Factors That Determined The Result Of 2016 US Presidential Election

The present text explores various pivotal factors during the 2016 presidential campaign that ultimately led to the election of Donald J. Trump. The paper discusses factors such as communication techniques, anti-establishment sentiments, the rust belt revolt, voter turnout, the authenticity of the election process, scandals, Clinton's health, and the influence of preceding president's policies. Though many argue on the numerous factors involved in swaying the election, voter turnout and polling data prove definitive elements that cooperated to reach an otherwise unanticipated result.

Numerous definitive factors altered the path of the 2016 presidential campaign. Trump's ability to communicate effectively, use of anti-establishment rhetoric, resonation with the rust belt, criticisms over a "rigged election", an ongoing criminal investigation, questions regarding Hillary's health, and preceding president policies delivered a fatal blow to Clinton in what would be regarded as the greatest upset in American history. Though many today still ponder the various influences responsible, there are pivotal factors that ultimately led to his success in the general election

Communication

Donald Trump's status as a well-known celebrity in the limelight made him no stranger to captivating an audience. In an interview with Time Magazine, Trump stated "It's not the polls, it's the ratings." His hold-no-punches rhetoric interested Americans everywhere, regardless if they liked him or not. Whether Trump was insulting a decorated war hero John McCain, picking a fight with popular Fox news reporter Megyn Kelly, or taking jabs at Rosie O'Donnell, his support only grew stronger over time. His ability to communicate with his audience along with his charisma and confidence created a man made of Teflon. Attacks came and rolled off without drawing any fatal blood. Rather than frame himself as a polished politician, Trump's embodiment of the unconventional candidate gave him leeway where others did not.

One of the most pivotal instruments for Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign was social media. More specifically, his twitter. His infamous twitter account was started in 2009 for publicity reasons. Trump's twitter soon became one of his greatest tools for his presidential campaign. His style of blunt, reckless, and carefree tweeting captivated audiences, regardless of the context. He was able to garner media attention at the whim of a tweet, whether they liked it or not. He was able to speak directly to his supporters by bypassing the middle man: the editorial media (Enli 52). Trumps use of social media allowed him to criticize mainstream bias, most notably the "failing New York Times." Regardless of how crude or controversial his tweets were, his ability to directly communicate to his 17.6 million followers saturated media headlines and maintained his relevancy. Trump's use of retweets far surpassed former Secretary Clinton, as 78% of his retweets were written by ordinary people. In contrast, Clinton's retweets originated from her team's various pages (Enli 54). Although Trump's inclination to interact with the community was risky, it portrayed him as genuine.

Trump’s ability to energize his audience transformed otherwise humdrum political rallys into entertainment television. During the course of the 2016 campaign, Trump held a whopping 323 rallies throughout 40 states. His “huge” crowds garnered media attention, furthering excitement and momentum within his base. Each rally seemed to grow larger than the last. Gwynn Guilford, a journalist who acted as an ethnographer in numerous Trump rallies, explained the fascination of the events, stating it is an “identity festival that embodies a politics of hope.” (Fitzduff 29) The rally became more of a celebration with a shared sense of identity, drawing supporters and pure curiosity to the event. Overspill became so common that overflow space was implemented outside, featuring food trucks, Trump memorabilia, and wide screen televisions to watch the candidate speak. The media had no choice but to broadcast the phenomenon, allowing Trump’s speech to not only reach his audience but Americans everywhere.

Anti-Establishment

America loves an underdog, and that’s exactly what Trump’s presence brought to the political arena. Donald Trump’s campaign was driven on anti-establishment rhetoric. Although he was shunned immediately from much of his party’s establishment and dismissed as a joke by the media, his message of economic grievance and need for change resonated with forgotten small-town voters and ultimately played a large part in his election success. The desire for change was validated from CNN exit polls, as 69% of respondents stated they were “dissatisfied” with the federal government. Trump’s emphasis on Washington’s corruption and the cronyism of the political elites made him into the ultimate outsider amongst a field of 16 Republican nominee contenders. His recklessness, crude style, and virginity to politics further contrasted himself from polished politicians in a time when the public was yearning for change. Trump’s slogan “drain the swamp” and the corruption within it quickly placed him at the top of the pack.

