

DAVID LEONHARDT

Trump’s Russia Motives

The mystery at the core of the Trump-Russia story is motive.

President Trump certainly seems to have a strange case of Russophilia. He has surrounded himself with aides who have Russian ties. Those aides were talking to Russian agents during the campaign, and some are now pushing a dubious peace deal in Ukraine. Trump recently went so far as to equate the United States and Vladimir Putin's murderous regime.

But why?

It's not a simple question. In their Russia-related inquiries, the F.B.I. and the Senate Intelligence Committee will need to focus first on what happened — whether Trump's team broke any laws and whether the president has lied about it. Yet the investigators, as well as the journalists doing such good work reporting this story, should also keep in mind the why of the matter. It will help explain the rest of the story.

The United States has never had a situation quite like this. Other countries have tried to intervene in our affairs before, sometimes with modest success. Britain and Nazi Germany, for example, tried to influence the 1940 presidential election, financing bogus polls and efforts to sway the nominating conventions. But never has a president had such murky ties to a foreign government as hostile as Putin's.

I count five possible explanations for Trump's Russophilia, and they're not mutually exclusive.

The first is the justification that Trump himself gives, and you shouldn't dismiss it simply because he has an open relationship with reality. He says that fewer tensions with Russia would benefit the United States, which is a reasonable position. It's not so different from the position of John Kerry, President Barack Obama's secretary of state.

Kerry saw Russia, the key ally of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria's civil war, as necessary to ending Assad's slaughter. Many other Obama administration officials believed that seeking Putin's help was a fool's errand. But remember that Obama never came up with an effective approach to Syria. Any successor would be wise to see if Russia could help moderate the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Of course, Syria can't explain all of Trump's Russia ties. There are too many, and they're too ominous. Together, they point to the next three explanations — the conspiracies.

Five possible explanations for the president's Russophilia.

The second explanation is the business conspiracy. Because many American banks wouldn't lend money to Trump's debt-soaked company, he had to look elsewhere, like Russia. "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets," Donald Trump Jr. said in 2008, specifically mentioning projects in SoHo and Dubai.

Trump could clear up this issue by releasing his tax returns. That he has not, unlike every other modern presidential candidate, means that he deserves no benefit of the doubt. The fairest assumption is that he has Russian business ties he wants to keep hidden.

The third explanation is a political conspiracy, and it's at the center of the legal inquiries. The facts are certainly worrisome. Trump campaign advisers had close links to Putin's circle, and some of them spoke with Russian officials during the campaign. Meanwhile, Putin's government was directing pro-Trump cyberattacks. If there was coordination — and there has not been any evidence to date — it would indeed be a worse scandal than Watergate.

The fourth explanation is the flimsiest: the idea, contained in a dossier compiled by private investigators, that Russia has compromising material on Trump. Unless real evidence emerges, I'd encourage you to ignore this theory.

The final possible motive — an ideological alliance — is in some ways the most alarming. Putin isn't only a leader with "very strong control over his country," as Trump has enthused; Putin also traffics in a white, Christian-infused nationalism that casts Islam and "global elites" as the enemies.

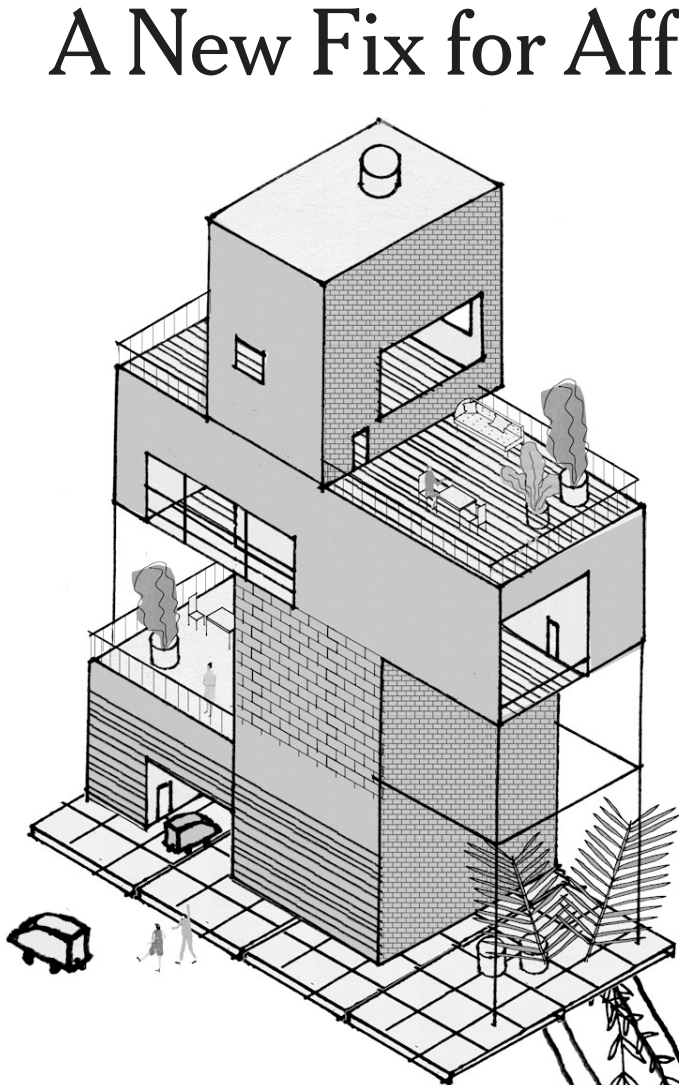
He does not go as far pursuing these themes as hard-core Russian nationalists, much as Trump merely flirts with the altright. Either way, the themes are undeniable. As Michael McFaul, a former ambassador to Russia, says, "The inauguration speech sounded like things I've heard from Russian nationalists many times."

