

BEYOND CONSERVATISM: HOW THE CRISIS OF THE AMERICAN RIGHT SHAPED TRUMPISM AND THE TRUMP VOTE IN THE 2016 ELECTION

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Abstract. *In this article, we have highlighted the main dimensions of populism promoted by Donald Trump, whose discourse has sought to exploit the tensions and resentment generated by the economic, social and political crises in recent years. Our aim was to explain the rise of Donald Trump's unique brand of populism in relation to the defining axes of post-democracy. Referring to the election strategies of the two White House candidates during the last election, we have noticed that Trump has intensified his populist discourse in states won with a long-lasting tradition of Republican vote, states that were neglected by the Clinton campaign.*

Keywords: *populism, identity politics, Republican Party, Trumpism, alt-right*

Trump: old wine in new bottle?

The prevalent explanation for Trump's resounding 2016 victory, namely that the billionaire-turned-populist politician built his patchwork doctrine by taking the lead of a far-right crusade against orthodox, moderate republicanism, is only partially true. First and foremost, as it is often the case with populism, his rhetoric blurred the Right-Left divide, Trump purportedly encroaching on some issues alien to the ideological core of right-wing republicanism: he was almost alone in his party in proposing a more robust protectionist approach to trade, for example. Trumpism is thus uniquely situated on the Right-Left spectrum, and it is simplistic to locate him in the vast morass that lies on the right of even the most intransigent Republicans. He created, arguably, a new ideological space in which his still inchoate and malleable doctrine can freely deploy. However, while he was able to circumvent some of the fault lines that defined the dichotomy between Republicans

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and Democrats, Trumpism relied on a narrative whose main tenets were already in place. The same narrative was previously used by some of its predecessors, notably Reagan. Our paper sets out to map the complex cartography of the American right, and identify how tropes both within and without the Republican intellectual tradition helped construct Trump's peculiar brand of populism. The second part of the present article takes a more statistically grounded approach to the dynamics of the Trump vote in key swing states, highlighting also in the process the rhetoric strategy of the Republican candidate. Looking at Trumpism through the lens of a post-democracy theoretical model, one can observe how he exploits electoral – and particularly republican – disfranchisement to redefine the social contract in a way that fundamentally threatens the institutionalized checks and balances of the American system.

*In search of a new Conservative
ideological “winning formula”*

The American Right was historically and ideologically a hybrid object and, for many European observers an unfathomable enigma. Unlike in Europe, where the revolutionary seism forged the left-wing dichotomy alongside fault lines that stayed in many respects remarkably stable, it was harder to pinpoint the exact date of birth of a similar divide across the Atlantic. The event that propelled the American Right into the global limelight was the election of Ronald Reagan, who ushered through a new right-wing doctrine that would go on to be known as neo-Conservatism. The impulse from America was to find a fertile ground in Thatcherian Great Britain; however, elsewhere in Europe its incapacity to dissolve itself in the pre-existing right-wing intellectual corpus (historically too wary of capitalism to be able to assimilate the Reaganian ultraliberal rhetoric) spelled its demise. The then-Prime Minister of France, Jacques Chirac, tried to implement in the mid-80s a similar deregulation experiment under the influence of a small group of liberal intellectuals, but rapidly backpaddled.¹ Even if in continental Europe neo-Conservatism appeared politically unviable, the “Conservative Revolution” brewing in the United States was immediately seized upon as an ideological phenomenon of epoch-changing magnitude. In many ways, it was indeed.²

Neo-Conservatism has been reduced in the early 2000, following the Bush-era Middle East ventures, to a hawkish foreign policy doctrine camouflaging under the guise of grandstanding patriotism an opportunistic economic imperialism. Its intellectual roots nevertheless tell a different story, and most importantly shed light of how the current Trumpian brand of populism built on a pre-existing narrative of crisis and of American disenchantment to consolidate its grip on the Grand Old Party's establishment. The “neo-con” movement's origin story is itself one of frustration and betrayal. In the late 1950s, the Trotskyist-leaning Jewish student

¹ Jean Baudouin, «Le moment néo-libéral du RPR: essai d'interprétation », *Revue française de science politique*, 1990, no. 6, pp. 830-844.

