

WHY HILLARY LOST: AN OUTLINE OF THE FACTORS LEADING TO HILLARY CLINTON'S DEFEAT IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

The present article looks into Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential bid in the US general election, providing an overview of the main factors that led to her surprising defeat by Republican contender Donald Trump, a former businessman and reality TV star with no political experience, who had never before sought public office. The aspects that significantly impacted the final outcome pertain to emotion rather than reason; out of these, our research analyses the flaws in the overall vision of her campaign, her gender, the negative campaigning against Trump and the "likability" factor, along with other oversights. The list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it possible to weigh the exact impact of each lapse; however, we believe that in a campaign where, from the voters' standpoint, it all came down to choosing the lesser evil, the aspects we have highlighted were the most important in overturning poll results and leading to Hillary Clinton's loss.

Keywords: presidential campaign, vision, negative campaigning, gender, glass ceiling, likeability

1. Introduction remarks

In the present article, we will tackle the 2016 US Presidential campaign, where Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton surprisingly lost her bid against Republican opponent Donald Trump, who had initially been credited with 15% chances of winning (Vohra, 2016:9). Although Trump gradually went up in the polls throughout a campaign riddled with challenges Hillary had to overcome, pre-election polls still predicted she would win², if only by a tiny margin. She had more positive media attention, was endorsed by more celebrities, her political experience was vast and she had one of the most outstanding CVs of presidential candidates of all times (she was an elected New York senator from 2001 to 2009 and Obama's Secretary of State

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² <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/us/elections/polls.html>, accessed on August 2, 2019.

from 2009 to 2013, alongside other remarkable professional accomplishments). She won all the three debates leading up to the elections, and she won the popular vote by almost 3 million ballots more cast in her favour (the largest margin ever for someone who won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College). Indeed, the final outcome (she lost the Electoral College vote with 227 out of the 270 votes needed) has led to ardent discussions and controversy over whether the Electoral College should be abolished (Law, 2019).

While Trump won the elections against the odds, having been vastly outspent by the Clinton campaign and despite (or maybe due to) his strong anti-immigration rhetoric, some claim that there is no clear economic rationale for his victory³, while others believe that he did tap into the economic frustrations of the working middle-class (a social category Hillary Clinton had alienated during her competition with Bernie Sanders in the preceding Democratic primaries). Whatever the case, and despite the fact that there can be no certain, all-encompassing, error-free underlying cause, an attempt to explain the Democratic candidate's defeat has to take into account a range of rational as well as emotional factors. In the following, we will provide a list of the most obvious ones, in random order; it is important to highlight that, although these factors stand out as essential, undoubtedly having mattered in the bigger picture leading to the surprising outcome, sometimes it is difficult to draw a clear line between them, as elements pertaining to some of them may overlap.

2. Vision

One of the most important problems leading to Hillary's defeat appears to be related to what was perceived as a lack of *vision* on the part of the candidate. Thus, while she was seen by many as the natural continuator of Obama's legacy and the most appropriate person to keep implementing the former president's policies, to carry on economic prosperity, keep America safe and reinforce its declining worldwide supremacy, her candidacy was also accused of lacking a noble objective above and beyond the contender's own ambitions, a long-term vision for the country and a capacity to make the campaign about more than Hillary herself.

For many electors, she was "the best chance to cement and extend Obama's legacy" (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 58); however, there appeared to be no sense of greater purpose, no vision attached to her endeavour, nothing that would explain to the American voter why she should have been the Democratic nominee in the first place, rather than Bernie Sanders who lost the race, or Joe Biden who had chosen not to compete; there was a failure of her aides to help connect her to a cause larger than

³ "The 2020 campaign will be more racially divisive than 2016 was", retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2019/07/17/the-2020-campaign-will-be-more-racially-divisive-than-2016-was?cid1=cust/dailypicks/n/bl/n/20190717n/owned/n/n/dailypicks/n/n/e/279203/n>, accessed on July 18, 2019.

herself (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 58) and convey a compelling message; in this misguided building of the character's image, neither her economic platform nor her gender-oriented rhetoric were enough to sweep her into presidency. Throughout her campaign, she courted African Americans, Hispanics, the LGBT community, women and migrants, especially Latinos, thus defining herself as a candidate of the minorities; this strategy eventually turned out to have significant drawbacks, as on the one hand it alienated working middle-class whites, and on the other hand there was no real emotive power behind her actions, an aspect we shall return to in section 4 of our paper.