Stephen Bannon, who has emerged as the White House's most influential adviser, clearly believes in ideological alliances, and Trump seems open to them. After winning the election, he met with Britain's leading nationalist, Nigel Farage, before Britain's prime minister.

In recent days, Trump has tempered his pro-Russia comments and even criticized its actions in Ukraine. So it would be a mistake to imagine that we know the full story of Trump and Russia. But based on what we do know, it represents a shocking risk to American interests.

The Republicans who run the Senate and the F.B.I. need to pursue their investigations without the friendly deference they have generally shown to Trump so far. If they don't, it will be left for patriotic leakers, and journalists, to make sure the truth comes out.

By Eric Uhlfelder



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WHILE President Trump talks repeatedly about fixing America's inner cities, it's a good bet that in the coming years, New York and other large metropolitan areas will need to be more self-reliant in solving pressing problems, especially low-income housing.

After all, many big cities face a triple threat: Mr. Trump wants to cut funding to sanctuary cities; his nominee to run the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Ben Carson, is unlikely to be a strong and creative leader; and the Republican Congress is eager to chip away at federal housing programs. In response, cities need local financing initiatives that make up for the coming reduction in federal assistance.

Fortunately, there's an already tested alternative: an annual luxury housing tax, levied on new high-end condos and rentals, which would feed a self-sustaining fund dedicated to develop truly affordable units.

While no city has such a plan in place, this strategy has been tried right here in New York. The city has already channeled approximately \$1 billion from luxury development for affordable housing into communities like Harlem and the South Bronx.

The history of this financing dates back three decades, when the Battery Park City development in Lower Manhattan was in its nascent stages. Planners intended to include low-income housing with the offices and luxury apartments and condos.

But when Sandy Frucher, the head of the Battery Park City Authority, asked leaders of poor and minority communities if they would prefer a few apartments in this new neighborhood or money to fix up far more housing in their own, he says they chose the latter.

As part of this strategy, the authority dropped most of its affordable housing plans, which helped jump-start high-end development in this once isolated part of the city. It then took a slice of the "excess profits" the authority generated from expanding ground rents and real estate taxes it

Eric Uhlfelder is a financial journalist.

By Steve Phillips

THE Democratic National Committee will choose its next leader on Saturday, and when it does it should choose a leader who will resist the pressure to pursue the wrong white people. Hundreds of articles have been written about the imperative of attracting more support from white working-class voters who supported Barack Obama in 2012 but then bolted to back Donald J. Trump.

The far more important — and largely untold — story of the election is that more Obama voters defected to third- and fourth-party candidates than the number who supported Mr. Trump. That is the white flight that should most concern the next D.N.C. chairman, because those voters make up a more promising way to reclaim the White House. The way to win them back is by being more progressive, not less.

