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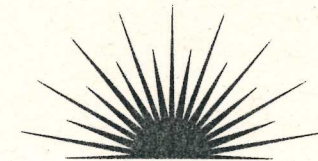
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États-Unis

ENTRE UNION ET DÉSUNION



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Introduction

Le projet national étatsunien s'est construit sur un projet unificateur : la déclaration d'Indépendance et la constitution visaient à promouvoir des valeurs collectives permettant de transcender les intérêts individuels des États et à rassembler des habitants dont les origines et le patrimoine étaient divers. Il promettait de faire « un » à partir de cette diversité structurelle, affichant « e pluri-bus unum » dès la période révolutionnaire. Pourtant, malgré la prégnance des mythes fondateurs, le communautarisme et les clivages linguistiques, ethniques, religieux, politiques, sociaux ont, depuis la période coloniale, non seulement perduré, mais d'aucuns peuvent même soutenir qu'ils se sont accentués¹. Ainsi, la nation étatsunienne se retrouve divisée, désunie, même si des efforts sont produits pour maintenir une cohésion nationale : la question du fédéralisme revient sans cesse, la politique étrangère oscille entre isolationnisme et interventionnisme, les tensions raciales se pérennisent, la contre-culture des années 1960 s'oppose au conservatisme des années 1980 ; les divergences politiques, idéologiques, entre corporatisme et démocratie, comme le montre John R. Saul dans *The Unconscious Civilization*² mettent en danger la stabilité de la société.

La vague de violences liée au déboulonnage de statues qui rappelaient un passé esclavagiste et de division en 2020-2021, écho moderne de la guerre de Sécession, a confirmé que les clivages sont intrinsèques à la société étatsunienne. La tentative de coup d'état par les partisans de Donald Trump qui se rallièrent pour « prendre » le Capitole en janvier 2021 suite à sa défaite aux élections présidentielles témoigne de la fragilité de cette union, ce que Joe Biden rappelle dans son discours inaugural dans lequel il prône un retour à une patrie unie et solidaire :

1/ Voir par exemple Arthur SCHLESINGER, *The Disuniting of America*, New York, Norton, 1992 ; George HAWLEY, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017 ou encore Bryan STEVENSON, *Just Mercy. A Story of Justice and Redemption*, New York, Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

2/ John R. Saul, *The Unconscious Civilization*, New York, Free Press, 1995.

Splitting the United States, Winning the White House: Donald J. Trump as Divider in Chief

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Introduction

Running for president in 2000, Republican George W. Bush promised to put aside the nasty partisanship of his predecessor's administration and to be "a uniter, not a divider"¹. His campaign pledge took for granted political scientist Anthony Downs' thesis that the great bulk of the participating voters are moderate and extremism does not pay at the polls².

Most presidential hopefuls have shared Downs' conclusion, at least since radicalism resulted in devastating debacles for Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Democrat George McGovern in 1972. Goldwater argued that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And [...] moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue"³. Instead of luring moderates, he decided to stimulate political controversy to offer voters "a choice, not an echo"⁴. Few Americans shared his stand and incumbent Democratic president Lyndon B. Johnson defeated him by the largest plurality in the percentage of popular vote in the twentieth century. Likewise, eight years later, Republican Richard M. Nixon, was reelected with the second largest plurality⁵. His challenger, McGovern, contributed to the 1972 GOP landslide because he antagonized moderate Democrats by running on a platform that advocated an immediate and unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam, the pardon of the draft resisters, and the

1/ *The Second Gore-Bush Presidential Debate*, October 11, 2000, <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-11-2000-debate-transcript/>. All webpages were last accessed on 27 February 2023.

2/ Anthony DOWNS, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York, Harper, 1957.

3/ "Text of Goldwater's Speech Formally Opening Presidential Campaign", *New York Times*, 4 September 1964, p. 12.

4/ Phyllis SCHLAFLY, *A Choice, Not an Echo*, Alton, Pere Marquette, 1964.

