**The US presidential election is tomorrow.**

I think I speak for most everyone when I say:

***WHEW. THANK ALL RELEVANT DEITIES THIS FUCKING THING IS ALMOST OVER.***

This election has been a ghastly spectacle—an inescapable carnival of bullshit that has haunted our collective consciousness for months and months and months.

99% of the election coverage has been political theatre—a largely counterproductive black hole of [tribal posturing and signaling](http://highexistence.com/moral-matrix-jonathan-haidt-yin-and-yang/) that has served primarily to stoke the infernos of hostility raging on both sides of the political aisle.

Despite seeming on one level like the Eternal Recurrence of the Worst Joke of All Time, on another level this election is, paradoxically, deadly serious. After all, we’re arguably electing the most powerful person in the world.

**A Caveat on Divisiveness**

Regardless of the outcome of this election, I fear that the divisiveness of American politics has reached a dangerous level.

For months, we’ve witnessed both parties constantly demonize and dehumanize “the other guys” in a vitriolic and contemptuous manner. This election seems to have catalyzed a significantly greater degree of polarization and animosity than I’ve seen in my lifetime. To be honest, I fear that no matter the outcome, there will be a violent backlash this week.

In the midst of this, I implore anyone reading this to remember that the people on the other side of the aisle are not monsters. They’re human beings with complex stories and deeply felt reasons for their actions, just like you. Neither side is fundamentally deplorable. The majority of individuals on both sides are well-intentioned people doing what they think is right. Instead of demonizing, perhaps we can try to understand. Instead of dehumanizing, perhaps we can try to appreciate that it is possible for good people to view the world in entirely different ways.

**Uncertainty and Risk**

I will be the first to admit that I cannot say with absolute [certainty](http://highexistence.com/possibilianism-middle-ground-strict-atheism-christianity/) whether a Clinton presidency or a Trump presidency will be better for the world. No one can say that. Because no one knows for sure.

What I can say is that I’ve spent hundreds of hours researching this election. I’ve considered many arguments for and against both candidates, including arguments by some of the most intelligent human beings whose existences I am aware of. And through all this I have sincerely endeavored (and surely sometimes failed) to remain unbiased and non-partisan. I do not consider myself a Democrat or a Republican. I feel I understand why many people support both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump (more on that below).

With that being said, I have made up my mind. After much deliberation, I believe the available evidence suggests that the worst-case scenarios of a Trump presidency are substantially worse and more likely to occur than the worst-case scenarios of a Clinton presidency. Given my commitment to minimizing [global catastrophic risk](http://highexistence.com/why-humanity-must-become-a-multi-planetary-species/), I am thus supporting the candidate I consider to be lower-risk, lower-variance. **I am voting for Hillary Clinton, and I encourage every American I know, especially those in swing states, to vote for her.**

**The Primary Argument That Cemented My Position**

The primary argument that cemented my position is this: Trump has revealed himself to be a wildly unpredictable candidate and has made numerousunconscionably reckless statements—statements which indicate an absence of the tact, acumen, and experience necessary to serve as leader of a global superpower and commander-in-chief of the world’s most powerful military.

He has asked why we build so many nuclear weapons if we’re never going to use them, and he has suggested that he might not support certain US allies (the Baltic states) in the event of an attack from Russia. These statements are dangerously irresponsible and indicate a lack of understanding of the web of international relations and understandings which act as a bulwark against a WWIII scenario in our present world.

To be clear, I am not a fan of Hillary Clinton (or any of the third-party candidates for that matter), but make no mistake: Voting for her is the only way to keep Trump out of the White House. **A “lesser of two evils” argument is valid if the greater of the evils is substantially more likely to cause a global catastrophe.** I detest our dysfunctional [first-past-the-post voting system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-past-the-post_voting) and think [reforming it](http://www.fairvote.org/) would be one of the best things for American democracy. Until that happens, though, we must be realistic in acknowledging that it *will* be either Clinton or Trump who wins on Tuesday. If you live in a swing state and don’t want a Trump presidency, please know that a vote for Clinton is the *only* vote that counts against Trump. If you’re in a swing state, don’t want Trump, and want to vote third-party, consider [swapping your vote](http://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2016/11/3/13478042/third-party-clinton-vote-trading) with a Clinton supporter in a safe state—it’s a win-win.

I have numerous other reasons for voting Clinton, many of which are spelled out in the forthcoming arguments. Certainly many of you will see things differently. That is absolutely encouraged and to be expected.

Nonetheless, I felt it would be useful for me to share the 12 most compelling arguments that persuaded me in this election. My hope is that these arguments may help, in this final moment before the election, to clarify the thinking of those who yet harbor some degree of indecision. I deeply appreciate anyone who takes the time to read/listen to the items I share, ponder them with an open mind, and earnestly weigh the arguments I present against all other relevant arguments.

**The 12 Arguments That Convinced Me**

**1.** [**Scott Alexander urges people to consider that Trump is an extremely high-variance/high-risk candidate**](http://slatestarcodex.com/2016/09/28/ssc-endorses-clinton-johnson-or-stein/)

Scott Alexander is one of the foremost rationalist writers/bloggers of the 21st century. His [essay](http://slatestarcodex.com/2016/09/28/ssc-endorses-clinton-johnson-or-stein/) endorsing Clinton is excellent and quite persuasive—probably the argument which most closely reflects my own position. Here’s a memorable portion:

“I can imagine someone admitting that Clinton will probably be better at governing than Trump, but preferring Trump’s position on the issues so much that it still gives him an edge. In that case, I beg you to consider not only the mean but the variance.

I think even people who expect Trump to be a better President on average will admit he’s a high-variance choice. Hillary is an overwhelmingly known quantity at this point. A Hillary presidency will probably be a lot like Obama’s presidency. There might be a Libya-style military action; probably not an Iraq-style one. If something terrible happens like China tries to invade Taiwan, she will probably make some sort of vaguely reasonable decision after consulting her advisors. She might do a bad job, but it’s hard to imagine a course where a Hillary presidency leads directly to the apocalypse, the fall of American democracy, et cetera.