Revolt of the Rust Belt

Donald Trump won the 2016 election against Hillary Clinton most notably because of his ability to win three rust belt states: Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Hillary failed to resonate among the upper Midwest, relying solely on tax credits and false outrage concerning “Trump ties are made in China.” (McQuarrie 146). Taking Iowa for example, Barack Obama successfully won 53 of the states 99 counties, while Clinton only won 6. Trump’s Jacksonian rhetoric regarding the average working-class American resonated with these industrial-rich areas, promising jobs and unity to the declining working-class (Cha 83). Trump relentlessly attacked Clinton on her support of NAFTA and the Trans Pacific Partnership, programs that have effectively dismantled the industrial states in the Upper Midwest. The ties the Democratic party held to the traditional blue states deteriorated. As unemployment rose and industries decayed, so did the workers unions that the progressive party traditionally stood for (McQuarrie 146). Their jobs had been shipped overseas, their factories became empty carcasses, and their cities were haunting memories of their former prosperity. The industrial Midwest was looking for a voice to channel their anger and resentment. Trump promised lower corporate taxes and a return of jobs to the disenfranchised middle class. Threats such as a 35% tariff on Ford’s imports if they went through with their plan to move their headquarters to Mexico embodied hope.

Trump’s victories within Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin were not only an endorsement of his message but marked a major failure within the Clinton campaign and the Democrat party. Though Hillary’s team had an ad budget of $200 million, she barely focused any energy or

money within the three states. According to Bloomberg, the Clinton Campaign's first ads launched as late as October 28th in the state of Wisconsin, and as late as November 1st in Michigan. Although it is impossible to tell whether or not greater focus on these areas by the Clinton campaign would have altered the outcome of the election, it remains a grave blunder.

"It's Rigged"

The validity of the 2016 Democratic nominee race was questioned regularly throughout the campaign with rising levels of frustration. Whether it be Donna Brazile providing CNN townhall questions to Clinton or superdelegates ruling against the public vote, the Democratic base splintered rapidly during the nomination process. Bad news for the Hillary camp continued as the Democratic National Convention began in an uproar. Leaked emails from WikiLeaks exposed Democrat party staffers devising strategies to undermine the Bernie Sanders campaign (Allen 271). Outrage from the socialist's supporters created a growing problem for the Hillary camp.

The turmoil resulted in the resignation of Wasserman Schultz from her position and the news gifted Trump more fuel for his "rigged system" narrative. Mounting evidence of the conspiracy emboldened Sanders supporters, many of which attended Clinton rallies with banners labeled "Bernie or Bust" or "Feel the Bern." Ongoing issues regarding debate schedules, access to the party's voter database and a joint fundraising campaign between Clinton and the DNC left Democrat voters demoralized (Allen 270). Hillary was now tasked with unifying a divided, bitter party in order to overcome Donald Trump in the general election.

Hillary Clinton's reputation was effectively crumbling before securing her party's nomination. Since the election, both Donna Brazile and Elizabeth Warren have admitted the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination was "rigged." Although the DNC's neutrality was crucial for transparency, Hillary's close ties to Schultz as well as a joint fundraising pledge with the committee made her a target for competitors, including Bernie Sanders (Allen 217). Brazile went on to describe Clinton's control of the party as a "cancer", as she paid the committee's debt under the condition that her campaign would manage all day-to-day operations as of August 2015. Hillary's campaign effectively controlled the DNC before the voters had the opportunity to vote. Brazile speaking out validated many concerns regarding the party's inherent bias towards Clinton. Not only did this compromise the party's integrity, but the result left a wound within the democrat party that would remain well into election day.

Criminal Investigation

Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server surrounded much of the 2016 presidential campaign. On March 2, 2015, The New York Times published information stating the former secretary of state possibly broke record keeping laws. Revelations that Clinton contained a private server in her New York home launched a subpoena for full disclosure of her emails. Hillary Clinton released her "work-related" emails to the state department, simultaneously deleting and bleaching those related to her personal life.

The Judicial Watch sued the state department, demanding all emails be retrieved from Clinton during her time as secretary of state. Hillary responded to claims of sabotage, indicating messages withheld pertained to "yoga" and conversations with her husband. Emails between

Clinton and longtime adviser Blumenthal were found by House Republicans that had not been turned in previously. Many criticized Clinton as possibly using her private email server to receive financial information that may have influenced her foreign policy decisions (Allen 243). Although Clinton insisted she never sent nor received classified information on her private email server, emails continued to be uncovered that consisted of classified information.

The FBI criminal investigation came to an end on July 5, 2016, with FBI James Comey's indictment of Clinton. After much speculation, Comey freed Clinton of all charges, while describing her conduct as "extremely careless." According to the State Department, the bureau discovered over 100 emails containing classified information, 22 of which contained "top-secret" information. Republicans were outraged, claiming Comey let Clinton off the hook, while Democrats were furious that Comey paired his verdict with a summary of her character (Allen 249). The result furthered Trump's claim of a corrupt, rigged system and tarnished the public's view of Clinton's judgement.

Hillary Clinton was poised confidently in the last week of October as she rose to a six-point lead above Trump. The Clinton campaign announced plans to go on the offense in Arizona, a longtime Republican stronghold. Although there was no genuine attempt to steal the red state, the move meant to symbolize momentum for the Democratic candidate (Allen 275). Just as Clinton geared for the offensive, the political climate flipped.

