

Winand Gellner
Michael Oswald *Hrsg.*

Die gespaltenen Staaten von Amerika

Die Wahl Donald Trumps
und die Folgen
für Politik und Gesellschaft



Springer VS

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ISBN 978-3-658-19922-7 ISBN 978-3-658-19923-4 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-19923-4>

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Springer VS

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Gedruckt auf säurefreiem und chlorfrei gebleichtem Papier

Springer VS ist Teil von Springer Nature

Die eingetragene Gesellschaft ist Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH

Die Anschrift der Gesellschaft ist: Abraham-Lincoln-Str. 46, 65189 Wiesbaden, Germany

Vorwort: Die USA nach den Wahlen

Der Präsidentschaftswahlkampf des Jahres 2016 markiert einen Höhepunkt der politischen Polarisierung in den USA. Die letztlich doch überraschende Wahl Donald Trumps und die Beinahe-Kandidatur von Bernie Sanders stehen dabei für eine Radikalisierung des politischen Lebens auf entgegengesetzten politischen Flügeln. Der damit einhergehende Verlust der Mitte mag allerdings nur für diejenigen verwunderlich sein, die die tief greifende politische Spaltung des Landes über die letzten Jahrzehnte nicht zur Kenntnis genommen haben. Die Radikalisierung der politischen Ideologien in der Folge der geradezu kulturrevolutionären Entwicklungen Mitte und Ausgangs der 1960er Jahre hat im Besonderen bei konservativen Gruppierungen zu einer nachhaltigen Entfremdung vom Ideal einer zwar pluralen, gleichzeitig aber gemeinsam handelnden Nation („e pluribus unum“) geführt. Das Gefühl, dass Minderheiten jedweder Art den Puls des politischen Lebens bestimmten, hat bei den vermeintlichen Verlierern dieses Wandels eine Entfremdung und damit Abwendung vom politischen System ausgelöst. Dabei sind es im Wesentlichen konservative/fundamentalistisch-religiöse Bewegungen am Rand der Gesellschaft gewesen, die, unterstützt von potenten Geldgebern in einem Geflecht von Interessengruppen, Think Tanks und Medien (Fox News), den von einer vermeintlich liberalen Elite geprägten politischen Diskurs zu verändern suchten. Geschah dies in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren noch eher verdeckt, ist spätestens mit der Präsidentschaft George W. Bushs ein extremer Kampf um die Deutungshoheit ideologisch-kultureller Lebensvorstellungen entstanden. Auch wenn Barack Obama zu Beginn seiner Präsidentschaft behauptet hatte, dass er die von ihm klar diagnostizierte Spaltung des Landes aufheben wolle, war doch aufmerksamen Beobachtern von vornherein klar, dass die Präsidentschaft eines dunkelhäutigen Amerikaners die latent oder auch offen ausgetragenen vorhandenen Ressentiments gegenüber ethnischen und sozialen Minderheiten wieder befeuern würden. Die Radikalisierung des politischen Lebens ist nur klarer erkennbar geworden,

angelegt war sie bereits seit dem Konflikt um die Bürgerrechtsbewegung und dem vermeintlichen ideologischen Sieg der liberalen West- und Ostküsteneliten. Die vor allem durch Donald Trump personifizierten, symbolischen Zielrichtungen lauten: Zurück zu den heilen 1950er Jahren, als im Besonderen das weiße (im Besonderen männliche) Bürgertum sich noch seines sozioökonomischen und gesellschaftlichen Stellenwerts bewusst war. Andererseits repräsentiert der überraschend große Erfolg Bernie Sanders' die Wünsche nach Verwirklichung nach einer radikalen, völligen Gleichstellung aller politischen und kulturellen Lebensstile. Der Befund einer nach wie vor virulenten Benachteiligung im Besonderen schwarzer Bevölkerungsgruppen vervollständigt dieses Bild.

Vor diesem Hintergrund haben wir im Februar 2017 in Passau einen Blick auf den Wahlkampf und seine Ergebnisse geworfen sowie breitere Fragen zur aktuellen Politischen Kultur der USA vor dem Hintergrund der Polarisierung, Fragmentarisierung und Ideologisierung des amerikanischen politischen Lebens gestellt. Diese diskutierten wir mit namhaften Experten. Die Ergebnisse präsentieren wir hier in aktualisierter Form (Stand der Beiträge: Frühsommer 2017).

Zu Beginn blickt John Robertson auf die Präsidentschaft Obamas zurück, um damit zu erklären, warum es – zumindest in Bezug auf den ersten dunkelhäutigen Präsidenten – zum Phänomen Trump gekommen ist. Michael Dreyer inspiert den Wahlkampf in Hinblick auf die Rolle des *Supreme Courts*, insbesondere die Möglichkeit mehrerer Neubesetzungen findet hierbei Beachtung. Die Rolle des Vizepräsidenten im Wahlkampf ist ein häufig vernachlässigtes Thema, daher nimmt sich Matthias Enders dieser Fragestellung an und beleuchtet dabei verschiedene Rollen, die der ‚Vize‘ einnehmen kann. Wichtig bei Wahlkämpfen in den USA ist auch das strategische Staging des Privatlebens der Kandidaten – Karsten Fitz betrachtet Donald Trumps Inszenierung im Vergleich zu früheren Kandidaten. Anderer Natur ist die Frage nach dem Einfluss von Wahlkampfspenden. Dieser geht Jörg Hebenstreit nach und er untersucht das Verhältnis von Wahlkampffinanzierung und den Erfolgen der Präsidentschaftskandidaten. Eine große Wirkung entfalten auch die Medien in solchen Wahlkämpfen. Curd Knüpfer versteht dabei Donald Trump gar als Medieneffekt, der aus einem ‚vierten Zeitalter‘ der politischen Kommunikation hervorging. Dem Kandidaten Trump wurde häufig zugeschrieben, einen Wahlkampf der ‚Nostalgie‘ zu führen. Warum diese Zuschreibung berechtigt ist und warum eine solche Strategie erfolgreich sein kann, erörtert Michael Oswald. Bernhard Stahl und Robin Lucke prognostizieren in Trumps America-First-Strategie eine Neuausrichtung in der amerikanischen Außenpolitik und sehen einen isolationistischen Kurs der USA voraus. Einen weiteren anstehenden Bruch mit der Politik der letzten Jahrzehnte verortet Andreas Falke in der Handelspolitik. Er schreibt dem von Trump versprochenen