It may not be surprising that, while from an economic standpoint her platform was as good as it was doable, thus striking the right balance between optimism and realism (unlike Bernie Sander's platform, which was considered populist to the point of demagogy), emotionally, the right economic and social data failed to strike a chord with potential voters. "She had plans for every imaginable corner of public policy, but they were loosely strong together. There was no simple vision unifying them – no central, defining policy of a Hillary presidency" (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 132). In other words, although rationally she was beyond reproach, there was one crucial aspect missing: what she wanted to do for the country, how America would be different if she won, did not emerge as clearly defined. Even her campaign slogan (one she initially disliked, but eventually approved of, *Stronger together*), while reinforcing the importance of preserving a *status quo* that had been as good as can be and emphasizing unity, appears by contrast to lack strength, determination and focus. Slogans need to have a powerful mass appeal, focusing on the individual characteristics of a specific candidate, telling them apart from the others; while there is nothing "wrong" with this one, its blandness did not help Hillary the way a more impactful mission statement would have.

Vision may seem an abstract concept; however, neglecting its importance may lead to disastrous outcomes. Thus, it is inherently linked to the process of candidate "branding" (Lilleker, 2006: 41-45), it helps establish the politician's place in the public eye and, most importantly, it differentiates them from rivals. Nowadays, in the age of entertainment, voters are looking for big, bold principles and concepts, for things and ideas that are easy to grasp and hold on to up to the finish line. In Hillary Clinton's campaign, there existed a series of easily identifiable, apparently minor errors of judgement we can pinpoint: she had no customized message for low-wage workers in the city who wanted to move up the social ladder – in other words, while she did have plans to subsidize lower and middle classes, there was no promise to help them move up, no ladder of opportunity; the campaign was out of touch with many swing voters as well, even in large Democratic urban areas, etc. However, above and beyond all these shortcomings (whose cumulated effect took a huge toll), there was no compelling substance to her campaign – while Trump's message broke through, Hillary's was missing, and the underlying reasoning behind this devastating

drawback was that she and her campaign staff were so confident they would win that they overlooked this aspect.

2.1 Negative campaigning

The lack of vision whereof Hillary's candidacy was accused partly stems from her intense negative campaigning. This may seem somewhat surprising for a contender who is seen as representing the *status quo*; however, her platform, concise and comprehensive though it may have been⁴, conveyed the misleading appearance of lacking a strong economic and reform message. In reality, Hillary's "vision for America" included a wide range of topics of maximum importance to American voters, topics ranging from gun violence prevention to health and economic issues. Still, due to campaign flaws as well as to her own personal inability to connect with the audience, her political message was perceived as focusing on negative campaigning and character assassination, on attacking Trump's racially charged rhetoric instead of attempting to beat him at economic and social arguments. While she was considered dishonest and corrupt by a significant part of the electorate, much of her campaign concentrated on throwing mud at Trump and convincing voters that he was even worse than her. In a context where, basically, it all boiled down to voters deciding which of the two was the lesser evil, the strategy fell short of reaching its goal.

In terms of advertising, while over half of the ads produced by Clinton's campaign organization, *Hillary for America*, between July 7, 2016 and October 25, 2016 overtly attacked Trump, "an additional 24% represented an implicit attack on Trump, juxtaposing him as the negative counterpart to Clinton's positive character" (Keaveny, 2016). Not only was Trump depicted as lacking the right qualities for presidency, such as intelligence and a good temperament (his tweets did help convey the message that he was unable to control himself), but he was also explicitly accused of trying to "bully his way into presidency", a message that was also backed by Hillary's endorsers (for instance, Michelle Obama's support speech at the Democratic National Convention in July 2016 carried an implicit attack against Trump, though his name was never mentioned – she referred to the "hateful language" used by public figures on TV that her daughters hear as a negative example⁵). Overall, the way the Democratic candidate's campaign was conducted, it appeared to tap into negative emotions such as fear, sadness and anger, aiming for negative voting against the opponent rather than striving to project a more likeable image of Hillary herself.