5/ Dave TARR and Bob BENENSON, *Elections A to Z*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2012, p. 301.

decriminalization of the use of marijuana⁶. McGovern's improper association with the legalization of drugs and the voluntary ending of pregnancies also torpedoed his presidential bid and enabled the Republican propaganda machine to label him "acid, amnesty, and abortion"⁷.

Pre-Trump Middle-of-the-Road Politicking

In response to Goldwater's and McGovern's routs, the two major parties tamed their most radical planks. This approach climaxed at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Bill Clinton's "new Democrats" dumped industrial workers to stand by what he called the "forgotten middle class"⁸. Clinton embraced globalization and did not send the Kyoto Protocol on climate change to the Senate for ratification over the protests of two previous key cohorts of his own party, the industrial workers and the environmentalists. He also signed into law the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, a counter-reform of welfare that aimed at eradicating less poverty than poor people's alleged dependence on federal subsidies⁹.

On the other hand, George W. Bush reshaped himself as a compassionate conservative. He pledged that he would cut taxes but also promote a quality education for all Americans, improve Medicare, and retain a social safety net¹⁰.

Barack Obama followed suit. He further spread global free trade, continued his Republican predecessor's "war on terror", promoted a health insurance reform that included neither universal coverage nor a single payer, and adopted a post-racial line to anti-black prejudice and discrimination¹¹.

6/ John David LEES, Richard A. MAIDMENT and Michael TAPPIN, *American Politics Today*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 1982, p. 98-100; Rick PERLSTEIN, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*, New York, Scribner, 2008, p. 650-651.

7/ Jody C. BAUMGARTNER and Peter L. FRANCA, *Conventional Wisdom and American Elections*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007, p. 77.

8/ Bill CLINTON, "Acceptance Speech to the Democratic National Convention", 16 July 1992, <http://www.4president.org/speeches/billclinton1992acceptance.htm>.

9/ Brendon O'CONNOR, *A Political History of the American Welfare System*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, p. 223-237.

10/ Arthur Frederick IDE, *George W. Bush: Portrait of Compassionate Conservative*, Las Colinas, Monument, 2000.

11/ Bill PRESS, *Buyer's Remorse: How Obama Let Progressives Down*, New York,

This strategy was successful overall because Clinton, Bush Jr., and Obama secured two terms at the White House. But it also alienated voters on the opposite fringes of the political spectrum, who deserted the polls, instead of making a choice between the two middle-of-the-road candidates on the Republican and Democratic tickets. It was hardly by chance that, after Clinton had moved to the conservative side on welfare, voter turnout reached an all-time low of 49.1 percent in 1996 as many liberals did not find a candidate they could identify with and deserted the polls¹². The same trend affected radical conservatives, too.

The rise of minor parties offered evidence that the Republican and Democratic standard-bearers left some areas of the political spectrum uncovered. In 2000 Ralph Nader's endorsement of environmental policies, same-sex marriage, and curb on corporate power mobilized voters in the ultraliberal camp who had distanced themselves from Clinton and his heir-apparent Al Gore. Indeed, roughly one third of Nader's supporters would have stayed home if he had not been on the ballot as the candidate of the hyper-progressive Green Party¹³. Similarly, dissatisfaction with both Bush Sr.'s and Clinton's foreign policy led to Patrick J. Buchanan's 2000 presidential bid on the ticket of the Reform Party. Buchanan criticized internationalism, both military and diplomatic, and stigmatized globalization as a threat to U.S. employment. In the wake of Bush Sr.'s war to liberate Kuwait and Clinton's Wilsonian policy of intervention and nation building based on ethical principles that had shaped the U.S. involvement in civil wars from Somalia to the former Yugoslavia, in Buchanan's opinion, Washington should pursue worldwide decoupling¹⁴.

Buchanan received only 0.43 percent of the popular vote in 2000. But his roughly 450,000 voters and an increase in turnout to 51.2 percent suggested the existence of hardline conservatives who identified with his pre-Trump advocacy of "America First" and did not feel represented by the moderate stand of the GOP¹⁵. After

Threshold, 2016.