Wandel einen Großteil seines Wahlerfolges zu. Neben der Wirtschafts- und Handelspolitik bestimmte noch ein weiteres Thema seinen Wahlkampf: Die Abwicklung von *Obamacare* und sein *Replacement* waren dabei Kernversprechen. Betsy Leimbigler beschreibt, wie es um die Gesundheitsversicherung und ihre Reform steht. Zudem zeigt die Autorin bestehende und noch zu erwartende Probleme auf. Die Unzufriedenheit der Amerikaner mit dem demokratischen System – und damit auch die Wahl Trumps – schreibt Christian Lammert einer Einkommens- und Wohlstandsungleichheit zu. Die USA seien nunmehr eine defekte Demokratie – viele Amerikaner fühlten sich vor allem nicht mehr angemessen von ihren Politikern repräsentiert. Auch Boris Vormann befasst sich mit dem Wandel des politischen Systems der USA von einer liberalen hin zu einer antiliberalen Demokratie. Dahinter sieht er einen allgemeinen Trend in westlichen Regierungssystemen: eine Abkehr vom Dritten Weg und eine neoliberale Verschiebung. Auch Josef Braml erkennt gravierende Defizite im politischen System. Er führt diese auf den hohen Einfluss von wirtschaftlichen Interessen zurück, insbesondere jenen aus der Finanzdienstleistung- sowie aus der Öl/Gas- und Rüstungsindustrie. Patrick Horst charakterisiert den Wahlsieg Trumps als populistische Revolte und zieht Parallelen zur Präsidentschaft Andrew Jacksons. Er schlussfolgert daraus mögliche Konsequenzen für die Zukunft der Republikanischen Partei. Christoph M. Haas widmet sich dem Einfluss der steigenden Polarisierung auf die Parlamentsarbeit und geht hierbei insbesondere auf Änderungen in Geschäftsordnungen und Verfahren ein. David Sirakov schließt den Band mit einem allgemeinen Blick auf die zunehmende Polarisierung im US-Kongress ab. Er betrachtet die Effekte dieser Entwicklung in Hinblick auf die Gesetzgebung und Wahlkämpfe. Allen Autoren und Teilnehmern der Tagung gilt unser herzlichster Dank. Nicht zu vergessen das Team am Lehrstuhl für Politikwissenschaft: Monika Öhler hat sich vorbildlich um die Organisation der Tagung gekümmert; Thomas Eibl, Carolin Stötzl und Dr. Michael Weigl haben zuverlässig Korrektur gelesen, Judith Heckenthaler übernahm die Formatierung des Bandes.

Prof. Dr. Winand Gellner
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Aftershock or Shock Wave? An Assessment of the 2016 Presidential Election from the Perspective of the ‘Obama Legacy’

John D. Robertson

Abstract

This paper explores the hypothesis that the 2016 presidential electoral outcome reflected a momentum building over the course of the eight years of the Obama era burdened by the hardening struggle of polarized politics, sharply divided political parties and a public energized by identity politics. Examining data over the course of three election cycles—2008–2016—and drawing on electoral vote results at the county level, this paper provides evidence to support the final conclusion that the stunning outcome delivered in the early morning hours of November 9, 2016 to the American public was indeed an aftershock to a previous building pressure. These pressures were emanating from an electorate growing increasingly less willing to endorse the Obama legacy shaped around notions of post-partisan republicanism and principled pluralism.

Keywords

Presidential legacy · Identity politics · Principled pluralism · Post-partisanship · Polarization · American elections · Electoral coalitions · Partisanship · Demographic change

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1 Introduction

In the preliminary edition of this volume, I offered a framework for interpreting the strategy guiding the Obama administration's quest for a preferred legacy. By preferred legacy I mean that which is intended by Obama and his supporters to grow from the evidence he preferred and one which would enjoy a positive and sustained endurance over time as a significant contribution to changing the direction of the American republic, and not a legacy crafted by historians or commentators that would blur the focus on the achievements Obama and his supporters valued. The main thesis in this paper was that one could discern an implied strategy for shaping a legacy by the Obama presidency constructed around navigating the partisan polarization and cleavages that had grown sharply during the previous decade or so. With a clear Rawlsian concept of justice built around moral equals tempered with sound reason and a firm dedication to the "difference principle", Obama, I claimed, had tried to blend his vision of republicanism, liberalism, pragmatic policy and social justice in a way as to present in effect four different presidency narratives (Robertson 2016). Such a complex and multi-dimensional strategic narrative in effect merely aggravated old divisions and cleaved some new ones. It was my conclusion that this strategy of legacy construction was in danger of collapsing from the weight of its inconsistencies stemming from the contradictions commonly perceived by both his supporters and his opponents. In what follows I wish to extend that earlier effort by examining what we can take away from the 2016 presidential election as evidence and assessment of the electoral success of that strategy and reflect on what it might mean for the near term future. It is my conclusion that Obama's legacy never regained the altitude lost between 2008 and 2012, nor did the divisions he sought to rectify merge into a unified vision of an America consistent with his early aspirations. The election of 2016 was the logical extension of a momentum set in motion eight years earlier that expressed the inherent divisions in society built around hardening identity conflicts impenetrable to Obama's vision of a moderate healing in the face of a liberal economic order.

