



NEWS &amp; POLITICS

## OPINION

## Why Do We Ignore Obvious Dangers?

By Michele Wucker • 05/26/16 8:42am

South Africa

This year's presidential campaign is full of the unexpected. Yet the underlying issues are anything but. It's hardly news that middle- and working-class incomes have stagnated and that Americans are fed up with a government that even squabbles over an impending public health crisis like Zika. Why, then, have the country's two leading parties been

taken aback by voters who are mad as hell and not going to take it anymore?

It's because everyone—not just politicians—underestimates the power of the obvious problems that loom right in front of us. So it's a surprise when inaction creates unpleasant consequences. The Democratic and Republican parties are learning this lesson the hard way.

The truth is that we get into most trouble when we've ignored obvious problems. I call these issues “gray rhinos” because they are huge and charging right at us and ought to be harder to ignore. Yet we miss the most important information—like calling rhinos black and white even though they are all gray.

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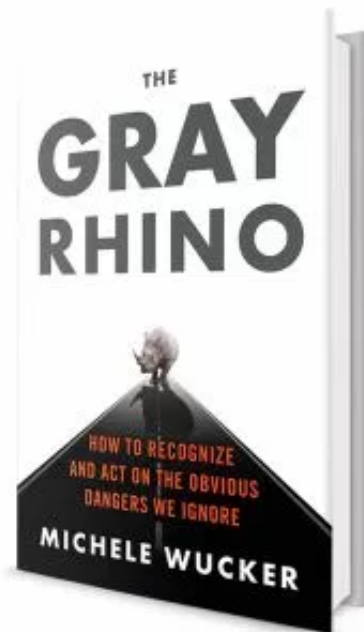
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You likely have heard about “black swans”—the improbable, unexpected events that blindside us. But it’s a cop-out to think of ourselves as unable to foresee some of the biggest shocks to our system. Most black swans—like, say, the 2008 financial crisis—happen only after we’ve neglected the gray rhinos.

This is the year of the gray rhino. The middle- and working-class rage over stagnating incomes and wealth that has dropped by roughly 20 percent since 2007 even as the share held by the top 1 percent has, according to Brookings Institution, risen to between 18 percent and 42 percent; the GOP’s failure to heed its own analysis of why it lost the 2012 presidential election; the Flint, Mich., lead-poisoned water crisis; the string of auto industry safety debacles, from the aftermath of the GM ignition switch scandal to the Volkswagen and Mitsubishi emissions problems to the expanding Takata airbag recall.

The Gray Rhino, out April 5.

We haven’t



(Photo: Courtesy Michele Wucker)

yet seen the full impact of China's slowing economy and mounting debt or of volatile oil prices on heavily indebted energy

companies. As the Federal Reserve raises interest rates, emerging market economies will feel the blow, which in turn will likely hurt U.S. exports. Rising interest rates also will slow the U.S. economy just as it has picked up steam.

Arguably, the most pressing obvious crisis is the failure to deal with governmental paralysis, which has led some people to drop out of the system entirely, while others stake out ever more rigid and extreme positions. These reactions only compound the problem.

These issues may seem, well, obvious. But clearly they are not obvious enough, or our political parties would not be facing an existential crisis. Still, as "they" say, a crisis is a terrible thing to waste.

Why do we neglect impending threats?

Recent behavioral science from a number of esteemed researchers, including psychologist Daniel Kahneman, behavioral economist Dan Ariely and neuroscientist Tali Sharot, shows that that we are vulnerable to cognitive biases that make us likely to downplay unwelcome information and to be over-optimistic. Groups of people from similar backgrounds are particularly susceptible to these mind games. Political and financial incentives throw more obstacles in the way. Sometimes we feel powerless to fix a problem, so we don't even try. Too often, it takes the very real possibility of a calamity—or worse, its aftermath—to prompt us to act.

The consequences of underestimating the danger of a gray rhino can be catastrophic. If there ever was a sign that America needs to rethink the costs and benefits of acting instead of muddling, this is the time.

The zoological term for a group of rhinos is a “crash”—wholly fitting since things are most likely to spin out of control when several gray rhinos come together. Such a crash is exactly what we face. It's up to us whether we get trampled or get out of the way.

