespread. However, we must ask ourselves whether racism, bigotry and bias really are the most important reasons to support Trump. If we fail to understand why people act in different ways, we might end up assuming that the behavior of Trump’s supporters is based on a lack of understanding. The charge of irrationalism obscures Trump’s performance, the authors claim. We should understand his political rallies as identity festivals that embody a politics of hope. Donald Trump is an entrepreneur of identity. He has the ability to address his supporters in the same way they experience the world. His fashion sense (formal attire) and the way he boldly attacks political heavyweights, separate him from the typical politician.

The third chapter, “Unexamined Assumptions About Leadership: Why People Follow Trump”, is written by Mark R. Leary. Leary explores leadership theories among voters, and applies them to Trump’s followers. He explains that most of us feel that our preferred candidate, despite his or her flaws, is the better choice over the alternative. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Clinton supporters cannot understand why anyone would vote for Donald Trump. Voters’ explicit beliefs about the most important characteristics that leaders should possess, do not differ much across political parties. Many consider intelligence, honesty and leadership as the most desirable leadership traits. With regard to implicit leadership theories, Leary distinguishes two sets of beliefs. One set consists of worldviews and personal motives that lead to support for a politician. The other set involves reasons for thinking a leader can effectively address problems, these reasons are based on personal leadership theories. People might subconsciously assume that Trump’s success in the business world will make him effective as a president, but this is an example of an implicit leadership theory. Leary also refers to the work of Kahneman in information processing. Kahneman’s system 1, fast/automatic mode of processing, leads to the implicit beliefs about Trump. Leary hypothesizes that the “Trump phenomenon” has arisen out of a convergence of worldviews, beliefs about leadership and personal motives. Voters who do not share the same configuration of the aforementioned factors fail to understand Trump’s appeal.

The fourth chapter, “Leadership and Followership: Trump – An Adaptive Mismatch”, is based on the literature on leadership and psychology. It is written by Micha Popper. Popper explains that the evolutionary perspective has been gaining momentum in the discussion on leadership. People tend to follow those who they feel might have an “adaptive value”. For example, people tend to follow strong leaders when faced with a crisis or the prospect of war. In accordance with Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory, Popper claims people are looking for a particular meaning within communication. Once they find a meaning relevant to their expectations, they start processing information in an automatic mode. Businessman Donald Trump might be seen as someone who knows how to solve problems. The attribution that his business success will make him as effective in government, has a strong adaptive value among certain groups in the United States. Some groups

really see businesspeople as cult heroes. Overall, this chapter provides an interesting insight into the concept of followership.

Ronald E. Riggio has written the fifth chapter, "Power, Persuasion and Bad Leadership". This chapter places a strong emphasis on the rhetorical power of Donald Trump. At its core, political leadership is about power and persuasion, according to Riggio. A comprehensive view on leadership should include power, influence and the idea of 'good' or moral leadership. Riggio distinguishes five different types of power: (1) legitimate power, (2) reward power (being able to provide resources to others), (3) coercive power (the ability to punish others), (4) expert power (derived from valued skills or expertise) and (5) referent power (from being liked or admired). Trump's business success gives him expert power, voters trust in his abilities to run the country based on his business expertise. His slogan, "Make America Great Again", suggests emotional or financial rewards. He also exerted coercive power by warning that electing Clinton would spell disaster. Riggio describes invoking an in-group – out-group bias as an important influence tactic. It involves calling on followers to defeat the out-group. When and why do power and influence enter the dark side? Good leaders avoid strategies such as winning at all costs, according to Riggio. They employ their followers to get things done, but they do not use them. However, in the political world, the process of selecting candidates is much harder to control than in the business world. This is one of the most compelling chapters in the book, with great attention for rhetoric and persuasion.

