

AMERICAN PATRIOT OR WHITE SUPREMACIST? THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND DONALD TRUMP'S VICTORY (2016)

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Abstract: In November 2016, a billionaire tycoon, called Donald Trump, was elected to the most powerful office in the world, defeating the ultimate political insider, Hillary Clinton. The election of a political outsider was a clear indication that American politics glossed over any rational arguments. The legitimacy of Trump was seriously questioned by millions of Americans who did not vote for him. As America was waking up to the extraordinary reality of Trump's victory, his opponents shared their fears for the future. Yet, his popularity reached fever pitch amidst his passionate supporters. They were thrilled that Trump would lead the mightiest nation on earth. The mood in the U.S. was dim as issues of economic discontent, immigration, and American identity came to the fore. Therefore, this article sheds light on the deep divisions that existed ahead of the 2016 American presidential elections. It further investigates the factors behind Trump's meteoric rise and explores why his robust and frequently controversial attitudes appealed to millions of American voters.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, 2016 presidential elections, immigration, economy, American identity.

PATRIOTE AMERICAIN OU SUPREMATISTE BLANC ? L'ELECTION PRESIDENTIELLE AMERICAINE ET LA VICTOIRE DE DONALD TRUMP, 2016

Résumé : En novembre 2016, un magnat milliardaire qui s'appelle Donald Trump, a été élu au poste le plus puissant au monde, battant l'ultime initié politique, Hillary Clinton. L'élection d'un outsider politique était une indication claire que la politique américaine a occulté tous les arguments rationnels. La légitimité de Trump a été sérieusement remise en question par des millions d'Américains qui n'ont pas voté pour lui. Alors que l'Amérique s'éveillait à l'extraordinaire réalité de la victoire de Trump, ses adversaires partageaient leurs craintes pour l'avenir. Pourtant, sa popularité a atteint son paroxysme parmi ses partisans passionnés. Ils étaient ravis que Trump dirigerait la nation la plus puissante du monde. L'atmosphère aux Etats-Unis était morose, car les questions de mécontentement économique, d'immigration, et d'identité américaine ont pris le dessus. Par conséquent, cet article met en lumière les profondes divisions qui existaient avant les élections présidentielles américaines de 2016. Il examine en outre les facteurs derrière la montée fulgurante de Trump et explique pourquoi ses attitudes robustes et souvent controversées ont séduits des millions d'électeurs américains.

Mots-clés : Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, élections présidentielles 2016, immigration, économie, identité américaine

Introduction

When Donald Trump was inaugurated president of the United States in early 2017, he faced massive protests from thousands of Americans who felt so furious about one of the most bitterly fought and divisive presidential campaigns in American history. While presidential candidate Hillary Clinton largely won the popular vote with 65.8 million votes, Trump had the support of 62.9 million voters. Surprisingly, he won in the Electoral College, getting 306 votes compared to Clinton's 232 ("2016 Presidential Election Results," 2017). Trump was chosen to be president and leader of the free world. Arguably, it has been the most perplexing presidential elections in American history. Donald Trump faced harsh attacks in the media, being frequently portrayed as a white racist, supremacist, sexist, and even a liar. His election victory was a political earthquake. A few months before the election, the very idea of seeing Trump president would be absurd. During the whole election campaign, Hillary Clinton received enormous support from the political elite in Washington and also from ethnic minorities in the U.S. The logical outcome of the election was predictably in favor of her. Candidate Trump stood little chance. But Trump had his own personal weapons. Despite of all the harsh criticism against him from many sides, Trump has divided and astonished America with his own brand of politics. His devoted and passionate supporters were ready to vote for him believing he can 'make America great again.' It is not surprising then that he was hailed as a real patriot and consummate leader by his voters, becoming the first outside contender to be elected president and defeat the ultimate political insider. Trump's bold and often unpredictable attitudes were essential to guaranteeing his election victory. For some commentators, his inspirational speeches demonstrated vigorous, patriotic leadership; to others, they revealed a white supremacist who abhorred American diversity. Regardless, Trump's election victory can never be the result of the self-made man. There are some other factors that allowed such a controversial candidate to be elected President. Therefore, this article seeks to answer one cardinal question: what are the major factors that have laid a foundation that has enabled Donald Trump to rise to the top and become president of the mightiest nation on earth? To answer this question, the article hypothesizes that four main factors set up the foundation for Trump's election victory. These included the fact that he did not belong to the American establishment mistrusted by the American voters, an indispensable religious role played by evangelicals, a difficult economic situation worsened by endless flows of immigrants, and an ambiguous plan by white nationalists to purify their country from the alien culture of minorities.