⁴ "Hillary's Vision for America", retrieved from <https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/>, accessed on June 18, 2019.

⁵ The full transcript of Michelle Obama's speech can be found at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/michelle-obama-speech-in-full-dnc-2016-barack-hillary-clinton-democratic-party-us-election-a7156031.html>, accessed on August 3, 2019.

Her negative campaigning against Trump pursued several directions, as she attacked him on several levels. While she did aim to portray him as the “poster boy for corporate insiders screwing the little guy” (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 330), most importantly, her negative campaigning was directed at his character: he was a bigot, misogynistic, anti-immigration, anti-Hispanic, anti-women, and a bully. Thus, in the general election, she competed against Trump focusing on the differences between them, a classic strategy – while highlighting the differences between herself and the opponent, she aimed to villainize the latter and cast herself off as the significantly better choice. The approach capitalizes on the Manichean distinction between good and evil (Enache and Militaru, 2013: 46-49), ever-present in political communication, that needs to be built up; against this background, the politician can go on to shed light on their strengths as opposed to the rival’s weaknesses. In this case, where both candidates were seen as flawed and neither stood for the values that strike a chord with the American electorate, Hillary’s campaign played on appealing to unity and stability as against the division Trump embodied through his anti-immigration discourse; she put forward the idea of “an economy for everyone” versus Trump being in it for himself (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 280), and she stressed her steadiness as opposed to the risk of Trump (since the latter’s character flaws, more specifically his impulsiveness, made him unreliable, untrustworthy and potentially dangerous).

However, where she did go wrong was in assuming that, if voters found Trump unsuitable for presidency, they would vote for her by default and she would win. While she speculated Trump’s unpredictability and anti-immigration, sexist discourse, she failed to convey a convincing message of her own, a clear motivation for her candidacy, for the necessity of electing her, a message powerful enough to break through the barriers of misogyny and override the controversies surrounding her own public persona. Moreover, in a society thirsty for authenticity, while neither of them could credibly stand for traditional family values, as Trump’s womanizing was famous, while Hillary was seen as an “enabler” in her husband’s infidelities (Wead, 2017: 308-324), he was not “running for saint”, never pretended to, while she continued to do so, presenting a “holier than thou attitude” (Vohra, 2016: 121). From an economic standpoint, too, while it was well-known that Trump had allegedly evaded paying income taxes for years, and he admitted having resorted to questionable practices in his life (“*That’s called business, by the way*” was his reply to her allegation that he had hoped to benefit from the 2008 housing crisis, during their first debate)⁶, the defiantly well-paid speeches she had given to banks hardly conveyed an impression of morality. Therefore, while Clinton did strive to highlight her rival’s weaknesses, the strategy failed, since out of the two already flawed

⁶ The full transcript of the first debate can be found at:
<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/full-transcript-first-2016-presidential-debate-228761>, accessed on August 3, 2019.

candidates, Trump appeared to be a more authentic persona overall and consequently, the lesser evil.

3. Gender

Hillary Clinton's gender can hardly be separated from her political career. To begin with, in a society that is still misogynistic to a large extent, her accomplishments are all the more valuable. In her 2008 speech, upon suspending her presidential campaign, she told her audience that "*when I was asked what it means to be a woman running for President, I always gave the same answer, that I was proud to be running as a woman, but I was running because I thought I'd be the best President.*"⁷ We can see, in the above, the unresolvable tension between embracing gender as part of her rhetoric, while also struggling to emphasize that femininity ought not to define a candidate in the era of empowered women, or should at least appear less important than the individual's personal qualities. In her pursuit of credibility and support, the speaker strives to strike a balance between resorting to gender as the ultimate legitimacy enhancer and shedding light on her political accomplishments irrespective of being a woman. It is a difficult, if not impossible task, as the candidate faces the insurmountable challenge of the *double bind* head-on.