12/ Alan GRANT and Edward ASHBEE, *The Politics Today Companion to American Government*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 2002, p. 222.

13/ Micah L. SIFRY, *Spoiling for a Fight: Third-Party Politics in America*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 318.

14/ Patrick J. BUCHANAN, *A Republic, Not an Empire: Reclaiming America's Destiny*, Lanham, Regnery, 1999.

15/ A. GRANT and E. ASHBEE, *op. cit.*, p. 180, 222.

all, Buchanan's platform included planks that would bring Trump's supporters to the polls: the repeal of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the protection of U.S. jobs, and the restriction of immigration, including the construction of a wall sealing the border between Mexico and the United States¹⁶. Conversely, George W. Bush, whose father had negotiated NAFTA, appealed to Hispanic voters even by speaking Spanish at rallies and rejected attempts at undocumented newcomers' criminalization¹⁷.

Trump's Extremism and Voters' Mobilization in 2016

Potential Republican but theretofore inactive voters were the cohort of the eligible electorate on which Trump laid his eyes in 2016. His unconventional and controversial first campaign for president aimed at bringing out ultraconservative Americans on Election Day instead of embracing the Republican hopefuls' traditional strategy of struggling with their Democratic opponents to secure the ballots of the moderates. In 2016, Trump relied on working-class and low-middle-class white Americans who had been left behind by globalization, had not benefited from the uneven economic recovery, felt socially and financially dispossessed by Hispanic and other-than-Caucasian immigrants, and resented absence of law and order domestically. Indeed, 83 percent of Trump's supporters wanted the American way of living to be protected from foreign influences and constraints, 75 percent were afraid of becoming victims of crime, two thirds were concerned with unemployment, and 65 percent were worried about terrorism¹⁸. Such disenchanted potential voters failed to identify with mainstream Republican policies of internationalism, neoliberalism, and inclusiveness, all of which they regarded as the reasons for their anxiety. To them Trump offered scaring scapegoats that supposedly accounted for his backers' problems and lack of confidence in the future: internationalism that

16/ Joseph LOWNDES, "From Pat Buchanan to Donald Trump", in Kathleen BELEV and Ramón A. GUTIÉRREZ (eds.), *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, Berkeley, U of California P, 2021, p. 265-286, p. 277-278.

17/ Jim YARDLEY, "The 2000 Campaign: The Texas Governor; Hispanics Give Attentive Bush Mixed Reviews", *New York Times*, 27 August 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/27/us/the-2000-campaign-the-texas-governor-hispanics-give-attentive-bush-mixed-reviews.html>.

18/ Molly BALL, "Donald Trump and the Politics of Fear", *Atlantic*, 2 September 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/09/donald-trump-and-the-politics-of-fear/498116/>.

wasted U.S. resources, free trade agreements that sent manufacturing jobs abroad, undocumented Hispanic newcomers who competed unfairly with native workers and were instrumental in increasing the domestic crime rate, Muslim terrorists who took U.S. lives on American soil, black activists who caused troubles and threatened white supremacy. As for the latter issue, Trump capitalized on the growing racialization of U.S. politics and Caucasian Americans' ensuing feeling of insecurity that had already undergone a significant increase during the Obama administration¹⁹.

Trump outlined simplistic solutions for the nation's difficulties with the purpose of making the country "Bigger, better and stronger than ever before": neo-isolationism, protectionism, the sealing of the southern border charging the expenses on Mexico, a ban on Muslim travelers and immigrants, and a "law and order" approach to African-American claims and protests against police violence²⁰. Remarkably, on July 16, 2016, Trump suggested that the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement had contributed to instigating the assassinations of police officers and assured that, in his capacity as president, he would instruct the attorney general to investigate such alleged connections²¹. As his stand "mobilized racist sentiments" and #BlackLivesMatter was conversely tweeted almost half a million times per day to show support for the denouncers of police brutality against African Americans, Trump helped consolidate the color divide²².