One might draw the impression from the aftermath of the 2016 election that the surprising outcome is frequently described in terms consistent with a political "aftershock". This metaphor suggests an electoral outcome analogous to a sudden burst of change eliciting in its wake a general sense of astonishment and surprise generated by the unexpected result itself. In order to better appreciate and to place into a more realistic assessment the degree of success delivered by a strategy of legacy pursued by the Obama administration, this paper offers a refined metaphorical description of the election of 2016. The data suggests the election of 2016

is best understood as a “shockwave” describing not a sudden moment of break and explosion and therefore eliciting a shocking alteration of reality, but instead is better understood as the result of the building force moving forward from an earlier event and emanating from the pressure of that earlier event through the accumulation of momentum from the energy absorbed by subsequent developments along the way. The distant event pushing the shock wave was really 2008, not 2016, and the election results are better understood as the manifestation of the power of that earlier event that has gained strength over the succeeding years. This paper suggests the momentum of this political shock wave has been pushed along from the sharp repercussions and the dramatic aftermath of a nation’s ongoing eight year struggle to come together around a vision the Obama administration wished to define as the Obama legacy. The “aftershock” metaphor suggests the Trump victory comes from a sudden buildup of pressure—quickly, surprisingly and uncontrollable. The “shockwave” metaphor imagines a mounting and persistent force of social and political pressure assisted by alignments of conflicting normative preferences and values perpetuated as mediums or sources of entropy push it forward. It cautions I reflect on a different interpretation of Trump: not the result of chaos, but of a muscular and indomitable process. Indeed, Trump is, as many have wisely noted, Obama’s lasting legacy, though not the legacy Obama envisioned.

This paper begins with a short reflection on the election’s basic results, then moves to a brief consideration of how the literature has drawn our attention to the sharp edges and raw wounds that became the boundaries of divisions within the American public over the demands, challenges and ultimately changes associated with the quest of Obama’s vision for a post-partisan, pragmatically progressive, and principled pluralist America. It will be concluded with an overview of what are arguably the more pertinent patterns of voter support for the Obama legacy from 2008 through 2016. Considered in the argumentation is county-level data and an observation of the steady retreat from what one might assume was a reasonable chance of the strategy of legacy construction to achieve success in 2008 to the eventual—at least a momentary—defeat.

The primary message to be offered in this study is that despite the focus on the unusual—an Electoral College win for Trump despite a popular vote triumph for Clinton—when viewed at the sub-national and sub-state level, the defeat of Clinton and the Democratic Party was profound and in fact, part of a trend that resonated across the period 2008–2016. At the aggregate national or state level the picture might look one way, at the more localized level, it was a harsh verdict rendered on the aspirations of a preferred legacy characterizing the Obama strategy since 2008.

2 The Deluge

Table A.1 presents the contours of the vote distributions for Clinton across key Democratic groups in the American public, based on updated exit polling reported by various sources. Across the range of indicators, Clinton was off from levels achieved by Obama in 2012 and 2008. She managed only 82% of black men, compared to Obama's 87% and 92% in 2012 and 2008, respectively. The level of support among latino women was eight percentage points down from Obama in 2012, four percent for white men, one percent from women, and five percent for youth (18–29 years). She achieved only one percent more votes among white women (43%) than Obama in 2012, and three percent less than Obama in 2008, and fell one percent among black women (95%). Most crucially, Whites in general, constituting about 67% of the American population, turned their back to the Democratic candidate in 2016, supporting Clinton with only 37%, compared to Obama's 41% in 2012 and 43% in 2008. Turnout rates on the whole were down to 55% for the electorate in 2016, from 60% in 2012 and 66% in 2008 (Pew Research Center 2016). Thus, on the whole, groups within the electorate stayed remarkably on course with their traditional “Red”/“Blue” preferences, denting the logic of a “non-ordinary” election. Ninety percent of Republicans who voted on November 8, 2016 cast their ballot for Trump; 89% of Democrats for Clinton. These figures resemble closely those of the 2008 and 2012 elections (Bartels 2016).

Aside from voting patterns of groups reflecting traditional patterns across Democratic and Republican groups, the overall pattern of incumbency effect held up. As well, ninety-seven percent of the 393 members of the House of Representatives that sought reelection in 2016 were returned to office, only eight losing in the general election itself in November 2016. Twenty-seven of the 29 Senators seeking reelection were reelected in the November general elections for an incumbency win-rate of 93%. Beyond the federal level, 80% of governors were successfully reelected. These reelection rates for the House, Senate and state Governorships were improvements over the Post-World War II rates of 94%, 84% and 78%, respectively. Hardly a populist house-cleaning, or a “draining of the swamp” (Kondik and Skelley 2016).

More telling than merely the pattern of group voting, the actual outcomes for official federal political offices distributed among Democrats and Republicans reflected an even more severe shock for Democrats. Table A.2 reports the outcome of major federal elections across the US in 2016. In contrast to their expectations in late October 2016 to win back the Senate, as well as hold the White

House, the Democrats lost both chambers of the US Congress, as well as suffered sharp declines in state legislative seats and chambers across the 50 US states throughout (Trende and Byler 2016).

The overall election result on November 8, 2016 was a remarkable across-the-board victory for Republicans and their headline candidate for president, Donald J. Trump. However, arguably, the bigger and more fundamental story of the election is what the election said of American's willingness to buy into the Obama legacy which he arguably preferred and his vision for the American republic. No one knows what propels the voter's preference—not so early on, at least. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the vote was a referendum on Obama's legacy (though not necessarily the man himself or the person of the President in particular).

Trump consistently and dramatically framed his campaign as an assault on the core legislative and foreign policy actions and preferences of the Obama administration, and Hillary Clinton who so clearly and avidly embraced the preferences and policies of the Obama administration. If seen in this light, the philosophy guiding the legacy of Obama was at risk for Obama, his supporters and to Clinton, and her supporters.

3 Defining the Obama Legacy

The core argument of this paper is that what in fact the Obama preferred legacy is and how it can be understood in terms of visions and ontological convictions must be kept at the forefront when one reflects on the outcome of the election and patterns of support expressed for the respective presidential candidates. This dictates what one looks for in the autopsy of this election. Let us parse out briefly an understanding of the preferred Obama legacy—the prize for Democrats at risk in the 2016 presidential elections.

