

**“Commanding Without Conscience: Determining the Frequency of Sociopathic
Presidents’ Elections”**

An Honors Thesis

by

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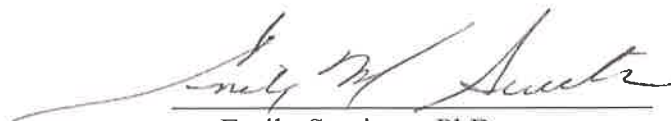
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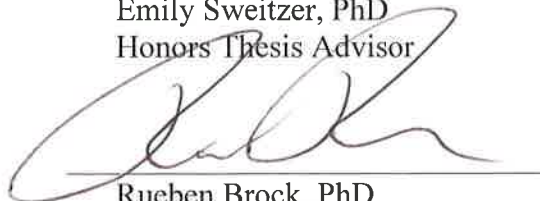
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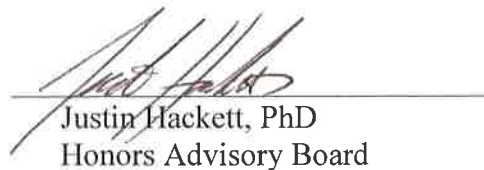
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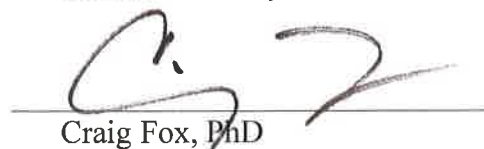
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Abstract

The acerbic quality of the 2016 Presidential Election prompted several psychologists to weigh in on the mental health of then-candidate Donald Trump, a trend that has continued into his presidency. One of the many diagnoses given to the president is that of sociopath, a label that is characterized by the absence of a conscience. This is a very serious charge to level at a president, because without a conscience, what would keep them from deliberately harming the American people? The present study seeks to analyze a sample of 15 US presidents stratified over the past 45 presidencies for sociopathic traits using the DSM-5 characteristics for antisocial personality disorder (APD) on biographies of their lives. It uses the data collected to understand how often presidents are elected with sociopathic traits and what historical contexts they were elected in, providing further insight on when and why the United States ends up with a commander without a conscience. Ultimately, it identifies that three out of the 15 presidents studied meet the criteria for APD and hypothesizes that the elections of sociopathic individuals occur in times of social uncertainty, a concept that will need to be analyzed in future research.

Keywords: sociopathy, psychopathy, antisocial personality disorder, American presidents, Goldwater rule

Commanding without Conscience:

Determining the Frequency of Sociopathic Presidents' Elections

The Executive Office of the United States is one of the most powerful positions in the world. The American president is Commander in Chief of the armed forces, leader in foreign diplomacy, head of the legislature, symbol of the country, among other substantial, powerful labels. With so much power invested in one person, one may wonder what type of person is attracted to such a position. An optimistic view would assert that presidential candidates are interested in the job because they believe they may positively impact the country in some way; a more cynical attitude might note how attractive the power, prestige, and dominance that the position comes with would be to a corrupt mastermind.

This distinction between good versus evil intentions has dramatic implications for the presidency, the United States, and the world. If the president is only striving for their own self-interest and not that of their constituents, what is to stop them from disregarding the needs and desires of the country, or even stop them from intentionally harming the country? Some would argue that their conscience would effectively prevent them from performing this kind of behavior, and for most people, it would. But this rule assumption does not stand for those among the population that lack a conscience.

Sociopathy is an untreatable lack of conscience or guilt found in 1 out of every 25 people (Stout, 2006). This lack of conscience is often accompanied by other disagreeable characteristics, such as egocentrism, lack of empathy, deceitfulness, or impulsivity (Stout, 2006; Hare, 1993). Although commonly confused with psychosis, an individual with this condition is not psychotic; they fully understand the world around them and the

consequences of their actions. They simply do not care about the distinction between right and wrong. In fact, the first time it was described in the early nineteenth century, it was called *mania sans délire*, “insanity without delirium” (Pinel, as cited in Kiehl & Lushing, 2014).

It is easy to imagine how someone free from the constraints of a conscience may desire a high-status position as a tool to get what they want, and what position is higher status than that of President of the United States? The present study seeks to examine how frequently an individual exhibiting sociopathic traits is elected to this office by the American people using the APA’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) criteria for Antisocial Personality Disorder (APD). It expects to find two out of the 45 presidents meet the criteria based on the 4% prevalence rate. It also asks the research question, “In what historical contexts do these individuals get elected, and what commonalities do these contexts share?”

Literature Review

Sociopathy, also known as psychopathy, refers to a pervasive set of behaviors and personality traits that persist throughout an individual’s lifetime. Although the words are often used interchangeably, Hare (1993) made a distinction between the two. The difference is in the source of the disorder’s development rather than the content; psychopathy can be attributed to biological sources while sociopathy can be attributed to environmental experience. Psychopathy also carries a stigma due to its similarity to the word “psychotic” (despite the differences between the conditions), while sociopathy fails to carry this same stigma (Hare, 1993). Because of the lack of stigma and personal blame, the preferred word of choice in the present study is sociopathy.