Trump isn’t a known quantity. Maybe he’ll kind of dodder around and be kind of funny while not changing much. Or maybe there will be some crisis and Trump will take what could have been a quickly-defused diplomatic incident and turn it into World War III. Remember also that it’s more likely the House and Senate both stay Republican than that they both switch to being Democrat. So if Hillary is elected, she’ll probably spend four years smashing her head against Congress; if Trump is elected, he will probably get a lot of what he wants.

Some people like high variance. I don’t. The world has seen history’s greatest alleviation of poverty over the past few decades, and this shows every sign of continuing as long as we don’t do something incredibly stupid that blows up the current world order. I’m less sanguine about the state of America in particular but I think that its generally First World problems probably can’t be solved by politics. They will probably require either genetic engineering or artificial intelligence; the job of our generation is [to] keep the world functional enough to do the research that will create those technologies, and to alleviate as much suffering as we can in the meantime. I don’t see a Clinton presidency as making the world non-functional, whatever that means. I don’t know what I see a Trump presidency doing because, Trump is inherently unpredictable, but some major blow to world functionality is definitely on the list of possibilities.”

**2.** [**Sam Harris and Andrew Sullivan explain everything wrong with Clinton and why they will still undoubtedly vote for her**](https://soundcloud.com/samharrisorg/49-the-lesser-evil)

This is an absolutely exceptional podcast episode and one of the most balanced election discussions I’ve found. Neuroscientist/writer/thinker Sam Harris and journalist/political commentator Andrew Sullivan spend a lot of time discussing a long list of legitimate criticisms of both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. They really don’t pull any punches when discussing Clinton, but they ultimately feel utterly convinced that Trump is a worse choice.

If there’s one thing to absorb and consider prior to voting, it’s probably [this](https://soundcloud.com/samharrisorg/49-the-lesser-evil). Here’s a taste:

Andrew Sullivan: “And once you see that moment—when [other Republicans] are too frightened of their followers to act—then you realize how terrifying this would be, were he to win. Because were he to win, almost certainly the House and the Senate would be with him. Almost certainly then he would be able to shape the Supreme Court. There would be no institutional resistance, except for the Republican party itself, which has shown itself to be incapable of resisting.

So that is where this is deeply dangerous. And let me point out— I just want to put this scenario out there because I think it hasn’t been put out there before: And we are at war! And the war could get worse. In fact, his very election, I think, would provoke a wave of jihadist terrorism. Now what would his response to that be? I think there’s no question that the Constitution as we’ve known it would be in tatters overnight. This is a man who has advocated—openly advocated—the torture of prisoners of war. He’s openly advocated the mass murder of civilians. He’s advocated the killing of the families of terrorists.”

Sam Harris: “But what’s confusing about this for his supporters is he’s also advocated an isolationism that makes Hillary look like the warmonger. He’s insisted that he was against the Iraq War, even though that’s at best ambiguous. He’s advocated a retreat from the world. Basically, he just wants to build a wall and hunker down, if you take him in at least most of his moods. And [for] many of the people who support him and who supported Sanders, frankly—this is music to their ears. [They think,] ‘We don’t need to be the world’s cop. We don’t need to be in the Middle East. Those people are barbarians who are never going to understand that democracy is a good thing. Let’s just make our country great again.’ Right? That’s the promise.”

Andrew Sullivan: “Except he’s not consistent on that because he wants to destroy ISIS, by which he means presumably a Putin-level bombing campaign.”

Sam Harris: “Or maybe a nuclear one. [Trump suggests,] ‘Why can’t we use our nukes? We’ve got ’em. Shouldn’t we be using them?'”

Andrew Sullivan: “What this does—and again, what you have to understand is we always project from our current situation and think things continue as they do—no. These kind of movements seize upon events. The events change our reality. The emotions that can be summoned up and manipulated in these processes—the mass emotions, especially when we have no elite control of the media anymore…—[are] incredibly dangerous.”

And here’s the full episode, if you happen to want to listen right now:

**3.** [**America Has Never Been So Ripe for Tyranny**](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html)

Actually, [this](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html) might be the absolute best thing to read prior to voting. A masterful and beautifully written essay on the reasons for Trump’s rise, by Andrew Sullivan, a brilliant and well-regarded political commentator. Here’s a sample:

“Mass movements, Hoffer argues, are distinguished by a “facility for make-believe … credulity, a readiness to attempt the impossible.” What, one wonders, could be more impossible than suddenly vetting every single visitor to the U.S. for traces of Islamic belief? What could be more make-believe than a big, beautiful wall stretching across the entire Mexican border, paid for by the Mexican government? What could be more credulous than arguing that we could pay off our national debt through a global trade war? In a conventional political party, and in a rational political discourse, such ideas would be laughed out of contention, their self-evident impossibility disqualifying them from serious consideration. In the emotional fervor of a democratic mass movement, however, these impossibilities become icons of hope, symbols of a new way of conducting politics. Their very impossibility is their appeal.

But the most powerful engine for such a movement — the thing that gets it off the ground, shapes and solidifies and entrenches it — is always the evocation of hatred. It is, as Hoffer put it, “the most accessible and comprehensive of all unifying elements.” And so Trump launched his campaign by calling undocumented Mexican immigrants a population largely of rapists and murderers. He moved on to Muslims, both at home and abroad. He has now added to these enemies — with sly brilliance — the Republican Establishment itself. And what makes Trump uniquely dangerous in the history of American politics — with far broader national appeal than, say, Huey Long or George Wallace — is his response to all three enemies. It’s the threat of blunt coercion and dominance.

And so after demonizing most undocumented Mexican immigrants, he then vowed to round up and deport all 11 million of them by force. “They have to go” was the typically blunt phrase he used — and somehow people didn’t immediately recognize the monstrous historical echoes. The sheer scale of the police and military operation that this policy would entail boggles the mind. Worse, he emphasized, after the mass murder in San Bernardino, that even the Muslim-Americans you know intimately may turn around and massacre you at any juncture. “There’s something going on,” he declaimed ominously, giving legitimacy to the most hysterical and ugly of human impulses.

