Thomas not here for the holidays. All-Blue Thanksgiving!

My goal: ensure that Donald Trump isn’t re-elected. If you don’t share that goal, you won’t be persuaded by this essay. There are *still* “burn it down,” it doesn’t matter… I don’t get that. Might speak to you in another essay.

Assuming the rest of you are with me that we need to get Trump out of office, let’s talk about the background conditions for 2020:

1. A deeply unpopular president can **only win via the electoral college**, which means narrow wins in battleground states even as he’s being wiped out by 3-5 million votes nationally. You can hate the EC, but that’s what we have in 2020.
2. **YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT THE BATTLEGROUND STATES ARE**, even in era of 538. Jesus Christ, people, that’s Episodes 1-4 of the show. Al Gore didn’t know George W. Bush was going to steal West Virginia in 2000; if he had, if he’d shorn that up, Florida wouldn’t have mattered. We did not know Trump was going to steal Wisconsin and almost win Minnesota in 2016. I don’t know where the unexpected battleground states are going to be in 2020. They PROBABLY won’t be Alabama or California, but YOU DON’T KNOW.

So I want to maximize the turnout for Trump’s democratic opponent in 2020, and here’s how I’m going to do that:

1. VBNMW. That’s not because Trump supporters aren’t responsible for Trump’s victory. That’s because I share a common base with the far left, and not with Trump supporters. I’m trying to talk Uncle Clarence with you, but.. come on.
2. Minimize acrimony in the primary – “sour grapes” effect. People who get disgusted with losing and then stay home/vote the other way/vote third party in the general election

My implementation:

1. “Tone policing” how we describe candidates – I want to steel-man the other side

If your position is: “Gosh, I really want Medicare for All right away and I’m disappointed that Liz Warren is going to phase it in over 3 years, and I really want Bernie to do it right away,” you’re more likely to vote Warren in the general if she’s the nominee, than if you have – and I’m going to quote from a Sanders supporter here directly:

“People know that if Warren is telling the Dem establishment she’s a “team player”, it means she is on the team of the rich & powerful, and therefore is \*NOT\* actually on the team of us regular everyday people. She has made her choice. People cannot be fooled. It explains why she has been vague on many important issues and has flip-flopped / backpedaled so much, such as when it comes to Medicare for all and whether or not she would accept big-donor money (bribes) as the nominee.”

Let me be honest: virtually *all* of this comes from Sanders supporters. But there are Warren supporters who repeat crap like “Kamala Harris is a cop” or “Pete Buttigieg is a Wells Fargo gay pride float”

So again, my premises are: (P1) personalized attacks crystallize “sour grapes” and reduce eventual turnout for the Democratic nominee; and (P2) small differences will make a big difference in the 2020 and it’s unpredictable where.

Thus, the conclusion: personal attacks now are likely to make a disproportionately negative effect in 2020 big difference in 2020, and, if you share my overarching view that Trump is a monster and we need to get him out of office, the conclusion that follows is that you should “tone police” personal attacks from yourself and your circle of friends.

(P2) I’ve proven already. So let me justify (P1) Personalized attacks crystallize “sour grapes”

**I don’t have hard data for this point. If you want to dismiss this entire essay, that’s the grounds on which to do it. All I can say is that I’ve looked through the psychological literature, I didn’t want to just slap on a citation here**, but here are my arguments:

1. it’s intuitive
2. it’s generally supported by persuasion studies that when you go to a politician’s *identity* rather than her *policies*, that crystallizes opposition, and
3. far more importantly, political experts use this tactic. It’s why the most effective negative campaigns focus on those kinds of attributes: Al Gore’s “I invented the internet,” “Flip-Flopper John Kerry,” “Lock Her Up!”

Sanders reply: using a consistent methodology, 12% of Sanders voters backed Trump in 2016, but 16% of Clinton voters backed McCain in 2008. So don’t blame us!

1. Not about blame – and that concedes that “sour grapes” is real. If I can do \*anything\*, I want to. 70,000 votes made the difference in 3 states in 2016 and that’s going to continue in 2020.
2. I would have criticized Clinton’s supporters for the personalized comments in 2008, too. Turned out not to matter, but the poli sci research data shows that Clinton voters cots Obama 1.1%. **Henderson et al 2010** (Public Opinion Quarterly):

<https://sites.duke.edu/hillygus/files/2014/06/hendersonhillygustompsonPOQ.pdf>

That didn’t matter for Obama in 08. That 1.1% TOTALLY mattered in 2016.

