Exploring the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

A study on how cultural, social, and economic factors influenced the people who voted for Donald J. Trump

Master's Thesis
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Resumé

En udforskning af det Amerikanske præsidentvalg 2016

Donald Trump, den mest polariserende figur i moderne politik, vandt overraskende det Amerikanske præsidentvalg på et løfte om at genoprette Amerikansk storhed. Donald Trumps kampagne stod i stor kontrast til billedet af samfundsøkonomisk vækst og middelklasse velstand som Amerikanske politikere har tegnet gennem i sidste fem årtier.

Den Amerikanske middelklasse har hidtil været drivkraften for Amerikansk vækst og dens forsømmelse, som Donald Trump pointerede, kan få alvorlige konsekvenser for USA fremadrettet.

Således ønskes det undersøgt, hvorfor meningsmålinger fejlvurderede udfaldet af det Amerikanske præsidentvalg samt hvilke kulturelle, sociale og/eller økonomiske faktorer der i størst grad påvirkede vælgerne.

Formålet med undersøgelsen er at bidrage til forskningen af den forværrende tilstand blandt den Amerikanske middelklasse samt udforske relationen mellem denne og valget af Donald Trump som præsident, herunder hvilke sociale, økonomiske og kulturelle faktorer, der har været udslagsgivende.

Undersøgelsesspørgsmålet er blevet belyst ud fra et kvantitativt studie, der inkluderer empiri baseret på en spørgeskemaundersøgelse blandt Amerikanske vælgere.

Undersøgelsens resultater viser, at den mest presserende udfordring for den Amerikanske middelklasse er den stigende jobusikkerhed som følge af til dels afindustrialisering og globalisering og til dels en radikal ændring i måde at drive virksomhed på, der gør det markant sværere at opretholde en stabil indtægt. Hertil påviser undersøgelsen, at den Amerikanske elite er blevet beriget såvel politisk som økonomisk på bekostning af den Amerikanske middelklasse, der i stigende grad kæmper for at holde sin økonomisk solvent. Endelig viser undersøgelsen, at underliggende kulturelle antagelser combineret med en undervurderet stigende usikkerhed og utilfredshed over den politiske elite blandt den Amerikanske middelklasse dannede vejen for Donald Trumps præsidentembede. Når der er sagt, så er der meget der tyder på, at forholdene for den Amerikanske middelklasse ikke vil forbedres under Præsident Trump; tværtimod vil uligheden sandsynligvis stige.
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1. Introduction

For the past five decades, politicians and economic leaders have been reporting about the exceptional performance of the U.S. economy and the strength of the American middle class. In 2004, President Bush’s Council of Economic Advisors said the following about the performance of the American economy: “In 2004, the U.S. economic recovery blossomed into a full-fledged expansion, with strong output growth and steady improvement in labor market. Real gross domestic product grew by 4.4 percent in 2004 for the first year as a whole. About 2.2 million new payroll jobs were created during 2004 – the largest annual gain since 1999... the U.S. economy is on a solid footing for sustained growth in the years to come.” (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014, pp. 1-2).

But not all Americans have shared in on the economic growth. A large group of Americans find themselves financially worse off today than they were fifty years ago. Surprisingly, the type of people who are having financial difficulties are Americans “pursuing the American dream – people who attended college, bought a house and started a family, and worked long hours – supposedly doing everything they were supposed to do in order to achieve and maintain a solid middle-class life. Barely treading water, middle class Americans have resorted to unorthodox methods of borrowing and brokering their futures. Middle class prosperity in the United States is nothing but an illusion.

Since the early 1970s, the economic and social standing of America’s middle class has been changing, often in undesirable ways. The move from an economy centered on manufacturing to one centered on services, the globalization of markets, and the information age has altered the economic realities of middle class Americans. It is a shift from “a social world characterized by long-term, stable relationships to one characterized by short-term, temporary relationships.” (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014, p. 5). The uncertainty following the short-term employment relationships has left many middle-class professionals anxious.

For the past five decades, the ever-worsening realities of the American middle class have largely been ignored by politicians who have failed at institutionalizing a method for interpreting the social and economic changes and to formulate a coherent set of “how-to” rules to help Americans adjust to the changes. That was until the 2016 U.S.
Presidential election. Running on a platform, on which he claimed to represent the “forgotten men and women”, the recently sworn-in President of the United States, Donald Trump, a 70-year-old multi billionaire who has made his fortune in construction, real estate, and show business, with no former political experience, promised to restore American greatness domestically and internationally (Mogensen, 2016). The 2016 U.S. Presidential election is one of the most controversial elections in modern times and “caught the entire world by surprise” (Gifford, 2017). An election in which Donald Trump, one of the most polarizing political figures in recent times, defeated the leading Democratic nominee and former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

This thesis sets forth the following research question:

Why did opinion polls misjudge the electoral outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and what cultural, social, or economic factors most influenced the people who voted for Donald Trump?

The research question includes two concepts that require further elaboration. This thesis will draw on the definition and conceptualization of culture as proposed by Edgar H. Schein (2009) who says that culture: “is a pattern of shared tacit assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaption and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.” (p. 27). The phrase, ‘the people’, besides referring to the almost 63 million Americans who cast their vote for Donald Trump in the general election (CNN, 2016), also has a second meaning. For this thesis, ‘the people’, refers to the particular group of Americans that Donald Trump addressed his political messages to: “the people who are ready to Make America Great Again” (Trump, 2016, p. 1). These people, ‘the people’, Chris Arnade (2016) refer to as the back row, as opposed to the front row. Arnade (2016) defines the back row in the following: “The back row primarily finds meaning through their local community, and its institutions like church and sports. They live in places they have long lived in, and their families have lived in. They didn’t leave for education, didn’t leave for jobs,” and the front row he defines like people who: “primarily find meaning through their careers, and hence through their
education. It defines who they are. Their community, and their neighborhoods, are global. They moved towns often for their careers.”

In order to answer the research question, this thesis primarily adopted a quantitative strategy of inquiry, using a quantitative research questionnaire for data collection, involving a total of 69 participating subjects, and thematic analysis. This was done though an abductive research approach. Departing in the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, this thesis works its way backwards in order to obtain an understanding of the cultural, social, and economic context in which the event in question could take place. Based on a selective literature review of American history and culture this thesis has chosen to use the American middle class as a case study, to prove how their development as a class over the past 50 years gave rise to the Trump movement. To verify the quantitative data the findings are matched against qualitative data in the form of personal accounts and statements from both primary and secondary sources.

While the basic argument of this thesis is complex, the conclusion is not. The continuous deteriorating state of the American middle class has culminated in the election of Donald Trump. Below the surface, the hidden state of the American middle class is revealed: an ever-widening group of Americans who are struggling to remain solvent, who have lost all faith in the American dream, and who are desperate for relief. With a desperate and vague hope for change, this group of Americans voted for Donald Trump. The deteriorating state of the American middle class is not a new phenomenon, as it has been on-going for the past fifty years. Thus, the topic is dealt with extensively within the field of social science. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to contribute to the debate on the status of the American middle class by exploring the links to the election of Donald Trump.

1.1. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into 7 main chapters. First, an introduction was provided in order to present the relevance of the study and the research problem. In addition, definitions of central concepts were presented followed by a brief account of the strategy of inquiry. The introduction also serves as a delimitation of the study. Chapter 2 presents the empiricism and the adopted strategy of data collection, while
presenting the theoretical framework adopted for this thesis in which the empirical findings are presented. The theoretical framework includes path dependency cultural theory, grid-group cultural theory, the literary concepts of class and identity, and neoliberalism. Chapter 3, presents the result of the study on the first part of the research question: the electoral outcome, as objectively as possible, according to the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth presentation of the results of the study on ‘the people’ who voted for Donald Trump according to a thematic analysis of the data. In chapter 5, my findings will be discussed in relation to the theoretical and conceptual framework as regards to why ‘the people’ supported Donald Trump. Based on this discussion, chapter 6 will address the appeal of Donald Trump’s political campaign to ‘the people’ and in a comparative analysis reflect on Donald Trump’s campaign promises and his administration’s achievements during its first 100 days in office. Finally, chapter 7 presents a conclusion.
2. Methodology & Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology and theoretical framework applied in the thesis in order to answer the research question. Note that they are not presented here in the order they appear in the thesis. First, the empirical research method and design is accounted for followed by an introduction of other sources of empirical data. Secondly, the theoretical framework in which the empirical findings are presented is introduced: 1) The operationalized definition of culture is given and an introduction to the applied theoretical methods of cultural analysis, path dependency cultural theory and grid-group cultural theory is provided, 2) a definition of the conceptualization of the terms class and identity is provided, and 3) a definition of neoliberalism is provided.

As stated earlier, this thesis is a quantitative study and thus representativeness is the most important quality of the research design. Thus, a quantitative research questionnaire using a semi-random sampling strategy was used for data collection. A quantitative research questionnaire provides data in the form of numbers, quantities, and size ratios, which, is the sample size is large enough, allows for more generalized problem statements while also the thesis can conclude more generally. Making the sample as representative as possible, the target population was to all citizens of the United States. The author living in Denmark, however, restricted the accessibility to the targeted population. Through network channels, a small group of targets in the state of Wisconsin were accessible. This suited the overall purpose of the thesis because Wisconsin is considered a swing state in which Donald Trump won the electoral vote. Although the intend of the research questionnaire was to collect data from both Trump, Clinton and third-party supporters, Trump supporters were of special interest, and for that Wisconsin as a launch pad was ideal. To get a larger sample size, the initial targeted subjects were asked to share the research questionnaire in their social network via social media platforms, which resulted in a total of 69 subject responses, see appendix C. Besides Wisconsin the research questionnaire reached subjects in Minnesota, Colorado, and Arizona. In order to make the pool of data as representative and random as possible only two eligibility criteria were stated: 1) the subjects must be American citizens residing in the U.S. and 2) they must be eligible voters.
The research questionnaire consisted of two parts in order to address the two-part research question; the first concerning the presidential election and the two major party candidates, and the second concerning social conditions in the United States in regard to growing inequality. The content and design of the research questionnaire was based on a selective literature review on the presidential election, and on American social and cultural studies. The layout of the questionnaire is printed in appendix A and B.

For verification, the findings are checked against other sources, incl. studies, reports, and opinion polls to see whether they support or challenge the findings of the research questionnaire. For a merely illustrative purpose, the findings are further matched with qualitative data in the form of personal accounts, thoughts, and statements from both primary and secondary sources.

As earlier stated, the definition of culture applied in this thesis reflects that culture is deeply rooted within a society and that thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individuals within that culture largely are unconsciously determined, by a firm belief in a set of underlying assumptions. Broadly speaking, this study focuses on national culture, more specifically, the culture of the United States of America. To study American culture and its role in the election of Donald Trump, this thesis will draw on the cultural research theory, path dependency, proposed by Charles Lockhart (2012) who says that: “culture interacts with both societies’ history and their paths of institutional development,” (p. 10) i.e. that culture must be understood in a historical context and that culture is shaped by the ideological thoughts that are reflected in a country’s institutional framework.

In addition to the historical analysis of the development of American culture, this thesis will draw on grid-group cultural theory which is an approach to cultural explanation that help us “understand why public policies with effects that are appreciated in some societies are not acceptable in others” (Lockhart, 2012, p. 15). Grid-group cultural theory distinguishes between two cultural dimensions: grid and group; the former concerning the relative acceptance of human inequality and the latter measuring the significance of group boundaries. The grid-group typology provides a classification of four cultural types: fatalists, hierarchical elitists,
individualists, and egalitarians, which are described in figure 1. According to existing research in the field, the United States is categorized as a highly individualistic country. The score that each country is given, is a median score, and Lockhart points out that all four cultural types are found within each country (Lockhart, 2012).

The purpose of the cultural analysis of this thesis is not to provide a comparative analysis of American national culture nor is this project a study on culture. Based on a selective range of cultural theory this thesis explores the underlying values and assumptions that have influenced the development of the American middle class. Additionally, the cultural analysis serves the purpose of partially explaining the social movement of electing Donald Trump. Furthermore, the cultural analysis provides an understanding of the social and economic changes that have occurred in the United States for the past five decades.

The basic concept of class used for this thesis springs from Karl Marx’s theory of social class and class interests and will draw on the definition proposed by American Marxist Erik Olin Wright: “Class structure is...a terrain of social relations that determine objective material interests of actors, and class struggle is understood as the forms of social practices which attempt to realize those interests [and] class consciousness can be understood as the subjective processes that shape intentional choices with respect to those interests and struggles’.“ (Oxford Reference). By his usage of “class”, Marx referred to, put simply, a distinction between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’; in modern capitalist societies between the bourgeoisie (or capitalist class) and the proletariat (or
working class), i.e. a distinction between whether people live on wages or on profit (Watkins, 2005). Note that this means that many people who today would be considered middle-class, in Marxist theory are working class. In describing the social structure of the capitalist society and the relationship between the two classes Marx refers to them as the base and superstructure respectively.

Identity is another concept that can be used as a category of analysis in the field of social science and public discourse. Depending on the context identity can do varies conceptual and explanatory work. For the purpose of this thesis, the term identity is used as a “collective phenomenon which denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 7). This is understood subjectively, as an experienced, felt, or perceived sameness. Further, this thesis will draw on Charles Tilly characterization of identity as “an actor’s experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience; the public representation often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative.” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 12).

As for the cultural analysis, this thesis does not offer a contemporary debate on the theory of these concepts and neither their relevance within the field of social science. Instead, based on a selective range of literature, the concepts of class and identity are applied in order to understand the demographic divisions in the United States and the social movement behind the election of Donald Trump.

The ideology of neoliberalism goes way back to Adam Smith and his work, The Wealth of Nations, that was published in 1776, in which Smith laid the foundation of neoliberalism by arguing that free exchange was a transaction from which both parties necessarily benefitted, since nobody would voluntarily engage in an exchange from which they would emerge worse off (Clarke, 2005). Over the past two centuries Smith’s liberal economic argument has been formalized and developed, most recently by the Austrian political philosopher, Friedrich von Hayek, and American economist, Milton Friedman (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism is, in the first instance, a theory of political economic practices that builds on the notion that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an industrial framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markers, and
free trade.” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Neoliberal ideas gestated within a period marked by the rise of Soviet communism and the rise of the welfare state in Western democracies, both of which threatened the capitalist order. In the 1970s, neoliberal economics were largely supported by the American government under Ronald Reagan, the OECD, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (Mudge, 2008), who together pushed on the production and export of the ‘Washington consensus’\(^1\) from North America to Central and South America.

One of the most radical critiques of the liberal approach to economics was developed by Karl Marx whose starting point was the socialist critique of private property to which Marx argued that “the evils of capitalism did not derive from the unequal distribution of property, but from the institution of private property itself.” (Clarke, 2005). Marx further argued that “even if a society started with an equalization of property, market processes would necessarily give rise to inequality and a polarization of wealth and poverty as money accumulated in the hands of a minority, while the majority lost the means to earn their own living and were forced to labor for others.” (Clarke, 2005). In other words, the critique goes that the ‘real purpose’ of neoliberalism was to restore class power.

The purpose of this thesis is not to revise neoliberal economic theory nor to compare it to other fiscal policies. Instead, this thesis explores the rise and social consequences of the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the United States in regard to the development of the American middle class and the election of Donald Trump.

\(^1\) Refers to a neoliberal economic agenda for developing countries pursued by Washington, D.C.-based public organizations concerned with development.
3. Analysis of the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

This chapter serves as an exploration of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election outcome. Moreover, explanatory factors for the misjudgment of the opinion polls is provided followed by an elaboration on a selective range of contributive factors to the electoral outcome. In addition to providing an overview of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, this chapter further illustrates the relationship between Donald Trump and his supporters referred to as the ‘Trump phenomenon’.

On June 16th 2015, the most controversial presidential candidate in American history since George Wallace², Donald J. Trump, announced that he was running for President seeking the Republican nomination. At his official announcement in Trump Tower on 5th Avenue, NY, Ivanka Trump, his eldest daughter, introduced her father as a man “who needs no introduction” (President Donald Trump News & Live Speech 2017). Riding down a gold-painted escalator, accompanied by his wife, Melania Trump, former supermodel, to the rock tunes of Neil Young, 70-year-old Donald Trump made his great entrance into American politics: “There’s colors in the street; red, white and blue. People shufflin’ their feet, people sleepin’ in their shoes. But there’s a warning sign ahead. There’s a lot of people sayin’ we’d be better off dead. Don’t feel like Satan, but I am to them. So I try to forget it, any way I can. Keep on rockin’ in the free world.” (Neil Young, Keep On Rockin’ In The Free World, 1989). This particular song is not chosen by random; it is a very clear statement, as shown by the following analysis: America (red, white, and blue) is struggling (shufflin’ their feet, sleeplin’ in their shoes) and although his candidacy will be met with resistance (better off dead, Satan), he, Donald Trump, will fight for what he believes to be right (the free world). Resembling a Hollywood celebrity, a rock star, or, if you will, a modern Messiahs descending from heaven to rescue the people, rather than a career politician, Donald Trump set the stage for his political legacy.

Because Donald Trump prior has flirted with a presidential run – first in 1987, then in 1999, in 2004 and 2008 and latest in 2011 (Diamond, 2015), the immediate reaction to his presidential announcement was skeptic. Beside skepticism, an opinion poll

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² Former governor of Alabama who ran for president four times, latest in 1968, on a highly racist platform supporting segregation and Jim Crow laws.
conducted at the time of Trump’s presidential announcement reveal that both among the population at large, but also among self-identified Republicans, the view of Donald Trump was highly unfavorable: 60 percent for the population at large and 47 percent for Republicans (Frankovic, 2015). In total, 12 candidates sought the Republican nomination of which Trump ranked the tenth most likely to win the nomination (Diamond, 2015). In an impressive fashion, despite the initial unfavorable odds, setting a new record for the most GOP primary votes ever, Donald Trump won the Republican nomination (DeSilver, 2016a).