Aside from the host of specific policies intended to institutionalize the legacy through law, the preferred legacy of the Obama administration was described by Milkis, Rhodes and Charnock as “overcoming the raw partisanship that had polarized the Washington community for nearly two decades and divided the country[...]” (Milkis et al. 2012). This strategy on the part of Obama and his presidency has entailed employing the powers of an administrative presidency to gradually build a progressive pragmatism through a process of tactical maneuvering between left and right along the partisan divide (Rudalevige 2016). A hallmark of the Obama era and the strategies during his legacy have been a clear effort

to move away from the traditional Democratic coalition groups that were the cornerstone of victories for Clinton in the 1992 and 1996, and Obama in 2008. This strategy required in 2008 moving closer to a grass roots movement within the country that were receptive to his post-partisan values and harness the energy through the 2008 campaign flowing from these groups as a result of the perceived minimalist role in the traditional Democratic Party. But, at the same time, once elected in 2008, Obama drew heavily on the powers of the executive system grown increasingly powerful within the constitutional balance of powers following the legacies of Bill Clinton (1993–2001) and George W. Bush (2001–2009). This only served to alienate three broader elements of his party.

First, it alienated the traditional liberal moderates and unions who grew impatient with Obama's pragmatic tactics which dictated pulling back from using the power of the executive as robustly as they believed the opportunity of Obama's election in 2008 and 2012 both allowed and dictated. And, second as well, the administrative presidential style of Obama as one of the core tools in the shaping of his legacy irritated and alarmed the left populist movement mobilized after 2008 which saw Obama's pragmatism as compromise with traditional power centers, including Wall Street, Republican congressional leadership, and paring back on pursuing a direct assault on economic inequality. And third, it displeased black Americans, who saw in Obama's pragmatism a willingness to ask too much of Blacks still suffering the lingering harsh effects of racism and discrimination in America. Not letting the "perfect" become the enemy of the "good" was hard to accept for many who felt the Bush years and those over the longer arc of time since Reagan had marked too much time or seen major setbacks to earlier gains.

To sustain the strategy, a clear and evident appeal to a civic theology characterized a crucial supporting component to the Obama legacy (Vidal 2016). Built on the foundation of an energized liberal clash of ideas and perspectives within a civil dialogue of tolerance and mutual respect, managed through solid republican ideals of constitutional balance and equilibrium, this cultural dimension of Obama's legacy has been explored in detail by Schumaker who has described it as "principled pluralism" (Schumaker 2016). Principled pluralism requires a post-partisan perspective—a republican or transcendent perspective that is an ontological framework de-legitimizing polarizing zero-sum contests.

Rather than reflecting the distribution of power brought to bear on behalf of various interests, political outcomes should (and can) reflect the common and emerging moral and political understandings of most people in a polity. To be supported and considered legitimate, decisions should be justified as reflecting appropriate principles that are accessible and acceptable to participants in decision-making and to the broader public affected by these decisions (ebd.).

The tempering of a strong executive-centered administration with principled pluralism only served to deepen the unmet expectations of his emerging coalition of post-partisan Americans.

If Obama hoped that this ambivalent partisanship would allow him to strengthen his political position and pave the way to a second term, he was to be sorely disappointed (Milkis et al. 2012, p. 58).

Tacking between principled compromise and republican confrontation have become the horns of a dilemma crippling the Obama presidency. As I have noted elsewhere, “squaring the circle has been made all the more daunting a task because of the broader political context which is colored by sharp partisan ideological division and separation deflating to some degree whatever strategy of political narrative and dialogue a Democratic and liberal president would ever offer with the hope of achieving some impact of change” (Robertson 2016).

For Milkis, Rhodes and Charnock,

Obama’s political difficulties have stemmed from his efforts to reconcile two competing approaches to presidential leadership—a venerable method of executive leadership exalting nonpartisan administration of the welfare and national security states, and an emergent style of partisan presidential leadership featuring vigorous efforts to accomplish party objectives. In so doing, he has sought to navigate the complex terrain of a “new American party system,” characterized by high expectations for presidential leadership in a context of widespread dissatisfaction with government, strong and intensifying political polarization, and high-stakes battles over the basic direction of domestic and military programs (Milkis et al. 2012, p. 58).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the vision coupling pragmatic progressivism and an active presidency on one hand with declarations and exhortations of principled pluralism built around civic liberalism and balanced republicanism on the other, was limited in appeal and effectiveness. Indeed, this controversial vision confronted resistance in direct proportion to the public’s continued embracing of partisan conflict structured along ideological polarized lines of narrative and value definition. In effect, the vision of Obama for a pragmatic government steering toward progressive solutions prudently contoured to conform to principled pluralist ideals of competing policy preferences was in itself preserving a structure to conflict that makes compromise costly and entailing endless collective action problems for representatives within a liberal democracy. Moving forward with a new post-partisan America as Obama wished at the outset of his presidency would be risky and difficult under any circumstances.

4 Identity Politics and the Counter-Legacy

But, at another level there was more to the legacy's deficits as being merely not robust enough for some Democrats and too laden with timidity for Republicans. The truly Olympian challenge standing in the path of the Obama strategy's goal of constructing a legacy built on pragmatism and principled pluralism is at its most fundamental the imperative need to temper and dilute the effect of identity politics. This was the pathway to post-partisanship and principled pluralism. This would legitimize the pragmatic progressivism allowing policy to be explored without cleaving the American public into intractable oppositions. Essentially, identity politics is the politics of groups—defined, reinforced and salient groups—whose members see themselves apart from other groups in terms of distinctive characteristics and defined needs and claims to rights and fungible resources. Identity politics is characterized by individuals within such a group who hold cognitive aspirations attached to clearly imagined resources, values and policies which they and members of like-minded identity hold to be salient and virtually indispensable to the social, political and cultural autonomy and dignity of the group and from which the person's sense of self-esteem and value sustains a need for belonging and security. "Identities are not primarily about adherence to a group ideology or creed. They are emotional attachments that transcend thinking" (Achen and Bartels 2016, p. 228). However, to the extent that identities separate one's viewpoint of the normative political landscape between those who are members of a group and those who are not, one's perceived group identity tends to accommodate the basic ingredients necessary for partisan conflict, partisan entrenched identity and reinforced ideological polarization. Whether reinforced through gender, ethnicity, race or status credentials, and energized by cognitive constructions of who we are and who we are not, coupled with some observance of who gets what and when from the arena of public affairs and political contents, social and political identity produce the headwinds within the political culture constraining the Obama legacies of post-partisan pragmatic preferences and principled pluralism (Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Greene 2014).