To call this fascism doesn’t do justice to fascism. Fascism had, in some measure, an ideology and occasional coherence that Trump utterly lacks. But his movement is clearly fascistic in its demonization of foreigners, its hyping of a threat by a domestic minority (Muslims and Mexicans are the new Jews), its focus on a single supreme leader of what can only be called a cult, and its deep belief in violence and coercion in a democracy that has heretofore relied on debate and persuasion. This is the Weimar aspect of our current moment. Just as the English Civil War ended with a dictatorship under Oliver Cromwell, and the French Revolution gave us Napoleon Bonaparte, and the unstable chaos of Russian democracy yielded to Vladimir Putin, and the most recent burst of Egyptian democracy set the conditions for General el-Sisi’s coup, so our paralyzed, emotional hyperdemocracy leads the stumbling, frustrated, angry voter toward the chimerical panacea of Trump.”

**4.** [**50+ Republican foreign policy and national security experts sign a letter asserting that they will not vote for Trump and believe he would be the “most reckless President in American history”**](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/08/08/us/politics/national-security-letter-trump.html)

This was exceptionally notable, considering that Republicans have tremendous incentive to support their *own party’s* presidential candidate. Such an unprecedented move is extremely compelling evidence that there is legitimate reason to fear the implications of a Trump presidency for the US and the world at large. Here’s an excerpt, which is basically the full letter:

“None of us will vote for Donald Trump.

From a foreign policy perspective, Donald Trump is not qualified to be President and Commander-in-Chief. Indeed, we are convinced that he would be a dangerous President and would put at risk our country’s national security and well-being.

Most fundamentally, Mr. Trump lacks the character, values, and experience to be President. He weakens U.S. moral authority as the leader of the free world. He appears to lack basic knowledge about and belief in the U.S. Constitution, U.S. laws, and U.S. institutions, including religious tolerance, freedom of the press, and an independent judiciary.

In addition, Mr. Trump has demonstrated repeatedly that he has little understanding of America’s vital national interests, its complex diplomatic challenges, its indispensable alliances, and the democratic values on which U.S. foreign policy must be based. At the same time, he persistently compliments our adversaries and threatens our allies and friends. Unlike previous Presidents who had limited experience in foreign affairs, Mr. Trump has shown no interest in educating himself.

He continues to display an alarming ignorance of basic facts of contemporary international politics. Despite his lack of knowledge, Mr. Trump claims that he understands foreign affairs and “knows more about ISIS than the generals do.”

Mr. Trump lacks the temperament to be President. In our experience, a President must be willing to listen to his advisers and department heads; must encourage consideration of conflicting views; and must acknowledge errors and learn from them. A President must be disciplined, control emotions, and act only after reflection and careful deliberation. A President must maintain cordial relationships with leaders of countries of different backgrounds and must have their respect and trust.

In our judgment, Mr. Trump has none of these critical qualities. He is unable or unwilling to separate truth from falsehood. He does not encourage conflicting views. He lacks self-control and acts impetuously. He cannot tolerate personal criticism. He has alarmed our closest allies with his erratic behavior. All of these are dangerous qualities in an individual who aspires to be President and Commander-in-Chief, with command of the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

We understand that many Americans are profoundly frustrated with the federal government and its inability to solve pressing domestic and international problems. We also know that many have doubts about Hillary Clinton, as do many of us. But Donald Trump is not the answer to America’s daunting challenges and to this crucial election. We are convinced that in the Oval Office, he would be the most reckless President in American history.”

**5.** [**A master list of hundreds of reasons to think Trump is not fit to be president**](http://quantum-displacement.tumblr.com/post/146015554444/anti-trump-masterpost)

Kudos to whoever compiled [this list](http://quantum-displacement.tumblr.com/post/146015554444/anti-trump-masterpost). It cites hundreds of events/analyses/quotes by Trump himself (with sources) that demonstrate the unfeasibility of many of his policy ideas, his frightening stances on nuclear weapons, the unsuitability of his character/temperament for the office he seeks, the crimes he’s committed in his life, the countless lies he’s told during his campaign, and much more. This one is less of a formal argument than all the other items on this list, but it seemed appropriate to include it.

It would be very difficult to read this entire list and feel good about giving this man the reigns of a global superpower and control of the world’s most powerful military. There’s also a [shorter Reddit version](https://www.reddit.com/r/EnoughTrumpSpam/comments/4teoxl/a_final_response_to_the_tell_me_why_trump_is_a/) of the list with better formatting and hyperlinks.

**6.** [**Sam Harris articulates why Donald Trump is a dangerous candidate**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Az1JyDJ_iKU)

This is a [segment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Az1JyDJ_iKU) from another one of Sam Harris’ podcast episodes, in which he dissects the deficiencies of character that make Trump a poor choice and would render any other candidate un-electable. I do think Harris could have done a better job of citing more examples/evidence to back up his claims abut Trump, but on the whole, this is a very persuasive breakdown. Here’s a taste:

“Consider the fraud of Trump University, where he built poor and elderly people out of their money in return for pseudo-knowledge. This is who Clinton is running against. We have to get out of the wilderness of false equivalence here. Yes, there’s a lot to say about Clinton. And, if you’re going to bring her husband into it, there’s just a wasteland of embarrassment there. But these are not the sorts of things that could push the career of our species into the ditch.

Trump shows every sign of being that sort of character, where a combination of hubris and ignorance of a sort that we’ve never seen could create extraordinary economic and political chaos. There is nothing like that on Clinton’s side. Hence, a “lesser of two evils” argument makes perfect sense here.

The amazing thing about Trump is that he is so terrible that he has completely reset everyone’s expectations of what is conceivably acceptable in a presidential candidate. You’ve seen the footage of him openly mocking a disabled reporter, right? Watch that footage, and imagine what that would have done to any other person’s campaign. Imagine president Obama, eight years ago, doing that. Imagine Hillary Clinton, today, doing that. That’s the end of the campaign. Trump has done a dozen things like that—that are so un-presidential, that show such poor judgment, such a lack of impulse control, such a pettiness, such narcissism, such emotional and intellectual immaturity. It would be inconceivable to promote such a person in any other context as the candidate of a major political party, and yet here we are with Trump.”