² Cf. Clarisse Berthezène & Jean-Christophe Vinel (dir.), *Conservatismes en mouvement*, Editions EHESS, 2016, Paris.

intelligentsia of New York was bitterly divided over the deep structural realignment of the American radical left. With the counter-cultural moment in full swing, the Marxist left faced its own internal revolution. The small Trotskyist faction had already initiated its own evolution, with its anti-Stalinism budding into a markedly anti-totalitarian stance that put many of its young leaders in contact with some of the liberal literature of the inter- and post-war period, notably Hayek and his *Road to Serfdom*.³ But the rupture was officially enacted when the counter-culture took over the New Left, replacing the core issue of material welfare for the industrial poor with a radical anti-authority intellectual project; not anecdotally, the hostility manifested by the far left towards the young Israeli nation also stirred a profound discomfort amongst numerous left-wing Jew intellectuals. The identity of the budding neoconservative thought was shaped by the pervading sense that the Left had betrayed them, and America was going terribly awry. For most of the 1960s they occupied an ideological space that Daniel Bell emphatically described as “socialist in economics, liberal in politics and conservative in culture”.⁴ They refused to be assimilated to mainstream conservatism. The neo-conservatism, for all their vitriol against the “totalitarian” statist welfare programs of the New Left, remained somehow committed to a form of “loyalty” to the poor America (and crucially to the white poor America). The white poor and middle-class workers of the hinterland, “abandoned” by the traditional coastal Left, came to embody the real America and its authentic value system.

Although – in terms of background, sensibility and trajectories – as remote from the garish populist political style as possible, the hyper-intellectual neo-conservative eminences forged a narrative matrix of the popular purity and elite betrayal which left deep imprints on the rhetoric of resentment with which Donald Trump will conquer the American vast hinterland in 2016.

The eventual juncture with the Christian right was uneasy, as many neo-Conservatives were naturally disinclined to buy into the grand apocalyptic prophecies of the fundamentalists; but they shared a common foe – the New Left – and, albeit for different reasons, agreed on an ethical and cultural anti-modern formula. With Jimmy Falwell’s Moral Majority and its staunchly anti-tax and pro-business creed, a common ground could be found on the economic terrain too. Recoiling from what they perceived as a mortal threat to American identity, neo-conservatives and fundamentalists forged an alliance that became the driving force behind the election of both Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. Even more durably, their common proclivity to frame their political views as cultural and quasi-ontological battles defined what was one of the central phenomena of the *fin-de-siècle* American political landscape: the culture wars.

The term “culture wars” is itself a complex and multifaceted concept. The German word *Kulturkampf* (roughly translating into cultural struggle or cultural war) was used to describe the late 19th century power struggle between the German

³ Yaron Brook & Bradley Thompson, *Neoconservatism: an obituary for an idea*, Routledge, London, 2010.

⁴ Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Origins of a Movement*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2013, p. 174.

State and the Catholic Church following the national unification. Subsequently, James Davison Hunter, a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia, tweaked the term slightly to create the notion of “culture wars” – the plural seemed indeed more fitting to render the vast arrays of contentious issues, ranging from condoms in schools to the fate of Confederate war memorials.⁵

Emerging from the sexual revolution, the counter-cultural movement and identity politics, this new set of issues could hardly track with the traditional left-wing economic and social debates, redefining a new axis of conflict. The disputes observed by Hunter in the early 1990 remained remarkably stable throughout the following decades. The cultural hiatus between the progressives and the conservatives seemed only to deepen. With the most salient fault lines of the 2000s – notably foreign policy and the Middle Eastern quagmire – slowly fading, cultural issues once again took centre stage. But in the twenty-or-so years that had elapsed since the culture wars of the 1990s, a new “culture” had appeared: it was only natural it would spawn its own wars. Besides the traditional topics of abortion, contraception and morality, new contentious issues include political correctness (“PC culture”), masculinity or internet censorship and *fake news*. The staunch pro-business line of thought of the cultural Right of the 1990s also gave way to scathing anti-consumerism and anti-capitalism, all embedded in a general critique of the new “elitist” normativity.⁶

From the fringes of the political spectrum, former white supremacist and neo-fascist groupuscules organized the rebellion against mainstream conservatives; known as the alt-right, this loose ideological current remained numerically peripheral, but its greatest victory was not on the streets or at Capitol Hill, but in the renovation of the very grammar of conservative lingo. Hitherto cryptic epithets such as *cuckservative*, an insult targeted at the moderate centre-right wing of the Grand Old Party, left the 4chan and 8chan message boards to become rhetoric hallmarks, especially amongst the supporters of Donald Trump. Pepe the Frog memes are now recognizable to every politically literate American: the culture of the radical Right seeped into culture at large.⁷

However, as the alt-right coagulated around Richard B. Spencer (who coined the very term) and his brand of overtly racist “white identitarianism”,⁸ it became evident that the sheer distance between agitators like Spencer and even hard-line GOP figures would be a factor severely limiting any significant ideological transfers. Bridging the gap between the alt-right and the Republican Party, the more colour-blind *alt-light*⁹ acted as a transmission belt and allowed some of the former’s ideas – purged of their less palatable racial undertones – to break into

⁵ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Define America*, Basic Books, New York, 1991.