1. Trump as a novice political outsider

Trump was not taken seriously by politicians or the mainstream media because he was, though a successful businessman, with no political experience at all. It looked that Trump would never come to political power as he never held a political office. Strangely, he claimed he could fix America's problems. He even preached that he has "joined the political arena so that the powerful can no longer beat up on the people who cannot defend themselves" (qtd in Sheckels, 2020:197). Some Americans were taken by Trump's words and strength. From the start, they did not see him as a conventional politician. Although Trump seemed to be a political novice, his supporters found his rhetoric mesmerizing. Trump thrived in an atmosphere of political mistrust. As an outsider, he declared at the first Republican presidential debate in August 2015 that "[American] politicians [were]

stupid” (“Donald Trump: Our Politicians are Stupid,” 2015). Trump intentionally attacked the political elite to gain support from ordinary voters. This egoistic statement was surprisingly shared by millions of Americans who extremely ridiculed mainstream politics. Some American voters were prepared to hold on to the belief that Trump could indeed make America great again. As a successful businessman, he convinced his supporters that politicians were the enemies of people after all. He was, however, the right man determined to right the wrongs of the political establishment. In her article entitled “What Voters See in Donald Trump,” Peggy Noonan (2015) argued that Trump was plainly “a symptom of massive disillusionment among the American public who [were] exhibiting a profound disdain, if not hatred, for the political and economic mainstream elites.” Trump’s route to the White House was to seize the opportunity that some Americans were despondent and mortified. He, instead, demonstrated a vision aimed at saving the American republic and pledging that the United States would be his cardinal theme (Diamond and Collinson, 2016). For some Americans, they had no other choice as they distrusted the establishment. They were fed up with empty and broken promises. It is ironical that like any politicians, Trump also brought nothing but promises of greatness, narcissism, and true leadership.

Trump unexpectedly won success after success in the primaries. After the primaries, he started thinking in epic terms. He wanted to be president of the U.S. In June 2015, he announced he was standing to be the Republican nominee for the presidency. He stated: “I am officially running for president of the United States... we will make America great again” (qtd in Timm and Howard). The Republican Party reluctantly agreed to make Donald Trump its presidential candidate because he was a disruptive outsider who had never shown any particular inclination for the Republicans. On the other side, the Democrats were so happy as polling showed that Clinton was ahead. According to a poll released by *CBS News* and the *New York Times* in May 2016, 47% of registered voters would support Hillary Clinton while 41% would opt for Donald Trump (Salvanto et al).

Yet, Trump had a winning card. He exploited people’s hatred and disdain of the government on his step to the White House, denouncing the American system as “rigged,” and claiming that anyone who defies the system is portrayed as a “a sexist, a racist, a xenophobe, and morally deformed” (Healy and Rappoport, 2016). Logically, the political establishment perceived Trump as a real threat. Even Republican politicians were hostile to Trump’s statements, yet they had no chance to refuse him. The Republican speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Ryan, was outraged. His spokeswoman, AshLee Strong, was compelled to state that the American election would be fairly conducted (Martin and Burns, 2016). Afraid of losing the presidential election, Ryan wanted Trump to tune down his message. However, for his diehard supporters, politicians attacked him because, though an outsider, he was capable of gaining support better than those who spent their lives in politics. Unlike Hillary Clinton, Trump did not have a family member who held a political position. The assumption among the political elite was that Hillary was the clear favorite. During the campaign, she raised a great deal of money compared with Trump. For instance, Mrs. Clinton’s team incredibly raised 143 million dollars in August 2016 while Trump’s fundraising totals were 90 million dollars (Addady, 2016). Yet, Clinton embodied the political establishment criticized by Trump himself:

Big business, elite media, and major donors are lining up behind the campaign of my opponent because they know she will keep our rigged system in place. They are throwing money at her because they have total control over everything she does. She is their puppet and they pull the strings.

Denton (2017:146)

Trump's extraordinary and personal attacks defined the election campaign. His belittling of Hillary Clinton was taken as strength of character. Yet, Clinton also unleashed her criticism on Trump, arguing that he was "running a cynical campaign of hate and fear for one reason: to get votes" (qtd in Philip, 2016). Those Americans who believed in the American values of tolerance and diversity ticked towards Hillary. Though considered to be the perfect presidential candidate by the Democratic elite, Hillary Clinton was deeply unpopular with large sections of the American voters. She certainly contributed to some mistakes. Because she was Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013, American voters distrusted her. For many voters, she was the embodiment of a corrupt and broken political system. Besides, it was the Democratic elite that enabled Clinton to win her fight for the Democratic nomination against socialist Bernie Sanders. She won 15.5 million votes compared with 11.9 million votes for Sanders (Zitner, et al, 2016). This means that some fellow democrats were against Clinton. They were for socialist Bernie Sanders. Massachusetts Democrat Elizabeth Warren agreed that the system was "rigged for Clinton" (Wolf, 2017). When Clinton won the primaries, Sanders' supporters deserted the Democratic Party in favor of Donald Trump. Even Sanders spoke to those who were disappointed in the American system. Like Trump, he ferociously attacked Wall Street and giant American banks, accusing them of tearing apart the fabric of America (Trehan, 2016). This statement against big businesses and globalization was an asset to Trump's campaign. When Sanders joined Clinton's campaign, his choice was not welcomed by some of his supporters because they branded Clinton as a Wall Street candidate. Furthermore, American voters suspected that Hillary Clinton was not revealing everything. She was dogged by controversy over her illegal use of a private server for professional emails while serving as Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013 under President Barack Obama. This meant that Clinton had no official email address when she was Secretary of State. As the case came to the fore, Trump fueled the debate saying that "Hillary Clinton created an illegal private e-mail server deliberately, willfully and with total pre-medication" (qtd in Gass, 2016). In March 2015, Clinton replied that she did not send or receive classified material from her private email account (Allen, 2015). However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found that thousands were work-related and some were classified (Levine, 2016). In other words, Hillary lied about the documents.