The sixth chapter, "Nationalist politics: the role of predispositions and emotions", is written by Michael C. Grillo. The chapter examines how Trump's nationalist rhetoric mobilized mass support. Much attention is devoted to the concept of symbolic politics (which states that antagonistic narratives and predispositions of strong emotional responses guide decision making). American nationalism seems to be about shared values of individualism. However, many white supremacists argue that the United States is a country created by and for white Protestants. Grillo argues that Trump appeals to this more chauvinistic side of American nationalism. Throughout his campaign, he has made it clear that the sources of America's problems are illegal immigrants and Islamic terrorism. Grillo's causal model of nationalism demonstrates that predispositions related to prejudice and identity lead to negative emotions, which in turn lead to support for Trump. The chapter provides us with clear empirical evidence about the link between nationalism, emotions, predispositions and support for Trump.

Chapter seven, "Trump: An Antiestablishment hero?", is written by Gregg Henriques. He argues that against conventional wisdom and without initial support from the Republican establishment, Trump managed to become the Republican candidate. Henriques explores which psychological, social and political forces propelled Trump to success. He offers the explanation of a fundamental divide in the American character and identity. A divide has emerged between "cultural traditionalists" and "cultural cosmopolitans". The traditionalists were feeling resentful about being unheard by the political and intellectual establishment and Trump picked up on that. His central message has been that the establishment is rigged and corrupt. His actions can be viewed as emotional symbols to his supporters, he can disrupt the establishment. This chapter has quite a negativistic view on Trump's supporters, with Henriques referring to them as destructive and acting out. Other chapters in the book offer a more nuanced view on the appeal of Trump.

Matthew C. MacWilliams has written chapter eight in the book, "Intolerant and Afraid: Authoritarians Rise to Trump's Call". MacWilliams explains how there are two variables defining Trump's supporters: authoritarianism and a personalized fear of terrorism. He explores several questions in relation to these two variables. First, he examines whether Trump's voters voted 'correctly' (based on a congruence between Trump's issue positions and voters' preferences). He finds that Trump's voters share his views on immigration and they tend to support a strong executive who takes action when necessary. Second, he asks what the rise of Trump, and his authoritarian voters, means for the future of American politics. MacWilliams finds that the unconstitutional, anti-democratic solutions of Trump's voters go much further than Trump's policy proposals. Third, he examines how Trump's supporters became so knowledgeable about his views. MacWilliams concludes that Trump has transformed the political discourse and that learning about Trump became some sort of entertainment. This chapter raises intriguing questions about the future of American politics.

The ninth chapter in this book, "Death: The Trump Card", is written by Florette Cohen, Sharlynn Thompson, Tom Pyszczynski and Sheldon Solomon. The authors examine the role of unconscious death anxiety on human behavior, and how it forges a bond between charismatic leaders and their followers. It builds on the "Terror Management Theory", which is based on the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. The authors explain how all forms of life have a basic, biological inclination towards self-preservation. Humans are unique in having abstract, symbolic thought and self-reflection. We have dealt with the awareness of death by embracing certain cultural worldviews, a sense that one is a person of value in a world of meaning. Reminders of death intensify cultural worldview defense and when mortality is salient, voters favor charismatic leaders. We have seen this unfold during George W. Bush's presidency. Prior to 9/11 many were uninspired by his leadership, but after his declaration that the nation was at war, his approval ratings reached unprecedented heights. The authors stress that Trump has entered the political arena at a time when his supporters were feeling economically and psychologically assaulted. For his supporters, threatening shared cultural worldviews increases insecurity and hostility towards outsiders. This has created an ideal opportunity for a charismatic leader, such as Trump, to provide meaning, value and security. This chapter offers a lot of historically relevant examples to explain Trump's electoral victory and it offers an interesting perspective on Trump, drawn from the field of cultural anthropology.

Chapter ten, "Insulter Trump: A Bonus for His Followers?", is written by Karina V. Korostelina. In this chapter, Korostelina examines the role of Trump's insults and how they affected his followers. Not all insults are similar, insults can refer to personal or group incentives, problems in interactions, or grounds for conflict. Trump's insults are often perceived as a representation of his aggressiveness, incivility and impoliteness. Korostelina notes that each insult has a specific purpose. Some function to create a negative image of his opponents, and some tend to increase the power of Trump in comparison to others. Trump's supporters also benefit from his insults, they improve their self-esteem and perception of power. They feel more empowered because the insults validate their bigotry and discriminative actions. Trump's supporters, through his insults, are experiencing a perception of higher social status and a feeling of being superior within the social hierarchy. The conclusion that Trump's followers feel empowered by his insults does not seem very groundbreaking. This chapter reads well but is not very inspiring overall.