⁶ Jacqui Shine, “Culture War: What Is It Good For?”, *Los Angeles Review*, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/culture-war-what-is-it-good-for/#!>, visited the 5th of October 2019.

⁷ Leslie A. Hahner and Heather Suzanne Woods, *Make America Meme Again. The Rhetoric of the Alt-Right*, Peter Lang, New York, 2018.

⁸ Tamir Bar-On, “Richard Spencer and the Alt-Right”, in Mark Sedgwick (dir.), *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019.

⁹ George Howley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2019.

the mainstream. The alt-light shared not only its more radical counterpart's fondness for memes, humour and sarcasm as cultural lubricants (and cultural leverage), but also, even more crucially, its fiercely anti-systemic discourse and its deep-rooted dissatisfaction with mainstream conservatism.

Although far from monolithic, the disenfranchised conservatives – allied with certain segments of the old radical right – have shaped a new ideological space to the right of the Republican Party. Trumpism was at its core an attempt to ensnare and reclaim this ideological wasteland, by reintegrating it into mainstream conservatism.

Post-democracy and the rise of populism¹⁰

Colin Crouch places the outcome of the US elections in the post-democracy development, a situation in which major decisions within democratic institutions are dependent on the influence exercised by the economic elite, despite the fact that elections, changes of government and free debates continue to be organized. Crouch points to the risks to which democracy is subjected by the rise of populist leaders such as Trump, Farage or Le Pen, who have built their image on the basis of a desire to exclude political opponents.¹¹

At the same time, Colin Crouch observes that we are witnessing a shift of axes within Western societies, as a result of the economic globalization effects that produce new social and political identities, sharply different from those of the past. Colin Crouch identifies the fact that people feel threatened by factors from outside their family sphere, which is why they face new decisions and cultural artefacts that feed their fear of “The Others”. Colin Crouch places Donald Trump (US), Marine Le Pen (France), Geert Wilders (Netherlands) and Norbert Hofer (Austria) on the same footing, considering them as central figures of the xenophobic contemporary movements built on targeted attacks on immigrants, refugees, and the national elite involved in the financial crisis.¹²

Another characteristic that we identify in post-democracy is represented by the institutionalized distortion of the fundamental democratic principle “one person, one vote”.¹³ In the elections of 1876, 1888, 2000 and 2016 in the USA, the President and vice-President-elect secured a comfortable majority within the Electoral College, despite the fact that they obtained fewer votes than their main counter-candidate among the voters present at the electoral roll.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Ciprian Negoită and Vladimir-Adrian Costea, “Criza democrațiilor occidentale – The Crisis of Western Democracies”, *Polis, Revistă de științe Politice*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (25), 2019, pp. 67-82.

¹¹ Colin Crouch in Mark Carrigan, “Viewpoint: Post-Democracy, Post Brexit – An Interview with Colin Crouch”, November 01, 2016, <http://discoversociety.org/2016/11/01/viewpoint-post-democracy-post-brexit-an-interview-with-colin-crouch/>.

¹² Colin Crouch, “The familiar axes of politics are changing, with momentous consequences”, *Political Reform, IPPR*, edition 23.2 of Juncture, September 22, 2016, <http://www.ippr.org/juncture/tilted>.

¹³ Wolfgang Merkel, “Trump and Democracy in America”, translated from German by Seongcheol Kim, in *Minda de Gunzburg, Center for European Studies Harvard*, November 14, 2016, p. 3.

¹⁴ Thomas H. Neale, “When the Electoral Vote and the Popular Vote Differ”, in *U.S. Department of State*, Vol. 13, No. 9, September 2008, p. 17.