Trump faced the ideal opponent for his unique brand of allegations. His criticism of Hillary Clinton focused relentlessly on her endless attempts to cover up her professional scandals throughout her political career. Trump said: "it's either criminal or incompetent, it's one or another... and neither's acceptable to be president." (qtd in "Surging Trump Says Clinton Email Saga "Devastating," 2015). Successfully, Trump caused doubt in Hillary's honesty and integrity. At the end of the year-long investigation, the FBI said it would not prosecute Hillary Clinton despite some damning revelations. On 5 July 2016, FBI Director James Comey stated:

We found no evidence that any of the additional work-related e-mails were intentionally deleted in an effort to conceal them... We did not find clear evidence that Secretary Clinton or her colleagues intended to violate laws governing the handling of classified information. There is evidence that they were extremely careless in their handling of very sensitive, highly-classified information.

FBI National Press Office

The FBI decision was outrageous. Hillary Clinton seemed above law. Yet, the emails' scandal constantly hovered over her fate. Many American voters were convinced that Clinton deliberately deleted incriminating emails when she was Secretary of State. According to a Gallup poll conducted on 2-3 November 2016, only 32% of Americans believed that Clinton was honest and trustworthy (Newport and Smith, 2016). The revelations of the emails scandal badly hurt her. Clinton's reputation never recovered. Unlike Clinton, Trump seemed to be seeking the truth and speaking for Americans who felt failed by a corrupt political establishment, represented by Hillary Clinton who had a huge record of lies. Though the political establishment was fearful about what an inexperienced president Trump might turn out to be, Trump's victory can be linked to positive attitudes toward him and negative attitudes toward Hillary Clinton who embodied the political establishment that people deeply detested. Clinton arrogantly described "half" of Trump voters as "deplorables" (Merica and Tatum, 2016). In return, she received an avalanche of criticism from the Trump campaign. For his staunch voters, the perspective of having Trump as president was a moment of pride; for his opponents, it was a moment of peril. The political atmosphere was tense.

2. Religion at the service of Trump

In the United States, faith is one of the most important factors of how people vote. Though it is impossible to know how many Americans based their vote on their religious affiliation, *Pew Research Center* revealed that evangelical voters were a key part of the coalition that swept Donald Trump to power in 2016 (Martinez and Smith, 2016). They believed that Trump was sent by God to save America. Though not really a devoted religious man, Trump was not afraid to use the language of faith. As a presidential candidate, he incessantly targeted Christian voters: "I am a true believer... Christianity is under tremendous siege... and yet we don't exert the power that we should have... if I am there... you will have somebody representing you..." (qtd in Campbell, 2016). Trump was a master manipulator. It was as if his election would kill one kind of America and give birth to another: A Christian United States of God. For his ardent religious supporters, America belonged to them, and they belonged to God. Although Trump professed himself to be a true Christian, some believed that he was long away from a Christian man. His values' system was extremely flawed. Opponents were appalled by his abusive language about women. He called women he did not like "fat pigs, dogs, slobs, and disgusting animals" (qtd in Legum, 2016). Accordingly, mainstream media tried to portray him as a sexist and immoral candidate. The *Washington Post* released an old recorded conversation in which Trump had bragged about "kissing, groping, and trying to have sex with women" in 2005 (Fahrenthold, 2016). The conversation proved that Trump was not a good Christian. Instead, he was practically amoral. Shockingly, many evangelicals did not take Trump's disrespectful comments seriously. Even his attitude to women did not bother them. They were prepared to overlook his turbulent private life in order to elect a president whom they

believed would defend their values. They were not interested in his past. For them, it was Trump's commitment to their causes which really mattered.

For instance, evangelicals were convinced that same-sex marriage was divinely cursed. In an interview with the Brody File, Trump too defended the sanctity of traditional marriage, and he asserted that evangelicals can trust him on that particular issue (Brody, 2016). It was a spiritual warfare and evangelicals were God's army on earth. It was necessary that they stood up and speak their truth. They wanted Trump to fill the fire of God's wrath on gays. Trump also consistently championed evangelicals' agenda on key issues like abortion. He clearly suggested that women should be punished for having an abortion (Glenza, 2016). Though the issue divided Americans, it was as Trump was trying to lure evangelicals who were more concerned with the dangerous influence of secular modernity. The Bible was all that stood between their country and moral collapse. Since Trump was fighting for the preservation of Christian values, God was on his side.

Trump had the support of hugely influential evangelical pastors, like Michele Bachmann, Jerry Falwell, and Franklin Graham. These Christians have been Trump's biggest cheerleaders. The first evangelical leader who explicitly backed Trump was the president of Liberty University in Virginia, Jerry Falwell. According to Falwell, Trump was "a successful executive and entrepreneur, a wonderful father and a man who... can lead [America] to greatness again" (qtd in Vitali and Rafferty, 2016). Franklin Graham's father, Billy, was known as America's pastor. Both preached to millions. Admiring Trump's shake up of the political process, Franklin urged Christians to vote in the 2016 election. He even believed that Trump stood for "Biblical principles and Biblical truth" (Caldwell and Jackson, 2016). Yet, America is not a united Christian nation. Unlike evangelicals, Jews, Hispanic Catholics, Christian 'nones,' and religious minorities were in favor of Hillary Clinton. She struggled to convince Christian voters to vote for her. In September 2016, Clinton quoted some passages from the Bible in a speech delivered in Kansas City. She said: "The Scripture tells us, let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Lord, 2016). Undoubtedly, there was a strong competition for the Christian vote.