Table 1

Items of the PCL-R by Factor

<u>Interpersonal</u>	<u>Affective</u>	<u>Lifestyle</u>	<u>Antisocial</u>	<u>Unrelated</u>
Glibness and/or superficial charm	Lack of remorse or guilt	Need for stimulation and/or proneness to boredom	Poor behavioral controls	Promiscuous sexual behavior
Grandiose sense of self-worth	Shallow affect	Parasitic lifestyle	Early behavior problems	Many short-term marital relationships
Pathological lying	Callous and/or lack of empathy	Lack of realistic, long-term goals	Juvenile delinquency	
Conning and/or manipulative	Failure to accept responsibility for own actions	Impulsivity	Revocation of conditional release	
		Irresponsibility	Criminal versatility	

Note. Information obtained from Hare (as cited in Hare & Neumann, 2005).

One popular measure of sociopathy is the Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R) by Robert Hare, which is a clinician-rated measure of 20 characteristics determined to be related to the presence of sociopathy (Hare & Neumann, 2005). Four factors have been found to represent 18 of these characteristics (see Table 1; Hare, as cited in Hare & Neumann, 2005). Neumann, Hare, and Newman (2007) built off of these four factors to make a definition of the condition.

[...] psychopathy is essentially a personality disorder involving a failure to: (a) adopt the common interpersonal conventions of honesty, modesty, and trustworthiness, (b) experience full-fledged emotions concerning one's relation to others (e.g., love, empathy, guilt), (c) adopt widely shared sociocultural norms

pertaining to financial responsibility and safe conduct, and (d) obey the laws of society. (Neumann, Hare, & Newman, 2007)

It is important to note that the presence of one or a few of these characteristics does not immediately make a person sociopathic. What matters is the number and degree of these characteristics, not just their occasional presence. Accidentally sleeping through a class might constitute a lack of responsibility, but if it only happens once, then it certainly could not be considered evidence of a personality defect.

Although sociopathy is commonly equated with criminals, especially serial killers, it may also be adaptive for certain careers. Kiehl and Lushing (2014) describe this idea as controversial, because “it is an oxymoron to suggest that someone is a ‘successful’ psychopath because by definition, to be afflicted with a personality disorder (e.g. psychopathy) one must have *pathological* symptoms that cause impairment in multiple domains of one’s life.” However Lilienfeld, Watts, and Smith (2015) argue that “[...] successful psychopathy is not an oxymoron; it may instead be a variant of psychopathy in which the adaptive traits (e.g., superficial charm, social poise) [...] are especially prominent.” In a study of employees at several companies located in the United States, researchers found that high PCL-R scores were positively correlated with high ratings on communication, strategic thinking, and creativity/innovation and low ratings on management style, ability to act as a team player, and performance (Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010).

Another concept related to sociopathy is Antisocial Personality Disorder, or APD, which only focuses on criminal and antisocial behaviors (leaving out the personality traits associated with sociopathy; Hare, 1993) According to the DSM-5, APD is the “pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others” (American

Psychiatric Association, 2013a). Again, individuals with this disorder are not psychotic, which makes APD extremely different from other mental disorders: it does not cause the individual any distress. For this reason, some argue that it should not be classified as a mental disorder at all (Stout, 2006). However, it is still included in the DSM-5, and its criteria are as follows:

- A. A pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15 years, as indicated by three (or more) of the following:
 1. Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest.
 2. Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure.
 3. Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead.
 4. Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults.
 5. Reckless disregard for safety of self or others.
 6. Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations.
 7. Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another.
- B. The individual is at least age 18 years.
- C. There is evidence of conduct disorder with onset before age 15 years.
- D. The occurrence of antisocial behavior is not exclusively during the course of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a)

Criterion C, evidence of conduct disorder, can be further described as the presence of “aggression to people and animals,” “destruction of property,” “deceitfulness or theft,” or “serious violations of rules” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a).

Mental Health of Presidents

Dutton (2016) acknowledges that some occupations benefit from the presence of certain sociopathic traits. A politician would make good use of these traits: ideal politicians are “charming, persuasive, self-confident individual[s] who can be ruthless when necessary and who is also heat resistant: he or she can maintain focus, keep a cool head and perform under fire” (Dutton, 2016). In his research, Dutton (2016) had biographers of historical figures complete an abbreviated form of another measurement tool for sociopathic traits called the Psychopathic Personality Inventory – Revised. The PPI-R has three different factors built out of its eight subscales: Fearless Dominance (Stress Immunity, Social Potency, and Fearlessness), Impulsive Antisociality (Impulsive Nonconformity, Blame Externalization, Machiavellian Egocentricity, and Carefree Nonplanfulness), and Coldheartedness (Benning, Patrick, Hicks, Blonigen, & Krueger, 2003; Benning, Patrick, Blonigen, Hicks, & Iacono, 2005). For politicians, high levels of Fearless Dominance and low levels of Impulsive Antisociality would make the “ideal” candidate (Dutton, 2016).