Of these, the US presidential election of November 7, 2000 is the most eloquent example of contesting the outcome of the Florida election, decisive in gaining the victory of Republican candidate George W. Bush, the brother of the Governor of that state,¹⁵ who won 2,909,135 votes, while the other candidate, the Democrat Albert Gore Jr., won 2,907,351 votes.¹⁶ Just like Al Gore, Hillary Clinton won the majority of the popular vote, but nonetheless suffered a clear defeat at the poll, receiving only 232 votes, compared to the 290 electoral votes secured by Donald J. Trump.¹⁷

The result of the 2016 US presidential election, however, is not surprising. In a ranking of the integrity of elections in democracies and autocracies by Pippa Norris, the United States ranks 52nd out of 153 countries, while Germany ranks 7th. Within this ranking, countries such as Croatia, Greece, Argentina, Mongolia or South Africa are above the US. The explanations identified by Pippa Norris regarding the low level of integrity of elections in the United States of America consists of the influence of private donors in electoral campaigns and programs. Another explanation lies in the high frequency of data falsification, as well as the discrimination generated by the voter registration system.¹⁸

According to the observation made by Charles Tilly, the functioning of democracy is closely linked to the reduction of categorical inequalities through political processes. Otherwise, accumulating social tensions prevent the functioning of democracy, as the categorical inequalities increase.¹⁹ Tilly's thesis is supplemented by Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris, according to whom the prospect of economic uncertainty explains the rise of populism amid deep changes in post-industrial economies.²⁰ Another explanation that Inglehart and Norris identify aims at forming a cultural reaction against progressive cultural change. Starting from the "silent revolution" theory of value change, the authors note that, within developed Western societies, generations have begun moving towards post-materialist values such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism.²¹

"Make America Great Again"

On the announcement of his June 16, 2015, nomination in the US presidential election, Donald J. Trump concluded the speech with a phrase that was to become

¹⁵ Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge, Polity, 2004, p. 2.

¹⁶ Supreme Court of Florida, *Palm Beach County Canvassing Board, Petitioner; vs. Katherine Harris, etc., et al., Respondents. Volusia County Canvassing Board, et al., Appellants, vs. Katherine Harris, etc., et al., Appellees. Florida Democratic Party, Appellant, vs. Katherine Harris, etc., et al., Appellees*, November 21, 2000.

¹⁷ Wolfgang Merkel, "Trump and Democracy in America", translated from German by Seongcheol Kim, in *Minda de Gunzburg, Center for European Studies Harvard*, November 14, 2016, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Charles Tilly, *Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 2007, p. 111.

²⁰ Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash", Paper for the roundtable on "Rage against the Machine: Populist Politics in the U.S., Europe and Latin America", 10.00-11.30 on Friday 2 September 2016, annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, Harvard Kennedy School, August 2016, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

his election mantra: “Together we will Make America Great Again!”²² Later, on the occasion of accepting the nomination from the Republican Party, at the end of the speech, the campaign slogan was presented in its extended form: “We Will Make America Proud Again. We Will Make America Safe Again. And We Will Make America Great Again.”²³

The slogan used by Donald J. Trump is an adaptation of the slogan used in the 1980 presidential campaign by Ronald Reagan: “Let’s Make America Great Again.” We find the phrase “Make America Great Again” for the first time at Ronald Reagan in the Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit, July 17, 1980:

“For those who have abandoned hope, we’ll restore hope and we’ll welcome them into a great national crusade to make America great again!”²⁴

Comparing the speeches announcing the candidacy in the US presidential election,²⁵ the slogan “Make America Great Again” is not the only common ground between Ronald Reagan and Donald J. Trump. In both speeches, we identify a common strategy of denigration of the former administration (Carter and Obama, respectively), which becomes responsible for the problems that America faces both internally (economic deficit, poverty, uneven access to education and health services, etc), as well as problems encountered on the external front (degradation of the military force projection, the weak capacity of border control). All this leads to the “ridicule” of the US image and the death of the American dream. The two speeches also resonate with the solutions proposed to American voters: the return to the glorious time of “government of the people, by the people, for the people”.²⁶

The break between the two is identified in relation to the positioning of the political parties and the American society as a whole. While Ronald Reagan promises to strengthen political parties and represent the interests of the whole of American society,²⁷ Donald J. Trump believes that American politicians are not a solution to the problems that American society faces, which is why he describes himself as a leader from outside the political system that cannot be bought. Paradoxically, we identify a speech that contradicts his actions: Donald J. Trump adopts an anti-establishment speech, pitting himself against the American political elite, stating that he is not a politician; however, he seeks the nomination by the Republican Party.

²² *Donald J. Trump Presidential Announcement*, June 16, 2015, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/donald-j-trump-presidential-announcement>.

²³ *Donald Trump’s speech to the Republican National Convention in Cleveland*, July 21, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/full-text-donald-trumps-2016-republican-national-convention/story?id=40786529>.

²⁴ *Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit*, July 17, 1980, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25970>.