The *double bind* was identified and explained as a gendered bias that women leaders have strived to overcome – the apparent incompatibility of *femininity* and *competency*. Thus, women who are considered feminine will be automatically seen as incapable of leadership, whereas women who present the characteristics necessary to be a leader (strength and competence) will be perceived as unfeminine and labelled as unnatural, deviant from the norm. "When a bind casts two supposedly desirable states as mutually exclusive, the woman is invited to believe that she is incapable of attaining success" (Hall Jamieson, 1995: 7) In the world of politics, femininity and competence are widely perceived as mutually exclusive, and harsh judgement is enforced upon those aiming to shatter that mentality.

Clinton's 2008 speech was inspiring and heart-breaking and represents, to this day, a landmark in American political communication. It is in the same speech that she famously incorporated the *glass ceiling* metaphor into her political rhetoric, by stating that "*although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it, and the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time*". Indeed, Clinton's presidential run stands

⁷ "Text of Clinton's 2008 Concession Speech", retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/jun/07/hillaryclinton.uselections20081>, accessed on July 22, 2019.

out as a historic moment in the US; up until the present moment, although women have gained significant ground in social and political life, society has remained biased against women reaching the highest public office. Clinton's campaign, culminating in her arguably unfair loss, needs to be understood "in a larger historical and cultural context that continues to perpetuate powerful patriarchal barriers and constraints to women presidential candidates". (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 1)

3.1 Approaches to a female presidency

Diane Blair (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015) provides thorough insight into how women's presidential candidacies tend to be interpreted, alongside their discourse and final outcome, in terms of a cultural context that is hostile, prejudiced and inherently biased. Thus, more specifically, she refers to the "rhetoric of the first", whereby female candidates on the campaign trail for public office pay tribute to the pioneering nature of their venture. While the intensive media coverage of women candidates allegedly emphasizes their uniqueness and novelty, the author significantly points out that women running are still not the norm, they are new to this arena, a fact which ends up undermining both their credibility and their chances to succeed. Their candidacy acquires a more symbolic dimension, to the detriment of its political weight. "While culturally, we may admire the "pioneering spirit" of these women's efforts, such a discursive frame also plays into anxieties over what we may perceive as radical change and transformation in the political process". (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 1) Thus, resorting to the *rhetoric of the first* may backfire, turning into a two-edged sword and transforming a potential advantage into a stigma, by highlighting that society is not yet ready to welcome these "different" candidacies.

The rhetoric of viability is closely linked to the rhetoric of the first. Viability defines a contender's chances to actually win the elections, zeroing in on whether the candidacy is merely a symbolic one or has any real political weight. Lack of viability may spawn a financial vicious circle, as sponsors only donate to candidates with true chances of success, while without funding, it is impossible for a candidacy to be successful. Also, the rhetoric of viability may negatively impact the potential advantages of tapping into the emotional resources of the rhetoric of the first, as the historic importance of a candidacy decreases dramatically in the absence of a real chance to win.

Thirdly, the rhetorical frame of the *masculine presidency* completes the picture, enhancing the compelling impact of the first two. Presidency is understood in a highly gendered way, while women's entry into presidential politics is difficult. In the first presidential debate, Trump stated that Hillary Clinton just "doesn't have the

stamina⁸” to be president, thus putting forth a widespread view: that women fall short of the standard profile of a person running for the highest office. By default, women are seen as weak, unable to control themselves under pressure and to make difficult, tough decisions (for instance, they are considered unable to handle a military crisis); should they, by contrast, prove that none of the above applies, they face the *double bind* challenge presented above.

Moreover, aside from the doubts shed on women’s emotional fitness for office, media attention also focuses on the way they look, and expectations are high. Things such as clothing, makeup, hair and other physical characteristics, which would be almost irrelevant in the case of a man, become the object of sharp, unwanted attention from the press if a woman is running. By focusing on looks and clothing, the media “trivializes these women’s campaigns and suggests such superficial issues should inform our judgements of these candidates as much, if not more than, their political position and expertise”. (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 6)

To conclude, we can say that these three rhetorical frames (of *the first*, of *viability* and of *a masculine presidency*) still continue to shape the general outlook on presidential politics. They “cultivate a social and political climate that makes it very difficult for women presidential candidates to be taken seriously” (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 7), reinforcing an unfortunate set of attitudes and beliefs that women running for presidential office are outsiders to the norm, stand no chance of winning and their candidacy is mainly symbolic. Thus, their endeavour is undermined and disparaged from the start, which leads to lack of both financial resources and general credibility. The three rhetorical frames described above greatly contribute to the perpetuation of the *glass ceiling* barrier, a form of discrimination that not even Hillary Clinton managed to completely set aside.