Dutton’s (2016) study organized the 42 U.S. presidents at the time of the study by overall PPI-R score and then also determined the top ten in Fearless Dominance and Impulsive Antisociality. The highest-scoring overall five were 1) John F. Kennedy, 2) Bill Clinton, 3) Andrew Jackson, 4) Teddy Roosevelt, and 5) Lyndon B. Johnson, while the lowest five were 38) William Howard Taft, 39) Rutherford B. Hayes, 40) James

Monroe, 41) Millard Fillmore, and 42) William McKinley. The top five in Fearless Dominance were 1) Theodore Roosevelt, 2) John F. Kennedy, 3) Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 4) Ronald Reagan, and 5) Rutherford B. Hayes. The top five in Impulsive Antisociality were 1) Bill Clinton, 2) Lyndon B. Johnson, 3) Andrew Johnson, 4) Andrew Jackson, and 5) Chester A. Arthur.

Other studies have investigated issues of presidential mental health other than sociopathy. Watts et al. (2013) investigated the presence of grandiose narcissism (flamboyance and dominance), vulnerable narcissism (emotional fragility and social withdrawal), and Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD; a blend of the two) in the 42 American presidents at the time. Presidents were higher on average than the population in grandiose narcissism and NPD but equal to the population in vulnerable narcissism. The highest scoring presidents on grandiose narcissism were 1) Lyndon B. Johnson, 2) Teddy Roosevelt, 3) Andrew Jackson, 4) Franklin D. Roosevelt, and 5) John F. Kennedy, while the lowest were 38) Millard Fillmore, 39) James Monroe, 40) Grover Cleveland, 41) Ulysses S. Grant, and 42) Calvin Coolidge. In the end, “this analysis revealed that grandiose narcissism, but not vulnerable narcissism or NPD, has increased significantly over time across the presidents” (Watts et al., 2003).

Instead of measuring exclusively one disorder, Davidson, Connor, and Swartz (2006) reviewed biographies, narrative accounts, and journals to compare all American presidents prior to 1974 to the disorders listed in the DSM-IV. They found that 49% of their sample had symptoms of DSM-IV disorders. Out of the 37 presidents reviewed, “the most common disorder was unipolar depression (N = 9), followed by anxiety (N = 3), alcohol abuse or dependence (N = 3), somatoform disorder (N = 1), bipolar I disorder (N

= 2), bipolar II disorder (N = 1), paranoia secondary to cerebrovascular accident (N = 1), and breathing-related sleep disorder (N = 1)” (Davidson et al., 2006). None of the time periods saw greater or lesser presence of disorders.

The Goldwater Rule

No discussion of public figures’ mental health would be complete without addressing the Goldwater Rule. The Goldwater Rule is an ethical standard that was created following a muckracking campaign against Senator Barry Goldwater during the 1964 presidential election that sought psychiatric evaluations of his fitness (Ginzburg, 1964). Also known as Section 7.3 of the American Psychiatric Association’s (2013b) Principles of Medical Ethics, this rule states that when a psychiatrist is called upon to give their professional opinion on the mental health or behavior of a public figure, it would be unethical to do so without having personally examined them and received permission first. It only allows for the psychiatrist to discuss “psychiatric issues in general.” The American Psychological Association does not have a direct equivalent to the Goldwater Rule; Sections 5.04 and 9.01 provide the closest approximation (Lilienfeld, Miller, & Lynam, 2017). Section 5.04 directs psychologists publicly sharing their expertise to do so in accordance with their professional experience and with the Ethics Code, and with acknowledgement that no therapeutic relationship exists between themselves and the subject (American Psychological Association, 2017). Section 9.01 states that psychologists must base their opinions on sufficient evidence, and must either attempt to personally examine the individual in question or, when an examination is not necessary, “conduct a record review or provide consultation or supervision,” making sure to explain the limits of their conclusion (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Due to the particularly acerbic quality of the 2016 presidential election, several psychologists and psychiatrists have felt the need to speak up about the mental health of now-president Donald Trump, calling into question the appropriateness of the Goldwater Rule. While there are many arguments in defense of the Goldwater Rule – a psychiatrist’s rule is to educate instead of comment (Friedman, 2014), a diagnosis cannot be done without a psychiatrist-patient relationship (Park, 2018), or an inaccurate or unsolicited diagnosis could damage the individual in question (Appelbaum, 2017) – there are just as many strong attacks against the rule. Kroll and Pouncey (2016) argue that the Goldwater Rule, as an ethic, only serves to protect the American Psychiatric Association’s image and does not actually protect individuals. As they eloquently put, “We believe that the Goldwater Rule is itself unethical if it suppresses public discussion of potentially dangerous public figures [...] Psychiatry should encourage scrutiny of the behaviors of public figures, not squelch it” (Kroll & Pouncy, 2016).

Lilienfeld, Miller, and Lynam (2017) provide a different, though equally as compelling argument on the ethics of speaking out. They call into question whether psychologists it is indeed ethical to follow a Goldwater-type rule when their expertise could potentially inform voters’ decisions. They call for a replacement of the Goldwater Rule which would allow professionals to give their professional opinions on the mental health of “individuals [who] hold positions of substantial power over others, as is the case for most high-profile politicians” but not on said individuals’ fitness for office (Lilienfeld, Miller, & Lynam, 2017). This viewpoint still emphasizes the role of educator advocated by Friedman (2014), while also granting psychologists more freedom to accomplish that education.