This threat and its potential impact on the integrity and coherence of the Obama legacy has drawn particular attention to attempts to assess the effect of Obama and his presidency on the racialization of politics in the United States during years of his presidency (Evans 2016). This, in turn, has brought concentrated attention closely on the matter of the rise of white identity as a reaction to the reality of American's first African-American president. Understood as a "process [...] whereby racial attitudes and race are brought to bear on political preferences" (Tesler 2016, p. 703) racialization has been a concept figuring prominently

in policy analysis, especially policies specifically constructed to manage issues central to race and social policy, such as affirmative action (ebd.). Tesler concludes that

[...] Obama presided over the “most-racial” political era—one in which Americans’ political orientations were more divided by and over race than they had been in modern times. That polarization of the electorate almost certainly contributed to the vitriolic political atmosphere during Barack Obama’s presidency, too. It is impossible to fully understand American politics in the Obama era, then, without understanding the political impact of Obama’s race (ebd., p. 328).

Some argue white anxiety itself has racialized the concern over the economic structural changes associated with globalism. This suspected racialized anxiety and concern has been particularly apparent among Whites, especially non-college educated Whites, male and female, living in areas most susceptible to economic globalization, immigration, and the decline of jobs—factors, ironically, that impact both White- and Black-, as well as Hispanic- and Asian-Americans.¹ This has found some support among social psychologists who have ironically documented the changes in political partisan attitudes and preferences implicitly connected to status changes during the administration of a black president, for example the work of Craig and Richeson (2014). Many students of race relations and partisan politics in America have noted the irony in such positions. The post-partisan presidency of Barack Obama has been trained directly on eradicating the instinctive reactions which anxiety, fear and distrust lead to racialization of policies, yet his strategy of pragmatic progressivism and principled pluralism have only served to disappoint both sides to the growing divide. For many, Obama’s legacy has generated a “white fear” (Glaude 2016, p. 74), which, Eddie Glaude asserts, is a particular “kind of political fear” (ebd., p. 74), which,

¹For an in-depth examination of identities and partisan politics, Green, D. P., Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2004). *Partisan hearts and minds: political parties and the social identities of voters*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Greene, S. (2004). Social identity theory and party identification. *Social Science Quarterly* 85 pp. 136–153. The theme of white resentment has been of particular interest and focus among scholars and journalists alike during the 2016 presidential election. Populism in general is one expression of such resentment. Oliver, E. J. & Rahn, W. M. Rise of the Trumpenvolk: populism in the 2016 election. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667 pp. 189–206/Rahn, W. M. & Oliver, E. (2016). Trump’s voters aren’t authoritarians, new research says. so what are they? *Washington Post*, 9 (03).

reaches beyond fright or anxiety experienced by individuals. It's bigger than any one person. It is a deeply felt, collectively held fear shared by people who believe, together, that some harm threatens them and their way of life. That apprehension, based in how we generally live our lives and sometimes in individual experience, guides political choices and policy (ebd., p. 74).²

The aspirations reflected in the Obama message has, to many, contributed to fueling instincts underneath the surface in American culture, such as authoritarianism, populism, and racial stereotyping among Whites, rendering strident and clear opponents of the legacy—such as Trump—ample room and protection to vividly express the resentment felt by those left behind in Obama's imagined world of diversity, tolerance, multi-cultural and post-partisan politics delegitimizing identity politics. This has afforded a particularly contemporary advantage to the populists wishing to appeal to a sense of White middle class betrayal (Holbrook 2016; Jacobson 2016, pp. 72–79; Vance 2016; Collins and Packer 2016; Alwin and Tufiş 2016, pp. 229–269).

This is captured vividly by Cornell Belcher when he notes,

the Dixiecrat George Wallace could not have been a major party presidential nominee when he ran in 1968 because, while his extreme politics might have appealed to a certain segment, there was at the time no clear and present danger to his natural constituency that the white majority was losing its dominant status. The contemporary, rapidly changing nature of the United States' population is what has made our politics so combustible (Belcher 2016, p. 2180).

Thus, to summarize, identity politics, partisan polarization along ideological lines, racialization of politics and the documented resentment, fear and push-back from segments of the white community in the US stand in sharp contrast to the preferred legacy of the Obama administration. Pragmatic progressivism and

²For further elaboration on this theme, see Major, B., Blodorn, A., & Blascovich, G. M. (2016). The threat of increasing diversity: Why many white Americans support Trump in the 2016 presidential election. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 1368430216677304/Brownstein, R. (2016). Trump's rhetoric of white nostalgia, *The Atlantic*, 2 (06) <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/06/trumps-rhetoric-of-white-nostalgia/485192/> Accessed December 15, 2016/March, D. S. et al. (2016). News media depictions of Obama influence automatic attitudes: implications for the Obama effect. *Social Cognition* 34 pp. 504–522. Schmidt, K. & Axt, J. R. (2016). Implicit and explicit attitudes toward African Americans and Barack Obama did not substantively change during Obama's presidency. *Social Cognition* 34 pp. 559–588/Kinder D. & Chudy, J. (2016). After Obama. *The Forum*, 14 pp. 3–15.

principled pluralism by 2016 have been interpreted by many as the roadblocks to a Democratic victory in 2016—regardless of whom the candidate might have been for the party.

It is reasonable to assert, as this paper does, that by fall of 2016, a candidate, such as Hillary Clinton, who had so closely aligned herself with the policies and aspirations of the Obama presidency would have a serious burden in carrying forward the mantle of Obama legacy—especially the legacy of pragmatic progressivism and principled pluralism. For the public, it would be the first time in eight years—two election cycles—that Obama the person was off the ballot and a rendering of the public's faith and investment in the legacy would be tested independent of the emotions and personal attachments many had toward him directly. The results were both dramatic and not inconsistent with the growing gulf in the American public. The gulf itself simply reflected by 2016 the sharp separation between those who seemingly identified with the policies and philosophy of the Obama legacy, and those who preferred normatively a non-Obama America.