1. BUT there are other confounding factors, like the fact that racists pretended to like Clinton in 2008 and sexists who pretended to like Sanders in 2016. Here’s the evidence for that. Clinton won Oklahoma, Indiana, and West Virginia in 2008. She won WV in MAY by 41 points. 67-26 May have been her single largest victory of the ’08 primaries.

Guess who won Oklahoma, Indiana, and West Virginia in 2016? Bernie Sanders. He won WV by over 15 points, 51-36. Sanders won every single county. Sanders won in North Dakota, in Kansas, in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, and Alaska. You *can* interpret that as a groundswell of rural support for a socialist… or you could interpret that as rural voters hating the front-runner and wanting to stop her, just like they did to Obama in ’08.

That’s what the research shows: Of that 1.1%, 1% is attributable to “those more favorable towards Whites than Blacks.” (p. 15)

1. Unlike 2016, in 2008, the *weakest* Clinton supporters were marginally more likely to defect to McCain and the strongest supporters more likely to support Obama. Page 16.

Finally: d) **We know that Russian-backed efforts use this tactic**.

Almost certainly already interfering in our primary. **Almost certainly you have already encountered some of these people**. I’m going to quote directly from Vol. 2 of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on the 2016 election.

<https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report_Volume2.pdf>

Internet Research Agency, St. Petersburg-based troll farm with a history of success.

p. 32:

In practice, the IRA's influence operatives dedicated the balance of their effort to establishing the credibility of their online personas, such as by posting innocuous content designed to appeal to like-minded users. This innocuous content allowed IRA influence operatives to build character details for their fake personas, such as a conservative Southerner or a liberal activist, until the opportune moment arrived when the account was used to deliver tailored "payload content" designed to influence the targeted user. By this concept of operations, the volume and content of posts can obscure the actual objective behind the influence operation. "If you're running a propaganda outfit, most of what you publish is factual so that you're taken seriously," [expert] "[T]hen you can slip in the wrong thing at exactly the right time."

p. 33-34: how do they do it?:

The IRA's ideologically left-leaning and right-leaning social media accounts posted content that was political in nature and made reference to specific candidates for President. Hillary Clinton, however, was the only candidate for President whose IRA-posted content references were uniformly negative. Clinton's candidacy was targeted by both the IRA's left and right personas, and both ideological representations were focused on denigrating her. The political content of the IRA, "was unified on both sides in negativity towards . Secretary Clinton." The IRA's left-leaning accounts focused their efforts on **denigrating Clinton and supporting the candidacy of either fellow Democrat candidate Bernie Sanders or Green Party candidate Jill Stein**.

p. 34 from the IRA indictment:

For instance, IRA employees were directed to focus on U.S. politics and to "use any opportunity to criticize Hillary and the rest (except Sanders and Trump-we support them)." Another IRA employee was criticized internally for having a '"low number of posts dedicated to criticizing Hillary Clinton' and was told 'it is imperative to intensify criticizing Hillary Clinton' in future posts."

p. 61 specifics:

IRA influence operatives used Tumblr accounts to build audiences of like-minded Americans, into which they would sow socially and politically divisive content. An IRA Tumblr account named "4mysquad," dealt almost exclusively with issues of sensitivity to the African-American community. On occasion, political content promoting Bernie Sanders, or criticizing Hillary Clinton was posted to this account. "4mysquad" posted a video of Clinton calling young black gang members "superpredators," which generated more 50,000 engagements with authentic Tumblr users. Over time, the IRA's influence operatives took the messaging broadcast via the "4mysquad" Tumblr account further and began posting content promoting the presidential campaign of Donald Trump.

I personally saw this in 2016. A prominent atheist socialist was reposting, uncriticially, hate-memes from Fox News and worse.

So, my takeaways:

1. Do conflict on the issues in the primary.
2. Don’t do what the Russians are doing. Don’t sow discord. Don’t engage in personal attacks.