And here’s the full clip, if you’d like to listen right now:

**7.** [**370 economists, including eight Nobel laureates in economics, sign a letter warning that Trump’s plan for the economy is fundamentally unsound, saying that he is a “dangerous, destructive choice for the country”**](http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/EconomistLetter11012016.pdf)

This was another fairly unprecedented occurrence. *The Wall Street Journal,* a right-leaning publication, published a [letter](http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/EconomistLetter11012016.pdf) decrying the Republican presidential candidate, signed by 370 economists from all over the US. Here’s a sample:

“We, the undersigned economists, represent a broad variety of areas of expertise and are united in our opposition to Donald Trump. We recommend that voters choose a different candidate on the following grounds:

— He degrades trust in vital public institutions that collect and disseminate information about the economy, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by spreading disinformation about the integrity of their work.

— He has misled voters in states like Ohio and Michigan by asserting that the renegotiation of NAFTA or the imposition of tariffs on China would substantially increase employment in manufacturing. In fact, manufacturing’s share of employment has been declining since the 1970s and is mostly related to automation, not trade.

— He claims to champion former manufacturing workers, but has no plan to assist their transition to well-compensated service sector positions. Instead, he has diverted the policy discussion to options that ignore both the reality of technological progress and the benefits of international trade.

— He has misled the public by asserting that U.S. manufacturing has declined. The location and product composition of manufacturing has changed, but the level of output has more than doubled in the U.S. since the 1980s.

— He has falsely suggested that trade is zero-sum and that the “toughness” of negotiators primarily drives trade deficits.

— He has misled the public with false statements about trade agreements eroding national income and wealth. Although the gains have not been equally distributed—and this is an important discussion in itself—both mean income and mean wealth have risen substantially in the U.S. since the 1980s.

— He has lowered the seriousness of the national dialogue by suggesting that the elimination of the Environmental Protection Agency or the Department of Education would significantly reduce the fiscal deficit. A credible solution will require an increase in tax revenue and/or a reduction in spending on Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, or Defense.

Donald Trump is a dangerous, destructive choice for the country. He misinforms the electorate, degrades trust in public institutions with conspiracy theories, and promotes willful delusion over engagement with reality. If elected, he poses a unique danger to the functioning of democratic and economic institutions, and to the prosperity of the country. For these reasons, we strongly recommend that you do not vote for Donald Trump.”

**8.** [**Scott Alexander refutes claims that Trump is likely to keep us out of war**](http://slatestarcodex.com/2016/10/01/he-kept-us-out-of-war/)

Scott Alexander wrote an [excellent rebuttal](http://slatestarcodex.com/2016/10/01/he-kept-us-out-of-war/) of the popular characterization of Trump as an isolationist. His blog post pairs nicely with this [Quora answer](https://www.quora.com/Is-Hillary-Clinton-a-war-hawk/answer/Tom-Buczkowski) explaining why Hillary Clinton’s supposedly hawkish foreign policy approach is more nuanced than people think. Here’s an excerpt from Alexander’s post:

“Trump has earned a reputation as an isolationist by criticizing the Iraq War. I don’t think that reputation is deserved. He’s said a lot of things which suggest he would go to war at the drop of a hat.

— He says he will “bomb the s#!t out of ISIS” and calls for sending 30,000 troops to destroy them. His campaign website says he will “pursue aggressive joint and coalition military operations to crush and destroy ISIS”.

— He is ambiguous about whether Obama should have intervened in Syria to depose dictator Bashar Assad. He complained “there is something missing from our president. Had he crossed the line and really gone in with force, done something to Assad – if he had gone in with tremendous force, you wouldn’t have millions of people displaced all over the world.”

**9.** [**Renowned ethicist Peter Singer urges American voters not to vote for a third-party candidate**](https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/jill-stein-should-withdraw-battleground-states-by-peter-singer-2016-08)

Peter Singer is perhaps the most famous philosopher in the world, well-known for his work in animal ethics and [effective altruism](http://highexistence.com/ultimate-flowchart-for-determining-how-you-can-help-the-world/). In August of this year, he wrote a [superb article](https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/jill-stein-should-withdraw-battleground-states-by-peter-singer-2016-08) explaining why he opposes Donald Trump and why voting for Jill Stein may have unpalatable consequences. Here’s a taste:

“I’m a Green. I’ve twice been the Australian Greens’ candidate for a seat in Australia’s federal parliament. But on November 8, all of the good that the Green political movement has done since it was founded could be outweighed by the Green Party in the United States if Jill Stein, its candidate for president, brings about the election of Donald Trump.

[…]

In accepting the Democratic Party’s nomination, [Hillary Clinton] said: “I believe in science, I believe that climate change is real.”

In contrast, Trump tweeted: “The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive.” He later called that statement a joke; but he has also said – not in a tweet, but in a major speech about economic policy – that he would “cancel the Paris climate agreement” and “stop all payments of US tax dollars to UN global warming programs.”

Yet, incredibly, Stein is sounding just like Nader in 2000. Asked if the prospect of a Trump presidency is equal to that of a Clinton one, she replied, “they both lead to the same place.” She then said that the Democrats “have better spin… but they’re catastrophic as well.” In support of that, she added, “Just look at the policies under Obama on climate change.”

I’m looking. And the policies on climate change under Obama are vastly better than those under Bush. Obama’s policies made possible the Paris climate agreement concluded last December – not enough, to be sure, but far better than anything Trump is likely to do. Given the Republican majority in the US Congress, Obama has done well.

Will history repeat itself? I suspect that Trump would be an even worse president than George W. Bush, so I hope not. But Stein is on the ballot in Florida and Ohio, two big states that could decide the election. One recent poll gives her 3% of the vote, enough to make the difference in either of those states.

I call on Green party leaders all over the world to ask Stein to take her name off the ballot in states where the contest is likely to be close. If she won’t do it, they should take their appeal to voters, and ask them, in this election only, not to vote Green. The stakes are too high.