For the general election, Donald Trump faced Democratic candidate, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton who had, in a much closer race, won the party nomination over the U.S. Senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders. Despite winning the Republican nomination superciliously, the odds were still against Donald Trump. In the national polls, as illustrated in figure 2, Donald Trump trailed behind Hillary Clinton, through the entire campaign period, except for two very brief periods in late May and late July 2016, after the Republican convention where Trump managed to make strides in his personal image and increased the support among independents (Agiesta, 2016). In the last polls, conducted on the morning of the election day, Hillary Clinton had, on average, a 3.2 percent lead over Donald Trump (Real Clear Politics, 2016). For the second time, Donald Trump defied the odds, securing 306 of the 270 electoral votes required to win the general election (CNN, 2016). Expecting the electoral outcome to be reflected in the research questionnaire, the collected data instead reflected the opinion polls, with a large majority (72%) of the participating subject, who voted in the general election, voting for Hillary Clinton and a minority (21%) voting for Donald

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3 The Republican Party - commonly referred to as the GOP which stands for Grand Old Party
4 Note, that the Democratic turnout for the primaries was 14.4% lower than in 2008 (DeSilver, 2016a)
Trump (see Q4 in appendix C). The reasons that may well be the cause of the deviation in this finding will be discussed throughout the thesis, when relevant.

The opinion polls had missed the target, or had they? The vote count shows that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by almost 3 million votes (CNN, 2016). The scenario of a winning candidate nominee who did not receive the most votes, is made possible by the nature of the American electoral system, which will be addressed later. To the majority of both Clinton voters (90%) and Trump voters (65%) the electoral result came as surprise (see Q9 in appendix C). 5 recurrent reasons for the electoral outcome were professed in the study: 1) people did not want to vote for Hillary Clinton, 2) Russian involvement, 3) the electoral college, 4) desire for change, and 5) ignorance, anger and racism among Trump voters (see Q12 in appendix C). With no solid evidence, at least at this point, Russian involvement is excluded. The other proposed explanations will be addressed in this thesis. The evaluations on the election of Donald Trump reveal a divided America and the hardship that Donald Trump faces in uniting the country. For an analogy, Donald Trump is either perceived as a brave national hero like Captain America with a mission to save America or as a basilisk super villain like the Joker who scorns the Establishment (Mogensen, 2016, p. 10).

In regard to the first part of the research question, it is noteworthy, that there are two precedents to Donald Trump. The first, Andrew Jackson, a populist, who won the presidential election over Quincy Adams, in 1828. Although this is almost 200 years ago it does carry resemblance. Like Donald Trump, Andrew Jackson ran on a campaign promising to hold the interests of ordinary Americans (then settlers from the western border states and slave owners from the southern states) and formed a coalition against the federalist establishment of the northeastern states (Østergård, 2016). The second precedent being Ronald Reagan who won a landslide victory over Jimmy Carter, in 1980, despite trailing well behind in public opinion polls. Then, Hamilton Jordan, a key Carter aide, said: “The American people are not going to elect a 70-year-old, right-wing, ex-movie actor to be President” (Troy, 2016) – but they did – and now the American people voted a 70-year-old, right-wing, Hollywood star, and entrepreneurial billionaire to be their next President. Like Donald Trump, Ronald Reagan ran for president in a time characterized by a new emerging enemy, then the Soviet Union, now ISIS, and a hurting economy. And like Trump, Reagan was an
advocate for free market forces and deregulation of the federal government, also known as neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). Unlike Donald Trump, however, both Jackson and Reagan had prior political experience; Andrew Jackson was a member of the House of Representatives (1796-97), a member of the Senate (1797-98) and served as Supreme Court Justice from 1798-1804 (Østergård, 2016) and Ronald Reagan served as the governor of California from 1967-1975. In comparison, Donald Trump will go down in history as the first American president who has not held a public office nor has any political experience.

As stated earlier, more than half of the American population had an unfavorable view of Donald Trump at the time of his candidature announcement. Assumedly, his popularity would have to go up in order to win the election. Surprisingly, his popularity has not increased much. Overall, among the participating subjects for this study, Donald Trump scored 1.74 points out of 10. Further, the data reveal an American population that is very divided on their newly elected President\(^5\) (see Q11 in appendix C). This finding is confirmed in a Gallup report. In the report, the presidential approval rating of Donald Trump is compared with approval ratings for American Presidents over the last 60 years (see appendix D), and concludes that Donald Trump is the most disliked President in the history of the United States, with 45 percent of the population disapproving their new President (Gallup, 2017).

The unfavorable view of Donald Trump remained at the center of the media coverage of the presidential campaign. During the primaries, Donald Trump had an advertising budget that was less than one tenth of the other candidates’ budget, yet he received more than 3 times as much media attention as the other candidates – combined that is! (Mogensen, 2016). Rather than focusing on Donald Trump’s political messages, the media attention was aimed at Donald Trump’s persona. During the presidential campaign, Donald Trump has been called opportunist, narcissist, fascist, sexist, racist and anarchist, among others (Mogensen, 2016). In addition, Trump has been compared to both historical and fictional persons of great evil and cruelty. Political commentator, Dana Milibank, has called Trump “The American modern Mussolini” (Mogensen, 2016, p. 84) and former president of Mexico, Vincent Fox says that Trump

\(^5\) Note, that 81% of Clinton voters gave 0 points, which was labelled “repulsive“.
reminds him of “Hitler” (Mogensen, 2016, p. 84). Critics have even compared Trump to the evil Lord Voldemort from the Harry Potter universe where to J.K. Rowling, the author of the books, tweeted in response that “Voldemort is not nearly as evil” (Mogensen, 2016, p. 11). Finally, neurologist Bobby Azarian compares Trump with one of the most repulsive imaginary creatures, obsessed with madness: "Donald Trump reminds me of Gollum from The Lord of the Rings, and the presidency is his ring to rule them all." (Mogensen, 2016, p. 71). Although interesting, the purpose of this paper is not conduct a psychoanalysis of Donald Trump, but rather to try to understand why a group of the population, despite reading these stories and headlines about Donald Trump, still voted for him.

In this regard, however, it is important to note, that both major party candidates were very unpopular. According to exit polls, 55 percent of voters had an unfavorable view of Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, and 60 percent had an unfavorable view of Republican nominee, Donald Trump (CNN, 2016). What is more interesting is that the poll reveal that a relatively large number of people voted for either Clinton or Trump despite having an unfavorable view of the her/him. The same applies to the question of honesty and trustworthiness. Again, the poll reveals negative ratings for both candidates and that a relatively large number (20% for each candidate respectively) voted for either Clinton or Trump despite their negative view (CNN, 2016). This could be explained by the strong party affiliation, which is characteristic for the American political culture or it could simply indicate, for reasons that will become clearer, that to many Americans the 2016 Presidential election was a choice between the lesser of two evils, as reported by Lewis & Silverstone (2016b).

So far, the remarkable facts of the 2016 presidential election has been laid out: America has, against the odds, elected a president with a historical high disapproval rate whom more than 60 percent of the population find both dishonest and lacking trustworthiness. Next, this chapter will explore why the opinion polls were wrong in their predictions.

### 3.1. Social Stigma Against Voting for Donald Trump

Nate Silver, a statistician who run *FiveThirtyEight* and who predicted the vote of 50/50 states in the 2012 election, predicted that Hillary Clinton had a 71.4 percent chance of
winning, economist David Rothschild predicted an 89 percent chance to Clinton, and the New York Times gave Clinton an 85 percent chance (Krishna, 2016). Why did they get it wrong? Giving the fundamental basis that data don’t lie, the reasons for the wrong predictions must be found in either the collection and/or representativeness of the data or in the interpretation of the collected data. Three possible explanations for the inaccurate prediction of the 2016 presidential election are offered: 1) the polls underestimated what turnout would be among different demographic groups, 2) Trump supporters were less likely to respond at all to pollsters given how much their candidate discredited polling, and 3) polling did not account well for what “undecided” respondents would do once in the voting booth (Krishna, 2016).

Breaking the social norm and putting oneself in an embarrassing situation, are something that most people tend to avoid. If a voter comes from a milieu were a vote for Trump would defy the social norm, that citizen may not want to disclose his intention to vote for Trump to a pollster. Instead, saying that he is “undecided” or even voting for Hillary Clinton, will spare him the discomfort of breaking the social norm. A confirmatory test of the latter theory was conducted in which almost 1 out of 5 Trump voters said that they prior to the elected had felt uncomfortable talking about their intention to vote for Trump and 7 percent said that they had told people that they were either ‘undecided’ or that they voted for another candidate (see Q2 in appendix C). Taking this into consideration it could help explain why so few Trump voters, in comparison to the number of Clinton voters, participated in the research study: Enraged Clinton supporters and proud Trump supporters, are more likely than Trump supporters who might feel embarrassed about their vote, to voluntarily participate in a research study. Given that the targeted respondents were encouraged to participate via a link shared on Facebook – nobody was approached directly - it was relatively easy to ignore the request.

A poll conducted by the LA Times supports this finding. As an outlier among other polls, this poll consistently placed Donald Trump in the lead, the differentiating factor being that it exclusively relied on an ongoing online survey. In a comment, the LA Times noted: “Trump voters were notably less comfortable about telling a telephone pollster about their vote. Women who said they backed Trump were particularly less likely to say they would be comfortable talking to a pollster about their vote,” (Krishna,
suggesting that the anonymity offered by an online survey, as opposed to a direct interview or a telephone interview allowed for more honest intentions of supporting Donald Trump. Donald Trump’s campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, has further supported this theory. In an interview with Channel 4 in the UK, Kellyanne Conway said that the Trump campaign counted on ‘undercover voters’ to win the election. According to Conway, the polls did not reflect Trump’s popularity because of the perceived social stigma of supporting the Republican nominee. (Jacobs & Rickett, 2016). In the interview, Conway explained: “It’s become socially desirable, especially if you’re a college educated person in the US, to say that you’re against Donald Trump.” And she continued: “People who are supporting Donald Trump, are so tired of arguing with family and friends and colleagues about their support of Donald Trump that they just decided not to discuss it.” (Jacobs & Rickett, 2016). In addition to the notion that openly support of Trump is linked to demographics, Stanton and Vergano (2016) found that the visible Trump supporters largely were white, Christian working- and middle-class men. For reasons that will be discussed in more detail later, this particular group of people have voted for Donald Trump because of bad economic circumstances or a lack of confidence in how the political institutions function – nothing embarrassing about that. Others may have had more tacit motives such as misogyny, racism, or xenophobia, for example.

The social stigma against voting for Donald Trump that Conway talks about is complex. This paper, will focus on three contributive factors, which will be discussed in turn: First, Donald Trump is not a career politician. Secondly, Donald Trump is mostly known publicly for his involvement in the entertainment industry notably the TV show The Apprentice and the Miss Universe beauty pageants and finally, his political incorrectness.

Unlike his predecessors, Donald Trump has no prior political experience. As put by Lars Mogensen (2016): “He [Donald Trump] does not hold a membership to the reactionary gentleman’s club which has dominated American politics for the past decades, but rather he appears as a futuristic gambler, even as the commander of futurism.” (p. 28). While this might have been appealing to some votes, rationally thinking it is very irresponsible to support a seemingly incompetent candidate. Politics is de facto
complicated – immigration, terror, climate change, and economic crises – there are no easy solutions or quick fixes to these problems.

Donald Trump is no career politician, but he has achieved and experienced more than most of his political peers, setting a new record for the oldest person to be sworn in as President. At age 25, Donald Trump undertook the family business in real estate and construction, later to become Trump Organization (Mogensen, 2016). 5 years later, in 1976, Time Magazine, in the first of many portraits of Donald Trump, provided the following introduction: “He is tall, slim and blond, with dazzling white teeth, and he looks like Robert Redford. He drives around in a silver Cadillac with the initials DJT on the license plate. He dates elegant models, attends the most exclusive clubs, is only 30 years old, and estimates his fortune to 'more than $200 million’.” (Mogensen, 2016, p. 20). Today, at age 70, Forbes ranks Donald Trump as the 156th wealthiest person in the world and estimates his net worth to $3.7 billion (Forbes). Donald Trump himself says his net worth is $10 billion (President Donald Trump News & Live Speech 2017, 2017).

Although rationally irresponsible, being a successful businessman was Donald Trump’s second-largest appeal among voters (see Q6 in appendix C). During the campaign, Donald Trump compensated for the lack of political experience by drawing on his business experience. As a businessman Donald Trump has made it his signature mark to excel where others fail and to turn ugliness into extravagance. Now the business mogul, has taken on the all-time toughest job: to fix our crippled America, as the subheading on Donald Trump’s book Great Again reads, and he claims that he can do it “on time and under budget” (Trump, 2016, p. 66). Donald Trump managed to successfully persuade the voters that rather than a President who understands politics and diplomacy, America needs “someone with a proven track record in business who understands greatness, someone who can rally us to the standard of excellence we once epitomized and explain what needs to be done” (Trump, 2016, p. 17). For reasons that will become clearer, Donald Trump’s pledge that he will ‘get things done’, in contrast to other politicians, was a major appeal to the group of voters who supported him.

In a world context, or at least a western context, a trend is emerging. All over, politicians who are skeptic of the current establishment is gaining ground, most
notably with the Brits voting against EU membership in June 2016 and latest in the French Presidential election in May 2017, where EU-critic, Marine Le Pen and her right-wing party Front National received the second-most votes. Following the European trend, the American election of Donald Trump suggests that at least a large group of Americans likewise, are unsatisfied with the status quo, given that one of Donald Trump’s strongest attributes were that he ‘is not an ordinary politician’ (see Q6 in appendix C). At the inaugural ball, with another carefully selected song, this time by Frank Sinatra, Donald Trump made a clear statement about his superiority, his ability to succeed where others fail, and mostly that he does politics in his own way: “Yes, there was times, I’m sure you knew. When I bit off more than I could chew. And through it all, when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out. I faced it all and I stood tall and I did it my way” (Frank Sinatra, My Way, 1968).

The second contributive factor to the social stigma against voting for Donald Trump: his involvement in the entertainment industry, is addressed next. Donald Trump is not the first celebrity in American politics; former President, Ronald Reagan, and the current California Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, both had major Hollywood careers before they went into politics. The difference, this thesis argues, is Donald Trump’s demeanor.

To most Americans, Donald Trump is known as the host of the NBC show The Apprentice, which first aired in 2004 and has run in various formats across fourteen seasons. In this show, a group of business people competed for a leadership position in one of Trump’s companies with a yearly salary of $250,000. In each episode, Donald Trump would fire one of the contestants by saying his 3 famous words: You’re fired. Since 2008, there has also been seven seasons of the Celebrity Apprentice, where celebrities compete to win money for their chosen charities. In part, what made The Apprentice one of the most popular TV shows was the host character of Donald Trump, whom from the boardroom, or bully room, judged the contestants on their performance. Donald Trump has been criticized for making demeaning and sexist comments about the contestants while hosting the show. Trump, however, has defended his behavior by saying that “a lot was done for the purpose of entertainment,” (Garcia, 2016), insinuating that he was merely playing a character that does not reflect his personality.
Another Trump venture that is worth mentioning is his involvement in the beauty industry. Throughout his life, Donald has surrounded himself with beautiful women. In 1999, Donald Trump founded his own model agency, Trump Model Management, and from 1996 to 2016, Donald Trump owned part of the Miss Universe Organization, which also includes the Miss USA and the Miss Teen USA pageants. Again, Trump’s demeanor is noteworthy. Former pageant contestants have, for example, told stories about how Donald Trump would enter the dressing rooms when they were changing clothes, to which Trump has responded: “I’m allowed to go in because I’m the owner of the pageant. And therefore, I’m inspecting it... Is everyone OK? You know, they’re standing there with no clothes. And you see these incredible-looking women. And so, I sort of get away with things like that,” (Stuart, 2016), implying that his status and wealth justifies his inappropriate behavior. Further, Trump should have made demeaning and racist comments about the contestants. He should, for example, have called the 1996 Miss Universe “Miss Piggy” because she gained weight and further called her “Miss Housekeeper” because she is Latina (Stuart, 2016).

Besides the Apprentice and Miss Universe, Donald Trump is a well-known person within the American sport, wrestling. Trump co-owns the mixed martial arts organization Affliction and in 2013 he was inducted into the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) Hall of Fame after hosting WrestleMania IV and V as well as participating in the Battle of the Billionaires at WrestleMania 23 against the chairman of the WWE, Mr. Mahon, which Donald Trump won and celebrated by shaving the head of his competitor, in the center of the ring (World Wrestling Entertainment).

In an article in Think Progress, Judd Legum, suggests that Donald Trump’s interest in wrestling is very important in order to understand the Trump phenomenon (Legum, 2015). By referring to an essay on professional wrestling published in 1957 by the French philosopher Ronald Barthes, Legum argues that Donald Trump’s behavior resembled that of a professional wrestler. Politics as we know it, Legum argues resembles the sport of boxing, which is an art of strategy and excellence. Wrestling, on the other hand, holds the same truth as theater; it’s a show where each strike is carefully planned in order to whip up and entertain the crowd. To quote Barthes: “The

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6 Donald Trump’s rise despite his unorthodox positions on issues and his relentless relationship with the truth.
logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future. In other words, wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone, without ever extending to the crowning moment of a result.” (Legum, 2015). According to Legum (2015), this theory explains why Donald Trump outmaneuvered his opponents: “As the rest of the field measured up their next jab, Trump decked them over the head with a metal chair.” According to this theory, Trump won the presidential election because his political rivals had no counterattacks to his spontaneity and unpredictability. In addition, the Trump supporters, like the wrestling fans, loved and celebrated the show and the spectacle. According to Barthes, it no longer matters whether the passion is genuine or not. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself. (Legum, 2015).

