Paradox of Political Candidates

The people most attracted to power are the most dangerous to let have it. Yet it’s only the people most driven to get elected that can survive the process. This creates a fundamental paradox to democracy, that the people best suited for the job on some dimensions would never win the election process, or [choose to run at all](http://scottberkun.com/2012/open-letter-to-people-complaining-about-politics/).

Reasonable doubts are part of the paradox. We all know there are excellent reasons to have doubts about big decisions. When you deeply understand an issue, it’s clear there are good arguments on both sides. But when we look for leaders, we demand certainty. We are attracted to people who have bold convictions about both what is wrong and what is the right way to fix it. We are drawn to people who project demigod like clarity, dismissing their opponents as fundamentally wrong rather than having a different perspective, even though we know deep down that level of certainty can’t really exist.

Any leader who admitted uncertainty, admitted doubt, admitted that there may be more than one good answer, makes for an impossible candidate. We wouldn’t listen to them for long, even if our attention spans allowed it. Even though those doubts may be a sign of their wisdom, rather than incompetence.

We chase the mythical image of a leader, and demand candidates give it to us, yet when they are elected and reveal themselves to be human, or change their mind as an act of progress rather than deception, we complain we’ve been betrayed. But in a way we all betray the people who might make for better leaders, by ignoring them in favor of a fantasy.