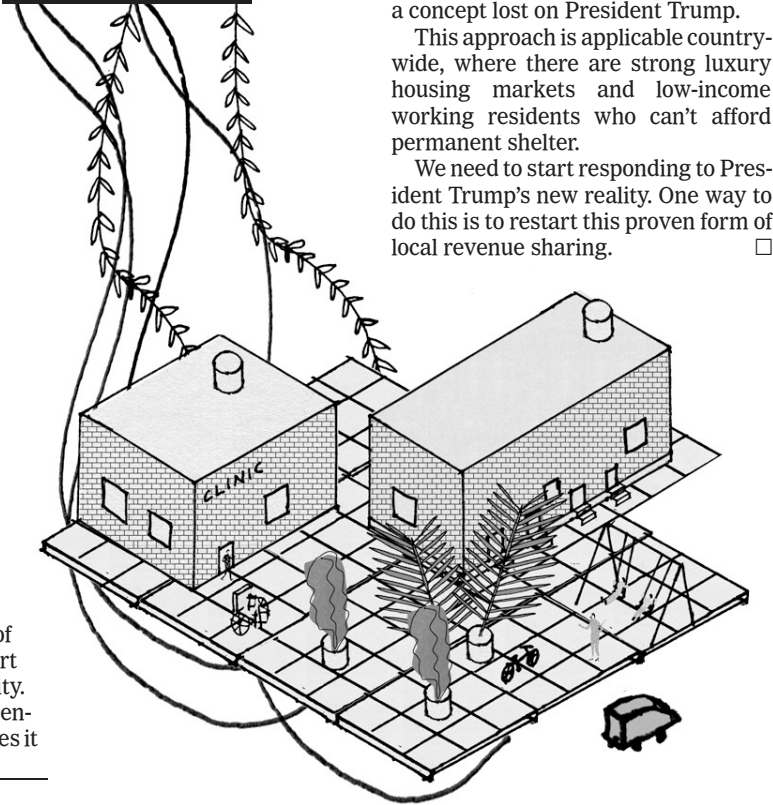
To be clear, all white voters matter. But Democrats must make tough, data-driven decisions about how to prioritize their work. Right now, too many are using bad math and faulty logic to push the party to chase the wrong segment of white voters. For example, Guy Cecil, who spent nearly \$200 million as head of the progressive "super PAC" Priorities USA, urged the party to rebuild trust with the "millions of white voters who voted for President Obama and Donald Trump."

The math underlying that conclusion is incorrect (Mr. Trump picked up not "millions," but only 784,000 white votes in the 10 battleground states he won by single digits). And it misses the bigger — and more fixable — problem of white Democratic defections to third- and fourth-party candidates.

Hillary Clinton lost the decisive states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan

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Luxury-condo taxes would make cities more self-sufficient.



RYAN PELTIER

Move Left, Democrats

by 77,744 votes; the number of Democratic votes dropped significantly from 2012 levels, and the Republican total increased by about 440,000 votes. The third- and fourth-party surge, however, was larger than the Republican growth, with 503,000 more people choosing the Libertarian or the Green candidate than had done so in 2012. When you look at the white vote in those states, the picture is even more stark.

In Wisconsin, according to the exit poll data, Mrs. Clinton received 193,000 fewer white votes than Mr. Obama received in 2012, but Mr. Trump's white total increased over Mitt Romney's by just 9,000 votes. So where did the other 184,000 Wisconsin whites go? A majority went to third and fourth parties, which, together, received 100,000 more white votes than they did in 2012.

Focus on progressive defectors, not conservative whites.

In Michigan, where 75 percent of the voters were white, Mrs. Clinton received about 295,000 fewer votes than Mr. Obama did, but the Republican total increased by just 164,000 votes. The ranks of those voting third and fourth party leapt to more than 250,000 last year from about 51,000 in 2012, and Mrs. Clinton fell short by just 10,704 votes.

In Pennsylvania, the Democrats' problem was not with white voters, but with African-Americans. Mrs. Clinton actually improved on the Democratic 2012 results with whites, but over 130,000 unenthused black voters stayed home, and she lost by about 44,000 votes.

If Democrats had stemmed the defections of white voters to the Libertarian or Green Parties, they would have won Michigan and Wisconsin, and had they also inspired African-Americans in Pennsylva-

nia, Mrs. Clinton would be president.

If progressive whites are defecting because they are uninspired by Democrats, moving further to the right will only deepen their disillusionment. But if the next D.N.C. chairman can win them back, the country's demographic trends will tilt the field in Democrats' favor. As Mrs. Clinton's popular vote margin showed, there is still a new American majority made up of a meaningful minority of whites and an overwhelming majority of minorities. Not only is there little evidence that Democrats can do significantly better with those white working-class voters who are susceptible to messages laced with racism and sexism, but that sector of the electorate will continue to shrink in the coming years. Nearly half of all Democratic votes (46 percent) were not white in 2016, and over the next four years, 10 million more people of color will be added to the population, as compared with just 1.5 million whites.

Keith Ellison, a D.N.C. chairman candidate, has a proven record of engaging core Democratic voters rather than chasing the elusive conservative whites, and the party would be in good hands under his stewardship. (Thomas E. Perez, the former labor secretary, has less electoral history, but his reliance on political superstars such as the strategist Emmy Ruiz, who delivered victories for Democrats in Nevada and Colorado, is encouraging.)