While it is socially unacceptable to applaud the kind of demeanor depicted above, a vote for Donald Trump is nonetheless a silent approval, and can, for reasons that will become clearer, have severe consequences for the American society. Next, the third and final contributor, addressed by this thesis, to the social stigma against Donald Trump, political incorrectness, is introduced.

As stated, the social stigma is complex and the third contributive factor is undoubtedly the result of the two factors previously discussed. According to Donald Trump (2016), “You listen to the politicians and it’s as if they are speaking from a script titled ‘How Boring Can I Possibly Be?’ Watching some of these people being interviewed is about as exciting as watching paint dry. They’re so afraid of tripping on their own words, terrified that they’re going to say something unscripted and go off message that they are verbally paralyzed.” (p. 29), supporting the common perception that politicians are controlled by behind-the-curtain-actors such as spin-doctors, lobbyists, and financial donors. As Leicht and Fitzgerald (2014) argue, corporations have become more concerned with pleasing their investors than taking care of their employees, and perhaps the same is true for politicians. As one interviewee, 92-year-old Ed Shepard from McDowell county in West Virginia said, when asked whether he believed whoever got elected president would make a difference: “I don’t think the president of the United States would have the remotes idea of where the hell McDowell country is,
to start with. And wouldn’t be interested, unless he knew how many votes he could get out of it.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016).

Due to his massive fortune and the extensive free media attention, Donald Trump has been less dependent on financial support and thus does not need anyone’s approval” (Trump, 2016). In sharp contrast to other politicians, as Mogensen (2016) observes: “He (Trump) is anything but bound by manuscripts. As a seasoned entertainer, he shakes words out of his sleeve, freely improvised and at random with such a loose hand that he often appears rambling.” (p. 9). The demeanor outlined in the previous chapter, Donald Trump continued during the presidential campaign. In a defending remark Donald Trump excuses his behavior: “Our country is a mess right now and we don’t have time to pretend otherwise. We don’t have time to waste on being politically correct.” (Trump, 2016, p. 29). At political rallies, in presidential debates, and particularly on the social media platform Twitter, starting a Twitter war or two, Donald Trump has attacked political enemies, the media, and various demographic groups. Especially his comments on women, immigrants, Mexicans in particular, and Muslims has received much media attention. The rather unorthodox, demeaning comments by Donald Trump, whether carrying a misogynist, racist, or sexist undertone have commonly been known as Trumpisms (Mogensen, 2016, p. 7). On Twitter, Donald Trump retweeted the following about the Democrat nominee: “If Hillary can’t satisfy her husband what makes her think she can satisfy America?” (@realDonaldTrump [Donald J. Trump], 2015). When announcing his candidature, he said the following about Mexican immigrants: “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” (President Donald Trump News & Live Speech 2017). And in a personal conversation, which was secretly being taped and subsequently leaked, Donald Trump said the following about his view on women: “I just start kissing them. I don’t even wait... And when you’re a star they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the p****. You can do anything.” (CasonVids, 2016).

Again, while this behavior is perceived as socially unacceptable, a vote for Donald Trump is a silent approval. Given the United States’ sensible history with minority groups, particularly African Americans, the allowance of discriminatory rhetoric at the

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7 A @reply war
presidential level could cause major damage to the equal rights achievement.

Allegedly, Donald Trump’s rhetoric and demeanor during his 2016 presidential campaign has already increased school bullying in the United States. According to an online survey among teachers, 90 percent of respondents said that Donald Trump had negatively impacted student’s behavior and mood, expressing particular concern for minority students incl. black, Muslim and LGTB children and teens (Gettys, 2016).

Additionally, Donald Trump has demonstrated a relentless relationship with the truth. Donald Trump’s various claims through the presidential campaign has been fact-checked by PolitiFact, among others. The result (see figure 4) is astonishing with only 4 percent of the claims checked by PolitiFact being completely true. More significantly, the lies do not appear systematic: Donald Trump lies strategically and pointlessly. He lies about important things and meaningless things. But above all, he lies frequently. In the three presidential debates, 104 false claims were counted for Trump and 13 for Clinton (Dale & Talaga, 2016). Regardless of the multiple lies, a large group of Americans voted for Donald Trump. The big question still remaining is why? Ignorance? Naivety? As mentioned before, according to the wrestling theory, the audience [the voters] are fully aware of the nature of the wrestling match; they don’t care for who is most deserving or most qualified, they care to be entertained.

Seemingly, the contributive factors to the social stigma against Donald Trump that possibly have restrained voters from declaring their intention to vote for him: the lack of political experience and the demeaning and discriminating behavior displayed both through his career in entertainment industry and on the campaign trail, would also appear to be his largest attraction. Next, a selection of contributive factors to the victory of Donald Trump will be addressed.

3.2. Contributive Factors to the Trump Victory

Apart from the attraction of Donald Trump, as discussed above, there are other factors that may either directly or indirectly have contributed to the electoral outcome. This
sub-chapter will address three contributive factors: first, the role of the media, secondly, the general contempt for Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, and finally, the electoral system.

The press coverage of Donald Trump has been condescending. The *Huffington Post*, for example, moved their coverage of Donald Trump to the entertainment section, refusing to acknowledge his run for President: “Trump’s campaign is a sideshow. We won’t take the bait. If you are interested in what The Donald has to say, you’ll find it next to our stories on the Kardashians and The Bachelorette” (Grim & Shea, 2015). As previously mentioned, however, one of the miracles of the Trump campaign was the ability to manipulate negative publicity. Launching a counterattack on the press media by questioning their objectivity and accusing them of playing “gotcha” games⁸ (Trump, 2016, p. 32), Donald Trump successfully changed the public sentiments: “The next thing you heard was that Trump said all immigrants were criminals. That wasn’t what I said at all, but it made a better story for the media.” (Trump, 2016, p. 47).

An opinion poll conducted by Gallup, just weeks before the presidential election, revealed that American’s trust and confidence in the mass media “to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly” was at its lowest level ever measured (32%). Especially among Republicans, the trust and confidence has decreased sharply with 14 percent of Republicans saying they have a great deal or fair amount of trust in the media compared to 51 percent of Democrats (Swift, 2016). Seemingly, Donald Trump’s plan worked as intended: “The American people are beginning to understand. The political media aren’t trying to give the people a fair representation of the important issues. Instead, they are trying to manipulate the people – and the election – in favor of the candidates they want to see elected.” (Trump, 2016, p. 49).

Apart from receiving the most negative coverage, Donald Trump further received the most coverage of all the other major candidates combined (Mogensen, 2016). Wisely, Donald Trump turned the ever-increasing interest for his persona into an advantage: “I get more minutes, more front-page coverage, more requests for interviews than anyone else – and most important for America – the opportunity to speak directly to

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⁸ Refering to journalist and interviewers setting up ‘traps’ and taking words out of their original context with the intention of damaging a persons reputation.
the people” (Trump, 2016, p. 41). With the continuous flow of unorthodox comments, tweets, and quirks creating a daily drama and not least an element of unpredictability holding more entertainment value that all the other, more carefully planned entertainment shows on TV, the news media simply could not withstand the temptation and eventually quality succumbed to quantity. As will become clearer, like Barack Obama who successfully mobilized college students, Donald Trump, through the nature of the press coverage, reached and mobilized another group of typical non-voters: middle class, low-educated Americans, thus expanding the democracy of the United States. Likely, pollsters did not account well for the turnout of this group of people, which partly could explain their wrong predictions of the electoral result.

A possible second contributor to the electoral outcome, that this thesis will address, is the Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton. For reasons that will become clearer, Hillary Clinton was, like Donald Trump, highly disliked among Americans and many people voted for Donald Trump just to keep Hillary Clinton out of the White House (see Q5 & Q6 in appendix C). For the Democratic primaries, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton was up against Bernie Sanders, Senator of Vermont. Particularly well-liked amongst millennials, Sanders lost the primaries. Unlike Donald Trump, who managed to capture the entirety of the Republican vote despite the prediction that he would defect particularly college-educated Republican women and conservative Latinos and Catholics, Hillary Clinton did not manage to pick up the Sanders’ vote and many Sanders voters either entirely abstained from voting, voted for Donald Trump, or went to support third-party candidates (Davis, 2017). As an illustrative example, Elliot, an Appalachian county in Kentucky, can be mentioned. With an impressive voting record of being Democratic in every presidential election since the United States was founded, and where Obama won in 2008 over McCain by a 2:1 margin despite having endorsed gay rights, in the 2016 election, Elliot voted 70 percent for Donald Trump (Davis, 2017).

Additionally, the strategies of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, respectively, was very different. Where Donald Trump was factory-hopping through the American hinterlands, Clinton focused almost entirely on major metropolitan counties and she entirely skipped the entire swing state Wisconsin (Davis, 2017). Looking at the electoral map of the 2016 presidential election in figure 5, the inattention to rural
states and rural counties by Hillary Clinton proved to be her downfall. The Clinton campaign prioritized Hollywood, Silicon Valley, and Wall Street receiving endorsement from celebrities such as Bruce Springsteen and Beyoncé Knowles while neglecting middle class Americans. Unlike Hillary Clinton who largely neglected middle class Americans, Donald Trump addressed them directly and recognized their struggles and needs, which will be discussed later: “I see them. I talk to them. I hug them. I hold them. They are all over the place.” (Trump, 2016, p. 14).

Moreover, the Clinton campaign tested 84(!) central messages (Reddington, 2016), suggesting a lack of compassion and sincerity. Donald Trump, on the other hand, had a single clear message: to make America great again and his passion was felt by the voters: “I just had to do the right thing. I had to do it. I had no choice. I see what’s happening to our country; it’s going to hell. I had to do it.” (Trump, 2016, p. 20). On the contrary, Hillary Clinton came of as a career politician, funded by Wall Street money and whose only motivation was a perceived sense of entitlement (Reddington, 2016). Furthermore, when Hillary Clinton’s email scandal, dating back to 2015 when she tenured as Secretary of State, was revived in the final weeks of the election, as allegedly new evidence appeared, it did further damage to her already staggering reputation⁹. In short, Clinton allegedly has used a private e-mail server to send thousands of emails, some of which contained classified information. In the following week, from October 29 to November 4, the Clinton email scandal dominated the press coverage of the election. During this period, the top 5 American newspapers published 100 articles on Clinton’s emails alone, while only printing a total of 49 Trump headlines (Savillo, 2016). In response to the emails, Donald Trump announced, on live TV during

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⁹ Note, that President Trump subsequently has fired the Director of FBI, James Comey, for his handling of the case.
a candidate debate, that he would have Hillary Clinton prosecuted if elected President (ReidBaerPoetry, 2016) – a promised favored by Trump voters (see Q_ in appendix C).

Lastly, it is possible, that gender both had a positive (discussed later) and negative effect on the popularity of Hillary Clinton. According to a study from Yale University, women are still at a disadvantage, despite many years fight for gender equality, in typical male professions, such as politics, where they consistently are being judged harder than men for their mistakes (Reddington, 2016). Along with the 2016 U.S. Presidential election the debate on gender roles and gender equality has resurfaced. As one female Trump supporter bluntly said it: “I think the women belong at home; cooking and doing dishes. I don’t believe that a woman should become president, any time!” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016f).

The third and final contributive factor that will be addressed in this thesis is the American electoral system. As mentioned, Hillary Clinton received almost 3 million more votes than Donald Trump and yet lost. This situation becomes possible because the United States as a so-called single member plurality (SMP) election system. Characteristic of the SMP system is that the electoral college of each state, which is proportional to population, elects the president and thus gives bigger emphasis to the more populated states (McKeever & Davies, 2010). As illustrated on the electoral map in figure 5 above, Donald Trump prioritized the large rural states, while Hillary Clinton did well among the smaller states located on the east coast.

Additionally, the SMP system tends to produce a two-party system, unlike representative electoral systems which allow minor parties to gain political influence. In order to win the majority of the electoral college, both parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, aim wide in order to represent as many interests possibly and thus become umbrellas for a variety of minorities. The growth of the Tea Party Movement within the Republican Party is a clear example hereof (Reddington, 2016). After the primaries, the winning candidates have to unite their party and here the political discourse becomes vague, as Hillary Clinton demonstrated in her delayed concession speech: “We’ve spent a year and a half bringing together millions of people from every corner of our country to say with one voice that we believe that the American dream is

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10 Also known as the first-past-the-post or winner-take-all system.
big enough for everyone - for people of all races and religions, for men and women, for immigrants, for LGBT people, and people with disabilities. For everyone.” (ABC News, 2016) – all mentioned, all forgotten. Consequently, the two-party system leads to internal instability which could result in party disloyalty, as discussed in regard to the Bernie Sanders voters.

**Sub-conclusion**

Republican nominee, Donald Trump, remarkably won the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Opinion polls mislead everyone in part because pollsters misinterpreted the data and in part because social norms abstained Trump voters to reveal their true intentions. Significantly, the characteristics that created the social stigma similarly proved to be the greatest attraction to Donald Trump. Aided by a flawed electoral system, the media, and Hillary Clinton’s poorly organized campaign and bad fortune, Donald Trump won the presidential election. While highlighting some rather unorthodox characteristics of the newly elected president, this chapter has laid the foundation for the next step of this research study: The Trump voters.

Additionally, this chapter has come across especially three issues that invites to further research, which unfortunately are not compatible with the purpose of this thesis: Firstly, given that all but one opinion poll misjudged the electoral outcome, a review on the manner in which polling is conducted followed by a discussion of their credibility and ability to foresee outcomes anno 2017 would make for an interesting study. Secondly, for the first time in an American presidential election, a social media platform was used as a primary outlet for political campaigning/propaganda. A study on both communication style and how social media has changed American politics would make for interesting topics. The third and final issues, that this chapter came across which would make for an interesting and relevant study, is the social consequences of the rhetoric and behavior of Donald Trump.
4. Analysis of the Voters

Building on the previous chapter, an exploration of voter turnout and voter demographics is provided in the following chapter. Additionally, through a comparative analysis, deviations from the previous presidential election is presented. In addition to provide an overview of the voters and their political preferences this chapter portrays the growing division between demographic groups.

In a historical context, the United States consistently experiences a low voter turnout\(^\text{11}\) at presidential elections than most of its peers among developed democracies. Among the 35 counties who are currently a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United States of America ranks 31\(^\text{st}\) when comparing voter turnout (DeSilver, 2016b). For the 2016 general election, approximately 130 million Americans voted which equate to 57.9 percent of the eligible voting population (Scott, 2016). Turned around, approximately 95 million eligible voters, for some reason, did not vote for the election. A 0.9 percent drop in voter turnout from the last election, indicates that hundreds of thousands of Americans who voted for the 2012 election did not vote for the 2016 election (Scott, 2016). In addition, taking into account that Donald Trump allegedly should have mobilized a large group of typical non-voters, as mentioned in the previous chapter, only adds to the number of people who abstained from voting for the 2016 election.

For reasons that will become clearer, the explanation for the general low voter turnout at presidential elections in the United States of America is to be found within the ideological and cultural ideas upon with the nation was founded. As for the drop in the voter turnout from the 2012 election to the 2016, two possible coexisting explanations are offered. First, as mentioned, the historical high disapproval rate for both the Republican and Democratic nominee has likely discouraged some voters.

Secondly, new state voting laws signed just prior to the 2016 election, may have resulted in a lower voter turnout. Voting laws in the United States is established both at the federal and state level, and thus the laws vary from state to state. Prior to the

\(^{11}\) In the United States of America, voter turnout is estimated as a share of the voting-eligible population by subtracting noncitizens and ineligible felons from the voting-age population and adding eligible overseas voters.
2016 general election, 14 states had signed new voting laws. Instead of making the voting process easier, new voting laws over the past decade have increasingly made it more difficult. Among the new restrictions are: make registration more difficult, cut early voting days, make it more difficult to restore voting rights for people with criminal records, and adding to the requirements for proof of identification and citizenship (Brennan Center for Justice, 2017). While lawmakers argue that the newly instated voting laws are measures to prevent voter fraud, critics argue they are voting restrictions targeted poor, minority communities, comparing them to the notorious Jim Crow Laws12 (Lang & Herbert, 2016). In the state of North Carolina, for example, new voting laws that were instated prior to the 2016 election put restrictions on early voting, same-day registration and out-of-verdict voting – all electoral mechanisms that research show is disproportionately used by blacks. The true intention of the law is revealed in the legislative record in which it is noted that Sunday voting was eliminated because “counties with Sunday voting in 2012 were disproportionately black” and “disproportionately Democratic”. In addition, absentee ballots, which is disproportionately used by white voters, were exempted from the new voter ID requirements. Further, the new voter ID requirements only approve IDs disproportionately held by whites, such as driver’s licenses, U.S. passports, and veteran and military IDs, while exempting the ones often held by poor minority voters, such as student IDs, government employee IDs and public assistance IDs (Lang & Herbert, 2016). For reasons that will become clearer, while new voting laws that were instated prior to the 2016 election may have negatively affected overall voter turnout, they may also have worked to Donald Trump’s advantage because of the strong link between race and party affiliation in the United States.