3.2 Gender in Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential bid

Hillary Clinton’s candidacy also falls under the scope of the three rhetorical frames discussed above. Not only is she the first former first lady to run for president, she is also the first woman ascending to nominee of one of the two major parties in the US; moreover, in terms of viability, she is the first female candidate with real chances of success. She came into the campaign with “the money, the name recognition, and the fund-raising power to back that claim of viability”. (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 7) Sadly, though, despite the fact that her being a Clinton provided unrivalled name recognition, it also backfired. Not only did her husband’s character flaws work against her more than they worked for her; but, perhaps as importantly, some people wondered who, in the case of her winning, would actually

⁸ The full transcript of the first debate can be found at:
<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/full-transcript-first-2016-presidential-debate-228761>, accessed on August 3, 2019.

be running the White House. Thus, her husband's fame may eventually have turned into a political liability for Hillary Clinton, just as much as the email scandal or her well-paid speeches to banks were.

Also, *the double bind* stigma described above took a powerful toll; her generally acknowledged political competence bestowed upon her the appearance of a lack of humanity – “her political acumen was presented explicitly as unfeminine, unseemly, and potentially harmful, especially to men”. (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 9) It is undoubtedly interesting to notice that her gender was used against her both ways: she was accused both of too much femininity (as has been said, in the first debate, Trump claimed Hillary “doesn’t have the stamina” necessary for a US president⁹) and of lack thereof (she was described as tough, mean, and ruthless by Republican Strategist Mike Murphy (Parry-Giles, 2014: 135-136); these are only two examples. The qualities laid out to undermine her political persona would be praiseworthy in men, while they are deemed unnatural and deviant in a woman; these views are not exceptions, they reflect general perceptions on the candidate amongst the electorate.

The same is true for the inherent controversy surrounding her authenticity. If she was authentic, if public perceptions reflected reality, she was harsh and ruthless. If she was not authentic, if her public image was just a front, that made her dishonest and untrustworthy. In either case, she was a dangerous, power-hungry candidate who would resort to any means to reach her end, another four years at the White House, this time as a principal rather than a plus-one (Dowd, 2008). Over the years, there had been numerous references aiming to “villanize Clinton and suggest that her political ambition is not only unfeminine and unnatural, but a sign of something much more sinister”. (Lawrence and Rose, 2010: 199) Everything she did fuelled that allegation, from the way she dressed to the way she laughed. Even her tears were deemed either insincere and manipulative, or proof that she lacks the emotional stability to handle affairs of state, make difficult decisions and overcome setbacks. (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 9)

Hillary did try to counterbalance the *double bind* stigma by portraying herself as an intelligent woman who “is comfortable near power and wielding power”. (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 43) She tried to put forward an image of herself in which her long years in the administration, her experience as former first lady and her family accomplishments would merge, granting her an unrivalled personal as well as professional edge; she tried to position herself as a powerful political figure, capable of holding her own, of making difficult decisions as well as implementing changes in institutions dominated by men without neglecting her personal life; however, on the one hand, she was closely followed by her husband's legacy, which turned into

⁹ The full transcript of the first debate can be found at:
<https://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/full-transcript-first-2016-presidential-debate-228761>, accessed on August 3, 2019.

a major challenge (not even her years as Secretary of State could completely erase that memory from older voters' minds); besides, Republicans did their best to tie her to the Obama's administration foreign policy errors, which Millennial voters were more familiar with (as was, for instance, the 2012 Benghazi attack); lastly, both her husband's sexual misconduct and the rumours of Chelsea being a "spoiled brat" (Halper, 2016) cast serious doubt on her authenticity as a happy, wise, successful wife and mother.