Still others believe that it would be futile to change the Goldwater Rule; McNally (2018) argues that suspending the Goldwater Rule and allowing psychologists and psychiatrists to offer diagnoses would not provide voters with any more information than they already have, because said diagnoses would be based on readily observable behavior. And if a voter supports a candidate despite the behavior, a diagnostic label would not likely change their minds. This study is of the opinion that allowing professionals to offer their expertise, though theoretically futile, is the right thing to do, and while it does not go so far as to officially diagnose any of its subjects with APD, it investigates with the purpose to inform future researchers and voters.

Methods

To answer the research questions, the researcher selected a stratified random sample of 15 U.S. presidents to study. This was achieved by splitting the 45 presidents, from Washington to current sitting president Donald Trump, into three groups (first 15, middle 15, and most recent 15) and selecting 5 names from each out of a hat. A stratified sample was selected because it would account for the most diverse set of historical circumstances to analyze. The 15 presidents selected were as follows: James Madison, James Monroe, Martin Van Buren, James Polk, Franklin Pierce, Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, Woodrow Wilson, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump.

For each president selected (except for President Trump, who was judged as too recent for various options of comprehensive biographies to be available), the researcher chose a biography to read and rate using the DSM-5 criteria for APD. The criteria for APD were preferred over the PCL-R because, although they are less related to

sociopathy, they rely more on observable behaviors and will therefore act as a more objective rating tool. Biographer bias and personal bias could confound any interpretations about personality or motivations, making decisions on Psychopathy Checklist items like “Egocentric” or “Need for excitement” particularly difficult to be objective (Hare, 1993). A president’s actions are more often hard facts, less subject to interpretation (though, they certainly could be subject to omission).

It is important to note that this type of design does not utilize proper historiographic or history analysis methods because it is not a historical study. A historian would be interested in gathering all relevant historical facts for understanding a particular event, using mostly primary sources; this study is more interested in gathering psychological data, and it is not within the scope of the present study to consult primary sources in a search for that data because of limited access and time. Instead, it uses psychological methods to analyze historical data collected by other people: biographers, who undeniably have more expertise on their subjects than the researcher.

The standards for the biographies selected largely rested on two premises: that they had to be biographies and not autobiographies, and that they had to cover the president’s entire lifespan. Autobiographies were excluded because of the potential for manipulation of facts to make oneself appear better. The biographies needed to cover their entire lifespan for two reasons. First, criterion C of APD requires the presence of conduct disorder when the individual was under the age of 15. For some presidents, though, information on their childhoods did not always survive, meaning that the presence of conduct disorder could not always be supported or contradicted. The second reason is that the diagnosis of APD requires an analysis of long-term functioning (Lyons

& Martin, 2014); any biographies that only focused on a certain time in the president's life, especially their term as president, were immediately excluded.

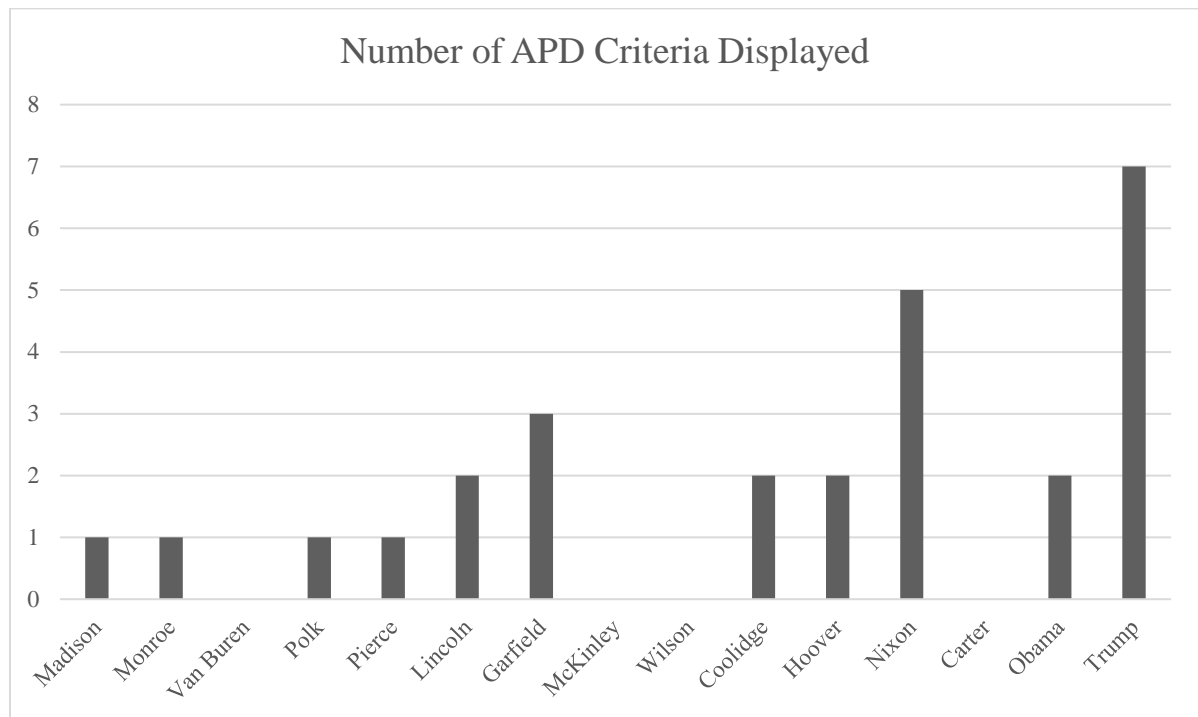
Other information that was used in selecting biographies was length, rating, and availability. Books under 300 pages were excluded, because it was assumed that the longer ones would have more content (but books over 1,000 pages were also excluded due to time limitations). Also, ratings and reviews on Amazon.com were taken into consideration because they provide valuable insight into the contents of book options that summaries might leave out. An example of a positive comment in a review would be attention to detail in all aspects of life, not just politics, while a negative might be a tendency to gloss over prejudices. Availability, though very important, was of least concern, because the researcher's university is part of the Pennsylvania Academic Library Consortium, Inc. and can borrow books from other universities' libraries when needed.

