

## US Presidential Election: The Trump Presidency

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Historical: this was the most frequent description used for the 2016 presidential elections even during the campaign. The unusually good performance of some presidential candidates - Bernie Sanders on the left and Donald Trump on the right - revealed that a substantial part of the American society was keen on having fundamental changes, and was looking for an anti-establishment politician. However, as most polls before the elections indicated that Democratic candidate Mrs. Hillary Clinton would emerge as the winner of the elections, the clear victory - at least in the electoral colleges, but not in the public votes - of Republican candidate Donald Trump had the world caught by surprise.

The frustration with the so-called established politicians and traditional parties is neither a new, nor a special feature of the U.S. society. Anti-establishment politicians and parties are gaining ground in Europe as well. Yet, the victory of Republican candidate Donald Trump (portraying himself as an anti-establishment politician) signals that he has touched on something vital when claimed to “make America great again”.

“I do not believe in the American dream any more” - Steven Tong, a second-generation Vietnam- American was quoted by The New York Times last summer. He was nine, when his parents fled to California. Without any special skills or schooling, they were able to find a stable job and afford a house in an affluent neighbourhood in San José. They have fulfilled the American dream, became respected members of the community. However, their son, at 46, lives at home, as he is unable to finance or even rent a decent home for himself. Steven Tong had his own dreams, too, wanted to become a designer but as he could not finance his studies, had to settle for simpler jobs.- Today everything is about Facebook and the social media. If you do not work in this sector you have no chance to find a job - complained Steven Tong to NYT. Although he did not see himself as a typical Trump-voter, he confessed that Trump’s words about ‘making America great’ resonated well with his feelings.

It is a hotly debated issue whether the American dream has been lost or it was just Mr. Trump who exaggerated the difficulties in the last decade in order to benefit from it politically. Somewhat simplified, the notion of the American dream means that if you are persistent and work hard, you can progress in life. This idea had motivated generations of Americans and immigrants. The American Dream implies a good and secure job, an own house, a contribution to your children’s schooling, and a retirement without debts. According to Pew Research, some 64 percent of the U.S. society still believe that hard work is enough to move forward. However, other statistics are not so rosy: those who were born into the lowest 20 percent (income-wise) have ten times more chance to remain there than to reach the top 20 percent. The social elevator, in other words, social mobility is not working as previously. The researchers of Harvard and Berkely also concluded that the vast majority of the young generation remained in the same social layer where they were born to.

Another concern is the growing polarization of the American society. The famous American middle class is shrinking and it does not comprise the majority of the society any more: according to Pew Research data, in 2015 only 120,8 million adults belonged to this category, as opposed to the 121,3 million, who constituted - comprised - the low or the high segments. The gap between the rich and the

poor is increasing. In the seventies, the high-income group enjoyed 2,5 times more income as the middle class, today the ratio is 7. The gap increased especially fast in the last 15 years, when 80 percent of Americans had to face a stagnation or a decline of their incomes, as written by the Brookings Institute. A clear sign of declining living standards is the change in the real estate market: whereas the majority of the Americans tended to own a house in the 1980s, the ratio of those renting (while not being able to afford to buy) is growing again. This trend is partly responsible for skyrocketing rent prices, and contributes to a growing anger and frustration, which could be summarized as: no matter how much I work, I cannot afford decent living conditions for my family.

Polarization applies geographically and professionally, as well. In the East and the West coast and primarily in the Silicon Valley, in the financial and tech sectors wages are growing fast and perspectives are bright. However, in the old Rust Belt region and in the agricultural-manufacturing areas there is a striking shortage of labour opportunities. Even skilled workers have to face the problem that their knowledge is eroding fast in a digital, global world. Secure jobs are an illusion: 40 percent of Americans are only contracted for a specific time, and will have to face longer or shorter times of unemployment during their lives. One-fifth of the employees have to take on a second ( or in cases, even a third) job, to earn enough money for a living. Thinking about a peaceful retirement - another cornerstone of the American dream - is not something they can afford...

The winners of the last few decades are clearly the older (above 65), married Americans with university degree, whose income and wealth both increased. Some of the African-Americans, who were supported by a wide range of social programs emerge also winners. The losers are however, mostly the young and those who lack higher education. According to the data of the US Ministry of Education, their number is growing: even the majority (60%) of students from middle-class families drop out of college, one third of them blaming financial reasons. It is increasing difficult to pay the horrendous tuition fees without the financial support of the parents, who are, in some cases, also losing stable employment. This might be the single most pressing problem of the U.S. society: the excessively high tuitions of a good education. If young people become disillusioned and social mobility is restricted by finances, the American Dream is soon dead.

Globalization has emerged as a scapegoat for all difficulties. NAFTA, the North-American Free Trade Agreements, is blamed for stealing the jobs, or China, for producing much cheaper than the U.S wages. According to World Bank economists, Branko Milanovic and Christoph Lakner, income levels have grown by 24 percent globally between 1988 and 2008, but it was distributed very unevenly. The winners were the BRIC countries, and their middle class (and of course, the global rich), while those benefiting the least were the poor in the so-called developed countries, especially in the U.S and the UK. However, their income has also grown, but to a much lesser extent, thus their perception is that they the losers of globalization. The numbers are much debated and they are prior to the financial crisis, which affected mostly the middle-class and poor of the rich countries - making them open to anti-globalisation and anti-establishment slogans.



In our short analysis of the 2016 presidential election we can conclude: the next President of the United States is called Donald Trump and the Republicans will have a majority in the Senate and in the House as well. It is a revolution unfolding. But on a positive note, we may say that the deadlock of the American politics is over. A new America is emerging in front of our eyes, and it is yet to see how and to which extent President Trump will be able to fulfil his electoral promises and make America great again.

*The pre-study was prepared in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Café series supported by the Embassy of the United States of America.*

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