I understand the importance of changing the two-party system. What the US needs to achieve this is voting reform. Greens should not be working to elect a Green president, which is impossible under the current system, but to institute a fairer voting system, perhaps like Australia’s, which uses what is known in the US as “instant runoff.” Voters rank the candidates in order of preference, and if no candidate receives a majority of all votes cast, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated. The votes received by that candidate would then be transferred in accordance with the second preferences of those who voted for him or her.

In the current election, Stein’s voters would be able to vote for their candidate without worrying that their choice might benefit Trump, who presumably would not be these voters’ second preference. If the US had such a system, I wouldn’t be writing this column.”

**10.** [**Eliezer Yudkowsky explains the “Level A and Level B” of politics and why national security experts “went into HOLY SHIT mode” over Trump**](https://www.facebook.com/yudkowsky/posts/10154650743819228?pnref=story)

Eliezer is the founder of [LessWrong](http://lesswrong.com/), an AI researcher at [MIRI](https://intelligence.org/), and an insanely smart dude. A couple weeks ago, he wrote one of the most sophisticated and convincing analyses of the election I’ve come across. Unfortunately, I think his argument was weakened because he chose to compare the seriousness of WWIII to the seriousness of sexual assault in a way that I think was distracting and unnecessarily provocative. Nonetheless, his argument is undoubtedly worth including in this list. Here’s an abridged version that captures the essence of the argument:

“Every election, the Chicken Littles of both parties make a big deal out of how this year’s election opponent is the Worst Ever and Literally Hitler, and take every single thing their opponents do and try to make it sound as terrible as possible, and so on.

Okay, but here’s the thing. What does NOT happen every election cycle—and this happened months ago, not in the wake of the current bandwagon—is the entire Republican national security establishment going HOLY SHIT and repudiating the Republican candidate en masse.

Maybe I shouldn’t take it for granted that everyone already looks at the world and sees (a) a level of politics that’s theater and (b) a level of politics that’s deadly, deadly serious.

Maybe you heard that Trump said maybe we shouldn’t defend NATO countries if Russia invades. And you interpreted that as Trump expressing fed-up-ness with American military spending and our trying to defend everything in the world without getting much in return. Somebody in the newspapers seemed to be making a big deal out of it, just like they make a big deal out of Clinton emails. Clutching at their pearl necklaces and fainting about how terribly important it is that America honor its commitments to other countries, or something.

No.

The people in the national security bureaucracy—hell, even \*me\*, even though I’m not a national security bureaucrat and have only read a handful of military history books—heard that and thought:

“HOLY SHIT.”

Members of the Washington DC establishment who privately laugh about… insider trading, heard that and thought: “YOU DON’T DO THAT.”

[…]

The system isn’t as stable as it might look when you’re just strolling along your non-melted streets year after year, without any missiles ever falling on your own hometown. I don’t even know how much work it really takes to prevent everything from falling over.

If I were to try summarize very briefly why Trump’s remarks on NATO crossed a HOLY SHIT line, it’d be along the lines of: “If you read the history books, you realize that it is REALLY REALLY bad to have any ambiguity about which minor powers the major powers will defend; that is how World War I \*and\* World War II both started.”

And: “In the wake of the second World War that started from that kind of ambiguity, the senior leaders in both the East and the West, enemies though they may have been, decided to learn the lesson and henceforth be more clear about which countries they’d defend. Not only did Trump blow through that, he did so in a way that indicates he has no idea of how World War I started and why this is one of the things you absolutely don’t do. He doesn’t listen to advisors. He doesn’t have advisors! God knows what other guardrails he’s going to blow through!”

[…]

What Trump said wasn’t a gaffe, it was not one of those things that you’d have to be an idiot to say in front of journalists, it was a world-threatening misstep in the real-life version of the National Security Decision-Making Game.

And now Xi Jinping is thinking about the part where Donald Trump said “Why do we have all these nukes if we can’t use them?” and wondering whether China can take for granted America’s possession of nuclear weapons given that America’s electoral system seems to allow for a certain kind of President. Even though Donald Trump doesn’t seem to give a fuck about the NSDM, the NSDM gives a fuck about him.

[…]

[Senior bureaucrats in her own party didn’t repudiate] former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she made a move about suggesting a no-fly zone over Syria. Because that’s a kind of move people make sometimes in the NSDM. Some people disagreed with that as a Level B move, and maybe some of those people wrote Level A articles about how terribly wrong and serious it was; but nobody who understood that Level B existed went HOLY SHIT over it. From their standpoint the difference is clear-cut, even if it so happens that you can’t immediately perceive that difference and what Clinton did sounds maybe arguably just as bad as what Trump did. The HOLY SHIT reaction to Trump from senior national security bureaucrats, and from a lot of smart people you know who never seemed that worked up about Mitt Romney in 2012, is one cue as to what just happened. Even though you can’t tell the difference yourself and maybe shouldn’t expect to be able to tell the difference yourself. Certainly the media isn’t going to tell you about the difference, because everyone in the Level A theater has to pretend that \*all\* the professional wrestling is terribly, terribly serious.

[…]

An evil but sane NSDM player is far, far less dangerous than an impulsive one who doesn’t care all that much about what the rules of NSDM are supposed to be.

That’s one reason why people at my level of national security expertise and above—and there’s a \*hell\* of a lot of headway above me on that one—went into HOLY SHIT mode over Donald Trump, on both sides of the aisle.”

**11.** [**How political idealism leads us astray**](http://www.vox.com/2016/8/4/12376522/political-idealism-enemy)

In this [great essay](http://www.vox.com/2016/8/4/12376522/political-idealism-enemy) published by Vox, Will Wilkinson discusses the political philosopher Gerald Gaus’ recent book, [*The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society*](http://amzn.to/2esAtL0)*.* Wilkinson/Gaus argue that in our idealistic quest for the perfect society, we must not lose sight of the tremendous progress we’ve made, of all that is profoundly *good* and *right* about the US in its current form. Preserving the progress we’ve made, Wilkinson/Gaus argues, is just as important as continuing to improve on things. Wilkinson urges those considering voting third-party in this election to instead vote for Clinton, arguing that Trump has threatened the foundations of our “Open Society of diversity, mutual toleration, and free inquiry.” Here’s a sample:

“That brings us back to the moral choices facing us in the current presidential election. To those entranced by a vision of utopia, the options may seem insignificant. Again we are confronted with the question: What’s the big difference, really, between a racist authoritarian thug and a hawkish imperialist technocrat? What’s worth saving in a comprehensively rigged, thoroughly unjust system?

