

May Democracy Survive This Election

I dreaded this debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. She easily won, but I'm not sure democracy will.

The [Fantasy of Trump](#) may be too powerful to be affected by anything we heard tonight.

Secretary Clinton was everything a professional politician could wish. She was well prepared with great sound bytes ("Trumped Up Trickle-down Economics" and her contrast of their paternal wealths). She maneuvered Trump into affirming with his responses real negatives (income tax return refusals and a completely confused response about first nuclear strike capacity). His sexism was on full display (how many women suffer men's interruptions?). I found her invocation of his stiffing of working class contractors especially compelling, but I care about social justice. I am not sure all of Trump's supporters do.

Most Republicans care first about liberty. They also care about security. Perhaps Trump managed to mobilize National Rifle Association enthusiasts, but most of those I know believe in caution and preparedness. They cannot abide inconsistency and recklessness. Trump was both tonight.

He was incoherent. Republican pundits even declared him so. And I do believe that every #ResponsibleRepublican has decided, after tonight, that they cannot vote for Trump. If the Libertarian ticket had not blown up in the last couple of weeks, Gary Johnson might have built the foundation for a new party. But this does not necessarily move to Clinton's advantage.

Many Republicans cannot stand Secretary Clinton. Many on the Left cannot abide her either. More than a few of my fellow tweeters wondered how Bernie Sanders would have fared in this debate. Indeed, critical theorist [Nancy Fraser](#) lamented the loss of the meaningful debate the Democratic Primary moved. I do too.

Nonetheless, to win the election, Secretary Clinton may need to continue to erode Mr. Trump's evident intelligence. That, frankly, seems easy. But I suspect too many people already alienated from Secretary Clinton will not be convinced. To win I think she needs convince those who distrust the system, who believe it rigged, who believe America headed down the wrong path, that she can recognize their distance.

I'm not sure she can carry out that political revolution, and thus, I anticipate she could still lose.

The middle is not where it's at. But at least Trump did nothing tonight other than reassure those already enchanted by his fantasy and blind to his racism and sexism.

I was also relieved that he would support the election's results.

Electoral democracy may yet survive. But I still do not rest easy.

Michael D. Kennedy

Professor of Sociology and International and Public Affairs