5 Race, Election Results and the Deflating Obama Legacy

What do the 2016 elections results reflect with respect to a public endorsement of the Obama legacy? To answer this question we systematically consider the context of voting patterns across communities (counties) in the 2016 election by considering the distribution of vote percentages according to racial makeup of the counties themselves. The sample employed consists of 3111 counties. The primary focus is the mean percentage vote for Hillary Clinton in each of the 3111 counties, grouped by quartile ranking. In the case of Table A.3, for instance, the quartile ranking is established on the basis of the percentage black or white population within the county, based on US Census Bureau's American Community 5-year census estimates 2010–2015 (Leip 2016). We compare mean percentage votes for the Democratic candidate across two dimensions: first, across the quartile ranks (from lower percent—bottom quartile—black or white in Table A.3, to higher percent—top quartile—black or white population percent within county). Second, we compare across the three presidential election cycles of the Obama years—2008, 2012 and 2016. This allows us to estimate the effect of the demographic characteristics of the county acting on mean percent vote (comparison across quartiles ranking of the key demographic), and compare over time the performance of the respective Democratic candidate across three elections—Obama in 2008 and 2012, and Clinton in 2016.

Table A.3 reports two additional measures which are particularly important to comparing the percentage of the candidates across counties based on the county's racial composition. We additionally measure the gap, or difference, between the mean percentage votes for the Democratic candidate in a given county, for each election, with the mean percentage vote for the Republican candidate in a given county, for each election. This affords an assessment of the Democratic competitiveness of the county and how that competitiveness changes across the demographic character (i.e., across quartiles) of the counties and over time across the three election cycles.

Finally, we also produce a simple estimate of how much the actual percentage vote for the Democratic candidate deviated from the “predicted” or estimated percentage vote for the Democratic candidate in each county. This deviation—or residual—is the gap between the *actual* recorded percentages votes recorded for the Democratic candidate in a county for each election, minus the *predicted* value of such a percentage based on the previous election of the Democratic candidate. These residuals plot the distance between what one would have expected of the percentage vote for the Democratic candidate in a given county based on the overall national performance of the Democratic candidate in the previous presidential election, and affords a measure gauging just how much deviation across counties there was in terms of “unexpected” support levels (high or low) being recorded.

Two important patterns stand out from Table A.3. First, over the three cycles, 2008, 2012, and 2016, support for the Democratic candidate declined across counties, whether we consider the quartile ranking of black population or white population. We see that Clinton's mean percentage vote total in 2016 was always off from that of Obama in 2008 and 2012, and Obama's mean vote percentage across counties within each quartile group for black and white populations was always down from his mean support levels across counties in each quartile rank from levels recorded in 2008. And, second, as would be expected, there is a distinct effect of race acting on the performance of the Democratic candidate across the counties, consistently holding up over all three presidential election cycles. Thus, as the percentage black population increases across the counties (moving from Quartile 1 to Quartile 4 in the bottom half of Table A.3), the mean percentage vote for the Democratic candidate increases sharply. For Clinton, the increase is from a mean value of 24.8% in 2016 to 41.1%; for Obama in 2008 it was from 38.4% to a mean of 46.2%. Yet, the percentage of white population within counties serves to depress sharply the percentage support for the Democratic candidate, for Clinton and Obama (see upper half of Table A.3). The lowest quartile of Whites in the upper portion of Table A.3 shows Obama in 2008 capturing 48.7% of the vote, yet dropping to under 40% at the top quartile for counties

with white population. The drop even is even steeper for Clinton, declining from 43.8% in quartile 1 for white county population to a mean of 23.7% for the counties into the top quartile of white population.

Turning to differences in mean percentage of vote for Democratic candidates from that of the Republican candidate (middle sections of both halves of Table A.3), we see that Clinton under performs relative to Obama in every quartile. In quartile 1 for black counties, and quartile 4 for white counties, Clinton's mean difference was nearly 44% less than for Trump, and more than 47% from Trump is the top quartile of white counties.

With regard to the residuals reported in Table A.3 (third section of both halves of Table A.3), we note that while Clinton's overall support levels were consistently underperforming Obama across quartiles in black and white counties, and while her competitiveness levels were off relative to Obama's across counties regardless of racial composition of population, she still managed to produce some significant improvements over what should have been expected given her overall performance compared to that of Obama's in 2012. She was not, however, able to do much better than expected performance across other levels of white or black across counties.

Thus, across communities at the county level based on race, regardless of white or black, Clinton underachieved relative to Obama in significant degrees. However, what is telling for the Obama legacy, Obama's vote performance dropped from 2008. Thus, across the three elections 2008–2016 votes for Democratic presidential candidate fell in both black and white counties, regardless of level of black or white population. If the 2016 election was a referendum on the Obama legacy, looked at from the perspective of communities based on race, it fared poorly in 2016 and has fared badly at this geographical level in each subsequent election compared to 2008.

6 Identity Politics, Election Results and the Deflating Obama Legacy

Collected data offers a different perspective on assessing the impact of the 2016 presidential elections in the Obama legacy. It compares the aggregate number of county wins and losses of Clinton to that of Obama in 2008 and 2012, as well as Kerry in 2004. The table divides the counties into those counties won ($N = 485$) or lost ($N = 2626$) by Clinton in 2016, based on our sample of 3111 counties. It then compares the profile of particular demographic groups in the population across counties according to some of the most important attributes generally

associated with the issues most sensitive to the Obama legacy. Thus, counties are compared according to the mean net number of manufacturing jobs created during the period of 2010–2015, the mean percent of the county population of civilian employees employed within the manufacturing sector of the economy, the mean net number of professional/technical jobs created and mean percentage of civilian employees employed within the professional or technical sector of the economy for the counties, the proportion of white population 25 years or older within the counties, the proportion of white male and female college educated, the mean per capita income of the counties and the mean net gain change in per capita income from 2010–2015 for the counties, the average median family income estimates, and finally the mean population density of the counties. All measures within each cell are means for the counties included within the group of counties sorted according to the relative win/loss status of the county.