This strategy seemed successful as Trump won the endorsement of Richard Spencer, the semi-official spokesperson and de facto leader of the alt-right²³. Moreover, 80 percent of

19/ Serge RICARD, "The Trump Phenomenon and the Racialization of American Politics", *Revue LISA*, vol. XVI, n° 2, 2018, <https://journals.openedition.org/lisa/9832>.

20/ Rupert NEATE, "Donald Trump Announces U.S. Presidential Run with Eccentric Speech", *Guardian*, 16 June 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/16/donald-trump-announces-run-president>.

21/ "Donald Trump: We Have to Demand Law and Order", Fox News, 18 July 2016, <https://www.foxnews.com/transcript/donald-trump-we-have-to-demand-law-and-order>.

22/ Napp NAZWORTH, "Race-Baiter, Misogynist, and Fool", in Donald J. SIDER (ed.), *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump*, Eugene, Cascade, 2020, p. 32-41, p. 33; Carolyn NIELSEN, *Reporting on Race in a Digital Era*, Cham, Springer, 2020, p. 67.

23/ Sarah POSNER, "Meet the Alt-Right 'Spokesman' Who Is Thrilled with Trump's Rise", *Rolling Stone*, 18 October 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/meet-the-alt-right-spokesman-whos-thrilled-with-trumps-rise-129588/>.

Trump's 2016 primary backers thought that the U.S. government had gone "too far in assisting minority groups"²⁴. Likewise, in the November elections, the sentiment of being "left behind" was a significant indicator of Republican vote²⁵. Specifically, 72 percent of those who blamed trade deals and undocumented newcomers for jeopardizing their economic and social status chose Trump over his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton²⁶.

Overall, Trump increased the following of the 2012 Republican standard bearer, Mitt Romney, by more than two million ballots. Such an edge resulted less from former Democrats' bolt to the GOP than from the mobilization of previously nonparticipating voters because support for Clinton declined by only 62,000 popular votes as compared with Obama's 2012 performance. Actually, in four years the share of swing voters fell from 9 percent to 8 percent, the lowest level since 1972, and Trump secured twice as many new voters as Obama defectors. In 2016 roughly 11 percent of the Republican candidate's support resulted from people who had not cast ballots four years earlier²⁷. Such mobilization, however, had already begun during the primary season, when the registration of previously inactive voters enabled Trump to succeed in a "hostile takeover" of the GOP²⁸.

Trump's incendiary language, too, stimulated the activism of previously apolitical extremist organizations. The Red Pill forum, for instance, emerged to oppose the alleged feminist encroachments in response to Trump's infamous bragging claim about groping women. After distancing itself from politics, as #PussyGrabsBack

24/ Gary C. JACOBSON, "The Triumph of Polarized Partisanship in 2016: Donald Trump's Improbable Victory", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. CXXXII, n° 1, winter 2017, p. 11-45, p. 20-21.

25/ Paul WHITELEY, Harold D. CLARKE and Marianne C. STEWART, "Populism Plus: Voting for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections", in Ivor CREWE and David SANDERS (eds.), *Authoritarian Populism and Liberal Democracy*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 87-105, p. 89-94.

26/ Susan PAGE and Brad HEATH, "How Anti-Establishment Outsider Donald Trump Was Elected the 45th President of the United States", *USA Today*, 9 November 2016, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/11/09/election-analysis-hillary-clinton-donald-trump/93198882/>.

27/ Richard C. FORDING and Sanford F. SCHRAM, *Hard White: The Mainstreaming of Racism in American Politics*, New York, Oxford UP, 2020, p. 186-189; Costas PANAGOPOULOS, *Bases Loaded: How the U.S. Presidential Campaigns Are Changing and Why It Matters*, New York, Oxford UP, 2021, p. 36.

28/ Theodore Roosevelt MALLOCH and Felipe J. CUELLO, *Trump's World*, West Palm Beach, Humanix, 2020, p. xv, 61.

spread via Twitter among female voters, the forum embraced the Republican candidate in 2016 because his vocal machismo, albeit overall disruptive, turned Trump into the champion of alpha masculinity and his election to the White House seemed as an opportunity to restore male supremacy²⁹.

