

How Russiagate Replaced Analysis of the 2016 Election

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An honest and accurate analysis of the 2016 election is not just an academic exercise. It is very relevant to the current election campaign. Yet over the past two years, Russiagate has dominated media and political debate and largely replaced a serious analysis of the factors leading to Trump's victory. The public has been flooded with the various elements of the story that Russia intervened and Trump colluded with them. The latter accusation was negated by the Mueller Report but elements of the Democratic Party and media refuse to move on. Now it's the lofty but vague accusations of "obstruction of justice" along with renewed dirt digging. To some it is a "constitutional crisis", but to many it looks like more partisan fighting.

Russiagate has distracted from pressing issues

Russiagate has distracted attention and energy away from crucial and pressing issues such as income inequality, the housing and homeless crisis, inadequate healthcare, militarized police, over-priced college education, impossible student loans and deteriorating infrastructure. The tax structure was changed to benefit wealthy individuals and corporations with little opposition. The Trump administration has undermined environmental laws, civil rights, national parks and women's equality while directing [ever more money](#) to military contractors. Working class Americans are struggling with rising living costs, low wages, student debt, and racism. They constitute the bulk of the military which is spread all over the world, sustaining continuing occupations in war zones including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and parts of Africa. While all this has been going on, the Democratic establishment and much of the media have been focused on Russiagate, the Mueller Report, and related issues.

Immediately after the 2016 Election



In the immediate wake of the 2016 election there was some forthright analysis. Bernie Sanders [said](#),

“What Trump did very effectively is tap the angst and the anger and the hurt and pain that millions of working class people are feeling. What he said is, ‘I Donald Trump am going to be a champion of the working class... I know you are working longer hours for lower wages, seeing your jobs going to China, can’t afford childcare, can’t afford to send your kids to college. I Donald Trump alone can solve these problems.’...What you have is a guy who utilized the media, manipulated the media very well. He is an entertainer, he is a professional at that. But I will tell you that I think there needs to be a profound change in the way the Democratic Party does business. It is not good enough to have a liberal elite. I come from the white working class and I am deeply humiliated that the Democratic Party cannot talk to the people where I came from.”

Days after the election, the Washington Post published an op-ed titled [“Hillary Clinton Lost. Bernie Sanders could have won. We chose the wrong candidate.”](#) The author analyzed the results saying,

“Donald Trump’s stunning victory is less surprising when we remember a simple fact: Hillary Clinton is a deeply unpopular politician.”

The writer analyzed why Sanders would have prevailed against Trump and predicted *“there will be years of recriminations.”*

Russiagate replaced Recrimination

But instead of analysis, the media and Democrats have emphasized foreign interference. There is an element of self-interest in this narrative. As reported in “Russian Roulette” (p127), when the Clinton team first learned that Wikileaks was going to release damaging Democratic National Party emails in June 2016, they *“brought in outside consultants to plot a PR strategy for handling the news of the hack ... the story would advance a narrative that benefited the Clinton campaign and the Democrats: The Russians were interfering in the US election, presumably to assist Trump.”*

After losing the election, Team Clinton doubled down on this PR strategy. As described in the book “Shattered” (p. 395) the day after the election campaign managers assembled the communication team *“to engineer the case that the election wasn’t entirely on the up and up they went over the script they would pitch to the press and the public. Already, Russian hacking was the centerpiece of the argument.”*

This narrative has been remarkably effective in supplanting critical review of the election.

One Year After the Election

The Center for American Progress (CAP) was founded by John Podesta and is closely aligned with the Democratic Party. In November 2017 they produced an analysis titled [“Voter Trends in 2016: A Final Examination”](#). Interestingly, there is not a single reference to Russia. Key conclusions are that “it is critical for Democrats to attract more support from the white non-college-educated voting bloc” and “Democrats must go beyond the ‘identity politics’

versus 'economic populism' debate to create a genuine cross-racial, cross-class coalition ...” It suggests that Wall Street has the same interests as Main Street and the working class.

A progressive team produced a very different analysis titled [Autopsy: The Democratic Party in Crisis](#). They did this because “the (Democratic) party’s national leadership has shown scant interest in addressing many of the key factors that led to electoral disaster.” The report analyzes why the party turnout was less than expected and why traditional Democratic Party supporters are declining. It includes recommendations to end the party’s undemocratic practices, expand voting rights and counter voter suppression. The report contains details and specific recommendations lacking in the CAP report. It includes an overall analysis which says “The Democratic Party should disentangle itself – ideologically and financially – from Wall Street, the military-industrial complex and other corporate interests that put profits ahead of public needs.”

Two Years After the Election

In October 2018, the progressive team produced a follow-up report titled [“Autopsy: One Year Later”](#). It says, “The Democratic Party has implemented modest reforms, but corporate power continues to dominate the party.”

In a recent phone interview, the editor of that report, Norman Solomon, said it appears some in the Democratic Party establishment would rather lose the next election to Republicans than give up control of the party.

What really happened in 2016?

Beyond the initial critiques and “Autopsy” research, there has been little discussion, debate or lessons learned about the 2016 election. Politics has been dominated by Russiagate.

Why did so many working class voters switch from Obama to Trump? A major reason is because Hillary Clinton is associated with Wall Street and the economic policies of her husband President Bill Clinton. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), promoted by Bill Clinton, resulted in huge [decline in manufacturing jobs](#) in swing states such as Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Of course this would influence their thinking and votes. Hillary Clinton’s support for the Trans Pacific Partnership was another indication of her policies.