But the truth is that our system is not so thoroughly unjust. And it is the nature of that truth that accounts for the difference between the thug and the technocrat. We are, more or less, an Open Society of diversity, mutual toleration, and free inquiry.

That’s why we have managed to gain altitude in the climb toward greater justice. That’s why, if we’re to rise higher still, it’s imperative to defend the openness we’ve got. But we can’t do that if we fail to recognize that leaders who are openly hostile to diversity and liberal toleration pose a special threat to the Open Society, and demand a special response.

From the improbably lofty height of a functional liberal democracy, the path of least resistance is definitely down. On the path up our mountain we push, always, an immense boulder, and it takes a monumental collective effort simply to hold it in place. We Americans do have an exceptional track record of upward progress, of recovery from slips.

But once the boulder starts rolling backward, it’s not easy to stop.

The fact that Donald Trump became the Republican Party’s nominee for president by promising religious and racial oppression, by expressing bald authoritarian contempt for liberal tolerance and constitutional constraint, means that our traction has already slipped. We’re already moving down the mountain. From the perspective of the Open Society, something awful has already happened.

If radicals for liberty and equality can’t be bothered to stop planning their trips to paradise with Gary Johnson and Jill Stein, if they don’t see the point of lining up behind this damn boulder and pushing like hell, we’ve already lost more ground than we know.”

**12.** [***Foreign Policy* endorses a presidential candidate for the first time in their nearly-50-year history because of tremendous concerns about Trump**](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/09/foreign-policy-endorses-hillary-clinton-for-president-of-the-united-states/)

*Foreign Policy* is one of a [growing list](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/feed/newspapers-and-counting-that-have-broken-tradition-to-endorse-a-democrat-for-president/) of newspapers that have broken their tradition of either not endorsing presidential candidates or of only endorsing Republicans in order to endorse Hillary Clinton. This, again, is unprecedented. *Foreign Policy’s* [endorsement](http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/09/foreign-policy-endorses-hillary-clinton-for-president-of-the-united-states/) of Clinton, written by the publication’s editors, is an exceptionally clear and to-the-point articulation of a host of legitimate criticisms of Donald Trump. Here are the opening few paragraphs:

“In the nearly half-century history of Foreign Policy, the editors of this publication have never endorsed a candidate for political office. We cherish and fiercely protect this publication’s independence and its reputation for objectivity, and we deeply value our relationship with all of our readers, regardless of political orientation.

It is for all these reasons that FP’s editors are now breaking with tradition to endorse Hillary Clinton for the next president of the United States.

Our readers depend on FP for insight and analysis into issues of national security and foreign policy. We feel that our obligation to our readers thus extends now to making clear the great magnitude of the threat that a Donald Trump presidency would pose to the United States. The dangers Trump presents as president stretch beyond the United States to the international economy, to global security, to America’s allies, as well as to countless innocents everywhere who would be the victims of his inexperience, his perverse policy views, and the profound unsuitability of his temperament for the office he seeks.

The litany of reasons Trump poses such a threat is so long that it is, in fact, shocking that he is a major party’s candidate for the presidency. The recent furor over his vile behavior with women illustrates the extraordinary nature of his unsuitability, as does his repudiation by so many members of his own party — who have so many reasons to reflexively support their nominee.

Beyond this, however, in the areas in which we at FP specialize, he has repeatedly demonstrated his ignorance of the most basic facts of international affairs, let alone the nuances so crucial to the responsibilities of diplomacy inherent in the U.S. president’s daily responsibilities. Trump has not only promoted the leadership of a tyrant and menace like Vladimir Putin, but he has welcomed Russian meddling in the current U.S. election. He has alternatively forgiven then defended Russia’s invasion of Crimea and employed advisors with close ties to the Russian president and his cronies. Trump has spoken so cavalierly about the use of nuclear weapons, including a repeated willingness to use them against terrorists, that it has become clear he understands little if anything about America’s nuclear policies — not to mention the moral, legal, and human consequences of such actions. He has embraced the use of torture and the violation of international law against it. He has suggested he would ignoreAmerica’s treaty obligations and would only conditionally support allies in need. He has repeatedly insulted Mexico and proposed policies that would inflame and damage one of America’s most vital trading relationships with that country.

Trump has played into the hands of terrorists with his fearmongering, with his sweeping and unwarranted vilification of Muslims, and by sensationalizing the threat they pose. He has promised to take punitive actions against America’s Pacific trading partners that would be devastating to the world economy and in violation of our legal obligations. He has dismissed the science of climate change and denied its looming and dangerous reality. He has promoted a delusional and narcissistic view of the world, one in which he seems to feel that the power of his personality in negotiations could redirect the course of other nations, remake or supplant treaties, and contain those tyrants he does not actually embrace.”

**A Few More Words on How I See Things**

**Some Thoughts on False Equivalence**

Many people’s analyses of the election resemble the following:

“I can see that Trump and Clinton are both bad people, so I can’t possibly vote for either of them.”

As Sam Harris put it, we need to get out of the “wilderness of false equivalence.” There’s a really necessary follow-up question that needs to be asked:

“Okay, so they’re both bad people. Just like every politician ever. Got it. But does one of them have absolutely zero political experience? Does one of them deny that [climate change](https://medium.com/@schuyler_brown/the-world-in-a-state-of-extreme-transition-b30f0e7b535), one of the greatest issues of our time, even exists? Has one of them expressed admiration for authoritarianism and open hostility toward tolerance and the democratic process? Has one of them made flippant, global-relations-destabilizing comments about starting nuclear wars and not defending our allies in the event of an attack?”

If the answer to any one of these questions is “yes,” that’s a deeply compelling reason to vote for the other candidate. If the answer to all of these questions is “yes,” then, for me, the necessary course of action seems clear.