Chapter eleven, "Tweeting Morals in the 2016 Election", is written by J.P. Prims, Zachary J. Melton and Matt Motyl. The authors use twitter to search for moral differences, based on political preferences, in the presidential primary. The authors use the "Moral Foundations Dictionary" to measure which Twitter users speak more about morality. The "Vice sub-dictionary", which was used in this study, contains words that correspond with five moral foundations: harm, cheating, betrayal, subversion and degradation. Data showed that both Clinton's and Trump's followers spoke little about harm. Clinton's followers spoke more about cheating and fairness in comparison to Trump's followers, whereas Trump's followers spoke more about betrayal and loyalty. Overall, Trump and Clinton followers showed similar patterns of diction. However, Cruz and Sanders followers scored above average on most foundations. In sum, this chapter offers a nice quantitative study about the media use by different political followers.

The twelfth chapter, "Dramatic Rationalities: Electoral Theater in the Age of Trump", is written by Mark Chou and Michael L. Ondaatje. In this chapter, the authors argue that theatrical insights provide a unique way of understanding the nature of Trump's appeal. They argue that theatrics have been an essential aspect of U.S politics for some time now. During Ronald Reagan's election, it became evident politicians would be rewarded based on their mastery of the stage and screen. Most campaign events are dramatic productions, carefully scripted, staged and managed. The authors argue that Trump, as a TV-personality, has taken performance politics to new heights. At first glance, we might conclude Trump is an anti-politician and authoritarian. However, through a dramaturgical looking glass we might conclude that Trump is not the man he appears to be. It is important that his supporters see an image of their aspirations in Trump. The authors of this chapter stress that real "theater buffs" probably would have detected some melodrama on Trump's part. This can be observed in his dramatic portrayals of good and evil. Building the wall, demonizing China or keeping out Muslims are all policies that fit within the melodramatic paradigm. The art of theater will teach us how to watch the human action. Political science has often stressed that politics and entertainment have been merging, and using theatrical insights to analyze political candidates is a refreshing way of looking at their appeal. It might help decipher the role of more subliminal aspects of campaigning.

The thirteenth and final chapter of this book, "Mindfulness: A Tool for Thoughtful Politics", is written by Christopher S. Reina. He discusses two factors, with regard to worldviews, that have set the stage for the "Trump phenomenon". Reina explains that the innate human tendency towards fight-or-flight responding and ego-based self-preservation, work together in influencing our behavior. The fight-or-flight mechanism ensures our survival, but we should be aware of what happens when we are continually experiencing a state of fight-or-flight. Media outlets ensure that problems are always at the forefront of our minds and this evokes the fight-or-flight response mechanism and a need to escape our situation. In times of stress, our amygdala becomes highly activated, which prohibits us from complex and rational thinking. A second mechanism influencing the human behavior is ego. The ego assumes all incoming information is self-relevant. By default, everything becomes personal, according to Reina. Whenever there is a loss, the ego becomes defensive, rationalizes that an event could not have been controlled or reinforces the comment or action that caused the issue. We have seen this in Trump, when he tweeted that he should be congratulated for being right on radical Islamic terrorism after the Or-

lando nightclub shooting. According to Reina, Trump appeals to our basic human tendencies of ensuring that the self prevails over others. Reina notes that winning at all costs is a strategy that does not come without high long-term costs. The ego will continually seek out victories over others and reinforce its own value. Letting our lives be dictated by past or future concerns brings out our basic fight-or-flight and ego-driven mechanisms and prevents us from higher-level reasoning. Reina's chapter is quite philosophical and offers great strategic advice about the next phase in Trump's leadership style.