²⁵ See *Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit*, July 17, 1980; *Donald Trump’s speech to the Republican National Convention in Cleveland*, July 21, 2016.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

*American Presidential elections: distortion of the
fundamental democratic principle “one person, one vote”²⁸*

The electoral success of Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in the US presidential election in front of former Democratic President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter Jr. has resulted in a majority of the popular vote,²⁹ but especially a huge victory in the electoral vote.³⁰ The result of the electoral vote, in fact, reflects the small number of states where “Jimmy” Carter managed to win the victory over Ronald Reagan: Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Rhode Island, West Virginia, DC, states in which Ronald Reagan’s campaign has proven its full effectiveness. The slogan “Make America Great Again” has succeeded in mobilizing the Republican electorate needed to get the majority of the popular vote in each of these states.

We note that the US presidential elections of 1980 provide an eloquent example of the institutionalized distortion of the fundamental democratic principle “one person, one vote”, as a result of a 90.90% majority in the Electoral College based on obtaining a majority of 50.75% among the popular vote.

In contrast, despite the fact that Donald Trump has won the 2016 US presidential election as a result of gaining the majority in the Electoral College,³¹ we must be cautious when interpreting the outcome of these elections from the perspective of mobilizing the electorate based on the populist discourse built around the slogan used by Ronald Reagan in 1980. An eloquent example in this regard is the fact that Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton won more than 2,800,000 more votes than Donald Trump.³²

The 2016 US presidential elections supplement the list of polls held in 1876, 1888 and 2000, respectively, after which the president and vice president-elect won the majority of the Electoral College votes, despite the fact that they obtained fewer votes than their main counter-candidate among the voters on the electoral ballot.

Comparing the result of the US presidential elections between 1996 and 2016, we can see that Donald Trump managed to mobilize the largest mass of Republican electorate, surpassing by almost 900,000 the votes obtained by George W. Bush in 2004. Compared to the other Republican candidates, the result obtained by Trump is surprising, in the context in which George W. Bush’s victory in 2004 places him as the only Republican candidate who managed to get the majority of the voters’ votes, surpassing his Democratic candidate with over three million votes. At the same time, Donald Trump is the only Republican candidate (from 1996 to the present) who has managed to obtain a result of more than 300 votes in the Electoral College.

²⁸ The results of the American presidential elections held between 1789-2016 are available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php>.

²⁹ 43,903,230 (50.75%) voted by Ronald Wilson Reagan, compared to 35,480,115 (41.01%) voted by James Earl “Jimmy” Carter Jr. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php>.

³⁰ 489 electors voted for Ronald Reagan (90.98%), while Jimmy Carter voted 49 (9.11%) electors.

³¹ 304 electors voted for Donald Trump (56.51%), while Hillary Clinton voted 227 (42.38%) electors.

³² 65,844,954 (48.04%) voted by Hillary Clinton, compared with 62,979,879 (45.95%) voted by Donald Trump.

Table 1. The results obtained by the Republican candidates in the American Presidential Elections

Election	Republican candidate	Nr. votes	Votes (%)	Nr. votes electors	Votes electors (%)
1996	Robert Joseph Dole	39,197,469	40,71	159	29,55
2000	George Walker Bush	50,456,002	62,040	271	50,37
2004	George Walker Bush	62,040,610	50,73	286	53,16
2008	John McCain	59,948,323	45,65	173	32,16
2012	Mitt Romney	60,933,504	47,20	206	38,29
2016	Donald Trump	62,979,879	45,95	304	56,51

Source: Results of the American presidential elections, available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php>.

In contrast, Hillary Clinton, despite gaining 2,800,000 votes over Donald Trump, had a lower result than Barack Obama's in the 2008 and 2012 elections, highlighting the erosion of the Democratic Party's ability to mobilize the left-leaning electorate. However, the result obtained by H. Clinton is much better than the results of the Democratic candidates from 1996-2004. Paradoxically, her husband was elected President in 1996 with over 47 million votes, while Hillary Clinton failed to win her victory, although she won over 65 million votes among the voters present. Regarding the number of votes obtained in the electoral college by the Democratic candidates between 1996 and 2016, the situation is diametrically opposed: Hillary Clinton obtained the fewest electors (227), while her husband obtained the most electors (379), obtaining a landslide majority of over 70%.

Table 2. The results obtained by the Democrat candidates in the American Presidential Elections

Election	Republican candidate	Nr. votes	Votes (%)	Nr. votes electors	Votes electors (%)
1996	William Jeferson Clinton	47,401,185	49,24	379	70,45
2000	Albert Arnold Gore Jr.	50,999,897	48,38	266	50,37
2004	John Forbes Kerry	59,028,444	48,27	251	46,65
2008	Barack Obama	69,498,516	52,93	365	67,87
2012	Barack Obama	65,915,795	51,06	332	61,71
2016	Hillary Clinton	65,848,954	48,04	227	42,38

Source: Results of the American presidential elections, available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php>.

