The Trouble with Trump

Some Evidence-based Reasons to be Afraid (Very Afraid) of The Donald

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"Every normal man must be tempted, at times, to spit on his hands, raise the black flag, and begin slitting throats."

This quote above, from H. M. Melkin, is also a summation of the personality type for Donald J. Trump as derived from a set of SYMLOG* observations made by a random sample of forty-six adults. Participants answered the question: "In general, what kinds of values does Donald J. Trump show in behavior?"

National polls indicate that, for a majority of the electorate, Trump is seen as a polarizing image rather than a unifying force. What is behind this image that brings such a potential for polarization?

The results of the aggregated ratings are shown in *Figure 1* as a bargraph profile. Each line of x"s represents the average observation. The line of "E's" shows the research location for "most effective" in interaction, whether for a leader, member, or team. Even with only a cursory inspection, it is not difficult to see that the bargraph for Trump deviates quite remarkably from the research norm for a "Most Effective Leader."

In order to understand the implications for "effective," consider the definition of effective leadership as: "a process that unifies a diverse group of people to work together towards a common purpose under varied and often difficult conditions, through the elimination of scapegoating, the maximization of mediation, and the judicious use of power."

In this case, the "group of people" is the electorate of the United States and Trump (in these data) appears to emphasize self-serving and authoritarian domination (items #6, 7, 14) rather than the mediation of differences (items #3, 11, 12). One can unify a diverse group in the short-term simply by applying heavy-handed authoritarian domination and punishment and/or scapegoating certain minority subgroups (e.g., Muslims, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans) for chronic and acute problems. However, the longer-term consequence of such approaches is actually increased conflict and polarization through an abuse of power, the violation of trust, and the undermining of legitimate authority.

Trump's dangerous approach to conflict resolution (primarily through intimidation and domination) is antithetical to participatory democracy. Democracy requires the mediation of differences in search of shared commitment, rather than simply strict compliance to imposed solutions. These observers perceive Trump as showing a seriously skewed set of values, long on self-serving intimidation and short on the collective collaboration so necessary for national unity.

Bargraph of the average of all ratings made on: DOT
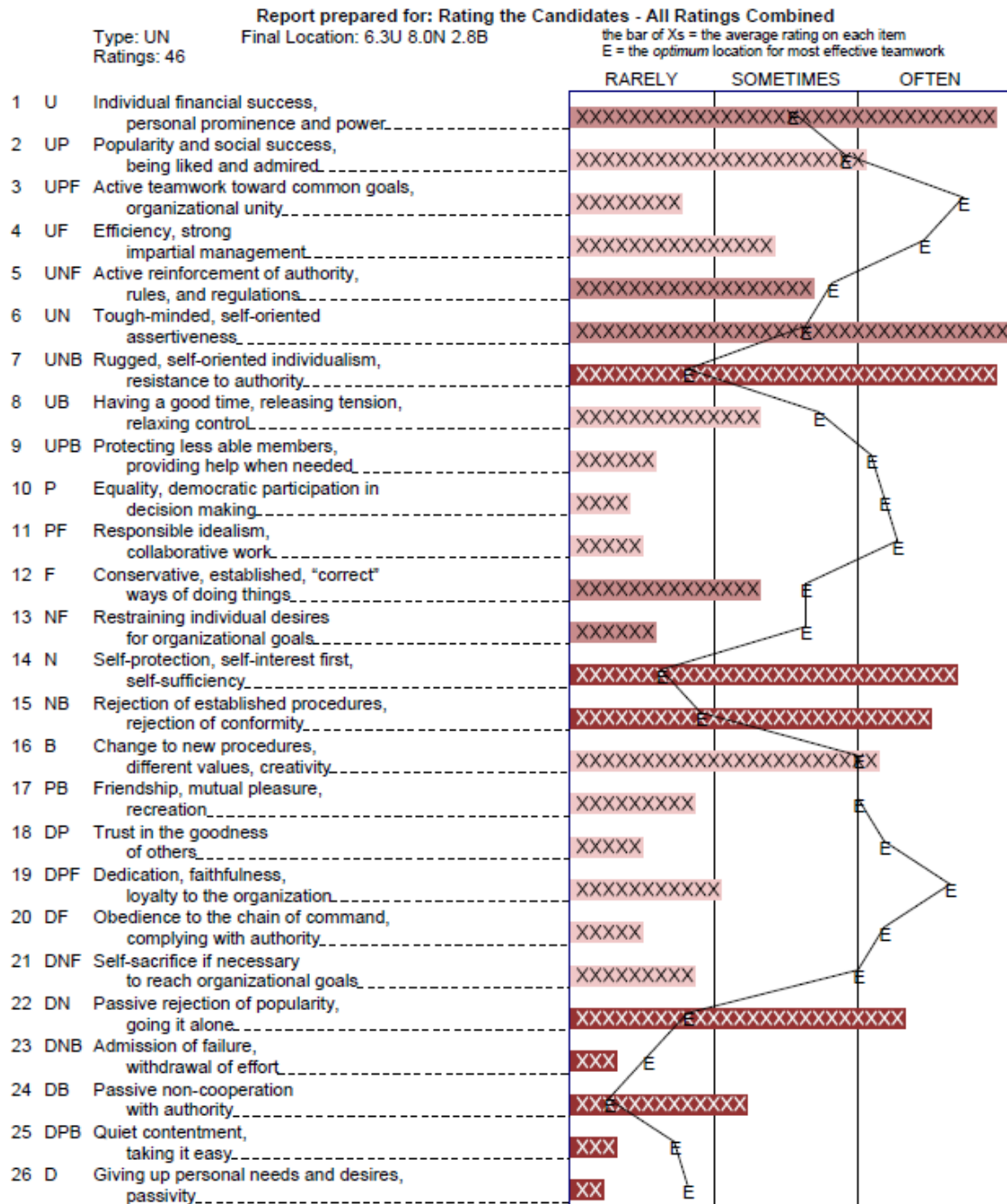Rating question: **In general, what kinds of values does this person show in behavior?**