On October 28, 2016, The FBI announced they were reopening the criminal investigation against Hillary after finding more emails pertaining to the matter. Hillary Clinton would now be on the defense for the remainder of the twelve days before the election. Trump capitalized on the issue, stating "She'll be under investigation for years. She'll be with trials. Our country, we have to get back to work." He emphasized the incompetence of leadership under Hillary Clinton, looming under endless investigations and scandals. According to CNN exit polls, 63% of voters expressed they were bothered "a lot" or "somewhat" by Clinton's use of a private email server.

Clinton's Health

Hillary Clinton's health became of greater concern following her collapse following the 9/11 memorial on September 11th, 2016. Cameras caught Clinton collapsing to the ground as she attempted to enter her motorcade. This immediately caught media attention as the public began questioning the state of her health, turning an otherwise right-wing conspiracy theory regarding her fitness into a relevant issue. Hillary was subsequently diagnosed with pneumonia and dehydration. Donald Trump responded to the fall, stating Hillary "doesn't have the strength or the stamina" to be president.

Trump's national spokeswoman Katrina Pierson continued with the attack, accusing Clinton of poor health. In an interview with MSNBC, Pierson alleged Clinton suffered from Dysphasia, a neurological condition that inhibits the ability to communicate and respond to speech. She alleged Clinton suffered from severe brain damage, citing her mannerisms, previous injuries and elongated time off the campaign trail as proof. Hillary dismissed the "conspiracies" surrounding her health, claiming she paid "no attention to them" (Allen 313). Despite her nonchalant exterior, the question of whether or not Clinton was healthy enough to handle the pressures of the presidency remained.

Dr. Drew Pinsky of HLN reignited the argument over Hillary Clinton's health after reading her released medical evaluation. Pinsky explained he felt alarmed regarding her blood clot found in her skull (transverse sinus thrombosis), an issue that formed after Clinton hit her head in 2012. He pointed out Clinton had been wearing "prism glasses" following her fall, explaining that it was the result of brain damage. He criticized her healthcare medications, stating she was on "bizarre" medications. Pinsky faced criticism following his comments, and his show was cancelled days after he spoke out. Although many dismissed his claims including former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, the argument of whether Hillary was healthy enough to serve as president had already ignited into a genuine concern.

The controversy regarding Clinton's health affected voters greatly. Just days following her fall at the 9/11 memorial, a poll of 1,501 people showed more than 40% of registered voters believed that Clinton was either in "below average" or "very poor" health. That number rose from 26% just the month before. The issue of health became a bona fide issue quickly in the campaign, with one in four respondents stating Hillary Clinton's health would have an impact on their vote. This was another issue in a mounting case against a vote for Hillary Clinton.

Preceding Presidential Policy

Donald Trump not only benefitted from running against one of the most flawed candidates in American history, but from the legacy of those before him. Americans were yearning for change after years of minor growth and disappointment. General election exit polls revealed 62% of voters believed the United States was on the "wrong track", compared to 33% who believe it was going in the right direction. One of the greatest reasons Trump achieved success in the presidential election was a result of one of the most contentious issues: healthcare.

Many Americans expressed contempt for Obamacare after premiums and deductibles skyrocketed out of control just weeks before the election. In the key battleground state of Pennsylvania, rates for people within the private insurance market soared to an average 55 percent. Other states such as Wisconsin and Michigan saw rates expand to 16 and 7 percent respectively. Midrange plans rose approximately 22 percent nationwide (Kogan 25). Hikes resulted from increased regulations and participants being forced to purchase coverage by threat of a penalty (Kogan 1). Trump promised to "repeal and replace Obamacare" and those suffering found hope within the candidate. According to RealClearPolitics, Americans disapproved of Obamacare at a 49.4 to 40.4 margin. Of the 47% of Americans that believed Obamacare "went too far", 82% voted for Donald Trump. Trump promised to replace Obamacare with "something terrific." Although it was not clear what the replacement was, the promise was ultimately a gamble the public was willing to take.

The success of Donald Trump's presidential bid in 2016 was a result of numerous influential factors. Candidate Trump and his charismatic celebrity persona allowed him to communicate effectively and capture an audience. His position as the ultimate outsider benefitted him during a time of national angst. His resonation with rust belt voters as well as Clinton's failed map expansion crumbled conventionally blue states. Some of Trump's greatest benefits stemmed from his competitor as concerns rose against a "rigged" election process, an ongoing criminal investigation, multiple scandals, Clinton's health, and preceding presidential policies. The election results combined with polling data demonstrated exactly what factors pushed voters to elect Donald Trump. Perhaps the greatest fault of those left bewildered is evaluating an

extraordinary historic election through a conventional lens.

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