Corroborating the results obtained by the Democratic and Republican candidates for each election, we find an increase in the mobilization of their electorate, the only exception being identified in the 2012 election, when the number of voters present was over 2.5 million lower than the number of voters present in the 2008 election (the vast majority of them being Democrats). At the same time, we note that the Presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 have generated unprecedented mobilization from the American electorate (especially Republicans), their presence registering an increase of more than 14 million voters compared to the previous election. Instead, we identify a decrease in the mobilization of the Democratic electorate for the 2012 and 2016 elections, while simultaneously noting the increase in the mobilization of the Republican electorate. While Barack Obama won by over 3.5 million fewer votes in 2012, compared to the result in 2008, Donald Trump managed to get over 2 million more votes than Mitt Romney in 2012.

Regarding the distribution of votes and voters at the state level, we note that during the period 1996-2016, the Republican Party has consistently awarded 118 electors,³³ while the Democratic Party has each awarded a number of 194 of electors.³⁴ In states like Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Texas, Republicans won the majority of votes, gaining the maximum number of voters for each state, while in California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, respectively, New York, the victory was adjudged by the Democrats.

Since 2000, Republicans have consistently won 59 electors after winning the majority in Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee and West Virginia. Also, with the exception of the 2008 election, the Republican Party obtained the votes of 26 electors in Indiana and North Carolina. On the other hand, the Democrats got the votes of 4 electors in New Hampshire (except for the 2000 election), as well as the votes of 5 electors in New Mexico (except for the 2004 election).

Analysing the results of the 1996-2016 period, we understand much better the result of the last elections, given the fact that the Democrats have failed to win the majority in any state in which the Republicans have consistently claimed victory after 1996. Even worse, the Republicans won for the first time since 1996 in Michigan (16 electors), Pennsylvania (20 electors) and Wisconsin (10 electors). In other words, without losing majority in states where they have recorded consecutive victories over the past twenty years, Republicans have won the votes of 46 electors in states where the Democratic Party has dominated since 1996. Donald Trump dominated not only in Michigan, Pennsylvania or Wisconsin, but also in Iowa (6 electors, the state in which the Republicans won the majority only in 2004), respectively Florida (29 electors) and Ohio (18 electors), states in which the Republicans won the majority in 2000 and 2004. In Michigan, we see that the Republican Party reached the electoral peak in 2004, registering a steady increase in 2008, while 2008 represented the electoral peak of the Democratic

³³ We refer to Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah and Wyoming.

³⁴ We refer to California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington + D.C.

Party. Referring to the result of the 2012 elections, we note that the Republicans registered an increase of 164,287 votes in 2016, and the Democrats lost 295,730 votes. We explain Trump's victory as the result of the promises made during the election campaign to create jobs and restore Michigan's economic prosperity.³⁵

The Republican candidate's speech focused on denigrating Hillary Clinton's image, both for the FBI's investigation of the 650,000 emails sent from her personal account, and for her husband Bill Clinton's decision to sign the NAFTA, an agreement also upheld by Hillary Clinton, after which, according to Trump, factory jobs fell by more than 25 percent in Michigan.³⁶ At the same time, Trump's campaign in Michigan focused primarily on African Americans, his proposal for a New Deal For Black America as well as measures to reduce taxes, giving Reagan's decisions as an example.³⁷ The victory of the Republican candidate in Michigan is surprising, given the fact that Democrats have been able to get the majority of votes in this state steadily from 1988 to 2012.³⁸ In addition, Hillary Clinton's victory over Donald Trump was considered as a given by opinion polls. In this regard, the EPIC-MRA survey conducted in August 2016 in Michigan showed a 10 percent difference between the two candidates (46% for H. Clinton and 36% for D. Trump).³⁹ It should not be overlooked that Hillary Clinton failed to win in Michigan ahead of Democrat Bernie Sanders in the primary election, gaining about 20,000 fewer votes than Sanders.

The evolution of the Democratic Party is similar in Pennsylvania, with the most votes in 2008, followed by a steady drop to the benefit of the Republican candidate, H. Clinton getting 63833 fewer votes compared to the result of Barack Obama in 2012. Instead, in 2016 Republicans managed to mobilize their electorate much better, compared to previous elections, increasing by 290,299 votes compared to their 2012 score.