To conclude this section, we can say that, undoubtedly, gender played a significant role in Hillary's 2016 campaign and is partly responsible for her loss. Not only did it constantly surface throughout her narrative, but it was also reflected in the electorate's outlook on her. "Women politicians need to be much more pro-active to control the construction of their public perception than male politicians, especially in the American political context, where women are traditionally assigned a lower level of political competence and leadership qualities". (Molek-Kozakowska, 2016) Against the impossible background where her professional savviness undermined her authenticity as a woman while her gender weakened her political credibility, she attempted to challenge all the previously established norms pertaining to presidency, while her gender impacted both her image, and others' expectations from her performance. Overall, Hillary's campaign, the responses she faced throughout and, most importantly, the final outcome provide compelling evidence that society is still patriarchal and misogynistic to a great extent, and shattering the glass ceiling may still be a long way away.

3.3 The "glass ceiling" metaphor

The term "glass ceiling" has gradually gained ground since 1986, when two Wall Street Journal reporters used the metaphor to describe the invisible, unwritten barrier that blocks women from accessing top positions in corporations. However, it first emerged in 1978, when Marilyn Loden, a mid-level manager at New York Telephone Co., spoke on a panel at the Women's Exposition in New York (Vargas, 2018). She wasn't aware that she was coining a term that would acquire iconic dimensions and would be used to describe a mentality lasting through generations on end. Indeed, the scope of its meaning has gradually widened, and has come to apply to difficulties that all minorities face in their professional lives. Thus, "the expression glass ceiling has been used to describe artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing to positions of power offering higher salaries and more responsibility and authority.¹⁰" The *glass ceiling* metaphor defines a palpable form of discrimination, whose persistence can be explained by a wide variety of social, economic and

¹⁰ "Glass ceiling", retrieved from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/glass-ceiling>, accessed on July 31, 2019.

cultural factors; it defines a barrier that is not usually visible but tacit, translating into implicit discrimination against women and other minorities through specific policies, practices and attitudes. Although the term initially applied to corporations, it later came to be applied in politics as well, describing the invisible limits above which women couldn't rise.

In her rhetoric, Hillary Clinton famously resorted to this metaphor twice, in her two concession speeches. Thus, in her 2008 Concession Speech, when she suspended her presidential campaign, she said: *"Although we weren't able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it, and the light is shining through like never before, filling us all with the hope and the sure knowledge that the path will be a little easier next time."* The candidate was then referring to a woman's access to winning nomination on behalf of one of the two major parties, while the eighteen million cracks were symbolic of the almost 18 million people who cast the ballot in her favour before she conceded to Barack Obama. Eight years later, in her 2016 Concession Speech, she returned to the metaphor, saying that *"Now, I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday someone will – and hopefully sooner than we might think right now"*. Thus, the arguably failed attempt to shatter the highest and hardest glass ceiling in American democracy, a woman's access to presidency, has become iconic of the politician's lifelong career, as by all imaginable rational standards, she ought to have won. There is no economic explanation for Trump's victory, it all stems from emotional factors, from the fact that she failed to connect with the electorate at a deeper level. She had the right experience, she had the ideological platform and she had the financial resources; still, she lost to a highly controversial, unpopular aspirant with no political experience.

Resorting to the *glass ceiling* metaphor is closely linked to her ethos, that is, to her character¹¹, to the way she cast herself off before potential electors. Ethos represents an important factor in persuasion, as it bestows credibility upon the rhetor and helps them connect with the audience, emotionally. This is where Clinton failed, as her narrative was "haunted by both the image of the emasculating warrior un-woman, and that of the weak wife who failed to sever a demeaning and humiliating personal relationship". (Lockhart and Mollick, 2015: 87) Thus, there was either too much or too little feminism in her persona, she was accused either of being too feminine or of lacking femininity, overall, as a politician; against this highly prejudiced, misogynistic background, whatever she did was wrong. The bias also took a toll on her rhetoric, as she had to face the insurmountable challenge of being "confident without appearing arrogant, defensive without being accusatory, and assertive without looking like a bitch". (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 327) Broadly speaking, her

¹¹ "Ethos, pathos and logos – Modes of persuasion" (Aristotle), retrieved from <http://www.european-rhetoric.com/ethos-pathos-logos-modes-persuasion-aristotle/>, accessed on August 2, 2019.