Getting Ready for the 2020 Elections

Apparently unmindful of the fact that he had lost the popular vote in 2016 by roughly three million ballots, the largest margin in U.S. history, Trump planned to gain a second term by swelling the number of his like-minded supporters, instead of reaching out to potentially swing voters within the Democratic camp. To this very purpose, he did not even refrain himself from antagonizing a few Republican leaders: Senators Susan Collins of Maine, John McCain of Arizona, and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who opposed the outright repeal of Obama's healthcare reform³⁰, and Mitt Romney of Utah, who criticized isolationism, protectionism, and nativism upon taking his seat in the U.S. Senate in 2019³¹. Similarly, former President George W. Bush expressed his uneasiness about Trump's "zero tolerance" policy concerning immigration³².

One might suggest that Trump did make a point of distancing himself from the establishment of his own party because his populist narrative contended that he was the champion of the people who fought for citizens' rights against the privileges of an

29/ Nicole PUGLISE, "Pussy Grabs Back' Becomes Rallying Cry for Female Outrage against Trump", *Guardian*, 10 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/10/donald-trump-pussy-grabs-back-meme-women-twitter>; Pierce Alexander DIGNAM and Deana A. ROHLINGER, "Misogynistic Men Online: How the Red Pill Helped Elect Trump", *Signs*, vol. XLIV, n° 3, 2019, p. 589-612.

30/ Jessica GLENZA and Tom MCCARTHY, "Collins, McCain, and Murkowski: Republican Trio Who Defied Party to Vote No on Health Bill", *Guardian*, 28 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/28/republican-healthcare-bill-mccain-murkowski-collins>.

31/ Joanie GREVE and Mariana ALFARO, "The Daily 202: Mitt Romney Outlines a Very Un-Trumpian Approach to Achieve Trump's Goal of Confronting China", *Washington Post*, 5 June 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2019/06/05/daily-202-mitt-romney-outlines-a-very-un-trumpian-approach-to-achieve-trump-s-goal-of-confronting-china/5cf694fb1ad2e52231e8e97c/>.

32/ Chris RIOTTA, "George W. Bush Says He's 'Disturbed' by Immigration Rhetoric under Trump", *Independent*, 13 July 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/george-w-bush-trump-immigration-detention-centre-racism-migrants-us-border-a8445981.html>.

entrenched bipartisan elite. Trump's approach had been blatant since his inauguration address. A statesperson should have seized the opportunity of the beginning of the presidency to heal the political wounds of the previous election campaign. This, however, was not Trump's case. He only paid lip service to reconciliation after the 2016 campaign, pledging "to every citizen of our land that I will be a president for all Americans" in his victory address³³. In fact, Trump subsequently gave his inaugural speech as if he had still been on the stump. He echoed his campaign pledge to "drain the swamp" of corruption and special interests influence in Washington and lashed out at the political establishment in behalf of such a vague entity as "the people". In particular, he contended that "For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government, while the people have borne the cost"³⁴. Against this backdrop, during his term Trump's rhetoric stigmatized his critics as "enemies of the people", as happened to CNN chief White House correspondent Jim Acosta³⁵.

Trump turned his presidency into a permanent campaign that aimed at energizing his own clique while overlooking the expansion of his 2016 coalition³⁶. Consequently, as *The Economist* has aptly pointed out, he was "the first modern president not to have been backed by a significant minority of his opponent's supporters early in his term"³⁷.

This strategy underwent progressive consolidation throughout his administration. Trump planned to gain a second term by cultivating the alt-right with populist nationalism, the strengthening of immigration restriction, the repeal of Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the revival of unilateralism in foreign

33/ Donald J. TRUMP, "Victory Speech", *New York Times*, 10 November 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/us/politics/trump-speech-transcript.html>.

34/ Donald J. TRUMP, "The Inaugural Address", 28 January 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>.