Despite massive voluntary efforts to get people out to vote, less than 60 percent of the eligible voting population voted for the 2016 general election, and thus the representativeness of the outcome is questionable. For reasons that will become clearer, the low voter turnout suggests that almost half of the population are indifferent about their President and his/her political agenda.

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12 State and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern states until 1965 when overruled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
4.1. Voter Demographics

This sub-section will explore the demographics of the small majority of the American population who voted for the 2016 general election and identity the demographic groups that predominantly voted for Donald Trump. In a comparative analysis, this sub-section will further explore the demographic changes between the 2012 election and the 2016 election.

With the prospect of the first female President in the history of the United States it was expected that Hillary Clinton would draw a great number of voters on that account alone, just like Barack Obama did when he in 2008 became the first African American President in the History of the United States. And Clinton did get a lot of votes because she was a woman, which 15 percent of those who voted for her confirmed in the research questionnaire (see Q5 in appendix C). This, as mentioned, is another indicator, that the presidential candidates were not rated on their politics and qualifications but rather on other attributes, such as gender and sincerity. According to Donald Trump, “The only thing she’s [Hillary Clinton] got going is the women’s card.” (Gearan & Zezima, 2016). Expectedly, Hillary Clinton would draw a lot of sympathetic votes because she is a woman and Donald Trump would repeal female voters because of his demeaning comments on women. Surprisingly, the gender gap is narrower than expected: Hillary Clinton (only) received 54 percent of the female vote, while Donald Trump received a small majority of the male votes (52%) (CNN, 2016). In comparison to the 2012 election, it becomes apparent that Hillary Clinton received fewer female votes than her Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama who received 55 percent of the female vote in the 2012 election (The Washington Post, 2012). From a 10-point margin in 2012 to a 13-point margin in 2016, however, the presidential vote preference of American women did widen, but not because Hillary Clinton attracted more women, but rather because Donald Trump deflected female voters.

On the contrary, Donald Trump won the male vote by an 11-point margin over Hillary Clinton (CNN, 2016). In comparison to the two previous elections, the 11-point margin to Donald Trump is larger than the 7-point margin that Republican nominee Mitt Romney had in 2012 and much different than in the 2008 election where male voters
favored Barack Obama over John McCain (The Washington Post, 2012). Over the past decade, the majority of male votes have shifted from voting Democratic to voting Republican, with Donald Trump attracting the most male votes to date. There is evidence that suggests, that especially male voters find Donald Trump with his many ‘flaws’, in contrast to the career politicians and their political correctness, more honest and relatable, as illustrated by an interviewee when commenting on the leaked audio tape of Donald Trump bragging about sexually assaulting women, as mentioned in the previous chapter: “It’s just guys being guys, it’s not guys being a little sissy or a freaking p****. That’s just how we talk in private” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016d). Further, for reasons that will become clearer, especially middle-class men when the targeted audience of Donald Trump’s political campaign.

In exit poll history, the 2016 gender gap in presidential vote preference is the widest on record (Tyson & Maniam, 2016) and whether this is a general trend or just a manifestation of the two polarizing 2016 candidates, would make for an interesting study. While the 2016 is a confirmation of general disapproval of Hillary Clinton, as discussed in the previous chapter, with 64 percent of Republican voters saying that one of their primary reasons to vote for Donald Trump was because “he’s not Hillary Clinton” (see Q6 in appendix C), it also confirms that Trump voters, largely men but also more women than initially expected, either silently approve of Donald Trump’s discriminatory rhetoric, particularly in regard to women, or that other issues have compensated for the discrimination.

For decades, baby boomers\textsuperscript{13} have dominated American politics, but for the 2016 election, there were for the first time more eligible millennial voters\textsuperscript{14} than people from the post-war generation. Winning the millennial votes, could thus prove were critical in order to win the election. While the exit polls show that Hillary Clinton did win the millennial votes by an incredible 19-point margin over Donald Trump they further show than 9 percent of millennial voters, the largest percentage for all age groups, voted for a third-party candidate (CNN, 2016). This tendency is verified in the

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\textsuperscript{13} The demographic cohort born during the post-World War II baby-boom ranging from the early 1940s to the early 1960s.

\textsuperscript{14} The demographic cohort with the early 1980s as starting birth years and the mid-1990s to early 2000s as ending birth years.
research study where 60 percent of subjects who voted for a third-party candidate were millennials (see Q1 in appendix C). Especially Gary Johnson from the Libertarian Party and Jill Stein from the Green Party were very popular among millennial voters. Although voter turnout demographics have not yet been made official, there are indications that proportionately large numbers of millennial voters abstained from voting as one female student said: “I feel like my opinion really doesn’t matter. It’s just one vote.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016c). Additionally, as mentioned, Hillary Clinton’s democratic opponent, Bernie Sanders was very popular among the millennial voters and in his absence large numbers of millennials simple abstained from voting: “We had young people fully engaged with Bernie Sanders. He was carrying the message and then we burned all of those young people when we pulled that candidacy away from him.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016c). Consequently, although Hillary Clinton did win the millennial vote it did not become the decisive factor as it was initially thought to be, as many millennial voters either stayed home on election day or voted for a third-party candidate, which worked to the advantage of Donald Trump.

On the contrary, Donald Trump won the age group 65+ by a 7-point margin and the age group 45-64 by an 8-point margin (CNN, 2016). In comparison, Mitt Romney won the same groups in 2012, but with different margins. Romney won the 65+ age group with a 12-point margin and the 45-64 age group by a 4-point margin (The Washington Post, 2012). In other words, Donald Trump was particularly popular among middle-aged Americans.

The 2016 Presidential election reveal an America and two political parties that are divided between generations: Baby boomers and the older generation X on one side, supporting conservative issues such as making abortion illegal, protecting the right to bear arms, and small government and the more modern millennials and the younger generation x on the other side, supporting issues such as women’s rights, LGTB rights, and green renewable energy initiatives. And yet, when two demographics are combined, age and race, a different result appears. Now the data show that for white Americans, Donald Trump won across all age groups and for non-white Americans,
Hillary Clinton won across all age groups (CNN, 2016), which leads to the next demographic.

As this thesis has already suggested the United States of America was divided along racial lines for the 2016 Presidential election. According to numbers from the Pew Research Center, there are 10.7 million more eligible voters today in the United States than in 2012 and more than two thirds of these are racial and ethnic minorities with a net increase of 7.5 million eligible voters. Therefore the 2016 election was the most diverse in the history of the United States, as nearly one-in-three eligible voters (31%) was Hispanic, black, Asian or another racial and ethnic minority, up from 29 per cent in 2012 (Krogstad, 2016). Consequently, like the millennial voters, ethnic Americans could play a very crucial factor in the 2016 election.

Receiving endorsement from prominent ethnic Americans such as the black super-couple, Beyoncé and Jay-Z, Hillary Clinton was expected to win the minority votes (CNN, 2016). Based on Donald Trump’s discriminating comments about minority groups alone, as referred to in the previous chapter, Hillary Clinton was expected to win big among minority voters as one black female voter put it: “We’re not going to touch him [Donald Trump] with a ten-foot pole. If you say these things about Mexicans and say these things about Muslims. Even his so-called appeal to us [African Americans]: ‘what the hell are you going to lose’. Are you serious? That’s how you talk to us? And you want us to vote for you? We’re not buying into that, that’s a deal breaker to us. Given the history of African Americans in this nation, for someone to disrespect minorities, and actually even if he’d never said that to us, but just the way he speaks about other minorities, we know what’s next.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016e). The exit polls show that Hillary Clinton did win the minority votes by an 81-point margin for blacks and a 38-point margin for both Latino and Asian voters (CNN, 2016).

Surprisingly, the comparison to the 2012 election shows that Hillary Clinton received far fewer minority votes that her predecessor Barack Obama did who won the black votes by an 87-point margin, the Latino votes by a 44-point margin and the Asian votes by a 47-point margin (The Washington Post, 2012). As mentioned, Hillary Clinton has received a lot of sympathizing votes from female voters and likewise Barack Obama received a lot of sympathizing votes from blacks and other minority voter, but still, the
decline in minority votes that went to the Democratic nominee is dramatic, especially because of the Donald Trump’s discriminating and racist comments about both Mexican immigrants and African Americans, as referred to previously. Additionally, although not officially confirmed, fewer minority voters supposedly voted for the 2016 election than the 2012 election. With those two factors combined, the minority vote did not play the decisive factor as was predicted, which worked to the advantage of Donald Trump.

While Hillary Clinton was endorsed by Beyoncé, the queen of pop music and a symbol of wealth, beauty, and glamour, Donald Trump was supported by other black celebrities such as the rappers 50 Cent and P. Diddy, while also the former boxer Mike Tyson officially supported Donald Trump. Common for these three is a disappointment in Barack Obama as they feel that too little has been done to help the black communities (All American Freedom Fighter, 2016). In contrast to Beyoncé who represents a rich lifestyle, the latter three represent the ghettos and, for reasons that will become clearer, income played a crucial factor in the 2016 election. The Dream, another black rapper who supported Donald Trump, explains the black communities support for Donald Trump in the following: “Donald Trump is what Americans love, Donald Trump is what Americans aspire to be: rich, powerful, do what you wanna do, say what you wanna say, be how you wanna be. That’s kinda been the American Dream. So that’s his appeal to me.” (All American Freedom Fighter, 2016). For reasons that will become clearer, the American dream in particular is very central in order to understand the 2016 Presidential election.

Besides, winning a larger share of non-white voters, Donald Trump further won the white votes by a 20-point margin (CNN, 2016) as his Republican predecessor, Mitt Romney had in 2012. The comparison further show that Donald Trump received a proportionally smaller share of the white votes than Mitt Romney - by 2 percentage points. To sum, Donald Trump voters were predominantly white, but also included a larger share of black, Latino, and Asian voters.

Significantly, the exit polls from the 2016 election show that less-educated voters generally supported Donald Trump, while people with longer educations generally supported Hillary Clinton. This is a remarkable change from the 2012 election. In
comparison, where Barack Obama in 2012 won among voters with no high school diploma by a 29-point margin and the group of voters with some college education by a 1-point margin, for the 2016 election, Donald Trump won the group high school or less by a 5-point margin and the group of voters with some college education by an 8-point margin. On the contrary, where Mitt Romney won among college graduates by a 4-point margin, for the 2016 election, Hillary Clinton won this group by a 5-point margin (CNN, 2016) & (The Washington Post, 2012). In other words, for the 2016 election, the education demographic was entirely opposite than the 2012 election with the Republican party largely represented less-educated Americans, while the Democratic party represented well-educated Americans.

Similar to the age demographic, when combining education and race, the 2016 exit polls show a United States of America that is strongly divided along racial lines. The exit polls show that a majority of white voters, regardless of level of education, voted for Donald Trump while a majority of non-white voters, regardless of their level of education, voted for Clinton (CNN, 2016).

Length of education and income are often interrelated, however, the data from the exit polls do not show a correlation between the two demographics: Clinton won the majority of voters from the two lowest income groups despite, as previously mentioned, that Trump won amongst Americans with the lowest level of education (CNN, 2016). There are several factors that could explain this. Firstly, students, as mentioned, who fall into the lowest income group, and who would be considered less-educated because they do not hold a degree, generally voted Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump. Secondly, as proportionally more ethnic Americans are poor than white Americans, and since these groups predominantly voted Democratic it could also help explain why Clinton won among the poorest Americans.

Further, the income demographic shows that Donald Trump received the majority votes from middle-income Americans, that Clinton won among the wealthy Americans, and finally that the two candidates equally shared the votes of the super-rich Americans, those earning more than $250,000 a year (CNN, 2016). For reasons that will become clearer, this income division is reflected in the appeal of Donald Trump’s politics.
Lastly, as a very religious country where one out of three voters attending religious services on a weekly basis (CNN, 2016), religion continues to be an important demographic in the American elections. In comparison, only 2.4 percent of Danes attend religious services weekly (Rasmussen, 2008). Allegedly, Donald Trump is very religious (Presbyterian) and attends church every Sunday. Further, he claims that his favorite book is the Bible: “Nothing beats the Bible. Nothing beats the Bible. Not even the Art of the Deal\textsuperscript{16}, not even close” (Rohit Gupta, 2015). Donald Trump did win the majority of religious votes with a 17-point margin for self-declared Protestants and a 4-point margin for self-declared Catholics (CNN, 2016). Particularly surprising is it that Donald Trump won the Catholic vote, which Obama won in 2012 with a 2-point margin (The Washington Post, 2012), as the head of the Catholic faith, Pope Francis\textsuperscript{17}, publicly advised against voting for Donald Trump: “A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian.” (Yardley, 2016). Generally, it is surprising that Donald Trump was the most favored candidate among Christian Americans, as his rhetoric and behavior, as illustrated in the previous chapter, does not reflect Christian values.

On the contrary, Hillary Clinton won among non-religious voters with a 42-point margin and among other religions, including Muslim voters, with a 33-point margin (CNN, 2016). One factor that could explain the religious divide between the two presidential candidates is the correlation, as proved in multiple studies, between poverty, education, and religion. In other words, low-income, low-educated people, two groups that generally favored Donald Trump, are more likely to be religious than high-income, well-educated people, who generally favored Hillary Clinton.

Thus far, this chapter has shown that the general Trump voter is male, middle-aged, and white. Moreover, it has shown that the average Trump voter is Christian, without a college degree, but yet within the middle-income group. From a social science perspective, the findings reveal that the division between varies demographic groups in their preference for party candidates, such as baby-boomers vs. millennials, whites.

\textsuperscript{16} Donald Trump’s first published book from 1987, which stayed #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list for 13 weeks.

\textsuperscript{17} In the Pope’s first official meeting with President Trump, the Pope presented Donald Trump with a letter on the importance of fighting climate change, another example of the Pope’s disapproval of Donald Trump.
vs. non-whites, uneducated vs. educated, and religious vs. unreligious Americans, has widened. The sub-section that follows moves on to further explore the Trump voters.

4.2. Who Are the Trumpsters?

Thus far this chapter has portrayed the Trump voters based on demographics alone. The following sub-section will provide a more in-depth study on the characteristics of the Trump voters, including the communities they live in and the jobs they work.

The Americans who supported Donald Trump, not those voting for him because he was the lesser evil, nor those Republicans who voted for him while holding their nose, but those who actually supported him, have been nicknamed the Trumpsters, similarly to the trend of nicknaming the fan bases of popstars such as Justin Bieber (Beliebers) and One Direction (Directioners). Perhaps the comparison to pop stars because Trump rallies, like pop concerts, were very festive events were the crowd enjoyed themselves and cheered for their idol. America is an enormous country and, as mentioned, an estimated 130 million Americans voted for the 2016 election. Acknowledging that each vote and the motivation behind was unique, a stereotypic portrait of the Trump supporters, as this chapter provides, will contribute to understanding the 2016 presidential election and thus to answer the research question of this thesis.

First, geography, as already briefly mentioned, show that Donald Trump won the Southern states, the Great Plains and the Rust Belt, whereas Hillary Clinton won the upper-east states and the West coast, as illustrated on the electoral map in figure 5 above. This illustrates not only a division between rich and poor American as it was illustrated above, but also division between rich and poor states. In comparison to a list of the richest and poorest states in the United States of America (Mekouar, 2015) the division is clear: Out of the 15 poorest states, Donald Trump won all but one and out of the 10 richest states, Hillary Clinton won all but one. As Jim Tankersley has labelled it, the 2016 election shows a division between high-output and low-output America (Muro & Liu, 2016). Especially the Rust Belt, formerly known as the Steel

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18 The Rust Belt refers to a region which begins in western New York and traverses west through Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, ending in northern Illinois, eastern Iowa, and southeastern Wisconsin.
Belt, is a very interesting geography in American elections. A large part of the states that make up the Rust Belt are in American politics referred to as swing states, which means that these states could reasonably be won by either the Democratic or the Republican presidential candidate. In the 2012 election the swing states in the Rust Belt, including Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania all voted for the Democratic candidate, Barack Obama (The Washington Post, 2012). In the 2016 election, however, all of these states, as illustrated on the electoral map, flipped and voted Republican (Real Clear Politics, 2016).

Distinctive for the states that form the Rust Belt are that they once made up the manufacturing heartland of the United States: Coal, steel, and manufacturing of industrial and consumer goods centered in the great American manufacturing cities of Detroit, Milwaukee, Youngstown, and Pittsburgh among others. During the late-19th to the mid-20th century these cities flourished and gave birth to a prosperous local middle class. But from the 1960s and onward the region has suffered as the United States changed from an industrial society to a service society.

As a result of the political and societal changes that have occurred in the United States since the late 1960s, which are discussed in more detail in the following chapter, the Rust Belt houses some of America’s poorest counties, including McDowell County, West Virginia, which is the poorest county in the United States and significantly, the county where a highest percentage of people voted for Donald Trump in the primary elections (91%) (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016g). Similarly, when micro-analyzing the 2016 election by looking at how votes were distributed county-wise the wealth division is confirmed: The less-than-500 counties that Hillary Clinton won nationwide encompassed a massive 64 percent of the economic output measured in 2015, while the more-than-2,600 counties that Donald Trump won generated just 36 percent of the country’s output (Muro & Liu, 2016). According to statistics, it is unprecedented for a losing candidate to have represented so large a share of the country’s economic base (Muro & Liu, 2016). Hillary Clinton won almost every large-sized county economy in the country and in contrast, Donald Trump won the hundreds of hundreds of tiny counties that make up the non-metropolitan hinterlands of America. This is illustrated
by the example of Wisconsin\textsuperscript{19}, one of the former great manufacturing states of the Rust Belt.