As Christianity has always inspired faith, it also inspired squalid politics. One of Trump's core promises had to do with keeping Muslims out of America. Trump tried to play off Christians against Muslims, and he sounded tough on Muslims. In his election campaign, he called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (qtd in Valverde, 2018). This statement was a calculated move after fourteen people were killed by a local couple of Pakistani descent in California (Serrano et al, 2015). Trump strongly believed that terrorist attacks were only carried out by Muslims who were to be blamed for all the terrorist attacks inside the United States. His fans thought that electing him might be one way out of America's problems. He could be a useful figurehead against Islamic terror. Yet, Trump's promise of blocking citizens from several Muslims countries from entering the U.S. generated widespread anger because of his clear discrimination against Muslims. The Republican Party started to worry out loud. Reaction from leading Republicans was swift and harsh. On 8 December 2015, the House speaker, Paul Ryan, denounced Trump's statement, saying that "what was proposed... [was] not what [the Republican party stood] for, and more importantly, it is not what [America stood] for" (qtd in Bruce and Siegel, 2015). Even Trump's party then was not happy in the way he treated the Muslim faith in the name of God.

Trump's opponents too were quick in denouncing his discriminatory plan towards Muslims. Khizr Khan, the father of a Muslim American army captain Humayun Khan who had been killed in Iraq in 2004, criticized Trump as he spoke at the Democratic Convention. He rebuked Trump: "Let me ask you: have you even read the United States constitution? I will gladly lend you my copy... You have sacrificed nothing." Khan declared that Trump "consistently smears the character of Muslims... If it was up to Donald Trump, [my son] never would have been in America" ("Khizr Khan's Speech to the 2016 Democratic National Convention," 2016). Trump showed no empathy or compassion for the Muslim parents' terrible loss of their son in Iraq. Yet, months later, he expressed regret: "sometimes in the heat of debate ... you don't choose the right words or you say the wrong thing. I have done that... I regret it... particularly where it may have caused personal pain" (qtd in Gibson, 2016). There were no specific apologies. It was just general remorse.

Trump's mission was to secure the white Christian American state from the Muslim threat. The irony is that only a very small percentage of the American population was Muslim. According to *Pew Research Center*, there were around 3.3 million Muslims living in the United States in 2015. They made up only 1% of the whole population (Mohamed, 2016). Due to their very negligible numbers, Muslims were a rare voice of protest. They were the victims of Trump's virulent campaign. As the vast majority of the American population was impregnable from Trump's pledge against Muslims, they did not have sympathy for people whose faith was radically different from theirs. Evangelicals believed that Islam and Christianity have always been locked in a battle for supremacy. They wanted to see a tough line on Islamic terror. Muslims were the enemies of the Christian faith after all, and Trump was the leader of the Christian faith. He, accordingly, thrived in this atmosphere of fear and religious intolerance.

Trump's seduction of evangelicals continued throughout his campaign. He explicitly said: "one of the greatest privileges of my journey has been the time I've spent with the evangelical community" (qtd in Wheaton, 2016). Consequently, they did not fail him. Evangelicals made up the Republican Party's largest voting block with around 81% of them voting for Trump; 52% of Catholics voted for Trump despite the Pope's unfavorable attitude towards him (Martinez and Smith, 2016). It is worth mentioning that Pope Francis suggested that candidate Trump was not a Christian because of his desire to build a wall between Mexico and the United States (Jacobs, 2016). However, despite the immeasurable gap between Trump and religious voters, they saw him as a man on mission to restore God's people to their former greatness.

Faith shaped the election battle in some states known as America's Bible Belt. Among these states are North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee. In North Carolina, faith tremendously mattered. It was also a key swing state. Results showed that 50.5% of its electorate voted for Trump. In Georgia, Trump got 51.3% of the vote compared to 45.6% for Hillary. Christianity was the spiritual invader that brought people to vote for Trump. The state of Florida can make or break a president. It has a Cuban-American community that was split over Trump. Yet, evangelicals believed that Trump was the best candidate: 49.1% voted for Trump while 47.8% were in favor of Hillary Clinton. Similarly, 58.3% of Mississippi voters gave their voice to Trump while only 39.7% chose to vote for Clinton. Voters thought Trump was doing the Lord's work. In Ohio, Trump expected unfailing support from the faithful. Ohio's voters believed that Trump was an agent to radical change. They thought they were protecting their core Christian values.

All these would be under assault if Hillary would win the election. Logically, 52.1% of the electorate was in favor of Trump whereas Clinton got 43.5% of the votes. Besides, Trump played shockingly well in the state of Tennessee where he got 61.1% compared to only 34.9% for Hillary (“2016 Presidential Election Results,” 2016). Religious affiliation enormously influenced the electorate’s vote in all these American states. The Christian vote was clearly for Trump and against the liberal elite represented by Hillary Clinton.