35/ Georg LÖFFLMANN, "'Enemies of the People': Donald Trump and the Security Imaginary of America First", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 5 October 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481211048499>; Jim ACOSTA, *The Enemy of the People*, New York, HarperCollins, 2019.

36/ Mark Z. BARABAK, "Again Breaking Ground, Trump Takes the Permanent Campaign to New Heights", *Los Angeles Times*, 23 August 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-permanent-campaign-20170823-story.html>; Marco MORINI, *Lessons from Trump's Political Communication*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 33-45.

37/ "Death, Taxes and a Failing Presidency", *The Economist*, 15 January 2022, p. 40.

affairs, and the renewal of protectionism, rather than by including moderates to broaden his own electoral basis. Consequently, after enjoying the endorsement of *The Crusader*, the mouthpiece of the Ku Klux Klan in Arkansas that boasted of being "the premier voice of the white resistance" in 2016³⁸, Trump came out against the removal of the monuments to Confederate generals and statespersons celebrating racial segregation in the South. In addition, when a peaceful protest against a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville resulted in the killing of civil rights activist Heather Heyer on 12 August 2017, Trump stated that there were "very fine people on both sides"³⁹. Similarly, besides aligning with police officers in July 2016 following the high-profile killings of unarmed African Americans such as Alton Sterling and Philando Castile⁴⁰, Trump criminalized BLM in the wake of George Floyd's murder four years later. He urged governors to use the national guard to quell civil rights protests and threatened otherwise to "deploy the United States military and quickly solve the problem for them"⁴¹. In the face of racial unrest, he further irritated his opponents by tweeting "when the looting starts, the shooting starts", a message that Twitter itself flagged for "glorifying violence"⁴². He even came close to legitimize the alt-right during the first 2020 presidential debate, when he mentioned the ultranationalist Proud Boys and called on their members to "stand back and stand by" as he was looking for somebody "to do something about Antifa", an anarchist-oriented, anti-Fascist and anti-racist movement⁴³.

38/ Thomas ROBB, "Make America Great Again", *The Crusader*, n° 4, October 2016, p. 1.

39/ Ben JACOBS and Oliver LAUGHLAND, "Charlottesville: Trump Reverts to Blaming Both Sides Including 'Violent Alt-Left'", *Guardian*, 16 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/15/donald-trump-press-conference-far-right-defends-charlottesville>.

40/ Perry BACON, Jr., "Trump and Other Conservatives Embrace 'Blue Lives Matter' Movement", NBC News, 23 July 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2016-election/trump-other-conservatives-embrace-blue-lives-matter-movement-n615156>.

41/ Donald J. TRUMP, "Statement by the President", 1 June 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/statement-by-the-president-39/>.

42/ Tony ROMM and Allyson CHIU, "Twitter Flags Trump, White House for 'Glorifying Violence' after Tweeting Minneapolis Looting Will Lead to 'Shooting'", *Washington Post*, 29 May 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/05/29/trump-minneapolis-twitter-protest/.

43/ *Presidential Debate at Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland Clinic*, 29 September 2020, <https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/>.

His provocations were deliberate. Trump did not confine himself to follow in the steps of Nixon, who portrayed himself as the "law and order" candidate in heavily racialized terms in 1968⁴⁴. Trump went beyond distancing himself from his Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, who had tweeted "George Floyd deserved better and his family deserves justice. His life mattered"⁴⁵. As Mark Shanahan and Mara Oliva have remarked, Trump's rhetoric aimed purposely at "embolden[ing] the narrow tract from white conservatives to white supremacists"⁴⁶.

Blind to moderate voters' reaction, Trump intended to bring to the polls ultraconservatives such as Mark and Patricia McCloskey, the couple that waved guns at BLM peaceful demonstrators marching past their mansion in St. Louis. He even invited the McCloskeys to speak at the Republican National Convention⁴⁷. After all, asked by *Time* magazine in 2019 whether he planned to appeal to swing voters in view of the 2020 presidential race, Trump replied "I think my base is so strong, I'm not sure that I have to do that"⁴⁸. Indeed, he was convinced that he had saved the Republican majority in the Senate in the 2018 mid-term election by the same tactics of extremism. As three out of four Republicans regarded illegal immigration a "very big" problem⁴⁹, Trump endeavored to get out xenophobic voters by stigmatizing the march of about 7,000 desperate Central American migrants toward the Mexican-U.S. border as a prospective "invasion"⁵⁰. Endorsing Republican

september-29-2020-debate-transcript/.