*Michele Wucker is the author of The Gray*

Rhino: How to Recognize and Act on the Obvious Dangers We Ignore, *published by St Martin's Press.*



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## OPINION

### **'Bernie or Bust' Movement Grows as Clinton Polls Tank**

The Senator's supporters remain principled and unwavering in the face of a crumbling Establishment

By Michael Sainato • 05/26/16 8:30am





**Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders.** (Photo: David McNew/Getty Images)

Democratic leaders and Clinton-leaning pundits are still grossly underestimating—and dismissing—the Bernie or Bust movement. As Hillary Clinton drifts down the path to securing the Democratic presidential nomination, her favorable ratings continue to plummet, with presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump closing in for a virtual tie. Yet, instead of accepting responsibility for propping up a candidate as weak as Ms. Clinton, her allies are placing the blame for her bad poll ratings on Senator Bernie Sanders.

Leaders of the Democratic Establishment are overwhelmingly in favor of Ms. Clinton for president, but millions of Democrats and Independents who traditionally swayed toward the Democratic Party in general elections are disenfranchised to the point of voting for Mr. Sanders no matter what. While the Green Party is often written



off, Mr. Sanders' campaign has proven an Independent can render enough support to make a third party challenge tangible.

This has been demonstrated by Mr. Sanders' recent victories. No matter how much Ms. Clinton's supporters cite the lead she holds in pledged delegates—and assert Mr. Sanders has no chance to recover before the Democratic National Convention in July—Bernie Sanders' supporters remain steadfast in their resolve to vote for him anyway.

In a pathetic attempt to push his supporters in line behind Hillary Clinton, Establishment-leaning journalists and Clinton supporters have tried desperately to discredit Mr. Sanders' arguments for staying in the race. Such calls for Mr. Sanders to drop out of the race backfired when supporters hijacked the hashtag #DropOutBernie and replaced it with #DropOutHillary, which skyrocketed to the number one trending topic in the country early this month. Since Bernie or Bust began, the movement has only grown in size and strength.

Bernie Sanders has cited one important democratically-principled argument for continuing his campaign: voters in every state should have the right to be heard in

the Democratic primaries—including super delegates at the Democratic National Convention. While some out-of-touch pundits have accused Mr. Sanders of hypocritically calling super delegates undemocratic while attempting to court their votes, their argument fails to comprehend what the longest-running Independent in the history of Congress was up against when he decided to run for president in the Democratic Party. Bernie Sanders is working within the system to change it. Super delegates have disproportionately supported Hillary Clinton—roughly 400 of them before anyone else was in the race. As Bernie Sanders refuses to give into the calls from the Democratic Establishment for him to drop out, his supporters remain principled and unwavering.

The corrupt Nevada State Democratic Party Convention was the latest ploy by the Democratic Party to shut out and silence Mr. Sanders' supporters in favor of Ms. Clinton's candidacy. False claims of violent Sanders supporters became the subject of controversy—when, in fact, the unrest at the convention was incited by the Nevada State Democratic Party chair, Roberta Lange, who took it upon herself to make decisions for the state Democratic Party on her own.

Erin Bilbray, Nevada's lone super delegate in support of Bernie Sanders, called it "the most unfair convention I have ever seen" in an interview with Adryenn Ashley. "I was born and raised in Nevada," she explained. "My family has been part of the democratic party in the state since the 1930s. My father was a congressman for eight years. And you know what? He ripped up his ballot and left—and he's a Hillary supporter—he was so disgusted by what was transpiring. They are not letting motions open on the floor. There is no room for debate. It's an unfair process."

The Nevada State Convention was an example of what is sure to be a controversial and unruly Democratic National Convention. It is highly unlikely the Democratic Party will offer Bernie Sanders enough to entice his millions of supporters to trust Hillary Clinton with carrying on the principled policies for which he stands. Millions of voters are defiantly Bernie or Bust because the only way to restore democracy in the United States is to support a candidate who walks the walk on campaign finance reform. The stakes facing our country are too high to negotiate merely because it's "her turn."

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