During reading, any behavior that may have met the DSM-5 criteria for APD were recorded on a sheet with the page number it could be found on. After reading, any criterion that saw repeated instances over the lifetime were recorded and tallied. Any president that met three or more criteria was judged to exhibit a concerning amount of sociopathic behaviors.

Results

Of the 15 American presidents studied, only three met the level A criteria for APD: James Garfield, Richard Nixon, and Donald Trump. Of those three, only Garfield and Trump had evidence of conduct disorder (APD criterion C) before the age of 15 (three other presidents also met this criterion: Pierce, Wilson, and Hoover, bringing the

total to five). The three out of 15 presidents showing a concerning number of sociopathic behaviors – 20% – can be extrapolated to 9 out of 45, presuming the observed trend would continue for the total number of presidents. Details about the 15 presidents studied follows.



James Madison, fourth President of the United States, was a remarkably responsible man, who had the best attendance record of the Continental Congress, supported his estranged brother’s children as if they were his own, and “weighed matters carefully [...] [suspending] judgements as long as possible” in order to make the best decision possible (Ketcham, 1992). James Monroe, his friend and successor, was described as equally as thoughtful (Ammon, 1990). These two early presidents both exhibited the same characteristic of APD: “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure” (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013a). As was the political fad of the time, Madison and Monroe both participated in publishing newspaper essays under pseudonyms, often attacking political enemies. Madison famously participated in the writing of *The Federalist* papers under the pseudonym Publius with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay in order to encourage ratification of the Constitution (Ketcham, 1992).

The analysis of Martin Van Buren, eighth President of the United States, was limited by the fact that most of the information about his life, particularly personal correspondences, have been destroyed (Widmer, 2005). Any conclusions about traits that he may have or may have not shown are based on inadequate information compared to those of other presidents. That being said, no evidence of any APD traits was discovered for the “Sly Fox of Kinderhook.” It may be noted, however, that he was particularly grandiose in his dress and event-planning, and also quite glib (he could say “everything and nothing at once;” Widmer, 2005). The eleventh president, James K. Polk, displayed a single trait out of the criteria: “Reckless disregard of safety of self or others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). This was particularly noticeable in the fact that he did nothing to avoid the possibility of going to war with Mexico (over the Republic of Texas) and with Great Britain (over the Oregon Territory) at the same time, a disastrous prospect due to the amount of resources simultaneous wars would require (Borneman, 2009).

As a child, fourteenth president Franklin Pierce roughhoused and destroyed furniture for fun, and one day decided he was tired of school and returned home (Nichols, 1998). These instances of physical fighting, destruction of property, and truancy provide enough information to support criterion C, evidence of conduct disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). As an adult, he could be irritable and of “mercurial

mood,” but not to the extent that he got into repeated fights (Nichols, 1998). He did, however, meet the criterion “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or gain” when he and his fellow Democrats attempted to use a congressional investigation for party purposes (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Nichols, 1998).

Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States, is widely regarded as one of the greatest for his management of the most divisive time in American history – the Civil War. Despite his hallowed historical position, Lincoln displayed two criterion for APD. First, he showed a “Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest” in participating in a duel, illegal in Illinois, across state lines and in his repeated suspensions of habeas corpus (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Donald, 1995). He also showed “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure” by writing newspaper articles attacking enemies under a pseudonym (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Donald, 1995).

James Garfield, America’s twentieth president, was an interesting man due to his seemingly indecisive, constantly shifting, and strongly held opinions. Examples of this are his sudden, fervent zeal for his Disciple faith (which he eventually questioned and neglected), his disgust at politics, which he swore he would never join, and his shift from ardent militarism to passionate pacifism (Peskin, 1999). As a child, he picked fights with other boys who he felt had crossed him, giving evidence for conduct disorder under the age of 15 (Peskin, 1999). As an adult, Garfield showed three criteria for APD, making him the first president studied to meet the minimum criteria. The first was “Failure to

conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a), which he exemplified in advocating for total war despite the military’s preference for chivalry and in breaking the rule prohibiting congressional votes on personal financial interests (Peskin, 1999). He also displayed “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). There were several accounts of his lying in Peskin (1999), including his accusation that two opponent congressmen were corresponding with the enemy and his deceitful defense in the *Crédit Mobilier* scandal. The third trait was a “Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another” which was shown in flirtations with other girls and even an infidelity during his marriage (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Peskin, 1999).