The electoral map of Wisconsin, as illustrated in figure 6, shows that metropolitan cities incl. Milwaukee, Green Bay, Eau Claire, and La Crosse all voted for Hillary Clinton (blue) while rural counties voted for Donald Trump (red). Conclusively, as illustrated by this case, Trump supporters predominantly live in rural counties in contrast to Clinton voters who predominantly live in metropolitan counties. Further, this suggests that the geographic divide between the two presidential candidates were not only state-wise but also county-wise with big metropolitan cities in favor of Hillary Clinton and small rural counties in favor of Donald Trump.

By using Milwaukee County as an illustrative case, a third geographical divide becomes apparent. The electoral map of Milwaukee County, as illustrated in figure 7, shows that Clinton voters (blue) almost exclusively live in metropolitan Milwaukee and Trump voters (red) live outside metro Milwaukee, in the suburbs. As for most metropolitan cities in the United States, the Milwaukee midtown predominantly consists of poor, minority communities, who, as concluded above, predominantly voted for Hillary Clinton. Moreover, as a college city with two large campuses located in midtown Milwaukee, this further explains why Midtown Milwaukee voted for Hillary Clinton. On the other hand, the electoral map of Milwaukee County shows that suburban Milwaukee, which

\textsuperscript{19} Wisconsin was chosen as the case example for four reasons: 1) Donald Trump won this state, 2) it’s a swing state, 3) it is part of the Rust Belt, and 4) this is where the targeted subjects of the research questionnaire live.
predominantly is inhabited by white, middle-class Americans, voted for Donald Trump, thus further confirming the findings above.

Summarizing, the Trumpsters live in poor, rural states either in a rural county or in a suburb to a larger metropolitan city. Further, the geography confirms that Trumpsters predominantly are white, middle-class Americans.

Comparing the states won by Donald Trump to the once won by Hillary Clinton on their emission of energy-related carbon allows this thesis to conclude, that Trump voters live high-carbon emitting states. Among the states that emit the most energy-related carbon per capita, the top 22 voted Trump over Clinton. In contrast, Hillary Clinton carried all eight of the states that emit the least energy-related carbon per capita (Muro, 2016). Conclusively, Trump voters predominantly live in high-carbon emitting states that are heavily invested in the fossil-fuel economy, either as producers of oil, natural gas, and coal, or as large consumers of low-cost, coal-powered electricity partly because several are manufacturing centers which it coherent with the finding in regard to the Rust Belt region, as discussed above. The Clinton states, on the other hand, generate less carbon because they have embraced digital and other services into their economy (Muro, 2016). Thus, it is likely that many Trump voters, given that they live in communities that are very dependent on high-carbon emitting industries either currently are, or formerly have been employed in one of these industries or in a sub-industry hereof.

Most people working in industrial jobs are considered blue-collar workers\textsuperscript{20} whom traditionally have been Democratic. Further, many of these industries are represented by labor unions, for example by the United Steelworkers labor union, which is the 7\textsuperscript{th} largest labor union in the United States. For the last four decades, 60 percent of union households voted Democratic (Moody, 2017). The 2016 electoral outcome, however, suggests than an increasing number of blue-collar workers and union members have broken with their party affiliation and voted for Donald Trump. Partially, for reasons that will become clearer, this finding could be explained by a general dissatisfaction over that prosperity has surpassed the people in this region and who works in these

\textsuperscript{20} Someone who performs manual work and either earns an hourly wage or is paid piece rate for the amount of work done.
industries as one life-long democrat crossover put it: “If you keep putting the same people in the same job and expect a different outcome it’s not gonna happen.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016e). Further, the Clinton campaign largely overlooked these regions of the United States, as mentioned, and thus the only thing that industrial workers remembered Hillary Clinton by was her promise to them: “We’re going to put a lot of coal miners and coal companies out of business,” (America Rising ICUMI, 2016) and replace this toxic industry with a green renewable energy sector – the latter part was largely exempted from the press coverage. Whereas Donald Trump, on the other hand, as mentioned, was factory hopping across the United States promising to “get those miners back to work” (Freedom Daily, 2016) and fighting the need for renewable energy sources: “The whole push for renewable energy is being driven by the wrong motivation, the mistaken belief that global climate change is being caused by carbon emission. If you don’t buy that – and I don’t – then what we have is just an expensive way of making the tree-huggers feel good about themselves.” (Trump, 2016, p. 90). As a result, the interests of blue-collar, union workers were to a greater extend represented by Donald Trump and the Republican Party, which explains the crossovers.

While many blue-collar workers are uneducated, corresponding with the education demographic previously discussed, the majority of people who voted for Donald Trump had some college education (CNN, 2016). Apart from industrial jobs, many other jobs do not require a college degree. In fact, 70 percent of white adults in the United States lack a college degree (Moody, 2017). Among these are managers, supervisors, cops, and people employed within insurance and real-estate. Also, according to data, there are some 17 million small-business owners without a college degree in America. People with these kinds of jobs typically draw an average salary of $112,000, placing them well in the middle-class income group (Moody, 2017), again coherent with the findings above. Similarly, the research study found that responding subjects who voted for Donald Trump work in middle-class jobs that do not require a college degree incl. delivery driver, small business owners, customer service, department supervisor, construction, real-estate, and production (see appendix C). In comparison, subjects who voted for Hillary Clinton predominantly work jobs that do
require a degree incl. therapy, teaching, nursing, IT, contracting, HR, and finance (see appendix C).

Particularly interesting about the Trumpsters is their perception of themselves and their perception of their themselves in relation to others. A survey reveals, that where most Americans recognize their European, African, or South American heritage in the surveys conducted by the American Census Bureau by identifying themselves as, for example, “German” or “British” besides “American”, Trumpsters strikingly more often only identifies themselves as “Americans” (Mogensen, 2016). This trend is significantly true for those constituencies where the controversial racial segregation supporter, George Wallace, got the most votes when he ran for president for the American Independent Party in 1968 (Mogensen, 2016). Additionally, a study from ANES, the American National Elections Studies, shows that Trumpsters stand out by being ethnocentric (Mogensen, 2016), meaning putting their own white ethnicity before others. Further, a study by the Presidential Election Panel Surveys (PEPS) shows a correlation between the willingness to vote for Donald Trump and suspiciousness of other ethnic minorities (Mogensen, 2016). Without insinuating that Trump voters are racists; these findings are important in order to understand their worldview and their attraction to Donald Trump.

**Sub-conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to provide a stereotypic portrait of the people who voted for Donald Trump. The findings show that the Trumpsters overwhelmingly are white, religious, middle-aged males who lives in rural states in the country side or in suburbs to larger metropolitan cities. These communities where the Trumpsters live have been, and continue to be very dependent on high-carbon emitting industries. While many Trump voters work in blue-collar jobs, the majority of Trump voters work in typical middle-class jobs that do not require a college degree. Further, the culture in which the Trump voters have grown up has produced a rather ethnocentric, patriotic, and protectionist worldview in which xenophobia and a general suspiciousness of others is common.
5. Analysis of the Development of the American Middle Class

Building on the portrait of the Trump voters from the previous chapter, the following chapter provides a more detailed account of the American middle class. An explorative analysis of the historical and cultural development of the American middle class is provided. Additionally, a comparative analysis emphasizing the institutional and cultural exceptionalism of the United States is provided. Finally, an explorative analysis of the social, economic, and political demise of the American middle class originating in a power shift from middle-class democracy to a democracy dominated by corporate elites beginning in the late 1960’s, is provided. In addition to provide an overview of the development of the American middle class, this chapter further attempts to explain the appeal of Donald Trump to the voters portrayed in the previous chapter.

To quote Max Weber\textsuperscript{21}: “History operates to determine the future of a nation the way a game in which the dice becomes loaded does.” (Lipset, 1996, p. 23). The quote by Max Weber suggests that to conduct a cultural analysis, one has to look at a nation’s history as a game in which the dice are not loaded at the beginning, but then becomes biased in the direction of each past outcome. Each time the dice come up with a given number, the probability of rolling that number again will increase. Taking on a Weberian approach, this chapter sets out to explore the social action by the American middle class – the election of Donald Trump.

Exceptionally, the United States of America is a country born out a Revolution and the “first new nation”, the first colony, other than Iceland, to gain independence. The term “exceptionalism” was first used to describe the United States of America by Alexis de Tocqueville in the early nineteenth century. Tocqueville, a French aristocrat, came to the United States in the early 1830s fascinated by the success of the fledging nation, then barely 50 years old. By studying American institutions and culture, Tocqueville hoped to understand why the efforts at establishing democracy in France, starting with the French Revolution had failed, while the American Revolution had produced a stable democratic republic (Lipset, 1996). Tocqueville’s observations on American

\textsuperscript{21} Marx Weber (1864-1920), a German sociologist who profoundly influenced social theory and social research by arguing that social action must be studied through interpretive means, based on understanding the purpose and meaning that individuals attach to their own actions.
exceptionalism are thus not directed at the American people, but rather on the exceptionalism of American institutions and culture.

Colonists in America, who were largely considered English subjects, played no formal role in determining English public policy, including policy towards the North American colonies. Rather, the colonists were deferred to the political judgments of metropole elites in London whose policies served the collective welfare of England and its empire. Although not culturally united, high-handed British taxation and regulation of colonial life strengthened the political position of people, like John Locke, the founder of liberalism, who evinced different views of humans and the social environment (Lockhart, 2012). Many colonists viewed human beings as more equal than the English political elite did, strengthened by the social conditions of colonial life which fostered relative open opportunities and a widespread belief that “persons could master their own fates through conscientious application of their relative equal broad talents” (Lockhart, 2012, p. 11). According to American sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset, American exceptionalism is to be understood as this set of distinctive basic national values – not better – only different - which he identifies as liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez faire (Lipset, 1996). As a result, many colonists sought greater autonomy from English control.

When the founders of the United States of America, post the war for independence, began to construct the institutional framework of America, they did so with their colonist beliefs and values of relative human equality and liberty in mind and they created what Lockhart (2012) calls a path of institutional dependency, which carries much resemblance to Max Weber’s analogy of the loaded dice, as mentioned above. In short, the path dependency theory states that “once a society starts building particular public institutions (e.g. a presidential as opposed to parliamentary democracy) or policies (e.g. the financing of medical care), it becomes increasingly difficult across time to effect institutional or policy change which breaks free of the initial path’s confining influence” (Lockhart, 2012, p. 7). According to the theory, aberrations from the path only occur when societies experience social dislocations. Because social dislocations vary in extend and frequency from society to society, this theory helps explain cross-societal political variations. The theory distinguishes between two types of social dislocations: sharp sudden social dislocations and slowly accumulating
changes. The frequency and severity of sharp, sudden social dislocations such as wars and economic depressions and their disruption of the lives of a society’s members are likely to cause policy changes. In comparison to Germany, which was surrounded by enemy states who tried to take a portion of its territory for nearly a century (mid-1800s through the mid-1900), the United States of America has enjoyed a relative absence of external security threats. In response to severe contingencies, such as those experienced by Germany, a society may develop public institutions (e.g., a large standing army) and policies (e.g., public programs providing benefits to injured veterans and war widows) that differ in kind and degree from societies that face more benign external threats, such as the United States where the most gripping conflicts have been domestic struggles with Native Americans and the Civil War (Lockhart, 2012). Although the United States suffered many casualties in the, for example the Second World War, its continental base remained essentially unhurt and thus the United States had not maintained a standing army of consequence prior to the mid-1950s (Lockhart, 2012). Furthermore, the geographic isolation from Europe and Asia, in conjunction with a rapidly growing internal market, has meant that domestic economic activity has been vastly more important to the health of the American economy than international trade. As a result, although the United States has experienced periodic internal difficulties, it has remained relatively shielded from economic shocks originating in Europe or Asia, at least until the 1930s (Lockhart, 2012).

On the other hand, slowly accumulating effects of gradual changes in the circumstances of everyday life may also foster innovations in political institutions and policies. Some of these changes may be anticipated and desired, but their social consequences may also not be foreseen or salutary (Lockhart, 2012). Taking the example of industrialization, which occurred in the United States and a number of other societies across the nineteenth century. Industrialization fostered increasing urbanization: Where large proportions of the population had lived in extended families working on their own property and often produced at least a portion of the goods the family consumed, they went to live in nuclear households in urban

22 The progressive replacement of extended families by nuclear households and the growth of wage dependency.
environments and supporting themselves by selling their labor to employers. This shift increased the relevance of mostly private, but also over time public, programs designed to help households cope with social hazards such as illness, injury, and aging. In some form, all societies increased tax rates, established a larger public sector, and broadened the range of government responsibilities in the area of public social services such as education, health care, and income maintenance for social hazards such as disability, unemployment and aging (Lockhart, 2012). Despite the common trends of both circumstances and policy of advanced industrial societies, the availability and extent of these public reforms differ greatly from society to society.

Among industrialized countries, the United States today lacks far behind its peers when it comes to public social services, which for reasons that will become clearer, has greatly influenced the well-being of the American middle class. Using the Great Depression as an illustrative case, it changed many Americans’ cultural orientation and emboldened others who had favored a larger and more active government all along. These changes in public sentiments helped bring a political elite to office who supported more active public measures to deal with the economic problems and as a result the size and activity level of the American national government grew substantially. Significantly, history shows that once the social dislocation has been resolved, sentiments reverse and societies return to their original institutional path (Lockhart, 2012): When America recovered from the Great Depression considerable retrenchment occurred among the new programs inserted by Roosevelt’s New Deal, with only few innovations enduring. For reasons that will become clearer, this theory possibly explains the appeal of Donald Trump to a group of voters greatly affected by societal changes.

According to Edgar H. Schein it is desirable when conducting a cultural analysis to distinguish between three fundamental levels of cultural manifestation: observable artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990, p. 111). This thesis concentrates on the latter two. Values refer to norms, ideologies, charters and philosophies, which can be discovered through interviews and questionnaires, where assumptions determine perceptions, thought processes, feelings and behavior that often are taken-for-granted, underlying, and unconscious. According to Schein (1990):
“Once one understands these assumptions [and values] it becomes easier to depict the meanings in the implicit various behavior that one observes” (p. 112).

As mentioned, cultural values often spring from an ideology. Exceptionally, where other countries’ culture derives from a common history and where nationality is related to community, being American is an ideological commitment; it is not a matter of birth and thus, those who reject American values are un-American (Lipset, 1996). Americanism is an “ism” or ideology in the same way that communism or liberalism are isms. As G. K. Chesterton, a prominent British writer, noted: “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theoretical lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.” (Lipset, 1996, p. 31).

The values embodied in the American Creed upon which the United States was founded: liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire are further manifested in the American Dream. Since the first English seafarers set out for America it has been the land of dreams, the “land of promise” (Adams, 1931, p. 214). Adams (1931) defines the American Dream as “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” (p. 404). Even to this day the American Dream attracts large numbers of immigrants from all over the world.

During the 1840’s the American Creed and values embodied in the American dream escalated into a deeply held belief in American greatness and superiority, summoned in the political doctrine called Manifest Destiny23 (Adams, 1931). As the analogy of the dice that becomes loaded and the theory of path dependency predict, the firm belief in both the American Dream and Manifest Destiny have continued to shape American culture and American political institutions and are thus, for reasons that will become clearer, both important concepts in order to understand the underlying meaning and

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23 A widely held belief that American settlers were destined to expand across North America – also referred to as the era of westward expansion, or expansionism.
psychology of the “Make America Great Again” slogan of the Trump campaign and its attraction to the American middle class.

Given the historically exceptional coming of America and the ideology upon which it was founded which created an institutional path, it explains why the United States responded differently than its Europeans counterparts to social dislocations and thus why American institutions, culture, and the American middle class developed very differently from European countries. In the following, this chapter will analyze three aspects of the American middle class: political influence, self-consciousness, and relationship to the corporate elite.

As mentioned, on the grid-group two-dimensional metric, America is classified as highly individualist society grounded in Americanism and the American Creed, as previously discussed. In the United States of America, individualism has produced a political discourse in which humans are seen as “self-interested and equal in broad capacities. They are probably motivated and sufficiently capable to master their own fates in a cornucopian world. Accordingly, individualists prefer to rely primarily on self-regulation among persons.” (Lockhart, 2012, p. 17). This individualistic view is reflected in the mistrust of government and the general favoritism of local regulation rather than federal regulation: “For them [individualists], government – with its inherent coercion – is frequently destructive of their preeminent value – a particular conception of liberty, and should be limited in its domain and activity.” (Lockhart, 2012, p. 17). As a result, the United States has decentralized national political institutions. Features of this decentralization include the multiple branches of government, varying terms of office, a loosely structured executive branch, a bicameral legislature with relative independent committees, and a two-party system affording weak interest-aggregative capacities. Each fraction of government focuses on protecting an autonomous sphere of activity from various regulatory intrusions rather than on deploying broad public programs, build through multiple compromise (Lockhart, 2012).

As pointed out by Lipset (1996), exceptionalism is a double-edged sword because virtues have flip-side vices. Besides causing low voter turnout, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the anti-governmental nature of American culture poses a number of problems for the American middle class. Because of the general anti-governmental
sentiments, Americans tend to oppose public programs, which explains why the public sector in the United States trails far behind Europe. Consequently, in the event of social dislocations such as economic recessions, Americans are more vulnerable than Europeans. Further, individualism explains why socialist parties and socialist movements in the United States, which will be discussed in more detail later, never gained the same momentum as its European counterparts.