character and actions appeared to lack authenticity, hence her use of the *glass ceiling* metaphor failed to achieve the desired impact. Since authenticity, the public's perception of a politician as a good, trustworthy person, where their personal lives fall into line with their public image, goes hand in hand with trust, which spawns the voters' confidence, Hillary's resorting to the *glass ceiling* metaphor conveyed the same impression that she was deceitful. As with the rest of her endeavours, "she presented a tedious, (...) phony and inauthentic appearance. She seemed interested in climbing the ladder, but not interested in anyone but herself". (Vohra, 2016: 120) That may not have even been true, but it is how she came across; in a world less focused on traditional values (perhaps because ever fewer contenders comply with them) and more interested in genuineness, she lacked what it took to gain trust. A system insider, with all the institutional and financial backing one could possibly want, she failed to deliver the message that her struggle was the struggle of all women and/ or minorities, let alone of all people, or that her victory would represent anyone else's triumph but her own.

4. Likeability

There are several important reasons why Hillary failed to be "liked" enough to win the 270 out of 538 electoral votes and become president. Though her competence as a politician was never in question, she seemed to be the right person to win the presidency and the person who would have handled it best (as she had one of the most remarkable CVs of presidential candidates of all times – she had been policy advisor to her husband, had won a place in the Senate twice and had been Obama's well-trusted Secretary of State), she lost to a man with no political experience, who had never before sought public office, and who was generally perceived as controversial and not fit to be Head of State. However, against a background where, if electors had been asked to describe each candidate in one word, they would have defined Hillary as "corrupt" (*crooked Hillary*, a nickname coined by Meghan McCain, the late senator McCain's daughter, subsequently became an insult frequently used by Trump to tarnish her) and Trump as "crazy", he was eventually preferred as the lesser evil.

The first reason she was not liked pertains to the fact that she was widely believed to be corrupt. Although the media frequently referred to her as smart and politically savvy, her alleged character flaws weighed harder with the electorate. There are several underlying causes behind the never-ending saga of Hillary's corruption, as this is not a label she acquired overnight; it took years for this reputation to become a permanent feature attached to her.

Out of the several factors that led, in time, to this general perception of her, the issue that seems to have had the strongest impact on the election's outcome appears to be related to the claims she faced for mishandling classified information by using a

private email server instead of the official State Department email accounts. The story took its toll on the candidate's image; while she was legally exonerated in July by FBI Director James Comey, who announced that he would not recommend charges to be brought against her, he also publicly condemned her behaviour as "extremely careless"¹². The implicit message was that Hillary had definitely done something wrong, albeit something she could not be prosecuted for; however, as in the world of politics, perceptions can hurt as much as reality, the impact on the electorate was undeniable. Moreover, the issue re-emerged in October, shortly before the elections, when Comey sent a letter to Congress announcing that the FBI had started analysing newly found email; not only did this do tremendous damage to Clinton's campaign, but Comey's final exoneration of her, on November 6, two days before the elections, pushed numerous enraged Trump supporters to the polls and is partly credited with her defeat.

Along the same lines, the fact that, in the period preceding her running for Presidency, she gave well-paid speeches to banks certainly did not help her look good in the public eye. In a time of rising populism, this only contributed to reinforcing her image as a system insider and Wall Street supporter in a context where people were looking for change and a fresh approach to governance. Thus, the general fear was that the "corrupt insider who had helped rig the political and economic system in favour of the powerful" (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 51), if elected, would only continue to do so. It helped reinforce many people's perceptions that she was a symbol of everything going wrong in America – the electorate was already angry with the political class in general, as there was a feeling that recovery from the recession had been significantly easier and faster for Wall Street and large corporations than for the middle classes (a category that Hillary also alienated in her endeavours to cast herself off as a candidate of minorities). The feeling that the Obama administration had in fact applied trickle-down policies in disguise and had fallen short of campaign promises had reached a peak, and Hillary's campaign errors deepened the electorate's frustrations with the Washington establishment.