44/ Carl FREEDMAN, *The Age of Nixon*, Winchester, Zero Books, 2012, p. 98.

45/ Ja'han JONES, "Public Figures Express Outrage and Demand Accountability after George Floyd Killing", *Huffington Post*, 27 May 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/celebrities-express-support-for-george-floyd_n_5e9ebdedc5b68760a99c1572.

46/ Mark SHANAHAN and Mara OLIVA, "Conclusion", in Mara Oliva and Mark Shanahan (eds.), *The Trump Presidency*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 249-254, p. 249-250.

47/ Emma GREEN, "The McCloskey's Unsubtle Message to White America", *Atlantic*, 25 August 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/08/mccloskeys-trump-suburbs-rnc/615655/>.

48/ "Donald Trump's Interview with *Time* on 2020", *Time*, 20 June 2019, <https://time.com/5611476/donald-trump-transcript-time-interview/>.

49/ Christopher CADELAGO and Ted HESSON, "Why Trump Is Talking Nonstop about the Migrant Caravan", *Politico*, 23 October 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/10/23/trump-caravan-midterm-elections-875888>.

50/ Eugene SCOTT, "Before the Midterms, Trump Harped on the Migrant Caravan", *Washington Post*, 8 November 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/>

incumbent Senator Ted Cruz of Texas for re-election, Trump called the migrants' caravan an "assault on our country"⁵¹. Cruz's subsequent victory easily came to epitomize the Republican grip of the Senate.

To a certain extent, Trump's strategy was effective in 2020, too. Though defeated, he managed to increase his following by more than 11 million votes over the 2016 elections, in spite of nearly 230,000 victims of covid-19 and a slump in the economy because of the pandemic⁵².

Eventually, however, Trump's radicalism turned out to be counterproductive. It triggered off a successful counter-mobilization of liberal voters who hardly identified with Biden's middle-of-the-road stand but nonetheless wanted to prevent such an extremist as Trump from gaining a second term. Yet, Trump came much closer than expected to stay at the White House for four more years. Actually, he would have secured reelection if he had carried the three states – Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin – in which Biden obtained a plurality of less than one percentage point⁵³.

Conclusion

Echoing Downs, Andrew B. Hall has pointed out that "Primary voters exhibit a marked preference for more ideologically extreme candidates [...], but general-election voters appear to prefer moderates"⁵⁴. Consequently, conventional wisdom has it that, although candidates radicalize their platforms during primary campaigns because mainly partisan stalwarts cast their ballots in these competitions, the nominees subsequently reshape their blueprints in more moderate terms to reach out to the less partisan voters who predominate among the participants in general elections. Such a shift was what even Trump's aides expected

2018/11/08/before-midterms-trump-harped-migrant-caravan-since-then-he-has-barely-mentioned-it/.

51/ Ben SCHRECKINGER and Matthew CHOI, "Trump, at Cruz Rally, Hits Immigration as Reason to Vote GOP", *Politico*, 22 October 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/10/22/trump-cruz-rally-immigration-928978>.

52/ Catherine J. ROSS, *A Right to Lie? Presidents, Other Liars, and the First Amendment*, Philadelphia, U of Pennsylvania P, 2021, p. 103.

53/ Gary C. JACOBSON, "The Presidential and Congressional Elections of 2020", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. CXXXVI, n° 1, winter 2021, p. 11-45, p. 11-32.