In contrast to Garfield and his infidelity, twenty-fifth president William McKinley was remarkably devoted to his wife, whose health was often failing (Merry, 2017). Merry (2017) overall portrayed him as a responsible, caring, and humble man, the complete antithesis to a sociopath. The study found no evidence to contradict this wholesome view. Woodrow Wilson, who served as twenty-eighth President of the United States, did cheat on his wife, but was fraught with guilt over the fact and realized his own selfishness (Heckscher, 1991). The only criterion supported by the text was criterion C, evidence of conduct disorder: as a child, Wilson enjoyed attacking unsuspecting neighborhood children with bows and arrows (Heckscher, 1991). This almost-unmarred record may have been due to biographer bias – the biographer completely omitted Wilson’s history of racism (Matthews, 2015). It is hard to tell, without reading another biography, what else

may have been omitted.

“Silent Cal” Calvin Coolidge, thirtieth President of the United States, is famous for his successful management of the Police Strike of 1919 and his efforts to cut back government spending in order to reduce the national debt (Shlaes, 2014). Coolidge was notably less racist than Wilson, but still exhibited more APD traits than said predecessor. First, Cal showed “Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). His attempts to start a fundraiser for charity while vice president may have seemed like a good idea, but it raised considerable concerns about bribery, making it a very poor decision (Shlaes, 2014). He also foresaw the Great Depression on the horizon, but “believed it was wrong to do anything about it” (Shlaes, 2014). Along with irresponsibility, he also displayed a “Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a), which came to the forefront when the nation was plagued by catastrophic floods and he stubbornly refused to give government aid to the areas affected, even after he was accused of being inhumane (Shlaes, 2014).

As a child, businessman-turned-president Herbert Hoover had a penchant for drowning squirrels in a local stream and once set his father’s workshop on fire, running away before he could be caught (Whyte, 2017). This behavior gives evidence in support of APD criterion C, conduct disorder before the age of 15 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). Once he entered the workforce as a mining engineer in Australia, Hoover’s dark side showed; he ran his employees like a “slave driver” and compared himself to the “devil” with no remorse, which provides evidence of “Lack of remorse, as

indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another” (Whyte, 2017; American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). He also portrayed considerable “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure” by backdating agreements, writing articles under pseudonyms, spying on competitors, and giving false explanations of statements under oath (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Whyte, 2017). However, almost all of Hoover’s sociopathic behaviors disappeared at the outbreak of World War I, when he suddenly became a humanitarian hero (Whyte, 2017).

There was no data to support the existence of conduct disorder in young Richard Nixon, but in adulthood he did exhibit many characteristics of APD. He exhibited “Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest” by breaking into a friend’s estate for a place to spend the night, conspiring with the South Vietnamese during his campaign to prevent his opponent from getting the upper hand, ordering a break-in in an attempt to find incriminating evidence against Lyndon B. Johnson, and paying hush money to the Watergate burglars, among other examples (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Thomas, 2015). He also displayed “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure” in his lies about his life history, manipulations of reporters, and his anonymous release of false rumors to embarrass an enemy and his subsequent refutations of his own rumors to make himself seem like the good guy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a; Thomas, 2015). Thomas (2015) also noted several examples of kicking, punching, pushing, and shoving his employees, which support the presence of “Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical

fighters or assaults” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). Nixon also showed “Reckless disregard for safety of self or others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a), which could be seen in his egging on violent protesters, advocating for intervention in and invasion of other countries, and refusal to visit the hospital for dangerous phlebitis (Thomas, 2015). Lastly, he exhibited an astonishing “Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). As a young man, Nixon had a stormy relationship with his then-girlfriend and started seeing other girls while they were still together, and later marginalized his wife from his political life, banishing her from the room or only allowing her to watch ceremonies while hidden behind a pillar (Thomas, 2015).

In complete contrast to Nixon, Jimmy Carter was portrayed as a caring and responsible man who resigned from a promising Navy career in order to run his family farm after his father died (Padgett, 2016). No evidence was found to support any of the APD criteria, but this could have been due to poor biography selection. Instead of describing Carter’s journey to the White House and what he did to get there, Padgett (2016) instead told the story of the people who campaigned for him, herself included, making it a partial autobiography that was likely biased in its descriptions of Carter. The biography on forty-fourth president Barack Obama, in comparison, was also written by someone who knew him, but as a reporter, not a friend (Mendell, 2007). This biography did provide evidence of two APD criteria: “Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest” and “Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing

having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a). As a young man, Obama often used alcohol (even underage) and marijuana and even tried cocaine, which is, of course, illegal (Mendell, 2007). He also got an incumbent disqualified to run for their own seat because they failed to properly gather signatures, devoted time to writing a memoir at 33 despite the strain on his wife, and after ran for senate despite the stress on his family, all without remorse (Mendell, 2007).