Another way for ordinary people to gain political influence, besides voting, is through collective action. I here want to distinguish between two kinds of collective action: labor unions and social movements. But before entering into a meaningful discussion of collective action, an introduction to “class” must be offered. Karl Marx, the father of class conflict theory argued that analytically there are two classes: the owners of the means of production and the non-owners. Descriptively, however, there are many classes (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014). Thus far, the Trump voters have been addressed as the American middle class, but the term has not yet been defined. To some people you are middle class “if you make more than the minimum wage but less than Bill Gates, if you are an office manager rather than a cashier at McDonald’s, or if you have graduated from college rather than dropped out of high school” (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014, p. 15). In general, three criteria determine your socioeconomic status: income and wealth, occupational prestige, and educational level. This thesis draws on the definition proposed by (Leicht & Fitzgerald) who refer to the American middle class as “those Americans who earn incomes approximately between $40.000 and $80.000 annually; who work as upper- and lower-level managers, professionals, and small business owners; who at least attended a four-year college; and whose primary source of wealth is homeownership.” (pp. 15-16).

According to Watkins (2005), “Americans are often in a state of denial to the extent to which class affects them.” (p. 78). Most would like to think of the United States as a classless society, or at least a society where class does not matter. This belief is rooted in the American Dream, as discussed above. In modern days, the American Dream of the middle class is translated to “the dream of a steady job with decent pay and health benefits, rising living standards, a home of your own, a secure retirement, and the hope that your children would enjoy a better future” (Smith, 2012, p. 16). In other words, Americans expect to do better and transcend the class into which they were
born, also known as upward social mobility. This also means, that many Americans, according to Watkins (2005), are unwilling to accept the idea that there are disadvantages to being born poor and advantages to being born rich that function independent of individual effort. As a result, a large group of Americas believe that the American Dream is attainable through hard work and a strong work ethic, and perhaps a bit of luck (see Q14 in appendix C). The truth, however, according to Watkins (2005) is that class in the United States matters more today than ever, which is supported in the finding that “Americans are arguably more likely than they were 30 years ago to end up in the same class into which they were born.” (p. 79). The perceived equal opportunity for upward mobility has historically meant that collective action to reduce inequality between classes has been comparatively low. This becomes very clear when looking at the history and development of labor unions in the United States.

According to Davis (1999), when studying unionism in the United States three periods stands out. The first is the period from 1832-1860 where the early battles for trade unionism begun. Second is the period from roughly 1877-1896, a period of volcanic postbellum labor insurgencies, and finally the great tide of strikes from 1909-1922. Although very interesting, a longer account for the history of American unionism is not relevant for this paper. While American labor unions have achieved some goals and somewhat improved conditions for American workers, they have comparatively been weak and poorly organized. According to great socialist thinkers, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the weakness of labor unions in the United States is the result of the comparatively absence of socialist parties and movements in the United States (Lipset, 1996). This thesis proposes two reasons for the weakness of labor unions and their relative small achievements. First, in comparison to Europe, the American industrialization was characterized by boomtowns24 such as Pittsburgh and Chicago. As a result, the labor movement of the United States arose without those deep roots of resistance to industrialism, which many historians have stressed as a determining factor in the formation of militant unionism and working-class consciousness in Europe (Davis, 1999). Secondly, the hostile reaction by native workers to the arrival of several million poor Irish and German workers in the 1840s, and subsequently immigrants in

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24 A community that undergoes sudden and rapid population and economic growth, sometimes starting from scratch.
general. These immigrants offered cheap labor, but instead of welcoming them into the labor market they were met by hostility of the native workers who rioted against them, evicted them from workplaces, refused them admission into trade unions, and tried to exclude them from the whole franchise (Davis, 1999). Without the strong historical foundation and with the inability to unite across ethnicity and race, American unions have struggled to grow and survive as they have been met with employer hostility and state violence.

As a result, social movements in the United States have not risen from class struggles. Instead, as Brubaker & Cooper (2000) argue, “the weakness of class politics in the United States left the field particularly wide open for the profusion of identity claims.” (p. 3). Consequently, identity issues rather than class struggles have been used by political entrepreneurs in the United States to persuade people to understand themselves and their interests and at the same time to organize and justify collective action. This sameness among members of a group or category may be understood objectively, as a sameness in itself, or subjectively, as an experienced, felt, or perceived sameness (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 7). During the gilded age of identity politics of the 1960s, and 70’s, ordinary Americans felt confident in their political power and its impact. By engaging in civic activism, they succeeded in setting the political agenda, forcing action by Congress and the White House through the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement, the labor movement, and the women’s movement among others (Smith, 2012). But the rush of power was short-lived. From the middle-class democracy of the 1950’s, ‘60s, and ‘70’s where American politics were dominated by a “high-visibility, outside political power game of mass movements and public participation” the United States of America now has a “low-visibility, inside power game dominated by the lobbyists for the American financial and political elite.” (Smith, 2012, p. 18).

The power shift, according to Smith (2012) started in 1971 with the Powell Memorandum. Lewis Powell, then one of the most respected corporate attorneys in the United States, argued that business was being victimized by government

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25 A business manifesto that called corporate America to arms, warning that anti-business sentiments in Washington had reached a dangerous new high and threatened to fatally weaken or destroy the free enterprise system.
regulations, consumer activism, and politically powerful trade unions. The memo led to the establishment of the Business Roundtable, consisting of chief executives from blue-ribbon corporations. These CEOs, “with the stature to call anyone in Washington and get their call answered” (Smith, 2012, p. 11), began to lobby Washington. By the late 1970s, business interests in Washington outnumbered Congress 130 to 1 (i.e. they had 130 lobbyists and advocates for each of the 535 members of Congress), and as a result, business shifted the political balance of power in Washington in favor of the corporate elite (Smith, 2012).

Another main source of the new corporate attitudes was new thinking by business schools and economics, referred to as neoliberalism, of which the Nobel economist, Milton Friedman, played a central role. The new political and political thinking came in a response to the restructuring of state forms and of international trade relations after the Second World War and was designed to prevent a return to the catastrophic conditions that had so threatened the capitalist order. The founding statement of the implementation of neoliberal economics read as follows:

The central values of civilization are in danger. Over large stretches of the earth’s surface the essential conditions of human dignity and freedom have already disappeared. In others, they are under constant menace from the development of current tendencies of policy. The position of the individual and the voluntary group are progressively undermined by extensions of arbitrary power. Even that most precious possessions of Western Man, freedom of thought and expression, is threatened by the spread of creeds which, claiming the privilege of tolerance when in the position of minority, seek only to establish a position of power in which they can suppress and obliterate all claim but their own. (Harvey, 2005, p. 20).

Translated into monetary policy, the idea behind neoliberalism, or the New Economy, as it was called when implemented by the Reagan Administration, was that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an industrial framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In regard to the state, neoliberal theory says that: “The role of the state is to create and preserve an industrial framework appropriate for such practices. State interventions in markets, once created, must be kept to a bare minimum.” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). In the neoliberal state, private enterprise and entrepreneurial initiative are seen as the keys to innovation and wealth creation and the continuous increases in productivity will
deliver higher living standards to everyone under the assumption that a rising tide lifts all boats or in economic terms referred to as the ‘trickle down’ effect. While liberty and freedom, already integrated concepts in American culture as discussed above, are guaranteed in the market place, each individual is held responsible for his or her own actions and well-being, which extends into the realms of welfare, education, health care, and pensions (Harvey, 2005, p. 65).

The Reagan administration took the campaign against big government to new levels. Deregulation of major industries from airlines to telecommunication opened up new zones of market freedoms for powerful corporate interests. Tax breaks on investment moved capital away from the unionized north-east and Midwest and into the un-unionized and weakly regulated south and west. Further, in the search for ever higher return rates, finance capital increasingly looked to markets abroad. Deindustrialization and moves to take production aboard became much more common. As a result, the marked, which in theory would foster competition and innovation, became a vehicle for monopoly power. Further, Reagan signed the largest tax cut in history when his administration reduced the top personal tax rate from 70 percent to 28 percent (Harvey, 2005). Consequently, whether intentional or not, for reasons that will become clearer, the power shift led to greater social inequality and a restoration of economic power to the American upper class.

As an illustrative case of the combination of the Powell Memorandum and Neoliberalism, Al Dunlap, whose corporation management techniques earned him the nickname “Chainsaw Al” can be highlighted. Dunlap, a cult figure on Wall Street, made it his specialty to parachute into troubled companies where he shrank them drastically which boosted their stock and turned a huge profit for Wall Street fund managers. To publicize his how-to management book, *Mean Business*, Dunlap posed in a Rambo headband with bandoliers of bullets crisscrossing his chest and two automatic pistols drawn at his hips, symbolizing his slash-and-burn strategies (Smith, 2012). Dunlap and his techniques became the role model for American CEOs of the 1980s as Wall Street banks and investors were pressuring corporate CEOs for ever-higher profit margins. As illustrated in figure 8, the new management techniques were successful as
productivity increased steadily. The social consequences of the power shift and neoliberal economic policies are explored in the following sub-section.

To summarize, the American Creed laid out a path for the future development of American political institutions. As a result, the political institutions fostered an American culture where values like egalitarianism, freedom, liberty, and laissez-faire were and continue to be the dominant keystones. The American middle class developed in this liberal climate. Furthermore, identity issues over, for example, race and gender, have been the dominant drivers for social movements to eradicate social inequalities in the United States, as Americans lack class-consciousness. Moreover, the individualist nature of American culture has produced a society where labor unions are comparatively weak and where self-reliance and the good-will of others are preferred over public programs and federal regulation. Consequently, neoliberal economic policies were well received when the Reagan administration introduced the New Economy, particularly by corporate America.

5.1. The Narrative of the Trumpsters

So far the exploration of the Trump voters has focused on the demographics and the cultural development as a class. The following section will analyze and discuss the social and economic narrative of the American middle class and explain how the election of Donald Trump resembles a social movement.

Because of their cultural heritage, Americans accept some inequality as part of their way of life, as inevitable and even desirable – a reward for talent and hard work and an incentive to produce and excel (Smith, 2012). High levels of inequality, however, may
hinder sustained growth, as expressed in 1935 by President Roosevelt when he warned about the accumulation of wealth and power and made his view clear that excessive market freedoms lay at the root of the 1930s Depression: “Americans must forego that conception of the accumulation of wealth which, through excessive powers, creates undue private power” (Harvey, 2005, p. 183). In a study conducted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), one of the founding institutions of neoliberal thinking that pushed heavily for neoliberal reforms in South- and Central America where indebted countries, such as Mexico who was driven into default in 1982, in return for debt rescheduling struggling were required to implement neoliberal reforms, such as cuts in welfare expenditures, privatizations, and more flexible labor market laws, the IMF now concludes that high levels of inequality can be “destructive” to sustained growth and that the best condition for long-term growth is “more equality in the income distribution” (Smith, 2012, p. 16).

The New Economy has increased inequality in the United States: As a result, the wealthiest Americans, the owners of the means of production, have accumulated trillions in new wealth, but the non-owners, the American middle class, has stagnated. The rising inequality is felt by most Americans (see Q19 in appendix C). As predicted by neoliberalist, productivity increased, as illustrated in figure 8 above, but the large revenues that corporations took out were not, as the theory predicted, shared with rank-and-file employees, in theory referred to as the trickle-down effect. Figure 9,

![Figure 9: Cumulative percentage change in economic indicators, 1990-2005](Source: (Anderson, Cavanagh, Collins, & Benjamin, 2006))
which illustrates the cumulative change in economic indicators during the period 1990-2005, shows that the minimum wage has dropped by 9.3 percent, average worker pay has increased by 4.3 percent while average CEO pay has increased by 298.2 percent, by 409.2 percent when it was at its highest.

In the 1970s, the minimum wage in the United States was about 46 percent of the average wage. By 2006, the minimum wage fell to under 31 percent of the average hourly wage only to recover to 36 percent by 2015 (OECD). Furthermore, chief executives in major companies were paid $1.2 million on average in the 1970s, adjusted for inflation, or roughly 40 times an average full-time worker’s pay. By 2015, the average S&P 500 CEO in the United States was paid $12.4 million on average. (Smith, 2012). In comparison, the average nonsupervisory worker earned roughly $37.000 in 2015, which according to the AFL-CIO26: “when adjusted for inflation has remained stagnant for 50 years” (Nicks, 2016). Commenting on the widening income gap, former Representative David Obey says: “The biggest failure that I’ve had and that Congress has had... is the failure to slow the transfer of income up the income scale, which has left this a two-tiered society... The economic elite of this country has performed the biggest rip-off of the middle class in the history of the universe.” (Smith, 2012, p. 65). Additionally, tax cuts and tax deductions for the wealthiest further added to the rising inequality (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014).

Leicht & Fitzgerald (2014) report that instead of investing in new technologies to spawn further productivity gains, corporate managers “overpaid themselves, doled out cash to investors, consumed luxury items, and engaged in corporate takeovers and mergers and acquisitions” (p. 56). This tendency stands in sharp contrast to the corporate mindset27 that dominated the post-war period from 1948-1972 where corporate leaders saw a competitive advantage in caring for their workforce, in economic terms called the “virtuous circle of growth” (Smith, 2012, p. 35). During this period, productivity grew by 96.8 percent and the hourly wage of average workers rose by 93.7 percent. In contrast, in 2007, before the recession, corporate profits garnered the largest share of national income since 1943, while the share of national income going to wages sank to its lowest level since 1929 (Smith, 2012). As an

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26 American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
27 Also referred to as the Social Contract
illustrative case, Wall-Mart can be mentioned. According to Ehrenreich (2008), employees at Wal-Mart, an anti-union corporation build on low-wage labor, cannot afford Wal-Mart products, despite the discount prices. Significantly, while Wal-Mart employees struggle to provide for their families, three out of four kids of Wal-Mart founder, Sam Walton, appear on Forbes top 20 list of Americas richest (Forbes).

Inequality in the United States has reached a point where most American openly say that the economy is unfairly tilted in favor of the wealthy and that the wealth should be more equally distributed (see Q20 in appendix C). This is an example of a slowly accumulating effect of a gradual change in the circumstances of everyday life which may lead societies to diverge from their institutional path, as previously discussed. Additionally, most Americans no longer believe that they will share in on the economic prosperity and declares that the American Dream increasingly has become reserved for the upper class or the few lucky ones (see Q14 in appendix C).

While inequality is growing, so is job insecurity. Firstly, finding and holding on to a good job has become increasingly difficult. As Smith (2012) puts it: “the corporate euphemisms of restructuring and downsizing have become a chronic economic malignancy for average Americans in good times as well as bad” (p. 78). With the slash-and-burn management style of Al Dunlap, as mentioned previously, mass layoffs are no longer a cyclical convulsion during hard times, but a permanent grinding reality even in good times. According to Jason Furman, a leading Democratic economist, this “flexibility of the American workforce”, is desirable because “it is one reason that recessions have been less frequent and unemployment less of a problem here than in Europe” (Ehrenreich, 2008). As an illustrative case of the “flexibility of the American workforce”, Circuit City can be mentioned. In 2007, Circuit City laid off 3,400 workers because they were overpaid – the dismissal was not related to performance but part of a larger effort to maximize profits. The overpaid workers were replaced by new hires of minimum-wage workers, as a part of the large corporate demand for efficiency and yet the CEO at that time took out a salary of $716,346 along with a $700,000 bonus. Note that the laid off workers were allowed to reapply for their old job after a ten-week ‘cooling-off period’ for a much-reduced pay (Mui, 2007). Without labor union to protect workers, this is far from the only example employee abuse in the United States.
Secondly, according to numbers from the *Brookings Institution*, free trade, outsourcing, and robot-automation have eliminated 7 million industrial jobs in the United States since 1980, almost one third of the skilled jobs. Consequently, employment at factories has fallen from 19 million jobs to 12 million jobs. Overall, more than 59,000 factories and production facilities were shut down all across America over the last decade (Mogensen, 2016). During the months of the presidential campaign, 26 major plants closed nationwide, as illustrated in figure 10. Note, that most plants were located in the Rust Belt area where, as found in chapter 4, Donald Trump won the electoral college. Additionally, over 600 coal mines closed between 2009-2015 resulting in a loss of over 36,000 jobs (The White House, 2017). The formerly prosperous regions of the Rust Belt and Appalachia are replaced by ghost towns: boarded up houses and closed-down stores and factories. McDowell County, West Virginia, is one of them. This county used to have 100,000 inhabitants, now there is just 18,000 (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016g). As Ed Shepard, a 92-year-old citizen in McDowell County says: “All the good activity is gone, and now we’re just sittin’ here”. Alma McNeely, another citizen in McDowell County recognizes this picture: “When I was little there was plenty of jobs; you got timber, coal mines and filling stations working on cars and stuff. Coal fields are gone, they’re done with timber and everything else. That leaves about it – everybody gone.” Alma used to have a good factory job, but now she recycles cans for 45 cents a pound for extra money (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016g). The failure to rebuild communities like McDowell County, and the hundreds and hundreds of other counties just like it, is one of the biggest failures of previous administrations, and as will become clearer, boosted support for Donald Trump. Note that Donald Trump won 91 percent of the primary votes in McDowell County (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016g). As José Arroyo, a member of United Steelworkers from Ohio explains it: “People don’t understand trade policy. What they do...
understand is that they used to work at a place that paid them $80,000 a year, and now they work two jobs and make $30,000 a year.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016e). As reported by Ehrenreich (2008), outsourcing does not solely occur in production and unskilled labor industries. For example, Ehrenreich reports of radiologist in India and Lebanon reading CT scans for hospitals in Altoona and Chicago and a growing outsourcing of American R&D departments to India and China.