54/ Andrew B. HALL, "What Happens When Extremists Win Primaries?", *American Political Science Review*, vol. CIX, n° 1, February 2015, p. 18-42, p. 18.

their boss to undertake after he had secured the 2016 Republican nomination⁵⁵. Yet, for the rest of the 2016 race and throughout the 2020 campaign, the strategy continued to be what his first manager, Corey R. Lewandowski, summarized by the formula "Let Trump be Trump"⁵⁶.

Such a slogan, however, implied a dimension of spontaneity that lacked in Trump's approach to politics. Commentators have contended that he was a dysfunctional, egomaniac, and erratic candidate who marginalized political consultants, relied on family members' often contradictory advice, and was unable to run a proper campaign⁵⁷. Yet, artificiality and careful planning could not but bulk large in the presidential bid of a billionaire who passed himself off as the self-proclaimed unlikely champion of the American working-class especially in Midwestern states⁵⁸. Trump himself admitted that his style and messages had not been extemporaneous but tailor-made for his prospective voters. After one of his staunchest supporters, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, complained to him that the former chief executive had shown "too much drama" in his denunciation of Biden's alleged stealing of the 2020 elections, Trump retorted that "I'll lose my base, if I change. They expect me to fight, to be disruptive"⁵⁹. Indeed, after appeasing the "no mask » movement as well as long fluctuating between the downplaying of the covid-19 pandemic and the denial of the disease itself⁶⁰, Trump was booed by his own followers at an event in Dallas, on 19 December 2021, when he revealed that he had received a booster shot of the vaccine⁶¹.

55/ Mari FIZDUFF, "All Too Human: The Allure of Donald Trump", in Mari FIZDUFF (ed.), *Why Irrational Politics Appeals: The Allure of Trump*, Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2017, p. 1-24, p. 17.

56/ Corey R. LEWANDOWSKI and David N. BOSSIE, *Let Trump Be Trump*, New York, Hachette, 2017.

57/ Lizzie WIDDICOMBE, "Family First", *New Yorker*, 22 August 2016, p. 24-30; Molly BALL, "There's Nothing Better Than a Scared, Rich Candidate", *Atlantic*, 2 October 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/10/theres-nothing-better-than-a-scared-rich-candidate/497522/>.

58/ Victor Davis HANSON, *The Case for Trump*, New York, Basic Books, 2019, p. 41, 62-63, 65, 120.

59/ Bob WOODWARD and Robert COSTA, *Peril*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2021, p. 409.

60/ Bob WOODWARD, *Rage*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2020.

61/ Azi PAYBARAH and Lauren MCCARTHY, "Donald Trump Said He Got a Booster Shot and His Supporters Booed", *New York Times*, 20 December 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/trump-supporters-booster-shots.html>.

Besides causing the dynamics of party competition to move away from Downs' search for moderate voters, Trump made a significant contribution to further polarizing the U.S. electorate, disuniting American society, and exacerbating the political debate as the 6 January 2021, attack on Capitol Hill subsequently demonstrated. His campaign slogan « Make America great again » could be easily rephrased as the rallying cry « Make America hate again » in the eyes of his extremist supporters. Indeed, Barbara F. Walter has even suggested that Trump placed the United States at risk of a civil war⁶². More than a year after the 2020 elections, the United States was still divided. In December 2021, only 58 percent of Americans thought that Biden was a legitimate president and 71 percent of Republicans believed that his victory was fraudulent⁶³. However, news outlets, too, helped Trump in the pursuit of his task. As media focused less on spreading political knowledge than on courting their respective audiences with the narratives and opinions their public expected to find, the information industry fomented the political conflicts and encouraged the divisiveness that Trump exploited in his election bids⁶⁴.

62/ Barbara F. WALTER, *How Civil Wars Start*, New York, Crown, 2022.

63/ Lisa HAGEN, "A Third of Americans Question Legitimacy of Biden Victory Nearly a Year after Jan. 6", *U.S. News and World Report*, 28 December 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2021-12-28/poll-a-third-of-americans-question-legitimacy-of-biden-victory-nearly-a-year-since-jan-6>.

64/ Matt TAIBBI, *Hate Inc.: Why Today's Media Make Us Despise One Another*, New York, OR Books, 2021.