Just because both candidates are corrupt does not mean they will be equally bad at leading a global superpower. There are far more variables to consider. Hopefully this point has been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt by the arguments I’ve included in this post.

**Why People Support Trump**

I think I understand why so many people support Donald Trump. If you’re curious to better understand the Trump phenomenon, I highly recommend David Wong’s [insightful breakdown](http://www.cracked.com/blog/6-reasons-trumps-rise-that-no-one-talks-about/), this [spectacular essay](https://morecrows.wordpress.com/2016/05/10/unnecessariat/) on the “unnecessariat,” Andrew Sullivan’s [analysis](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/04/america-tyranny-donald-trump.html), moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt’s [TED Talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en) on the moral roots of liberals and conservatives, and David Chapman’s [essay](https://meaningness.com/metablog/communal-vs-systematic-politics) on the “new politics of meaning.”

Here’s a summary: Many Americans are deeply frustrated with the status quo. In the last few decades, the US economy underwent some radical changes, many jobs disappeared, and some large segments of the American populace (particularly those in rural communities) had the proverbial rug pulled out from under them. Despite [some encouraging evidence](http://www.snopes.com/barack-obama-accomplishments/), it’s [not clear that the economy has really recovered](http://www.ianwelsh.net/the-economy-has-not-recovered-with-graphs/) from the 2008 financial crisis. Many millions of Americans are unemployed, underemployed, or working jobs they despise. (Many more are facing tremendous (student) debt and exorbitant healthcare costs.)

The reasons for this are extremely complex. Trump would have people believe that the culprits are immigrant job-swipers and policymakers who have outsourced many jobs overseas. While this may be partially true, Trump neglects to mention *automation,* which has been a huge factor and will continue to be. Many manufacturing jobs are simply never coming back because *robots do them now*. [Self-driving trucks are poised to displace](https://medium.com/basic-income/self-driving-trucks-are-going-to-hit-us-like-a-human-driven-truck-b8507d9c5961) millions of truck-driving jobs in the next couple decades.

The US is experiencing the inevitable growing pains of transitioning to a post-industrial economy, and it’s no surprise that this is causing much distress. It’s hard to imagine how such distress could have been avoided. This is an immensely complex issue with no simple solutions. Trump has managed to frame himself as The Big Strong Man Who is Opposed to the Status Quo and is Going to Fix Everything. He has a [simple, digestible narrative](http://www.ianwelsh.net/leave-won-because-it-has-a-better-story/) about who has stolen the jobs and how he’s going to get them back, and many Americans desperately want to believe him. They’re fed up with how things are, and for better or worse, Trump seems like he’s going to “shake things up.”

The dark irony of the situation is that they’ve been convinced by [Trump’s rhetoric](http://highexistence.com/12-psychological-tactics-donald-trump-uses-to-manipulate-the-masses/) that a self-worshipping billionaire born into money who [wants to reduce taxes on the wealthy](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/12/upshot/donald-trumps-plan-to-raise-taxes-on-rich-just-kidding.html) genuinely gives a damn about working-class Americans and is going to be their champion. I’m afraid I can’t agree. As I shared earlier in this post, 370 economists around the US [signed a letter](http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2016/11/01/prominent-economists-including-eight-nobel-laureates-do-not-vote-for-donald-trump/) asserting that Trump’s plan for the economy is fundamentally unsound. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton has an [extensive plan](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/briefing/factsheets/2016/06/22/stronger-together-hillary-clintons-plan-for-an-economy-that-works-for-everyone-not-just-those-at-the-top/) for [improving the economy](https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/jobs/)—a plan which [has been endorsed by 19 winners of the Nobel Prize in economics](http://www.nobellaureatesforclinton.us/economics/)—that seems worthy of consideration.

**Are Things Really So Awful?**

Despite the fact that there *are* many serious and legitimate problems in the US, there are also many reasons to feel good about where we are and optimistic about the future. The unemployment rate has [dropped by 50%](http://www.snopes.com/barack-obama-accomplishments/) since 2010. The [homicide rate](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/07/is-violence-in-america-going-up-or-down/491384/) and [violent crime rate](http://www.statista.com/graphic/1/191219/reported-violent-crime-rate-in-the-usa-since-1990.jpg) have been declining steadily for decades. The poverty rate [has been decreasing](http://www.statista.com/graphic/1/200463/us-poverty-rate-since-1990.jpg) for the last five years. We’re also living in [the most peaceful and prosperous period of human history](http://www.refinethemind.com/global-progress-11-charts-world-is-getting-better/).

And let’s not forget that the average American has free education, spacious housing, plentiful food and water, a car, electricity, a plethora of modern tools and appliances, heating/air-conditioning, a computer, a smartphone, access to the world’s library of knowledge, a relatively safe community, a massive amount of freedom to do most anything one can dream up, protection by a functioning system of law and order, access to modern medical care, a TV, a video game console, bountiful other entertainment options, and [considerable opportunity](http://highexistence.com/50-sentences-will-convince-become-digital-nomad/) to improve their lot in life. **None of these things should be taken for granted.** The fact that we’ve devised complex systems that provide this quality of life for the majority of people in a country of 300 million is something of a miracle. Most of these benefits didn’t exist for most of human history. In fact, for most of our ~200,000-year history (and for hundreds of millions of people in the world today), there was no guarantee that one’s basic survival needs would be met.

Many Americans are genuinely struggling. There is no doubt about that. But many are also suffering from historical amnesia and failing to recognize how good we actually have it in the states. Our quality of life is fantastic compared to most civilizations/societies throughout history and most other countries in the world today. Hillary Clinton’s experience/expertise is likely to preserve this quality of life, keep the ship sailing in its current direction, and hopefully build upon [Obama’s successes](http://www.snopes.com/barack-obama-accomplishments/) to create an “economy that works for everyone,” ensure universal healthcare access, and further increase the US’s clean energy production. As I hope the arguments I shared in this post demonstrated, Donald Trump is an utterly unpredictable wild card who seems non-negligibly likely to make some hugely costly errors due to excessive narcissism, stubbornness, impulsiveness, and a total lack of experience and expertise.