Whoever prevails as chairman must resist the pressure to follow an uninformed and ill-fated quest for winning over conservative white working-class voters in the Midwest. The solution for Democrats is not to chase Trump defectors. The path to victory involves reinspiring those whites who drifted to third-party candidates and then focusing on the ample opportunities in the Southwest and the South.

Mrs. Clinton came closer to winning Texas than she did Iowa. She fared better in Arizona, Georgia and Florida than she did in the traditional battleground state of Ohio. The electoral action for Democrats may have once been in the Rust Belt, but it's now moving west and south.

DAVID BROOKS

This Century Is Broken

Most of us came of age in the last half of the 20th century and had our perceptions of "normal" formed in that era. It was, all things considered, an unusually happy period. No world wars, no Great Depressions, fewer civil wars, fewer plagues.

It's looking like we're not going to get to enjoy one of those times again. The 21st century is looking much nastier and bumpier: rising ethnic nationalism, falling faith in democracy, a dissolving world order.

At the bottom of all this, perhaps, is declining economic growth. As Nicholas Eberstadt points out in his powerful essay "Our Miserable 21st Century," in the current issue of Commentary, between 1948 and 2000 the U.S. economy grew at a per-capita rate of about 2.3 percent a year.

But then around 2000, something shifted. In this century, per-capita growth has been less than 1 percent a year on average, and even since 2009 it's been only 1.1 percent a year. If the U.S. had been able to maintain postwar 20th-century growth rates into this century, U.S. per-capita G.D.P. would be over 20 percent higher than it is today.

Slow growth strains everything else — meaning less opportunity, less optimism and more of the sort of zero-sum, grab-what-you-can thinking that Donald Trump specializes in. The slowdown has devastated American workers. Between 1985 and 2000, the total hours of paid work in America increased by 35 percent. Over the next 15 years, they increased by only 4 percent.

For every one American man aged 25 to 55 looking for work, there are three who have dropped out of the labor force. If Americans were working at the same rates they were when this century started, over 10 million more people would have jobs. As Eberstadt puts it, "The plain fact is that 21st-century America has witnessed a dreadful collapse of work."

That means there's an army of Americans semi-attached to their communities, who struggle to contribute, to realize their capacities and find their dignity. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics time-use studies, these labor force dropouts spend on average 2,000 hours a year watching some screen. That's about the number of hours that usually go to a full-time job.

Fifty-seven percent of white males who have dropped out get by on some form of government disability check. About half of the men who have dropped out take pain medication on a daily basis. A survey in Ohio found that over one three-month period, 11 percent of Ohioans were prescribed opiates. One in eight American men now has a felony conviction on his record.

This is no way for our fellow citizens to live. The Eberstadt piece confirms one thought: The central task for many of us now is not to resist Donald Trump. He'll seal his own fate. It's to figure out how to replace him — how to respond to the slow growth and social disaffection that gave rise to him with some radically different policy mix.

The hard part is that America has to become more dynamic and more protective — both at the same time. In the past, American reformers could at least count on the fact that they were working with a dynamic society that was always generating the energy required to solve the nation's woes. But as Tyler Cowen demonstrates in his compelling new book, "The Complacent Class," contemporary Americans have lost their mojo.

Cowen shows that in sphere after sphere, Americans have become less adventurous and more static. For example, Americans used to move a lot to seize opportunities and transform their lives. But

Don't just resist Trump. Replace him.

the rate of Americans who are migrating across state lines has plummeted by 51 percent from the levels of the 1950s and 1960s.

Americans used to be entrepreneurial, but there has been a decline in start-ups as a share of all business activity over the last generation. Millennials may be the least entrepreneurial generation in American history. The share of Americans under 30 who own a business has fallen 65 percent since the 1980s.

Americans tell themselves the old job-for-life model is over. But in fact Americans are switching jobs less than a generation ago, not more. The job reallocation rate — which measures employment turnover — is down by more than a quarter since 1990.

There are signs that America is less innovative. Accounting for population growth, Americans create 25 percent fewer major international patents than in 1999. There's even less hunger to hit the open road. In 1983, 69 percent of 17-year-olds had driver's licenses. Now only half of Americans get a license by age 18.

In different ways Eberstadt and Cowen are describing a country that is decelerating, detaching, losing hope, getting sadder. Economic slowdown, social disaffection and risk aversion reinforce one another.

Of course nothing is foreordained. But where is the social movement that is thinking about the fundamentals of this century's bad start and envisions an alternate path? Who has a compelling plan to boost economic growth? If Trump is not the answer, what is?