During the election campaign, Donald Trump came up with new education proposals in Pennsylvania, in the context of education being the main divide in the state, but also with a speech about protecting African-Americans in the face of violent demonstrations. The attacks on Senator Clinton were not missing this time either, being accused by D. Trump of the fact that in Pennsylvania, more than 70 million women and children live in poverty.⁴⁰

As in Michigan, Donald Trump's victory is surprising given the fact that Democrats have been steadily winning since 1992.⁴¹ In terms of polls conducted

³⁵ Donald J. Trump Campaign, "In Michigan, Donald Trump outlines his urban renewal agenda & promises to bring back jobs", October 31, 2016, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/in-michigan-donald-trump-outlines-his-urban-renewal-agenda-promises-to-brin>.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ James Hohmann, "The Daily 2002: Six explanations for Bernie Sanders's surprise win in Michigan", March 9, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2016/03/09/daily-202-six-explanations-for-bernie-sanders-s-surprise-win-inmichigan/56df2e58981b92a22d78d6d3/?utm_term=.747df46343f5.

³⁹ Daniel Strauss, "Why Clinton is trouncing Trump in Michigan", August 19, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/08/trump-clinton-michigan-election-227176>.

⁴⁰ Donald J. Trump Campaign, "Trump remarks on new education proposals in Pennsylvania", September 22, 2016, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/trump-remarks-on-new-education-proposals-in-pennsylvania>.

⁴¹ The Pennsylvania Democratic Party, "History", <http://www.padems.com/party/history/>.

during the election campaign, we identify the same tendency to give the Democratic candidate a considerable advantage. In a survey by The New York Times, conducted by 824 respondents on October 23-25, 2016, Clinton had a 7% advantage: 46% for H. Clinton, and 39% for D. Trump, respectively. However, by referring to the size of the state of Pennsylvania, a possible explanation for the discrepancy between the survey result and the result recorded in the presidential election can be found in the small sample size of the opinion poll.⁴²

Unlike the electoral evolution of the two parties in Michigan and Pennsylvania, the scenario is different in Wisconsin, as Republicans peaked in 2004, registering a slight drop in 2016 from 2012 (by 2682 votes). Instead, we identify a sharp decline among the Democratic electorate, which translates to 238,449 fewer votes in 2016 than in 2012.

Donald Trump's campaign in Wisconsin, the state where Democrats won all the Presidential elections from 1988-2012, envisaged "restoring law and order" to reduce the homicide rate, which is increasing by 10% nation-wide.⁴³ As in Trump's other speeches, there is only one culprit for the issues identified within each state: Hillary Clinton! Therefore, we note that Trump's rhetoric, which we find in his speeches in the US, is based on the same pattern: corrupt Hillary Clinton is responsible for any problem, while Donald Trump is the image of the Saviour, the only candidate capable of bringing America back to its glorious age. Instead, in the Democrats' camp, we identify the same strategy of putting Clinton's advantage in the polls. In this regard, on the candidate's website we find numerous articles taken from the media that present her, through the results of various opinion polls, as a detached winner. For example, one of the surveys conducted in Wisconsin is a sample of 600 respondents, conducted between May 10 and 12, 2016, which highlights a 12 percent difference between the two candidates: 43% voting intention for Hillary Clinton, respectively 31% intention vote for Donald Trump.⁴⁴

Florida differs from the other states in that it has become one of the heavily contested states between Republicans and Democrats, each winning three victories in the last six presidential elections in 1996-2016. In addition, compared to the 2012 elections, both candidates managed to mobilize a greater number of voters, which is why the 2016 elections stand out for the fact that both parties managed to get the highest number of votes compared to results obtained over the last 20 years.

In this context, the additional mobilization of the American electorate is an explanatory factor regarding the inability of opinion polls to properly evaluate the voting intention. However, the promotion of opinion polls was an important part of Hillary Clinton's campaign strategy. In this regard, the poll conducted by Monmouth University, in which Clinton had a 5 percent advance over Trump

⁴² Nate Cohn, "Hillary Clinton Leads by 7 Points in Pennsylvania Poll", New York Times, October 27, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/10/27/upshot/pennsylvania-poll.html?_r=0.

⁴³ Donald J. Trump Campaign, "Trump remarks in Waukesha, Wisconsin: Follow the money", September 28, 2016, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/trump-remarks-in-waukesha-wisconsin-follow-the-money>.