Current president Donald Trump is fascinating because there is evidence to support every criterion of APD. Due to the recent nature of his election, the researcher elected to study news articles instead of biographies because sufficient book options were not available yet. As a child, Trump allegedly punched a teacher in the face, threw rocks at his neighbors, attacked teammates for getting outs in baseball, and tried to push his roommate out a window (Schwartzman & Miller, 2016). As an adult, he has shown a remarkable pattern of behavior in line with all of the antisocial traits.

- “Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors, as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a): Took an illegal loan to keep Trump Castle casino open, ran the fraudulent Trump University, and possibly participated in Russian collusion (Buettner & Bagli, 2016; Hamburger, Helderman, & Crites, 2016; Hemel & Posner, 2017)
- “Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a): claimed grievances against business partner while partner was incommunicado in Nepal and could not respond, ending the deal and turning

all benefits over to Trump, and contacted news stations using a pseudonym “John Barron, Trump’s spokesman” to talk about himself (Brenner, 1990; Borchers, 2016)

- “Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a): Donald J. Trump Twitter account, where he often posts claims with no supporting evidence and also frequently posts insults to his enemies despite advice that he should stop (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump>)
- “Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a): allegedly raped his ex-wife Ivana, although she has since changed the story (Gerstein, 2016)
- “Reckless disregard for safety of self or others” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a): made comments suggesting a Clinton assassination during the 2016 presidential campaign (Cummings, 2016)
- “Consistent irresponsibility, as indicated by repeated failure to sustain consistent work behavior or honor financial obligations” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013a): hired and exploited illegal immigrants, delayed payments on debts, failed to pay contractors and suppliers for their casino work, used casino money to invest in real estate instead of to pay off casino debt, put personal debt under the casino names and then gave responsibility to shareholders, and experienced four bankruptcies at the casinos (Brenner, 1990; Buettner & Bagli, 2016)
- “Lack of remorse, as indicated by being indifferent to or rationalizing having hurt, mistreated, or stolen from another” (American Psychiatric Association,

2013a): intimidated Ivana into a prenuptial agreement, refused to change said prenuptial agreement, pressured her to sign a new agreement later, and threatened her with divorce if she failed to “act like his wife” and take care of “her” kids (Brenner, 1990)

Discussion

After identifying which presidents exhibit a high number of sociopathic traits and calculating the frequency in which their elections occur, the logical next step would be to examine the historical circumstances in which they occur. Although a complete analysis of the historical circumstances that influenced the elections of James Garfield (1880), Richard Nixon (1968), and Donald Trump (2016) is outside of the scope of the present study, some brief notes on the events happening during those times can be collected from the biographies read and the personal experience of the researcher.

The election of 1880 took place in the Post-Reconstruction era, a time when many states had only just been readmitted to the Union and African Americans were exploring new but still limited rights. This was also a time of concern over Chinese immigration, with many Americans advocating for new restrictions or even bans on immigration from China due to competition over jobs. Of primary concern in the election, however, was the tariff and the gold standard (Peskin, 1999). Garfield, as a Republican, was in favor of a high tariff and the gold standard. The previous president, Rutherford B. Hays, was also a Republican, meaning there was no shift in party power with this election.

The election of 1968 was plagued by the Vietnam War and protests against it, along with Martin Luther King’s assassination and the resulting race riots (Thomas, 2015). Richard Nixon ran on a platform of “law and order,” promising to provide stability

to the social situation. He also made a campaign promise to end the draft. His predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson (who succeeded John F. Kennedy after he was assassinated) was a Democrat who had increased US involvement in the Vietnam conflict; the shift from him to Nixon was not just significant because of party differences, but also because of the differences in the way they publicly handled the war.

The election of 2016 continued certain themes from the two just described. Illegal immigration from Mexico was highlighted in President Trump's push for a border wall. The unpopular war in Afghanistan continued, as did concern about terrorism. Racial tensions were high due to televised cases of police brutality, and the social justice movement advocated for increased respect for and fair treatment of minorities. Donald Trump inherited all these issues from Democratic president Barack Obama, so during this time of social unrest the nation also had to cope with the changing of parties.

The common thread between all of these elections is social unrest, typically in race relations. This unrest and instability can shake up people's lives, creating a lot of uncertainty about safety, economic security, and especially, group membership or identity. According to the social identity theory of leadership from the field of social psychology, this uncertainty of group and individual identity can explain why citizens would elect someone who does not represent their group. Social identity theory of leadership posits that group leaders with high prototypicality (how stereotypical they are of a group) are viewed as more effective and receive more support from group members than leaders with low prototypicality (Hogg, 2001). However, in times of uncertainty, people seek ways to reduce that uncertainty because it is an unpleasant experience; so, people are more likely to support a non-prototypical leader because "any leader who can

reduce uncertainty is more appealing than no leader” (Rast, Gaffney, Hogg, & Crisp, 2012). Winter (1987) contributes to this concept by identifying that “the greatest presidents were those who were least congruent with the followers of their society.” According to his research, George Washington, Teddy Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and John F. Kennedy are all highly rated and highly incongruent, while James Buchanan, Ulysses S. Grant, Warren G. Harding, and Calvin Coolidge are lowly rated and congruent.