Report prepared for: **Rating the Candidates - All Ratings Combined**

Type: UN   Final Location: 6.3U 8.0N 2.8B

Ratings: 46

the bar of Xs = the average rating on each item
E = the *optimum* location for most effective teamwork

			RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1	U	Individual financial success, personal prominence and power	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXEXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
2	UP	Popularity and social success, being liked and admired	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXEX		
3	UPF	Active teamwork toward common goals, organizational unity	XXXXXXXX		E
4	UF	Efficiency, strong impartial management	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX		E
5	UNF	Active reinforcement of authority, rules, and regulations	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXE		
6	UN	Tough-minded, self-oriented assertiveness	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXEXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
7	UNB	Rugged, self-oriented individualism, resistance to authority	XXXXXXXXEXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
8	UB	Having a good time, releasing tension, relaxing control	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX	E	
9	UPB	Protecting less able members, providing help when needed	XXXXX		E
10	P	Equality, democratic participation in decision making	XXXX		E
11	PF	Responsible idealism, collaborative work	XXXXX		E
12	F	Conservative, established, "correct" ways of doing things	XXXXXXXXXXXXXX	E	
13	NF	Restraining individual desires for organizational goals	XXXXXX	E	
14	N	Self-protection, self-interest first, self-sufficiency	XXXXXXEXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
15	NB	Rejection of established procedures, rejection of conformity	XXXXXXXXXXEXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
16	B	Change to new procedures, different values, creativity	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXEX		
17	PB	Friendship, mutual pleasure, recreation	XXXXXXXXXX	E	
18	DP	Trust in the goodness of others	XXXXX	E	
19	DPF	Dedication, faithfulness, loyalty to the organization	XXXXXXXXXXX		E
20	DF	Obedience to the chain of command, complying with authority	XXXXX	E	
21	DNF	Self-sacrifice if necessary to reach organizational goals	XXXXXXXX	E	
22	DN	Passive rejection of popularity, going it alone	XXXXXXXXEXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX		
23	DNB	Admission of failure, withdrawal of effort	XXX	E	
24	DB	Passive non-cooperation with authority	XXEXXXXXXXXXX		
25	DPB	Quiet contentment, taking it easy	XXX	E	
26	D	Giving up personal needs and desires, passivity	XX	E	

Figure 1

SYMLOG Bargraph Profile for Donald J. Trump (2015)

An item-by-item analysis of the SYMLOG bargraph helps to illuminate what a majority of the electorate seem to sense intuitively.   Keep in mind that an expression of certain values can have differential effects on unification and polarization, and may:

- *Contribute* to effective working relationships;
- Be *necessary sometimes* but dangerous to working relationships if overemphasized; or,
- Almost always i̲nterfere with effective working relationships when shown in excess.

In the case of Trump, almost every value is out of line with what research (the line of E's) has demonstrated to contribute to effective working relations among a diverse group. Instead, the profile in *Figure 1* displays an imbalance that is potentially catastrophic for someone with responsibility for, and direct access to, nuclear weapons. It is the profile of a dominating, self-serving, anti-establishment rebel who calls other candidates for the Presidency "stupid," "weak", and "idiots."