The election of Trump was a historic inevitability. In his victory speech, Trump made it clear that he won’t forget his loyal religious backers, pledging never to let them down (CNN Staff, 2016). By voting Trump, religious voters thought they were helping to create a cohesive society that would allow a nation to form. Religion was the glue that could bind Americans together. Trump, though at odds with Christianity, surprisingly corresponded to the religious voters. On the other side, his political rival, Hillary Clinton, was with no religious credibility as she was the representative of the liberal elite that destroyed Christian American values.

3. Economic Discontent and Immigration

Donald Trump also won with American voters who cited the economy as their chief concern. Poverty is a harsh truth that exists in America. According to a report based on information collected in early 2017, there were more than 40 million poor people in the United States in 2016. The official poverty rate was 12.7 % (Semega et al, 2017). Some areas were neglected and bankrupt. In these areas, one realizes why politicians were viewed with contempt. In his article “Donald Trump’s Angry America,” Freddy Gray (2016) demonstrates that more Americans have grown frustrated with the system since the 2008 financial crisis. To them, America disintegrated into a failing state with rampant inflation and soaring prices. Trump claimed ability to restore America’s economic fortunes. During the primaries, Trump relentlessly criticized his Democratic rival Ted Cruz for being controlled by large banks and oil companies. As the ultimate insider, Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton was also accused for being beholden to a wealthy network of fundraisers. Trump pointed that “Goldman Sachs ... have total control over [Ted Cruz] just like they have total control over Hillary Clinton” (qtd in Diamond, 2016). Trump defiantly alleged that big money corporations had no control over him. Nonetheless, a report by the *New York Times* found that Trump was indebted to big money institutions for 650 million dollars, including Goldman Sachs and the Bank of China (Flores, 2016). It turned out that Trump too, though a billionaire, has taken money from fundraisers.

Americans had to be reminded that Trump himself was part of an American elite that has become extremely well-off as many Americans did not receive a decent wage rise for many years. While productivity grew over three times as fast as 61.8%, the wages received by workers grew only by 17.5% since the 1970s (Lee, 2022). Trump has also been absent from the pain and suffering felt by millions of Americans. Astonishingly, some American voters were not interested in details. They only wanted to hear someone share their fright and frustration. Trump’s election slogan “Make America Great Again” was strongly felt in those states where Americans knew that their country was no longer economically exceptional. For decades, industrial decline was rampant. Despondent and demoralized, many voters were disappointed to hear Hillary Clinton claim that America was already great. She said: “we know we’ve got work to do... but that work in not to make America

great again. America never stopped being great” (qtd in Collins, 2016). In hard times though, words cannot heal the misery and the suffering felt by ordinary Americans.

Among those states that suffered economic decline was North Carolina. On 18 August 2016, Trump delivered a campaign speech in Charlotte, North Carolina, pledging “to end the decades of bitter failure and to offer the American people a new future” (Politico Staff, 2016). North Carolina’s unemployment rate exceeded that of the nation, reaching 10.9 % in 2010 (Department of Commerce, 2017, p.5). Therefore, it was a hotly contested state. Yet, the state’s electorate is heterogeneous. There were 2.2 million African-Americans in North Carolina in 2016. That state had more Black American voters than any other swing state, representing 22% of the electorate (Stanford, 2018). Therefore, the outcome of the election in such a swing state can only be secured through winning the votes of African-American voters.

Similarly, Ohio was a major battle ground in American elections. Yet, it was also one of the broken industrial towns in heartland America. In this state, economic disparity was monstrous. The top 1% of the population earned more than \$752,000 a year while 99% earned less than \$43,000 a year (Hanauer, 2016). In other words, one can find the tranquility and the prosperity they expect, and the crushing poverty and despair they do not. Therefore, the image of a peaceful Ohio was very deceptive. Under the surface, it was seething. It was like a jungle where wild life was thriving and people were struggling.

Besides, once known as the engine of America and the home of innovation, Ohio was trapped in the past. It was known across the world for its steel industry, but recession hit and the jobs have gone overseas. Small towns like Monroe Country in Ohio were hollowed out, gutted, and they became a reminder of the economic power of global forces (Coolidge, 2020). Company workers and owners felt abandoned by the system. In 2016, Ohio became a key battleground state. At Ohio state University, Clinton addressed her audience in October 2016: “we are going to have a big investment in infrastructure: our roads, our bridges, our tunnels, our ports, our airports, our water systems. They need to be upgraded and maintained and built” (qtd in Staff Writer, 2016). Yet, those who lost their jobs were waiting for someone who did not belong to the system.

Donald Trump was the perfect candidate who promised hopeless Americans their jobs back. Drawing the bold lines of his economic policy, Trump (2016) pledged that “jobs will return, incomes will rise, and new factories will come rushing back to [American] shores.” Many voters were mesmerized by Trump’s vows and embraced his vision for a strong America. Blue collar America was switching over to Trump. More precisely, white working class voters voted for him. With the exception of Illinois that voted for Hillary Clinton, all the swing states that were badly hurt by the forces of globalization voted for Trump. These states were Ohio, North Carolina, Michigan, Florida, Wisconsin, Arizona, and Pennsylvania (Cummings, 2021). Trump’s votes in the swing states brought him decisive victory.