What about the low turnout from the African American community? Again, the lack of enthusiasm is rooted in objective reality. Hillary Clinton is associated with “welfare reform” promoted by her husband. According to [this study](#) from the University of Michigan,

“As of the beginning of 2011, about 1.46 million U.S. households with about 2.8 million children were surviving on \$2 or less in income per person per day in a given month... The prevalence of extreme poverty rose sharply between 1996 and 2011. This growth has been concentrated among those groups that were most affected by the 1996 welfare reform.”

Over the past several decades there has been a huge [increase in prison incarceration](#) due to increasingly strict punishments and mandatory prison sentences. Since the poor and working class have been the primary victims of welfare and criminal justice “reforms”

initiated or sustained through the Clinton presidency, it's understandable why they were not keen on Hillary Clinton. The notion that low turnout was due to African Americans being unduly influenced by Russian Facebook posts is seen as ["bigoted paternalism"](#) by blogger Teodrose Fikremanian who says,

"The corporate recorders at the NY Times would have us believe that the reason African-Americans did not uniformly vote for Hillary Clinton and the Democrats is because they were too dimwitted to think for themselves and were subsequently manipulated by foreign agents. This yellow press drivel is nothing more than propaganda that could have been written by George Wallace."

How Clinton became the Nominee



Since the 2016 election there has been little public discussion of the process whereby Hillary Clinton became the Democratic Party nominee. It's apparent she was pre-ordained by the Democratic Party elite. As exposed in the DNC emails, there was bias and violations of the party obligations at the highest levels. On top of that, it should now be clear that the pundits, pollsters and election experts were out of touch, made poor predictions and decisions.

Bernie Sanders would have been a much stronger candidate. He would have won the same party loyalists who voted for Clinton. His message attacking Wall Street would have resonated with significant sections of the working class and poor who were unenthusiastic (to say the least) about Clinton. An indication is that in critical swing states such as [Wisconsin](#) and [Michigan](#) Bernie Sanders beat Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary race.

Clinton had no response for Trump's attacks on multinational trade agreements and his false promises of serving the working class. Sanders would have had vastly more appeal to working class and minorities. His primary campaign showed his huge appeal to youth and third party voters. In short, it's likely that Sanders would have trounced Trump. Where is the accountability for how Clinton ended up as the Democratic Party candidate?

The Relevance of 2016 to 2020

The 2016 election is highly relevant today. Already we see the same pattern of establishment bias and "horse race" journalism which focuses on fund-raising, polls and elite-biased "electability" instead of dealing with real issues, who has solutions, who has appeal to which groups.

Mainstream media and pundits are already promoting Joe Biden. Syndicated columnist EJ Dionne, a Democratic establishment favorite, is indicative. In his article ["Can Biden be the](#)

[helmsman who gets us past the storm?](#)” Dionne speaks of the “strength he (Biden) brings” and the “comfort he creates”. In the same vein, Andrew Sullivan pushes Biden in his article [“Why Joe Biden Might be the Best to Beat Trump”](#). Sullivan thinks that Biden has appeal in the working class because he joked about claims he is too ‘hands on’. But while Biden may be tight with AFL-CIO leadership, he is closely associated with highly unpopular neoliberal trade deals which have resulted in manufacturing decline.

The establishment bias for Biden is matched by the bias against Democratic Party candidates who directly challenge Wall Street and US foreign policy. On Wall Street, that would be Bernie Sanders. On foreign policy, that is Tulsi Gabbard. With a military background Tulsi Gabbard has broad appeal, an inclusive message and a uniquely sharp critique of US “regime change” foreign policy. She [calls out](#) media pundits like Fareed Zakaria for goading Trump to invade Venezuela. In contrast with [Rachel Maddow taunting](#) John Bolton and Mike Pompeo to be MORE aggressive, Tulsi Gabbard has been [denouncing](#) Trump’s collusion with Saudi Arabia and Israel’s Netanyahu, saying it’s not in US interests. Gabbard’s anti-interventionist anti-occupation perspective has significant support from US troops. A [recent poll](#) indicates that military families want complete withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria. It seems conservatives have become more anti-war than liberals.

This points to another important yet under-discussed lesson from 2016: a factor in Trump’s victory was that he campaigned as an anti-war candidate against the hawkish Hillary Clinton. As pointed out [here](#),

“Donald Trump won more votes from communities with high military casualties than from similar communities which suffered fewer casualties.”

Instead of pointing out that Trump has betrayed his anti-war campaign promises, corporate media (and some Democratic Party outlets) seem to be undermining the candidate with the strongest anti-war message. An article at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) says, [“Corporate media target Gabbard for her Anti-Interventionism, a word they can barely pronounce”](#).

Russiagate has distracted most Democrats from analyzing how they lost in 2016. It has given them the dubious belief that it was because of foreign interference. They have failed to analyze or take stock of the consequences of DNC bias, the preference for Wall Street over working class concerns, and the failure to challenge the military industrial complex and foreign policy based on ‘regime change’ interventions.

There needs to be more analysis and lessons learned from the 2016 election to avoid a repeat of that disaster. As indicated in the [Autopsy](#), there needs to be a transparent and fair campaign for nominee based on more than establishment and Wall Street favoritism. There also needs to be consideration of which candidates reach beyond the partisan divide and can energize and advance the interests of the majority of Americans rather than the elite. The most crucial issues and especially US military and foreign policy need to be seriously debated.

Blaming an outside power is a good way to prevent self analysis and positive change. It’s gone on far too long.

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