

Opinion **US politics & policy**

## Why does calling Trump 'weird' hurt him so much?

Democrats are beating the former US president at his own game

**JEMIMA KELLY**



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**Jemima Kelly** 5 HOURS AGO

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Donald Trump manages to provoke a whole range of feelings in people — anger, fear, amusement, adulation, bewilderment — but he doesn't often make them cringe; he's usually far too self-assured for that. And yet I'm sure I'm not the only one whose face contorted reflexively into a grimace as I watched [his latest attempt](#) to defend himself and his running mate against the charge that they are both “weird”.

“He is weird, right? He's weird. I'm not weird. He's weird,” Trump said during a town hall in Wisconsin on Thursday, leaning rather awkwardly on a chair and looking around the room for reassurance. The “he” that Trump was referring to is Tim Walz, governor of Minnesota, Kamala Harris's running mate and the man responsible for making “weird” one of the defining words of the 2024 US election.

“See, they come up with sound bites, they always have sound bites, and one of the things is that JD and I are weird. We're not — that guy [JD Vance] is so straight . . . He's doing a great job, smart, top student, great guy, and he's not weird and I'm not weird. I mean we're a lot of things but we're not weird.”

The man doth perhaps protest a little too much.

It was back in July, before he became the vice-presidential nominee, that Walz started using the word. “These are weird people on the other side — they want to take books

away, they want to be in your exam room,” he [told MSNBC](#). “Don’t get sugarcoating this: these are weird ideas. Listen to them speak. Listen to how they talk about things.”

Ever since then, the Democrats and their supporters have taken Walz’s line and have gleefully — and gainfully — run with it. MSNBC ran a [“Trump expands his coalition of the weird”](#) segment on Wednesday after Trump added Robert F Kennedy Jr, a man he only recently [called a “Radical Left Lunatic”](#), to his presidential transition team. Barack Obama mocked Trump’s “weird” obsession with crowd sizes at the Democratic National Convention last month (before making an improvised “sizes” innuendo with his hands).

Trump, clearly, is rattled. He’s used to being the bully who comes up with the mean jokes rather than being the butt of them. And while I confess to having found some of the nicknames he’s used on previous opponents very amusing (“low energy Jeb Bush” is a personal favourite), “Laffin’ Kamala” just doesn’t have much ring, or sting, to it. It is particularly ineffective given that her laugh is a selling point, while Trump never seems to laugh at all, which, if we are being honest, is a little . . . weird.

The ironic thing about Trump’s apparent allergy to the word is that his natural weirdness — his way of pronouncing words like “CHAINAH”; his hand gestures and dance moves; his enduring attachment to the song “YMCA” — is actually a large part of his appeal. It makes him come across as authentic, and means that he is [entertaining](#) and [instantly recognisable](#). So why is he so bothered by it, and why is it so effective?

The first reason is simply that it’s funny, and laughing makes people feel good. You might think Trump represents the gravest threat to liberal democracy since Hitler, you might think that his second term would be more terrible and dictatorial and damaging than the first, you might think he is the most dangerous presidential candidate ever, but none of these warnings are motivating or compelling to the average undecided voter. Poking fun is. And while Trump was the only one who seemed [able to use humour effectively](#) when Biden was the nominee, with Harris and Walz this is no longer the case.

The second reason is that it is devoid of any moral grandstanding. One of Trump’s greatest strengths has been to come across, despite his privileged upbringing, as a man of the people. Calling someone “weird” brings the name-caller down to just the right level: mean but not quite low enough to be considered below the belt.

Think it’s the other side of the argument to be the “weird” One of the main attacks

In fact, it's the other side who are meant to be the "wackos". One of the main attack lines from the right over the past few years has been framing the left as weird: "weird" drag queens reading books to children; "weird" pro-choicers who want to kill babies; "weird" women who choose not to have children. It must be rather uncomfortable, then, to suddenly be told that it is your side, actually, that is "[creepy](#)".

It comes down to this: the Democrats are currently beating Trump at his own game. The intellectualising, the moralising, the hysteria over Trump's threat to world stability — all of that was too dull and depressing and too obviously partisan to be persuasive. Cackling at him and his "cat lady"-obsessed running mate, though — now that's something that everyone can get on board with.

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