It is true that those who lived through America’s industrial decline voted for Trump, yet the country was more fractured, and the atmosphere was socially toxic between underpaid and unemployed white Americans on one side and immigrants on the other side. Trump skillfully played to the issue of immigration in the Southern states. White people think that immigrants changed the face of America. Immigration to the U.S. was about 43.7 million out of 325.7 million inhabitants in 2016, an increase of half a million since 2015 (Camarota and Zeigler, 2017). This immigrant population represented 1/8 of the whole

population. Therefore, many Americans fervently believed that the tide of people entering the U.S. needed to be slowed, and even halted.

According to a polling done in partnership with *Vox* by *Morning Consult* in July 2016, over 50% of the American population saw immigrants as a burden on the country; 39% thought that immigration should be decreased (Yglesias, 2016). Nonetheless, some argued that America has a long history as a migration nation. The Statue of Liberty says "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (qtd in Hunter, 2018). In other words, America welcomed the multitudes. They settled in America; they prospered; and they became the new Americans. The fact is that though people may get anxious, immigration made America richer. Non-white immigrants, in particular, worked hard to pay taxes and to claim less benefits than the whites. America's official forecasters say less immigration means more costs for the whites. According to *Pew Research Center*, if immigration controls are applied in a very harsh way, there will be a lofty economic price to pay (Passel and Cohn, 2017). Without immigrants, the future of the American economy would be at stake. Additionally, immigrants made a positive contribution to the public finances, adding two trillion dollars to the U.S. growth domestic product in 2016 ("Immigration Facts," 2020). The U.S. needed immigrants to keep the economy growing. They enabled growth to carry on at a faster pace.

In the American South, the immigrant population overwhelmed some states. Still, there are predictions of new comers of Mexicans and Latinos. Like so many cities, California has been transformed over the past decade. *Pew Research Center* estimated that about ten million of the residents of California are immigrants, representing around 27% of its population. Texas, New York, and Florida had more than four million immigrants each, in 2016 (Budiman, 2020). Other American states like New Mexico and Arizona are also overwhelmed with immigrants. There has been a quick social change that needed to be halted. Besides, Trump voters believed that illegal immigrants were the enemy within. The U.S had a settled population of over 10.7 million illegal immigrants in 2016, including over half born in Mexico (Passel and Cohn, 2018). Dependence of illegal immigrant workers was high in some states. Illegal workers in 2016 were 8.6 percent of California's labor force, and 8.2 percent in Texas (Jordan, 2018). Logically, white workers thought that their jobs were at risk, and their wages were undercut. However, as white Americans still refuse to work in particular fields and domains such as farming, illegal immigrants find their opportunity to fill the void. They even help drive the economy forward.

Due to immigration, great difficulties emerged, and worries became real. No wonder politicians felt they had to act. During the campaign, many of Trump's promises had to do with immigration. He attacked illegal immigrants on many occasions, reasoning that "when Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some...are good people" (qtd in Holpuch, 2015). Trump's supporters argued that they had no objections to immigrants, only who were illegal. They praised Trump for his belief in legal migration and the rule of law. Besides, the comments about the wall being important for national security and crime prevention brought more people into Trump's tent. However, the Drug Enforcement Administration said that only a small percentage of drugs seized by American authorities came across on territory: 95% of the drugs were moving on the water via container ships ("How do Cartels get Drugs into the US?," 2015). Yet, Trump

continued to play on immigration myths, repeating his false accusations in front of his supporters.

On 14 January 2016, Trump said to applause: “I will gladly accept the mantle of anger... Illegal immigration is beyond belief. Our country is being run by incompetent people. And yes I am, angry” (qtd in Hackman, 2016). Then Trump maintained that he would secure the border through the immediate construction of a physical wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Trump also pledged to deport millions of illegal immigrants living in the U.S through building a deportation force: “you’re going to have a deportation force and you are going to do it humanely” (qtd in LoBianco, 2015). Yet, the deportation of illegal immigrants is very costly. Estimates from the Center for American Progress suggest that it would cost around 114 billion dollars to remove 11 million immigrants from the United States (Wolgin, 2015). Regardless, Trump’s message against illegal immigrants convinced his supporters that he stood up for America.

Strangely, a mere Trump’s promise convinced American voters that immigration was coming under control. The election campaign was a moment of inspirational hope but also of utter chaos. Truly, the border wall with Mexico became one of the most controversial issues in American politics. It had divided America and deeply offended its southern neighbor, Mexico. Some saw the wall as an ugly symbol of hate and fear; nonetheless, others, who felt threatened by the waves of immigrants, hailed Trump as a savior who echoed their wishes.

4. American nationalism in favor of Trump

American nationalism played a key part in the American election results in 2016. In its essence, the United States is seen as a nation of immigrants. The presidency of Barack Obama represented the final triumph of that vision of America as a multi-ethnic nation. Though the U.S. society is more multi-ethnic than ever, its values of diversity were challenged by nationalism which vigorously showed itself in the 2016 presidential elections. Historically, the white color of skin has always been a fundamental pillar of identifying an American. Therefore, who should be allowed to enter America and call themselves an American is still one of America’s most divisive issues. The early settlers were themselves immigrants, but they were overwhelmingly white and European. They saw America as fundamentally a white and Protestant nation. However, historical events challenged this view. After the United States tremendously won its war over Mexico in 1848, the latter was obliged to cede many parts of pre-war Mexico including Utah, Nevada, Oklahoma, Wyoming, California, New Mexico, Colorado, and parts of Arizona. With that land came tens of thousands of Mexicans. Therefore, the fantasy of a purely white America came to an end not through immigration but through the shifting borders of conquest. The American South became a patchwork of disparate ethnic groups. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), there were approximately 56.6 million Hispanics in the United States, making up 17.8% of the whole population in 2015. They became the largest minority in the country. Many of the Hispanics living in America are of Mexican descent.