⁴⁴ Brendan Morrow, "Wisconsin General Election Polls: State Favors Hillary Clinton Over Donald Trump". Heavy, June 10, 2016, <http://heavy.com/news/2016/06/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-wisconsin-poll-polls-head-to-head-match-general-election/>.

regarding the US electorate's intent to vote in Florida, was strongly promoted by her campaign team to minimize the chances of the Republican candidate.⁴⁵

On the other hand, the main message conveyed by D. Trump during his visit to Florida focused on criticizing the Obamacare plan, promising instead that he would put America back in the first position by adopting similar measures promoted during Ronald Reagan's term in office, namely tax cuts. The Clinton email scandal is resumed as part of the Republican nominee's speech, in order to discredit her image among the American electorate.⁴⁶

As in 2004, Democrats lost surprisingly in Iowa, and this is not so much due to the mobilization of the Republican electorate, but especially because of the sudden demobilization of the Democratic electorate. While Donald Trump won 70,366 more votes than Mitt Romney did in 2012, Hillary Clinton lost 168,875 votes compared to Barack Obama's 2012 result.

Donald Trump's speech in Iowa is similar to that in Wisconsin: "Follow the Money". The main purpose is to label counter-candidate Clinton as biased by her entanglement in the "swamp", being supported by corrupt elite figures in the White House race.⁴⁷ Also, at the beginning of 2016, Donald Trump was the protagonist of a lesser-known moment during the electoral campaigns, when he recited the lyrics of the song „The Snake“ written in 1968 by Al. Wilson, in order to capture the consequences of the Syrian refugee crisis.⁴⁸

Among Democrats, the novelty we identify is in admitting that Donald Trump is better placed in the voting intentions of the US and Nevada electorates (compared to Romney's 2012 position), which is why competition between Republicans and Democrats becomes „interesting“ in these states. We also note the absence of reference to an opinion poll favouring one or the other of the two candidates.⁴⁹

An interesting evolution of the two parties is also found in Ohio, where each party has won three victories in the last 20 years, as results of the two parties registering variations during this period. However, referring to the last two Presidential elections, we are reminded that the Republicans' victory comes as a result of a democratization of the democratic electorate.

The result is all the more surprising given the fact that Donald Trump lost the primary election to John Kasich by a difference of more than 200,000 votes⁵⁰; it

⁴⁵ Michelle Hackman, "Hillary Clinton Holds 5-Point Lead in Florida Poll", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2016, <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2016/09/20/hillary-clinton-holds-narrow-lead-in-florida-poll/>.

⁴⁶ Donald J. Trump Campaign, "In Florida, Trump blasts Obamacare and proposes real change that will put America first, October 25, 2016, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/in-florida-trump-blasts-obamacare-and-proposes-real-change-that-will-put-am>.

⁴⁷ Donald J. Trump Campaign, "Trump Remarks in Council Bluffs, IA: Follow the Money", September 28, 2016, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/media/trump-remarks-in-council-bluffs-ia-follow-the-money>.

⁴⁸ Ali Vitali, "«The Snake»: Trump Poetry Slams Syrian Refugees With Allegorical Song", NBC News, January 12, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/politic8s/2016-election/snake-trump-poetry-slams-syrian-refugees-allegorical-song-n495311>.

⁴⁹ Philip Bump, "Why is Trump doing better in Nevada and Iowa than other places?", *The Washington Post*, August 29, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/08/29/why-is-trump-doing-better-in-nevada-and-iowa-than-other-places/?utm_term=.afaaf977e750.

⁵⁰ Lily Mihalik, Anthony Pesce and Ben Welsh, "Live results from the Ohio primary", *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2016, <http://graphics.latimes.com/election-2016-ohio-results/>.

was also a state in which the chasm between the two candidates was the largest, according to the statistics promoted by the campaign team of Democrats who then held a 9 per cent advantage on Trump.⁵¹

A general characteristic we identify in Donald Trump's speeches is the redefinition of the relationship between the President and the citizen through a "contractualist" type of commitment, but whose effect is limited only to electoral "sanctions"⁵². Donald Trump's contract with the American voter is, in fact, the symbolic transfer of power into the hands of US citizens, amid deep distrust of the political elite.

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⁵¹ 'New Ohio poll puts Hillary Clinton ahead of Donald Trump by 9 points after news of Trump's vulgar talk', *Cleveland*, October 12, 2016, http://www.cleveland.com/open/index.ssf/2016/10/new_ohio_poll_puts_hillary_cli.html.

⁵² See "Donald Trump's Contract with the American Voter", https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/_landings/contract/O-TRU-102316-Contractv02.pdf.

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