Education has been the recommended solution for the unemployed because as Ehrenreich (2008) puts it: “in the globalized future, America would be the world’s brains while Mexicans and Malaysians would provide the hands” (p. 93). Unfortunately, education is not for everyone: “A lot of miners got laid off, you know. They [the government] give them opportunity to go to school, they pay them to go to school, and learn another trade. Some of these guys are old, you know, they can’t go to school, hell most of them can’t even read and write.” (Lewis & Silverstone, 2016g). Also, younger middle-class Americans find it increasingly harder to obtain a college education: with tuition easily costing $40,000, college education has increasingly become a privilege of the upper-classes (Ehrenreich, 2008).

Thirdly, the jobs that do remain are highly discriminated. Especially baby boomers in their late fifties and early sixties struggle to find employment. According to Smith (2012), by late 2001, one in six Americans in this age group, nearly 4.3 million, were unable to find full-time employment, and half of them had been looking for more than two years. An illustrative case, is the story about Timothy J. Bowers, a 65-year-old who robbed a bank in 2006 of $80, just to hand them over to the security guard. In court, he pleaded guilty and told the judge that he would like a three-year sentence. What goes before this event is that Bowers lost his job back in 2003 and had not been able to find a new one since. The three-year sentence would give him just enough time to reach the age of eligibility for Social Security benefits. Bowers justified his actions by saying that: “At my age, the jobs available to me are minimum-wage jobs”, adding that “there is age discrimination out there” (Ehrenreich, 2008, p. 55). In contrast, also younger well-educated Americans experience difficulty finding employment. Ehrenreich (2008) reports that by 2008, there were about 7 million college graduates working in jobs that do not require college degrees.
Fourth and finally, competition for the remaining jobs is growing. In 2015, the United States welcomed just over one million new legal permanent residents (Migration Policy Institute). Additionally, the United States attract large numbers of illegal immigrants. The Pew Research Center estimates that in 2015 there were 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States, of which it is estimated that half are Mexicans (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2017). Particularly unauthorized immigrants whom are likely to accept lower pay, which makes them more attractive to employers looking to cut costs, pose a potential threat to American workers.

Most Americans express concern over the difficulty of finding and retaining a good job with a decent pay and most have found themselves either involuntarily unemployed or underemployed within the past five years (see Q15 in appendix C). The growing insecurity has a number of consequences, among them declining middle class purchasing power. By pursuing a deliberate strategy of continual layoffs and by holding down wages, business leaders are doing themselves a disservice. By squeezing their employees, corporations are slowly strangling the middle-class purchasing power, which previously has fueled the economic expansion of the United States.

Significantly, despite the problems described above, middle-class households have enhanced their purchasing power (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014). There are multiple contributive factors hereto. First, traditional, male-breadwinner families have been replaced by two-income families. A statistic from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that from 1970-1997, the percentage of families in which both husband and wife worked rose from 35.9 percent to 59.5 percent (see appendix E). Secondly, a statistic from the Bureau of Labor shows that average weekly work hours have increased dramatically since 1964 (see appendix F), either because Americans work longer hours or have taken on second jobs. Thirdly, a statistic by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis shows that Americans have stopped saving money and started living from paycheck to paycheck (see appendix G), which leaves them little or no buffer against misfortune.

Fourth and finally, Americans rely on credit to support their living standard. The deregulation of the banking industry during the 1980s transformed the consumer credit landscape: Limits on the maximum interest rate were lifted, constraints on securities were removed, and interstate branch banking was allowed (Leicht &
As a result, “banks and credit card companies blanketed the nation with preapproved credit card offers totaling $350.000 per family.” (Smith, 2012, p. 94). As bankruptcy professor of the University of Illinois, Robert Lawless, explains it: “We have gone from a society where most consumer borrowing was episodic and for special purchases, to a society where many families have to use credit to pay for ordinary household expenses and are permanently indebted.” (Smith, 2012, p. 92). Today, the average debt for every adult male and female in America, when combining credit cards, auto loans, home mortgages, student loans, and other forms of credit, has nearly quadrupled since the 1950s (Smith, 2012). Lending money has become a very profitable business. As reported in The Two-Income Trap, “More than 75 percent of credit card profits come from people who make those low, minimum monthly payments at 26 percent interest rates. Who pay late fees, overbalance charges, and cash advance premiums.” (Smith, 2012, p. 94). Lending companies make profit on families that can barely make ends meet, households that are precariously balanced between financial survival and complete collapse. These families are, according to Smith (2012) singled out by the lending industry, “barraged with special offers, personalized advertisements, and home phone calls, all with one objective in mind: get them to borrow more money.” (p. 94). As a result, Americans are being socialized to live on debt, developing spending behaviors disconnected from financial realities. As a result of the new lending strategies, personal bankruptcies have soared. In 2005, there were more than 2 million personal bankruptcies; roughly 7 times as many as in 1984 (Smith, 2012). As Harvard Law School professor Elizabeth Warren wrote in 2003: “Bankruptcy has become deeply entrenched in American life. This year, more people will end up bankrupt than will suffer from a heart attack. More people will file for bankruptcy than will be diagnosed with cancer. More people will file for bankruptcy than will graduate from college. Americans will file more petitions for bankruptcy than for divorce.” (Smith, 2012, pp. 90-91).

In addition, the new neoliberal corporate mindset has resulted in declining corporate benefits. The company-provided welfare safety net that rank-and-file employees enjoyed from the 1940s and into the 1970s has been sharply cut back and a huge share of the cost has been shifted from corporation to employee. In terms of the overall financial burden shift from corporation to employee, by far the largest change has
come in retirement benefits. In 1980, 84 percent of the workers in companies with more than one hundred employees were in lifetime pension plans financed by their employers. By 2006, that number had dropped to 33 percent. The rest either gets nothing or are switched into funding their own 401(k) plans with a modest employer match (Smith, 2012). Moreover, by the mid-2000s, only 18 percent, one-quarter of the percentage in 1980, were getting full health benefits paid by their employer. 37 percent got partial help but had to pick up a large share themselves and the remaining 45 percent got no help at all (Smith, 2012). While some companies might have needed this shift to survive the 2001 recession, others have simply added the cost savings to their profit line. On her journey through low-wage America, Barbara Ehrenreich (2011) found that especially concerns over health care kept working class America awake at night and put them at a great disadvantage compared to the more well-off Americans, as they cannot afford to take their feverish child to the doctor, medicate themselves on Advil, or ignore that mystery lump. With the introduction of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, also known as Obamacare, the Obama administrations took steps to deal with this growing problem. The bill for example required companies with more than 100 or more full-time employees to insure 95 percent of their full-time employees by 2016. Obamacare is an attempt to make radical changes in a society in which the ideological foundation strongly opposes this change and which, according to path dependency theory, as mentioned earlier, is very insufficient. Obamacare has proved insufficient to effectively deal with the problems at hand. For example, according to statistics, approximately 96 percent of employers are small businesses with fewer than 50 full-time employees whom therefore are exempted from the provision (Obamacare Facts). And the simplest way for employers to work around their responsibility is to simply cut workers’ hours.

Sub-conclusion

This chapter began by describing how cultural values such as egalitarianism, liberalism, and individualism have shaped the political institutions of the United States and further determined the development of the American middle class. It went on to suggest that the election of Donald Trump could be considered a social movement rising from the shared narrative of the American middle class: social and economic
decline. Finally, this chapter attempted to illustrate that middle-class prosperity in the United States is an illusion.

Karl Marx predicted that capitalism would eventually fall: “The workers, fed up with immiseration, would revolt and seize the means of production” (Ehrenreich, 2008, p. 50). Although not a socialist revolution in the sense predicted by Karl Marx, the 2016 presidential election suggests that the American middle class is frustrated and angry that prosperity has passed them by, but mostly scared for their future. To quote Chris Arnade: “these are good people who is overwhelmed with the daily realities of THEIR world” (@Chris_arnade [Chris Arnade], 2017).

In the chapter that follows, an analysis of the political campaign by Donald Trump is provided followed by an elaboration on President Trump’s first 100 days in office.
6. How to Make America Great Again?

Building on the previous chapter, the political appeal of Donald Trump to the American middle class is discussed in the following chapter. An exploration of the “Make America Great Again”-slogan and Donald Trump’s political campaign promises will be provided followed by an evaluation of President Trump’s first 100 days as President of the United States.

The slogan, “Make America Great Again”, was formerly used by President Ronald Reagan when he campaigned for president: "This country needs a new administration with a renewed dedication to the dream of America, an administration that will give that dream new life, and make America great again," and "For those who've abandoned hope. We'll restore hope, and we'll welcome them into a great national crusade to make America great again" (Margolin, 2016). The meaning that Donald Trump attaches to American greatness, was first uncovered in March 2017, two months after the presidential inauguration. In an interview with the New York Times, when asked about American greatness, Donald Trump pointed to periods of military and industrial expansion which occurred at the onset of the 20th century and in the years following World War II. About the late 1940s and 50s Donald Trump said: “we were not being pushed around, we were respected by everybody, we had just won a war, we were pretty much doing what we had to do.” (Sanger & Haberman, 2016). About the turn of the century Trump said that is was “a pretty wild time for this country and pretty wild in terms of building that machine, that machine was really based on entrepreneurship.” (Sanger & Haberman, 2016). The phrase, make America great again, can have various meanings to different people and by not revealing (deliberately or not) his own frame of reference, Donald Trump allowed voters to attach their own, context-specific meaning to the phrase (e.g. middle-class prosperity in the 1940s and 50s, racial segregation etc.). Based on the New York Times interview Donald Trump’s perception of greatness is linked to money and power, not surprising taking his business empire into consideration. During the presidential campaign Donald made numerous promises. Next, an exploration of the

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28 Illustrates that the media coverage of the presidential election prioritized entertainment and scandals over politics, as previously discussed.
promises made by Donald Trump that most appealed to voters will be provided followed by an evaluation of the actions by President Trump to fulfill those promises.

The most appealing promise by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign was his promise to “bring back jobs from places like China, Japan, and Mexico.” (Trump, 2016, p. 186) (see Q8 in appendix C). Donald Trump promises to make the badge ‘Made in America’, “a badge of honor just like it used to be.” (Trump, 2016, p. 188). Donald Trump intends to do that by “changing the business climate so that manufacturers can get the best deal right here in the US.” (Trump, 2016, p. 185).

Donald Trump supports the free market: “the free market works, it just need leadership,” (Trump, 2016, p. 116) but he differs from his neoliberal predecessors, Ronald Reagan. In order to bring outsourced jobs back to the United States, Donald Trump wants to make the American business climate more competitive by, for example, introducing tax cuts for corporations (Trump, 2016). When Ronald Reagan introduced historic tax cuts, they did so under the assumption that the tax cuts would pay for themselves because profits would flow into the economy. As mentioned, corporate profits were largely used to increase the personal wealth of CEOs and investors rather than shared with rank-and-file employees. As a result, national debt was obtained to make up for the missing revenues.

Additionally, it was promised by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign to revive the coal industry, which has experienced downsizing as renewable energy sources increasingly are preferred over fossil fuels. Donald Trump, who, as mentioned, do not believe that climate change is the result of the emission of carbon, promised to “put the miners back to work” (Freedom Daily, 2016). Before the inauguration, Donald Trump made a promise to the coal industry: “I will rescind the coal mining lease moratorium, the excessive Interior Department stream rule, and conduct a top-down review of all anti-coal regulations issued by the Obama Administration.” (The White House, 2017).

On his 97th day as President, Donald Trump issued a Tax Reform Plan, which confirms the intention to bring down corporate taxation. According to the plan, the corporate tax is to be reduced from 38.9 percent to 15 percent to “encourage jobs and spur economic growth” (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc). The new tax reform plan
acknowledges, that previous tax cuts have had unintended consequences and in order to deal with those the tax reform plan promises to “reduce loopholes and deductions available to the very rich and special interests” (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc). The tax reform plan further intends to reduce the taxation of small businesses. From a corporate point of view, the tax reform plan is very lucrative but it still remains unknown whether it will pass Congress. It does however require a change in the corporate mindset, if the increasing profits as a result of the tax reform, are to be fused into the economy – and there are no signs that such a change is underway.

In regard to the promise made to the coal industry, on February 16, 2017, Donald Trump signed legislation to stop Stream Protection Rule, as he had pledged he would. According to a press release from the White House, the costly Stream Protection Rule was expected to reduce coal production, leading to fewer coal jobs across the country. Also, the regulation threatened the coal industry with millions of dollars in compliance costs, which would have put an unsustainable financial burden on small mines (The White House, 2017).

During the first 100 days in office, 99,000 new construction jobs, 49,000 new manufacturing jobs, and 27,000 new mining jobs were created. The White House further reports that unemployment is currently at its lowest level since March 2007 (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.) and confidence in the American economy is rising. A survey by Pew Research Center, shows that the overall public opinion about the U.S. economy has risen with 14 percentage points since last year, which makes it “the largest one-year improvement in public sentiment about economic conditions in the history of this survey” (Stokes, 2017). Especially Republicans’ opinion on the economy have improved. In 2016, 31 percent of Republicans had a positive view on the American economy. In 2017, that number has jumped to 61 percent. In comparison, 57 percent of Democrats had a positive view in 2016, which has risen to 60 percent in 2017 (Stokes, 2017). Additionally, the Dow Jones Industrial Average Index was, on Donald Trump’s 100th day, up over 12 percent since the election day (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.).

The second-most appealing promise by Donald Trump doing the presidential campaign was the promise to repeal and replace the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act,
Obamacare (see Q8 in appendix C). According to Donald Trump, Obamacare is a “costly, ludicrous solution to our health care woes” (Trump, 2016, p. 21). As pointed out by Ehrenreich (2008) & (2011) poses a major threat to the overall well-being of Americans and so many others point out, health care poses a major threat to the well-being of ordinary Americans – for the first time since 1933, life expectancy declined in 2016, particularly for men (Bernstein, 2016). As for the job-creation, as mentioned above, the solution to the health care problem is not going to be state-substituted. Instead, the solution is to be found within the private sector and the free market and open competition play a central role: “We need to fix the problem by creating competition in the private sector between insurance companies, and by allowing patients to choose the family doctor they want. It will be a much better plan, a much less costly plan” (Trump, 2016, p. 16). The logic goes as follows: competition among insurance companies will press the price downwards and thus more people can afford to take out an insurance policy. Similarly, open competition between doctors and medical companies will make doctor visits cheaper and make price on medicine go down. Donald Trump has further expressed that he was open to cut cost of the federal health care program of the elder, Medicare. While this solution will cut costs for both corporations and the federal government, there is no guarantee that competition will make health care more available to the American population. As of Donald Trump’s 100th day in office, there is no progress in regard to health care.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth most popular promises by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign are related to immigration (see Q8 in appendix C), which as mentioned in the previous chapter, is related to the growing job insecurity among middle class Americans. In the exit poll, when asked about the most important issue America is facing a majority of people who voted for Clinton answered either “foreign policy” or “economy”. In contrast, the majority of people who voted for Donald Trump answered either “immigration” or “terrorism” (CNN, 2016). In the opinion of almost one-third of the people who voted for Donald Trump, the promises in regard to immigration are positively received (see Q6 in appendix C). The appeal of Donald Trump’s immigration policies likely varies from voter to voter and could be grounded in one or more of the following: concern over jobs, rising crime rates, fear of a terrorist attack on American soil, concern over the increasing federal costs associated with
immigration, or it could be racially motivated. Historically, the United States has always been a racially divided country, which also was apparent in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, as previously discussed.

The most popular among Donald Trump’s promises in regard to immigration, is the following promise: “I will build a great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall. Mark my words” (Trump, 2016, p. 43). The idea behind the wall is to effectively end the continuous flow of illegal immigrants that cross the American-Mexican border, because according to Donald Trump, “a country that doesn’t control its border can’t survive” (Trump, 2016, p. 61). As of Donald Trump’s 100th day in office, there are not yet any concrete plans to build the wall, but several ideas have been submitted to the Department of Homeland Security (Isidore, 2017).

The second-most popular promise on immigration was a promise to temporarily ban Muslims from entering the United States (see Q8 in appendix C). During his first 100 days in office, Donald Trump has successfully managed to impose a controversial temporary ban on travelers from seven Muslim countries which are identified as sources of terror, the countries affected by the ban are Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen (Foster, 2017). Note, that Saudi Arabia was exempted from the ban list although most hijackers from the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Towers and Pentagon were Saudis. Further note that Donald Trump registered eight new companies in Saudi Arabia during the election campaign (Foster, 2017).

Assuming that Donald Trump builds a wall at the American-Mexican border, successfully deports illegal immigrants in the United States, successfully alters welfare programs so they become unavailable to illegal immigrants, and successfully hinders possible Muslim terrorists from entering the country, these initiatives will hardly bring any economic relief to the American middle class.

Insisting that the way to make America great and to improve the lives of ordinary Americans must be achieved by enhance the competitive advantage in the United States in the global economy, it is very unlikely that the minimum wage should be increased during the Trump presidency. But Donald Trump has taken other steps to provide some economic relief to American workers. From the tax reform plan, all Americans can look forward to tax cuts, and those earning less than $25.000 will be
completely exempted from paying income tax, which according to the Trump administration will mean that income tax will be eliminated for over 73 million households. Further the death tax will be removed (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc). Relief for the American middle class cannot be expected to come in the form of welfare programs, as Donald Trump has set out to downsize and streamline the federal government. Instead, Donald Trump supports the fundamental idea on which America was build; that equal opportunity should be provided to all with education as the creator of opportunity. According to Trump, public education in the United States is an embarrassment: “We’ve dumbed down the curriculum to the lowest common denominator; in many schools, we’ve eliminated grading entirely and diplomas have been practically devalued into certificates of attendance,” (Trump, 2016, p. 87) and the political correctness in public schools worries him: “We’re more concerned about kids having self-esteem and feeling good about themselves than we are about preparing them for real life. Our children will fail America if we don’t do something about it.” (Trump, 2016, p. 87). And the solution, according to Donald Trump is for the government to completely withdraw from education: “Let schools compete for kids. I guarantee that if you forced schools to get better or close because parents didn’t want to enroll their kids there, they would get better. Those schools that weren’t good enough to attract students would close, and that’s a good thing.” (Trump, 2016, p. 91). There are not any concrete plans to either improve or privatize the American system of public education yet.