By 2014, California’s majority was no longer white. According to *Pew Research Center*, Latinos made up 39% of the state’s population while white residents comprised 38.8%. California was also composed of 13% Asians, and 5.8% Blacks (Lopez, 2014). This means that more than half of California’s population was not white. Likewise, immigrants’ share of the population in Texas increased in the last decade, reaching more than half of the population. In 2016, whites made up 43% of Texas population; Hispanics’ share

increased to 39%; Asians made up 5%; and Blacks comprised around 12% of the population (Ura, 2017). Undoubtedly, many citizens felt that the country was no longer an ethnically homogeneous society of the whites. In the long-term, white people may be a minority. Latinos were capable of modifying the balance of power between ethnic minorities and the white Anglo-Saxon or more broadly European majority.

Immigrants' hard work made America richer. The powerful state of California, with its multi-ethnic population, contributes to the U.S. economy more than any other state. According to the *Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy* (2017), California had the sixth largest world economy in 2016, ahead of countries like France, Brazil, Italy, and India (p. 1). Yet, part of the problem is a cultural clash. Latinos are resistant to assimilation. Their communities are not interested in white American values as they were proud of their own culture. Undoubtedly, non-white communities were accused of jeopardizing the white American culture. Nationalists then feared that the United States is threatened in its identity by unassimilable immigrants. Peter Brimelow's book *Alien Nation* (1995) warns that the United States would be confronted with a radical transformation of its national identity by the Latino community whose cultural influence continues to grow (Hendrickson, 1995). However, defenders of multiculturalism remind us that the greatness of America as a country with its unique exceptionalism is based on the celebration of diversity. In a multi-ethnic America, it is the white European model which represents an anomaly.

Besides, the English language holds the levers of economic, cultural, and political power. It symbolizes national unity in the United States. However, Spanish, the native language of Latino immigrants, is a distinctive sign of the Mexican and Latin American power. A survey of Hispanic adults conducted in 2012 found that 95% of respondents thought that it was important for future generations to continue speak Spanish (Taylor et al, 2012). Speaking Spanish is a strong marker of Latino identity. Its place in a society whose dominant language is English increased. The *United States Census Bureau* estimated that Spanish was the native language of more than 40 million people living in the United States in 2015 ("Facts for Features," 2016). The presence of Spanish in American states irritated English-speaking Americans. For them, Spanish was not seen as an asset but rather as a problem because it symbolized the refusal of the English model. Latino immigrants argued that Spanish has always been present in the United States' history, especially in the west. It was the U.S. that historically annexed Mexican territories in the middle of the 19th century. The continuous flow of immigrants maintains the dynamism of this language. It is a linguistic battle between Spanish and English.

Fear of the loss of the American culture was a perfect mobilization tool for Donald Trump. When he sought the Republican nomination for president, race was taking central stage. Trump realized that nationalists wanted America to return to its vigorous values of white purity. His 'America First' approach assertively rejected the immigrants' alien values that could threaten the pure American culture. On 16 June 2015, Trump gave a speech to vilify Mexican immigrants. He accused Mexico of the exportation of drugs, crime, and rapists to the United States (Kopan, 2016). Trump expressed his robust attitude on immigrants by intentionally insulting them. Yet, his dreadful attack gained him more popularity amidst white Americans who felt fired up by his campaign. Moreover, American nationalists admit that non-white immigrants made America a prosperous country, yet social stability was not guaranteed because illegal immigrants brought in the U.S.

numerous crimes (Flagg, 2018). As a presidential candidate, Trump also dwelt on the security problems posed by immigration. In late August 2016, he notably began his speech in Phoenix, Arizona, with a series of murders committed by undocumented migrants. He even invited relatives of the victim to join him on stage (Barbaro et al, 2016). That gesture was a clear reaffirmation of his radical position on immigrants: the deportation of all illegal immigrants was his ultimate goal.

Broadly speaking, Trump was not the sole anti-immigrant speaker. Anti-immigration positioning united American nationalists and nationalist parties in Europe. The arrival of immigrants from non-European countries gave new impetus to nationalists who refused the torrential numbers of immigrants. Nationalists believed that taking severe steps against immigration would be a necessary measure for the survival of the already endangered European culture. In France, the National Front Party, led by Marine Le Pen since 2011, was able to gain two electoral seats in the French Senate for the first time in history (Penketh, 2014). Besides, the bloody attacks of 2015 and 2016 made French citizens more receptive to nationalist rhetoric. They saw the attacks as a proof of the ineffectiveness of the European Union.