First, note that Clinton managed to win only 17 counties in 2016 that Obama did not win in 2012, and only 6 counties that Obama lost in both 2008 and 2012. Of the 485 counties Clinton won in 2016, 456 were counties Obama won in both 2008 and 2012, 468 were won by Obama in 2012, and 368 were won in 2004, 2008 and 2012 by the Democratic presidential candidate. This highlights the conclusion that 2016 was just another normal election in the performance cycles for Democrats. However, Clinton lost 224 counties in 2016 that Obama had won in 2012, and 204 counties in 2016 that Obama had won in 2008 and 2012. She managed to lose 129 counties that had been held by the Democrats over three previous election cycles (2004, 2008 and 2012).

More significantly however, we see the relative difference in Democratic attributes across the various groups of counties Clinton won in 2016 (or Obama and Kerry won or lost previously), and those counties in 2016 which Clinton lost (or Obama and Kerry lost in previous cycles). Overall, Clinton counties—those she won—were more professional and high tech ($\bar{x} = 8708$), more successful actually at creating manufacturing jobs overall ($\bar{x} = 3695$), less white for the population 25 years or older ($\bar{x} = 57\%$), more college educated among the white population ($\bar{x} = 25\%$), more white male and female college educated among the populations ($\bar{x} = 15\%$ and $\bar{x} = 16\%$, respectively), actually less successful slightly at producing net gains in per capita income ($\bar{x} = \$1867$), though overall slightly richer in terms of per capita income across the counties ($\bar{x} = 26,311$), wealthier in terms of the average median family income ($\bar{x} = 61,311$), and significantly more urban and densely populated ($\bar{x} = 908$) than those counties she lost in 2016. As one might expect from these comparative profiles of demographic characteristics on identity attributes likely to be sensitive to the Obama legacy, we would have expected counties and communities suffering from manufacturing job loss, less

professional and technical, less affluent, less highly educated among its white population, though no more white in its population overall, and more rural, to be the countries where the Obama legacy would be rejected.

Collected data show a shift from a mere comparison of the counts of county wins and losses to return to an assessment of the actual mean percentage vote for the Democratic candidate in the three presidential election cycles across the Obama years. We group counties according to the degree to which each county exhibits one of the demographic attributes denoting potential identity issue challenges for the Obama legacy. The grouping is again by quartiles, and in this data set the focus lies on the two most sensitive occupational categories testing the public's commitment to changing nature of the American economy and the associated social and cultural changes attached to these transformations over recent years: manufacturing and professional/technical occupational profiles.

Quartile 1 for each attribute represents a low representation of the attribute within the included counties. Quartile 4 represents the counties most characterized by the particular attribute. Consistent with the pattern of county wins and losses that first, Democratic presidential candidates indeed lost support as the net job creation in the manufacturing occupations declined, and second, gained mean percentage votes across the counties as the net gain in professional and technical jobs increased. However, while it is clear that as the concentration of professional/technical jobs increased support for the Democratic presidential candidate across all three election cycles 2008–2016, the pattern was not nearly as evident with concentration of manufacturing jobs. Support for Democratic candidates varies little across counties according to the concentration of manufacturing jobs within the counties. Obama has a mere three percent shift between the bottom quartiles of counties based on percent manufacturing employment, while Clinton's hold on counties in 2016 was fairly stable across all quartiles. However, the diminished support over the three elections cycles is as robust for percent manufacturing employment as it is for the net loss of manufacturing jobs within counties. In 2008, Obama enjoyed a 40–42 mean percentage support at all levels of percent of manufacturing employment, while Clinton was approximately 10% below Obama's levels on average for all four quartiles of percentage manufacturing employment. On the whole, however, it is clearly evident from the results of the data analysis that one cannot ignore the fact that the Obama legacy is not likely to build on a resilient reception drawn from among those communities in America where traditional manufacturing livelihoods are common. Indeed, any such legacy of support among these demographic units has weakened considerably since 2008.

Table A.4 concludes our analysis of the verdict offered on the prospects of the Obama legacy based on the three presidential elections across the Obama years. Highlighting the patterns across communities based on white population, the figures reported in Table A.4 track mean percentage support for the Democratic candidate according to the ascending percentages of four measures of white population reflecting core attributes sensitive to the consequences following from the strategic pursuit of the Obama legacy. As the concentration of white population within counties increases, the mean percentage vote for the Democratic candidate declines accordingly, for Obama's two election cycles, and for the failed Clinton campaign. However, the decline in 2008 was a mere 10%, dropping from a mean vote of 48.7% in 2008 for those counties in the lowest quartile of white population, to 39.3% in those counties at the top quartile of white population. By 2012 this gap increased to more than 13%, from 47.8% in 2008 to 34.4%. In 2016, the difference across the low and high quartiles increased to more than 20 mean% vote, declining from 43.8% at the lowest quartiles of white population counties, to 23.7% for those counties in the top quartiles. Across the range of quartiles, once again, Clinton underperformed relative to Obama, especially among those communities with the largest proportion of white population. However, as we have seen in previous tables, the decline across the Obama election cycles was consistent at all levels of white population within the communities.

This general pattern is reversed when factoring in college degree status. Across all four quartiles, those communities with higher percentages of white male or female college educated residents recorded increasing support for the Democratic candidate, across all three election cycles in the Obama era. Yet, as with white population in general, the mean percentage vote received for Democratic candidates declined across the three election cycles, as well. Obama enjoyed a mean percentage vote support of 49.1% for those communities in the top quartile for white female college educated residents in 2008, and 48.3% for those counties in the top quartile for white male college educated residents. Clinton was able to capture on average 42.6% and 42.1% of the vote, respectively, within these top quartiles for college educated Whites. White college educated males and females, the demographic category which, along with ethnic and racial minorities, should have been the most loyal and devoted advocates of the Obama legacy, could not stem the steady decline of support for Obama in 2012 and Clinton in 2016.