The items noted below all show an overemphasis to the extreme.

Item 1: Individual financial success, personal prominence and power

A moderate emphasis on this value promotes strength, stability, and predictability. An extreme emphasis tends to promote a reliance on raw power, domination, and mistrust.

Item 6: Tough-minded, self-oriented assertiveness

This kind of value recommends the exercise of aggression with very little window dressing. It has survival value in "primitive" situations but is generally dangerous to effective working relationships. Individuals who show these values sometimes function alone; ally themselves with the agents of authority and act as "enforcers"; and sometimes ally themselves with revolutionary leaders as "freedom fighters." In each of these cases the effect is to escalate polarization toward its most damaging form: "totalitarianism of the far right" versus "revolution of the far left."

Item 7: Rugged, self-oriented individualism, resistance to authority

If a person holds these values strongly because of earlier experience of humiliation, it may take very little to activate the dysfunctional behavior that has the aim of asserting the self in opposition to authority and conventionalism. The behavior may include displaying the self as fascinating, shocking, unrestrained, and spectacular. It may also include showing contempt for others who appear "weak" or "low energy," or submissive and dependent on authority. A fear of being defenseless in the face of a threatening authority is often the underlying emotion. The most immediate effect is undermining legitimate authority. The longer-term effect is often anarchy.

Item 14: Self-protection, self-interest first, self-sufficiency

Fear that survival of the group is severely threatened may bring out these values in people like Trump. Some individuals, however, because of prior experiences, are threatened by any increase in friendliness, solidarity, and consensus in the group itself. They fear they may come to trust others too much, or be drawn into mediocrity, or prevented from rising in status, or that they will incur obligations they do not wish to meet. Their behavior seems unfriendly, negativistic, and persistently in disagreement. Strong attempts to "bring them into the group" only increase the polarization and make things worse by deepening the conflict.

Item 15: Rejection of established procedures, rejection of conformity

There are times when established procedures fail to work, and the emergence of these values among a number of group members is to be expected. A "revolution" of sorts may be the best solution. Trump appears to reject established procedures, but also promotes procedures that conform to methods associated with autocratic totalitarianism, such as the way conflict is resolved—through domination. Weakness is punished through intimidation.

Item 22: Passive rejection of popularity, going it alone

Trump seems enthralled with his popularity among his supporters but exhibits volatile disdain for those who fail to show enthusiasm for him. He rejects support from members of the establishment and trumpets his own self-sufficiency in mounting a campaign that indicates he needs no establishment support. Trump wants to "Make America Great Again" by using only strong individualists who agree with him and who themselves are outside the mainstream of establishment politics. Ironically, the more Trump gains in popularity the more he dismisses and diminishes those whom others perceive as statesmen or stateswomen who prefer diplomacy to the exercise of raw and coercive power.

Item 24: Passive non-cooperation with authority

Trump seems clearly an anti-establishment candidate even though he expresses his own brand of authoritarian dogma. Many adolescents are known for their passive non-cooperation with parents and school officials which can come off as a kind of petulance or ridiculing of establishment mores and values. Even though Trump is no longer an adolescent, he is perceived by these raters as being unreceptive to ideas and procedures that do not conform with his own fairly ridged and self-centered conceptions of what is required to promote comity in working relationships, especially in something as seemingly disdainful to him as government service.

Other problematic areas of concern in the bargraph:

Underemphasized to the extreme: Notice that the more collaborative items #3, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 are all underemphasized in Trump's profile. In many ways, these values are the polar opposite of the self-centered and self-sufficient values Trump is perceived to overemphasize. A constellation of collaborative values, when shown often, tend to promote evidence-based trust, group solidarity, and mutual commitment to common goals among a diverse group of people. Collaborative values, which Trump appears to underemphasize, are key to fostering democratic participation in governance.

Summary:

 In short, by overemphasizing values that tend to interfere with effective working relations in a diverse population, Trump is highly likely to act in a governing role much like a narcissistic, power-oriented dogmatist who is unwilling and unable to unify diversity except through intimidation, domination, and the arbitrary application of self-serving and self-aggrandizing actions. Such behavior is dangerous with a highly conflicted set of domestic and global relationships requiring effective leadership, wisdom, seasoned diplomacy, and collaboration to avoid cataclysmic consequences that accompany the exercise of raw power in acute and chronic conflict situations.

*SYMLOG is a Harvard-based survey research method described as: A System for the Multiple Level Observation of Groups. An outline of the method may be viewed at www.symlog.com