Likewise, the nationalist voice played an important role in the Brexit referendum in June 2016. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) advocated a stronger national sovereignty and warned against EU enlargement and unlimited immigration. The white working class, which no longer felt represented by a cosmopolitan Labor Party nor by a liberal Conservative Party, became a fertile ground for UKIP. The Brexit referendum offered a good opportunity to show dissatisfaction with the British political establishment: 53% of white adults and 58% of those describing themselves as Christians voted to leave the European Union (Lord Ashcroft, 2019). It was crystal clear that the effects of immigration triggered fears among those people threatened with economic and social decline. Additionally, England and Wales overwhelmingly voted to leave the EU. Being British became secondary as English citizens decided the outcome of the referendum. Two thirds of those who mainly perceived themselves as English voted for Brexit (Lord Ashcroft, 2019). Therefore, it is not surprising that the 'Leave' campaign targeted England.

Similarly, many American voters associated American identity with the feeling of being overwhelmed by non-white race and culture. Matthew Heimbach, the leader of the traditionalist Worker Party, is a prominent nationalist and white supremacist who hates immigrants and ethnic minorities. In 2016, he pushed a black woman, called Kashiya Nwanguma, out of a pro-Trump rally in Kentucky (Yuhua, 2017). Heimbach and the white nationalists believed that racial equality in America was demonstrated against the interests of the white people. Therefore, Trump's election victory would bring American nationalism out of the shadows. America's most notorious white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), shares Heimbach's beliefs.

The Klan has re-emerged in America since 2014. Historically, it was formed in 1865 after the American Civil War as a vigilante group aiming to restore white supremacy to the South. The group gained a reputation for lynching black people. As America is a multi-ethnic society, the KKK is seen as a symbol of racist white terror. Surprisingly, this infamous supremacist group claimed a surge in membership across the South. There were 917 white supremacist groups in the U.S. in 2016 (Ganim et al, 2017). Their ideology is based on the premise that whites are genetically and culturally superior. The Klan claimed that its members were not violent. But when a 21-year-old white supremacist, named Dylann Roof, walked into a church in Charleston, South Carolina, and killed nine black

people saying he wanted to start a race war, the danger of the white supremacist ideology became a terrifying reality (Blinder and Sack, 2017). The racially-motivated massacre was investigated as a hate crime. America became a fractured society plagued by violent racial tensions.

The racial issue in America was a golden opportunity to press for Trump's goals. In 2016, Trump made significant gains in the presidential elections due to white supporters. According to the *Edison Research*, white voters who made up the large majority of voters, comprising 70% of the electorate, voted for Trump. He won 58% to Clinton's 37%. White voters did not disappoint Trump. Among minorities, Blacks voted overwhelmingly for Clinton- 88% to Trump's 8%. Likewise, Hispanics tremendously backed Clinton- 65% to Trump's 29% ("Reality Check: Who Voted for Donald Trump?, 2016"). As Trump spoke to the white voters' fears, he successfully directed their frustration and mobilized them for his political goals. On the other side, the minorities' vote was in vain.

Geographically, Clinton won the votes in states which were composed of a significant majority of ethnic minorities. In California, nearly 62% of voters were in favor of Clinton while Trump won only 32%. Clinton also won the election votes in New Mexico and Colorado. Additionally, Clinton won the votes in states and cities which are considered to be more diverse and cosmopolitan like Hawaii, Massachusetts, New York, Washington, Washington D.C., Maryland, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Interestingly, Trump spiked in states of the Midwest which are known as the rural parts of America. These states included Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Missouri, and Iowa ("2016 Presidential Election Results," 2016). 62% of voters living in rural America voted for Trump, compared to 34% voting for Clinton (Morin, 2016). Trump won several states against his rival Clinton because of the importance of white culture to many voters. There was a potent link between the voting results and white nationalism that abhorred the minorities' values. Therefore, the struggle in the 2016 elections was between white nationalism and ethnic minorities. Unfortunately for Clinton, the minorities' vote was not enough to bring her election victory.

Conclusion

When Donald Trump won the Republican Party's nomination for the presidency in 2016, his election victory against Hillary Clinton seemed all but miraculous. Surprisingly, Trump became the voice for voters who believed that the American system was rigged. As FBI investigations showed that Clinton lied about the use of a private server for her professional emails while serving as Secretary of State, Clinton's credibility was weighed down. To many voters, she was the representative of that American rigged system. Additionally, at the heart of America's monumental decision was the battle for God. Evangelical America was just another way of saying Christian America. Tenacious religious voters showed off their credentials and wielded a disproportionate level of influence on elections. Driven by fear of the extinction of their Christian values, they backed Trump and undid Hillary Clinton's hopes. Moreover, Trump came with a mandate from industrial areas who felt that the economic system was not working for them. He vowed to rebuild a broken America. Though immigrants have helped make America wealthier, they were blamed for its economic troubles. The election was won in a handful of swing states that delivered a marginal but essential victory for Trump. Despite its unmatched superiority, the United States became a country plagued by hate and bigotry. Again, ethnic minorities were

accused of the adulteration of the pure American identity. White nationalists used cultural weapons in their struggle for the affirmation of identity, and Trump's election victory was the embodiment of their nationalist power. Though millions of Americans strongly believed that Trump was illegitimate as president because he lost the popular vote, his victory was the culmination of all these factors that gathered strength in the 2016 presidential election.

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