Further, Trump has promised to put an end to the ever-rising costs of college education: “A four-year degree today can be expensive enough to create six-figure debt. We can't forgive these loans, but we should take steps to help students.” (Trump, 2016, pp. 97-98). The root of the problem, according to Trump (2016) is the federal government: “There is no reason the federal government should profit from student loans. This only makes an already difficult problem worse. The Federal Student Loan Program turned a $41.3 billion profit in 2013.” (p. 98). While Donald Trump’s promises on education will not provide immediate relief for the American middle class, they could improve the chances of upward mobility, given that there are jobs in the other end.
Because of the hypothesis of this paper, that the deteriorating social and economic situation of the American middle class gave rise to the social movement behind the election of Donald Trump, it is curious to find that relatively few campaign promises seem to provide immediate relief for the American middle class. Donald Trump’s politics do not resemble Roosevelt’s New Deal, which actively addressed unemployment and poverty, rather they resemble Ronald Reagan’s neoliberalist politics, which, as illustrated through this thesis, were the direct cause of the deteriorating state of the American middle class and the rising inequality.

Most American do not believe that Donald Trump as President will improve the lives of middle class Americans. Where Clinton voters think that the situation will worsen, Trump voters are only hopeful that the situation will improve (see Q21 in appendix C). Did Donald Trump win, based on hope? The exit poll, as illustrated in figure 21, show that where people who voted for Hillary Clinton were most concerned about candidate qualities concerning judgement and experience, people how voted for Donald Trump were, in contrast mostly concerned about the candidates’ ability to bring change.

Donald Trump has, in his first 100 days in office, proved that he is capable of decisive action. In his first 100 days, Donald Trump has signed 13 Review Acts, which is more than any President in the American history. Further, Donald Trump has signed 32 executive orders, which is more than any other President since Roosevelt. In comparison, Obama signed 19 executive orders in his first 100 days. And finally, Donald Trump has signed 28 bills into law in his first 100 days in office, which is more
than any President since Eisenhower. In comparison, Obama signed 11 bills into law in his first 100 days (Donald J. Trump for President, Inc.).

**Sub-conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to provide a brief overview of the campaign promises made by Donald Trump during the presidential campaign period that appealed most to the voters. Moreover, this chapter has evaluated a selective range of President Trump’s political actions during his first 100 days as President of the United States.

This chapter concludes that relatively few campaign promises made by Donald Trump are directed at providing direct economic or social relief for the American middle class that voted for him. The renewed prosperity for the American middle class is to come from the neoliberal idea of free markets and open competition where productivity gains will trickle down to the workers - an economic theory that has only so far worsened the living standards for middle class Americans. Finally, this chapter has suggested, that rather than actually believing that Donald Trump will provide positive changes for the American middle class, the American middle class based their vote for Donald Trump on hope. Hope that he would make their lives better, or at least that they would not worsen further.
7. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this thesis has been to produce explanatory research concerning the electoral outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the connection to the deteriorating state of the American middle class. Firstly, in regard to the research question, it was found that a social stigma against voting for Donald Trump derived from lack of political experience and discriminatory and atypical governance behavior combined with wrong predictions of the turnout among different demographic groups misled poll makers. Additionally, it was found that the same characteristics of the Republican nominee that produced the social stigma also were the characteristics that appealed most to voters. Secondly, in regard to the research question, it was found that mostly white, religious, middle-aged men who live in poor, rural areas working middle-class jobs that do not require a college degree voted for Donald Trump. Third and finally, in regard to the research question, it was found that cultural assumptions combined with growing middle-class insecurity and growing dissatisfaction with previous administrations, motivated people to vote for Donald Trump.

In order to answer the research question, it was found relevant to obtain a theoretical understanding of U.S. culture, which can point towards underlying motivations that can explain the observed behavior. Moreover, it was found relevant to obtain a theoretical understanding of the two most common sources of social movements: class struggles and identity issues, which could explain the social movement behind the election of Donald Trump. Finally, a theoretical understanding of neoliberalism was relevant in regard to understand the political and economic discourse of the United States.

There are a number of limitations to this thesis. Firstly, it is worth stressing that, given the nature of the research, the findings presented in this thesis are generalizations and thus not context-specific. Secondly, it is worth mentioning that the misjudgment of the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential electoral by poll makers calls into question the trustworthiness of quantitative data, upon which this study relied.

Additionally, this thesis has laid the foundation for a number of future studies, some of which are mentioned next. Firstly, while this thesis has discussed a selective range of
the political achievements of Donald Trump during the first 100 days in office, it seems relevant and interesting, when time is due, to evaluate Donald Trump’s time as President and to analyze the social and economic consequences of his politics. Secondly, future research concerning social and political consequences of the growing polarization of various demographic groups in the U.S. such as gender, race, as illustrated in this thesis seems a relevant and interesting topic. Thirdly, future research concerning the use and role of social media in American elections both by political candidates but also by the news media is a relevant and interesting study. Fourth, the rhetoric by Donald Trump should allegedly have increased bullying and discriminatory behavior in the United States, for example among students, and it would make for a very interesting study to attempt to confirm or deny this. Fifth and finally, it would be very relevant study to compare the election of Donald Trump to Brexit and the increasing popularity of right-wing, nationalist parties across Europe and to either confirm or deny that they carry some resemblance.
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Appendix A: Questionnaire Part I

What's your name?

How old are you?

What's your profession?

Did you vote in the 2016 election?

Yes

Who did you vote for?

Clinton

Why did you vote for Clinton? (chose from list)

Did you vote for Trump? (chose from list)

Why did you vote for Trump? (chose from list)

Other

Did people know you voted for Trump? (Chose from list)

Why do you think Trump won?

Other

Were you surprised that Trump won?

Why do you think Trump won?

What is your impression of Trump? (Scale 0-10)

How do you think Trump is doing so far? (scale 0-10)

Other

Did you vote for Trump? (chose from list)

Why did you vote for Trump? (chose from list)

Other

What is your impression of Trump? (Scale 0-10)

How do you think Trump is doing so far? (scale 0-10)

No

Why not?

Other

Were you surprised that Trump won?

Why do you think Trump won?

Other

What is your impression of Trump? (Scale 0-10)

How do you think Trump is doing so far? (scale 0-10)
Appendix B: Questionnaire Part II

1. Does America provide equal opportunity for all? (y/n)
2. Is the American Dream* attainable for all? (choose from list)
3. Within the last 5 years, have you been either involuntarily unemployed or underemployed? (y/n)
4. Have you or anyone you know, within the last 5 years, been fired as a result of business closure, business relocation or job/staff cuts? (y/n)
5. Assessing your own economic situation, would you say that you are better off now than you were 5 years ago? (choose from list)
6. Are you content with your current living standard? (choose from list)
7. Is inequality rising? (y/n)
8. Should the wealth be more equally distributed? (y/n)
9. Will Donald Trump, in his time as president, improve the lives of working- and middle-class Americans? (choose from list)

*The dream of a steady job with decent pay and health benefits, rising living standards, a home of your own, a secure retirement, and the hope that your children will enjoy a better future.
Appendix C: Results of Questionnaire Part I & II

In the following, the results of the quantitative research questionnaire are presented. To preserve the anonymity of the participating subjects, information of identification is exempted, but can be provided upon request.

Q1: How old are you?
69 out of 69 people answered this question

![Age distribution chart]

Q2: Did you vote in the 2016 general election?
69 out of 69 people answered this question

![Voting participation chart]

Q3: Why not?
2 out of 69 people answered this question
➢ I’m not interested in politics
➢ I missed the local deadline

Q4: Who did you vote for?
67 out of 69 people answered this question

![Candidate preference chart]
Q5: Why did you vote for Hillary Clinton?
48 out of 69 people answered this question

Q6: Why did you vote for Donald Trump?
14 out of 69 people answered this question

Q7: Did your friends and family know you voted for Donald Trump?
14 out of 69 people answered this question
Q8: Which Trump campaign promises do you agree with?
14 out of 69 people answered this question

Q9: Were you surprised that Donald Trump won?
67 out of 69 people answered this question

Q10: What is your general impression of Donald Trump?
67 out of 69 people answered this question
Rating on a scale from 0-10, 0=repulsive, 10=admirable
Q11: How do you think Donald Trump is doing so far (as President)?
67 out of 69 people answered this question
Rating on a scale from 0-10, 0=much worse than expected, 5=as expected, 10=much better than expected

Q12: Why do you think Donald Trump won the election?
67 out of 69 people answered this question
Clinton voters:

- Trump won because the people who supported Clinton did not get out and vote. She did not get the votes that Obama got.
- Many voters were looking for a change and viewed Trump as the answer. Many who voted for Trump did so based on emotion. Many just didn’t want to vote for Clinton.
- There are some people who are uninformed--many people said Hillary lied, but Donald Trump lied over 75% of the time, while Hillary's "lies" were approximately 37%
- He scammed the voters
- He lied to the right political base. He manipulated his voters.
- He committed treason by colluding with the Russians - likely with the president of Russia Vladimir Putin
- Ignorant voters.
- Russian involvement
- I think he won because of the electoral college system. He did not win the popular vote.
- So many people who didn't support Trump didn't vote. Years of anti-Hillary lies from the right. Fearful people who want the US to return to a golden time for white people turned out to vote for Trump.
- It was stolen
- I really don't know
- He played to the most base instincts of people. I believe the hyper-political correctness has resulted in this backlash. He is white and rich and his voter base wants to be like him but never will be.
- An ignorant and fearful population.
- I believe Trump won for a variety of reasons. The primary margin of victory in three states was roughly 89,000 votes in PA, WI, and MI. 89,000 votes in these three states counted more than 2,000,000+ votes in California, and New York. This is the first and simplest reason. The second reason is that I believe Hillary was put at a disadvantage in the weeks leading up to the election when James Comey released information regarding her email investigation. This, coupled with the preponderance of negative social media propaganda (fake news) from non-substantiated and possibly Russian sources surrounding Hillary, pushed more of the undecided vote in rural areas towards Donald Trump. I believe these people saw him as a change from the typical political machine in WA. Thirdly, the Democrats were out campaigned, especially in the later weeks of the election and spent too much of their physical time in large cities, and ignored rural areas in mid-western states, the very states they lost.
- Those who voted for him were misled and manipulated. Thought he'd provide a better life.
He appealed to the people who voted for him.
Cause he lied on his position on issues
Because people are gullible, fearful, and selfish and believed his lies.
There are many reasons, all creating a perfect storm of opportunity. One of the biggest is the way the media increasingly portrays elections as a "horse race," favoring perceived closeness for better ratings. Additionally they gave Trump excessive coverage and we're too afraid of being accused of bias that they continuously presented his and Hillary's ideas as false equivalents. Add to that the growing resentment of poor whites and the scapegoating of blacks and immigrants...you have rural whites definitely seeing a decline in jobs, wages and general support for recession recovery while Obama was president. They hear the economy is doing well and they don't see it. Trump and Co. seized that opportunity to turn that anger against minorities and urban dwellers. And then of course there's Republicans, salivating over the possibility of controlling the house, Senate and white house, that they were willing to endorse anyone. Plus they couldn't possibly endorse Hillary, a victim of decades long smear campaigns, primarily because she is female and dare be powerful and not demure and soft. Sexism cannot be underplayed here either. She couldn't win...too shrill, too restrained, do this but not that but also don't do that. As a woman I know the contradictory ideals we are told to strive for. And I know the penalties for stepping out of bounds are strong and engrained in our culture. Particularly for the GOP, whose top powerful women tend to all be young, white and conventionally attractive. They tend to disappear when they are no longer pretty to look at. And then, on top of all that, you have definite shady activity from Russia. Obviously we don't know the extent of it, but Trump and Putin are clearly on good terms.

1. Poor and undereducated people voted emotionally and against their best interest 2. The near consensus that Russian efforts and Trump teams collusion is very damning. I mean come on, Michael Flynn is asking for immunity.

People are unhappy.
Promises to blue collar workers
Bigots coming out of the woodwork
I still don't know why.
I think some didn't want a woman and some didn't want a politician. And I think the rest were blind.
Electoral College is a flawed way of voting for President - he lost the popular vote by almost 3 million votes, after all. Also, Trump lied to conservative rural white folks to get them to vote against their own self-interests and at the expense of many other Americans unlike themselves.

He tapped into a lot of hate and ignorance
Because people are racist assholes
Hillary was very unpopular and people didn't care he was unqualified since he was not her
Americans are paranoid. Paranoid people act irrationally.
False promises
His strategy.
People respected his "honesty"
People are sick of politicians. His negatives were relatively ignored by people who liked that he spoke his mind and made big promises. I'm trying to not buy into the idea that Russia helped him in some way without solid evidence, but I'm starting to think there was some shady work going on there as well.

Individuals who have never voted before came out in masses. Many people who did not favor either candidate did not vote. DT rhetoric is un"presидентed" and engaged new voters
The rural communities
People did not won't to vote for Hillary because she is a "crook". They heard what they wanted to hear from trump and thought he was being truthful.
I think he won because a segment of the US population will only vote along party lines instead of taking time to educate themselves about the most qualified candidate. I think working class, uneducated Americans who wanted a quick fix believed the lies Trump told
and excused his deplorable behavior because they'd rather have a despicable man in the White House over a qualified woman.

- Backlash from majority of White population due to internalized racism, him preying on people's ignorance (promising things that are impossible), sexism for not wanting a woman president, fake news.
- Fake news stories spread in rural communities
- People didn't want to vote for Hillary
- He likely won due to deep rooted divides in the country and an overall lack of desire to understand and/or inability to articulate differences in a productive and meaningful.
- I think many people felt Obama was too liberal, so people voted in the opposite direction.
- I think at the time some people were enamored by Trump's celebrity. The bad publicity with the clintob email scandals on the news all the time through summer of 2016 Clinton really didn't stand a chance.
- The media.
- A combination of rhetoric that common-senseified immigration reform, normalized nationalism, and lies and distortions regarding certain policies from the Obama Administration.
- Populism, and the electoral college

**Trump voters:**

- He appealed to deplorable people like me.
- He was by far the better choice than Clinton.
- He’s not an establishment candidate
- He wasn't Hillary Clinton and she didn't get the groups out Obama did
- Because he ran on solid principles, common sense approach to issues important to voters and voters could not trust Clinton and her obvious lies
- Because America wants get to back the Basics of the working people and not make it a free life that no one works for
- Because people are sick of globalist running our lives. We can see through there bullshit. Donald Trump has called them out and will eventually bring them down. The days of the globalest elites is over!!!
- Something different
- People were tired of the same old issues never being taken care of. He offered something different, he offered a businessman approach.
- People didn't trust Hilary and they chose the "lesser", in their opinion, of two evils.
- I think a lot of people voted for him just to keep Clinton out.
- People wanted change.
- He spoke to people that felt stifled by liberals
- I don't think America wanted to see the Clinton family in the white house again. Also, I think the majority of the population forgets Clinton/Trump were not the only options.

**Other voters:**

- He was something different (not a politician), and the possibility a lot of voters didn't want a female POTUS.
- He won because he applied to the redneck society.
- Wish I had an answer to this so that we could find a way to never let it happen again.
- I think he won because he wasn't part of the establishment. He promised to do away with a lot of things that Republicans had been angry about Obama enforcing, even though he didn't have concrete plans of how to do it. He played on people's fears about the direction our country was going in.
- Political ignorance and an under-educated nation.
Q13: Does America provide equal opportunity for all?
69 out of 69 people answered this question

Q14: Is the American dream attainable for all?
69 out of 69 people answered this question
Q15: Have you been either involuntarily unemployed or underemployed, within the last 5 years?
69 out of 69 people answered this question

Q16: Have you or anyone you know, been fired as a result of business closure, business relocation, or job/staff cuts, within the last 5 years?
69 out of 69 people answered this question

Q17: Assessing your own economic situation, would you say you are better off today than you were 5 years ago?
69 out of 69 people answered this question
Q18: Are you content with your current living standard?  
69 out of 69 people answered this question

Q19: In your opinion, is inequality rising (i.e. the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer)?  
69 out of 69 people answered this question
Q20: In your opinion, should the wealth be more equally distributed?
69 out of 69 people answered this question

Q21: In your opinion, will Donald Trump, in his time as President, improve the lives of middle-class Americans?
69 out of 69 people answered this question
Appendix D: Record Low Presidential Approval Rating of Donald Trump

This figure illustrates the record low presidential approval rating of President Trump, at the time of inauguration, in comparison with U.S. Presidents over the past 60 years. Donald Trump beats the former most disliked President, George W. Bush, by 20 points.

![Presidential Approval Ratings](source)

Source: (Gallup, 2017)

Appendix E: Male, Bread-winner Families Replaced by Two-income Families

This figure shows the percentage of “tradition” and two-income families from 1970-1997 and illustrated that the former has been replaced by the latter.

![Percentage Distribution](source)

Source: (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014)
Appendix F: Average Weekly Working Hours Increase

This figure shows the index of aggregate work hours from 1964-2012.

Source: (Leicht & Fitzgerald, 2014)

Appendix G: Americans Have Stopped Saving

This figure shows U.S. net savings as a percentage of gross national income from 1947-2017.

Source: (Economic Research, 2017)