From where I’m standing, humanity’s largest problems at this moment are [ecocide/climate change](https://medium.com/@schuyler_brown/the-world-in-a-state-of-extreme-transition-b30f0e7b535), the potential for nuclear war, and other [global catastrophic risks](http://highexistence.com/12-profound-vinay-gupta-quotes-on-big-data-elon-musk-virtual-reality-and-saving-the-world/). Trump *denies that climate change even exists* and makes flippant comments about starting nuclear wars; he’s [repeatedly questioned](http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/08/trump-asked-advisor-why-cant-we-use-nuclear-weapons.html) why we build nukes if we’re not going to use them. On these enormous issues—the issues that quite literally affect *all 7 billion humans and the trillions of other lifeforms on the planet*—Trump fails.

For these reasons and the many others explicated in the arguments I shared in this post, I cannot support a Donald Trump presidency. Hillary Clinton is not an ideal candidate, but if nothing else, one must concede that she has the experience and expertise necessary to hold this country’s highest office. She will play by the rules, is unlikely to cause any major catastrophes, and has extensive plans for improving the US that are worthy of consideration. She has my vote, and I sincerely hope she’ll get yours too.

**A Final Appeal for Compassion**

Charles Eisenstein [shared a meditation](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1259415464110522&id=220033021382110&substory_index=0) on the topic of divisiveness and compassion earlier today and summed it up better than I can:

“This is how a war begins[:]

“Their stupidity is amusing.”

“Stopping Trump is essential. Anyone who says otherwise is either foolish or blinded by privilege.”

“People should get hated for voting for Johnson because he is a moron.”

“Are Trump supporters too dumb to know they’re dumb?”

“Hillbots have complete inability to do anything except parrot their hero Shillary’s endless lies”

“Anyone who votes for Killary has already been drugged and taken the stupid pill.”

“They will never change.”

“Disgusting, twisted human beings.”

Anyone who reads Facebook or pretty much any political website is sure to see comments like these that dehumanize not only the opposing candidate, but the candidate’s supporters too. This polarization and vitriol, unprecedented in my lifetime, has me more concerned than the prospect of an evil candidate winning. It is as if what is really going on here is a preparation for civil war.

Dehumanization is a predecessor of war. When you see your opponents as subhuman in their morals, conscience, or intelligence, then you will have to defeat them by force. Moral or rational persuasion won’t do it. That is what the above-quoted comments imply.

The dehumanization runs top to bottom, from the headlines in major news outlets to the comments on Facebook and Twitter. Photos of political candidates chosen to provoke contempt, statements taken deliberately out of context… the no-holds-barred tactics of war. Both sides feature the most outrageous comments made by partisans of the other side, seeking to indict all of them through guilt by association. Similar to the atrocity stories used to whip up war hysteria among a pacifist public before World War One, these reports polarize the electorate and sow paranoia and distrust.

If you read only one side, you don’t know that the other side expresses the same outraged grievances as yours does. Most of my readers are probably familiar with articles about gun-toting “poll watchers” sent by Trump operatives to intimidate voters. But unless you read right-wing media, you won’t be aware of its earnest, indignant articles about agents provocateur from the Clinton camp seeking to sow violence at Trump rallies. Each side claims the other exaggerates and misconstrues. Each side is constructing a reality in which the other is hideous.

Reading right-wing and left-wing news sites side by side, one gets the impression that reality has diverged into two. I read both, in order to understand the sickness that has infected my country. Headline news in one camp is totally absent from the other. It isn’t just the interpretation of the news that is different – the two sides don’t even agree on fundamental facts. Here’s how one Facebook commentator, Amelia Bagwell, describes the experience of reading a conservative friend’s news feed: “News agencies I have never heard of with bold headlines of’Breaking News’ announcing HRC’s pending arrest. Trump is second to none in morality, decency and honor…loves Jesus…and is a perfect example of a godly family man. If the same stories are reported, they are akin to reading two different languages. We are divided not just ideologically, but at a core level of raw information.”

Such a gulf of perception inflamed by hatred presents a very dangerous situation.

I will not venture an opinion on whether the candidates themselves are hideous. We live in a system that encourages and rewards corrupt and even psychopathic behavior. What I do know, though, is that the vast majority of ordinary people are not the cartoonish caricatures of human beings that political rhetoric has made them out to be. They have an experience of life, a history, a convergence of circumstances that has brought them to their opinions. Just like you.

Statements like those quoted above create a climate for extreme measures. Take them seriously, and you have to conclude that there are an awful lot of people out there who just need to be locked up, medicated, forcibly re-educated, or maybe shot. They are reprehensible, appalling… they are deplorable.

Once the name-calling starts it is self-perpetuating, since anyone who says that you are a deplorable person will seem to you deplorable themselves. How could they be so wrong about you? How could they not see your deep humanity, the good reasons you have for voting the way you do, your sincere attempts to make the world a better place? They seem just hateful.

And so, the body politic tilts further and further into extreme polarization. This will not end well, no matter which side wins.

Dehumanizing narratives are never the truth. The truth can only be sourced from the sincere question, “What is it like to be you?” That is called compassion, and it invites skills of listening, dialog, and communicating without violence or judgement. Now there may be times when such skills fail and there is no choice but to fight. Failure is guaranteed, though, when the surrounding narrative casts the opponent as evil, twisted, disgusting, or deplorable. In that case, war is the likely result.

Can we please stop creating conditions for war? Can we please stop demonizing those who disagree with us? Can we stop the cheap and degrading psychoanalyzing of our opponents? These tactics might seem to succeed in the short term – one side or another will win – but in the end we have only strengthened the climate of hate and the mentality of war.

What can you do about it? I suggest the following: see to it that you imbue everything that you post to social media, every comment, every reply, with a spirit of compassion and respect. Do not let your pain erupt forth as an implicit call to hatred. Do not beat the drums of war.”

Whoever you vote for in this election, I hope you’ll remember that above all, it is imperative to recognize that we are all part of the same country and the same world. If we are unable to work together—if we are unable to cooperate in spite of our differences—then a grim fate surely awaits us.

*This essay was originally* [*published*](http://www.refinethemind.com/12-best-arguments-against-trump/) *on Refine The Mind*