As with other data surveyed in previous tables (Tables A.2–A.4) of county-level support from the Democratic candidates across the election cycles of 2008–2016, the energy of an Obama legacy has lost momentum steadily, whether among black communities (Table A.3), highly educated white communities (see

also Table A.4), and especially if college degrees are increasingly absent among residents (Table A.4), or absent higher concentrations of professional and technical employees within the counties. The Obama legacy limped into the 2016 election cycle, and came out weaker than 2008—as measured by mean percentage voter support for the Democratic advantage across the 3111 communities included in our sample for the Obama years.

7 Conclusion

The preceding pages and figures point directly to a single but significant conclusion: the Obama years have seen a clear division develop within the American public, shaped by structural changes within the national economy influenced heavily by the very nature of globalization promoted in large part by liberal economic policies embraced by Obama and his recent predecessors. This structural change, however, has brought with it cultural ramifications extending throughout society—cultural changes that are the logical extension promoted by the Obama administration through rhetoric and policy and intended to realize the promises and vision of the Obama legacy. The efforts of the Obama administration to realize a post-partisan, pragmatically progressive and principled pluralist system constructed on civic discourse and consensus have been tethered to a strategy of narrative designed to navigate carefully between two key antipodal ends along the broader preference spectrum within the contemporary American political system. At one end of this preference spectrum are located the more traditional and often threatened preferences generally associated with the emotions of the political right. At the opposite end of this preference spectrum are found the energized and motivated, yet often fickle and impatient social movements of the left joining a broad but diverse coalition of affluent, highly educated youth and ethnic and racial minorities. It was the later antipode that comprised the coalition which helped propel Obama to office as the nation's first black American president, and to keep him there through two terms despite midterm election setbacks in 2010 and 2012. From the start of the Obama years, there has been a retreat in public support for the principles at the core of the Obama vision of post-partisan republican pluralist society contoured to the principles of Rawlsian justice, moral equality and difference principles. By 2016, even those communities within the American republic that had so steadfastly supported the leader of the Obama legacy in 2008 and 2012 were ready to abandon the successor to that legacy. Moreover, by 2012, there was already clear evidence that strains on the public's tolerance and patience with a commitment to continue with the consequences manifested by the

legacy were already well developed and evident across wide swaths of communities in the United States.

So, where does this take us? As Verba and Nie noted decades ago, “[...] given the fact that [the voter’s] own agenda is quite individual and may contain many varied issues, it is unreasonable to expect there to be a voting choice tailored to his own particular policy preferences at the moment” (Verba and Nie 1974, p. 106). Therefore, we cannot obviously know how salient the preferred Obama legacy was as a coherent framework of principles in the mind of the voter in 2008, 2012 or 2016. We cannot know if the preferred legacy of Obama and his administration was the legacy the voting public actually cued on during the 2016 election. We cannot know whether in fact the voter approached the casting of their ballot with a clear and proximal desire to strike a blow against the vision of Obama’s post-partisan, diverse, consensual, and pragmatically progressive republic and community. What we can reasonably deduce, however, is that over three election cycles for the presidency during a time of a stable, clear and consistent messaging from the Obama administration as to what the principles were that guided its overall strategy of legacy, it would be hard to conclude the public did not at least have a sense of association between the man, his policies and the vision for America embedded in the desired Obama legacy. Three times the public had an opportunity to reflect and weigh in on the choice through the election process, and over the course of two successive elections and eight years (2012 and 2016) from 2008 onward, voters in communities across America pulled back from the levels of support they had previously extended and at least implicitly granted the Obama legacy. By 2016 such a critical mass of defection had been reached so as to propel someone to the White House and his partisan fellows into clear majorities in the Senate and House who stood for principles, ideals and often even moral guidelines entirely alien to the minimal standards cherished as part of the Obama legacy.

So, the best we can do at this stage is state the obvious: the strength of the roots of the Obama legacy can only be known over the course of several years to come. Whether the trend line from 2008 across communities holds or erodes will not be known for another four years, and possibly beyond. Judis and Teixeira concluded their prescient study in 2002 with an assessment of the American public at the start of the 21st century:

Today's Americans [2002], whose attitudes have been nurtured by the transition to post-capitalism, increasingly endorse the politics of [...] progressive centrism. They want government to play an active and responsible role in American life, guaranteeing a reasonable level of economic security to Americans rather than leaving them at the mercy of the market and the business cycle. They want to preserve and strengthen Social Security and Medicare, rather than privatize them. They want to modernize and upgrade public education, not abandon it. They want to exploit new bio-technologies and computer technologies in order to improve the quality of life. They do not want science held hostage to a religious or ideological agenda. And they want the social gains of the sixties consolidated, not rolled back; the wounds of race healed, not inflamed (Judis and Teixeira 2002, p. 14).

That was 2002. Eight years after that historical turning point in the American experiment in liberal republican democracy, after the successive cycles of elections where Obama's majority across communities has continually dwindled, it remains an open question if the immediate future for America is one where consensus around the values and ideals articulated by the progressive center which Judis and Teixeira described can actually take shape. Two competing normative centers and indeed rival imaginations seem to co-exist—one holding close to the principles and ideals of the Obama legacy, the other clearly establishing boundaries demarcating its vision from that of the Obama legacy, preferring a polity more akin to employing identity politics and economic nativism, as well as restricted cultural preferences. At least, at this moment, one cannot dismiss this possibility. And, as this paper has shown, it is a development that did not happen overnight in the unique rancor of the 2016 presidential elections. It was a shockwave representing changes and forces moving toward this emerging reality over the course of the Obama years. This fact may paint a different picture of the Obama legacy, one of bifurcation and division, not unification. The immediate future for the American polity will be conditioned on the one hand by how the Democrats rebound from the failure of the strategy intended to construct the Obama legacy preferred and pursued from 2008. On the other hand, the near term future of the American polity will very much rest on how a Republican Party deals with the consequences that follow from the most basic manifestation of the Obama legacy's failure—namely, the arrival of Donald Trump on the whirlwind of populism, identity politics linked to racialized narratives and economic nationalism.