This study does not present enough research to establish a relationship between historical circumstances, uncertainty, and sociopathic presidents, but it does present an interesting hypothesis: When societal events occur that generate more uncertainty in citizens’ lives, there is more support for sociopathic candidates than in relatively stable times. This hypothesis would be important to investigate because it could help in predicting presidential elections due to an increased understanding of voters’ decision-making processes. Future researchers pursuing this hypothesis would need to identify which presidents are and are not sociopathic, investigate the social climates at the time of their campaigns to measure uncertainty and prototypicality, and determine which candidate in each campaign was more prototypical. This design would require a great deal more historical analysis than was performed in the present study, and would therefore be even more labor intensive.

Implications on the Goldwater Rule

After hypothesizing about voter motivation, it is once again important to return to the Goldwater Rule. In light of the information covered in the literature review and the results of the present study, the researcher argues that the Goldwater Rule should be

removed or replaced in accordance to the recommendations of Lilienfeld, Miller, and Lynam (2017). Information relevant to the mental status of a political figure, especially when it concerns repeated and pervasive patterns of behavior that are not likely to go away, would be vital for informing not just voters, but also other political figures. In the case of the President of the United States, the 25th Amendment of the United States Constitution provides circumstances for the removal of the president due to an inability to perform the duties of their office (U. S. Const. amend. XXV). An inability to perform the duties of a president does not have to be due to a physical handicap, but could also be due to a mental condition as well; would it be unethical to withhold psychological expertise about the abilities of the president from the Vice President and other principle officers of government in their decisions regarding Amendment 25? Because of the wide-ranging effects on society of this decision, the researcher argues that yes, to deny any information about the mental functioning of the president in such a circumstance would be unethical. Although providing this information without the permission of the individual (the president) may seem like an ethical infraction and invasion of privacy, one must remember that in becoming president, the individual relinquishes some privacy due to the scrutiny and needs of the entire country.

There is another alternative to removing the Goldwater Rule that hasn't been discussed: perhaps the Commander in Chief could be required to complete routine psychiatric evaluations while in office. This seems like a commonsense answer to the problem, but there are several major issues that could limit the effectiveness of such a plan. First, what conditions would exclude a president from holding office? Some mental disorders are more easily treatable, more temporary, or more docile than others – where

would the cutoff need to be placed? This determination is outside the scope of the present study, and would need to be addressed in future research. A second concern is the impact such a policy would have on mental health stigma. While exposing Americans to the fact that even their president can be susceptible to mental disorders may have the positive effect of normalizing mental disorders, it may have the opposite effect of increasing stigma due to fear of what a powerful person with a mental illness could do to the country. Third, if the president is aware that their career hinges on their responses in the evaluation, they may be inclined to lie or withhold potentially damaging information (Lilienfeld, Miller, & Lynam, 2017).

Limitations

This study had several limitations that may have affected its results which should be addressed in future studies. The first limitation is that plenty of valuable information may be lost to history. Unfortunately, save for miraculous discoveries of missing data, nothing can be done about this limitation. Letters burn, memories die with people, and there is nothing that can be done to recover that information. However, biographer bias may be something that can be counteracted. Biographer bias, such as intentionally omitting relevant facts that may improve/ damage the image of the biography subject, can dramatically impair the researcher's ability to be objective in their analysis. One way of circumventing this limitation would be consulting multiple different biographies to get multiple different viewpoints on the subject; another would be to study primary resources only. Due to time and resource constraints, these methods may not be feasible and the future researcher must develop their own method to avoid this limitation.

Another limitation of this study is the incomplete education of the researcher; she

is completing her Bachelor's level degree and does not have the same level of clinical expertise that a researcher with a PhD in the field would bring to a study. This unfinished educational training may have affected the decisions and conclusions described in this paper, and future replications are needed in order to validate the results. The final and most salient limitation for this researcher and potentially any researcher studying political figures is personal bias. The researcher of the present study identifies as a liberal democrat, who does not agree with President Trump's policies. This outlook may have negatively affected the analysis of Trump, and positively affected recent Democratic presidents. The danger of biased analysis of earlier or less well-known presidents is not as high, because preconceived opinions are less likely to exist on them. However, precautions must be taken in the future to prevent personal bias from affecting results. This may be done by using multiple raters of varying political opinions and creating an average response.

Conclusion

Due to sociopaths' potentially dangerous lack of consciences, it is important to analyze the American presidents for sociopathic traits because of the large amount of power they yield. This study provided some brief insight into the frequency rates of APD in American presidents compared to the general population, which raises important concerns about the ethics of the American Psychiatric Association's Goldwater Rule. In order to better inform voters, the Goldwater Rule should be revised or retired to allow psychiatrists the opportunity to give the public their professional opinions. This study also provides a jumping-off point for future research, in suggesting research on what historical contexts presidents with sociopathic traits are elected in. Further research on

the mental health of presidents is necessary not only for informing voters but also predicting their future voting patterns, giving this line of work far-reaching applications.

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