Aside from her being viewed as corrupt, there are other aspects to consider when looking into Hillary's failure to make herself liked by the electorate. She had been in the public eye for 25 years when she ran for president, and she had come to be perceived as one of the most polarizing, most controversial public figures of all times. Amongst the factors lining up against her, we can think of her husband's temperamental flaws and, more importantly, of the allegations against him of several sexual improprieties over the years, culminating with the Monica Lewinsky affair.

¹² "Statement by FBI Director James B. Comey on the Investigation of Secretary Hillary Clinton's Use of a Personal E-mail System", retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/statement-by-fbi-director-james-b-comey-on-the-investigation-of-secretary-hillary-clinton2019s-use-of-a-personal-e-mail-system>, accessed on August 5, 2019.

Moreover, Hillary herself was thought an inadequate women's candidate, since she was rumoured to have mistreated women who accused her husband of inappropriate sexual behaviour (Holmes and Rose, 2016), a fact Trump used against her in the second debate¹³. Considering the way she was said to have treated women who complained of abuse and even assault from Bill, she could not project herself as a credible representative for them, nor could she convincingly portray Trump himself as a person who bullies, shames, mistreats and disparages other women.

Most importantly, Hillary failed to convey an impression of humanity, to connect with voters at a level deeper than that of her political platform. There was no emotion attached to her message, and people were left with the impression that, after so much time in the limelight, they still could not get to her core. As her mother had died a few years before, the two people who knew her best as a person, Bill and Chelsea Clinton, advocated for her, attempting to present the person to the public rather than the politician; however, in an era when for the average citizen, connecting with politics is "an emotional experience" (Lilleker, 2006: 78), their message did not get through.

From an emotional point of view, the main impression she aimed to transmit was that, unlike her opponent who was dangerous, she was steady; therefore, her strong point was stability. However, no matter what she tried or how hard she tried, no matter how much they disliked Trump and saw him as unfit to become president, people still were not convinced to vote for her. "For some, her education, privilege, and perceived sense of entitlement were more off-putting than her agenda, her secrecy, or even the way her voice hit their ears. She wasn't like them. And that made it harder, if not impossible, to get them to listen with an open mind". (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 227) Rationally, she would have been significantly more fit for presidency than her rival. Emotionally, that reality failed to reach its recipients. Many voters, especially less educated whites, but even some small yet committed communities of voters of colour and some women, simply did not like Hillary and what they thought she represented and was going to fight for, and there was nothing in the world she could have done to change either their minds or their perceptions of her.

5. Other aspects

Several other factors have played an undeniable role in Clinton's defeat; the current section of our paper will briefly review them. Firstly, in an era when political allegiances falter and electors are becoming ever fickler, demanding constant

¹³ The full transcript of the second debate Hillary Clinton- Donald Trump (October 9, 2016) can be accessed at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/10/us/politics/transcript-second-debate.html>

change, she was seen as a product of the establishment. The perception falls into line with the “Clinton fatigue” (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 360), a syndrome gaining ground amongst the population both because she was seen as the continuator of Obama’s policies in a would-be third consecutive Democratic mandate, and because she herself had been in the public eye for a long time, albeit in different roles and positions. Thus, the feeling of fatigue reflected negatively not only on the party she represented, but also on herself as an individual. Against this background, where the erosion of power as well as dealignment – decreased loyalty to one candidate or party (Lilleker, 2006: 65-68) – steered public perceptions, she was the *status quo*, whereas Trump, unfit for presidency though he may have been, represented the preferred agent of change.

Another factor that had an irreversible impact on the final outcome was Bernie Sanders’ bid for the Democratic nomination, which inflicted a tremendous amount of damage on Hillary’s campaign and likely resulted in significant vote loss for the latter in the general elections. Throughout the fierce competition in the primary, he called her corrupt and dishonest, feeding the voters’ worst fears about her and laying out a favourable ground for Trump to sow his anti-establishment discourse. From the very beginning, his campaign capitalized on the already existing antipathy for Hillary Clinton inside the Democratic Party. After she won the nomination and he officially endorsed her, part of his supporters followed suit; however, those who disliked her more than they valued him turned into haters. It appears that around 12% of people who voted for Sanders in the 2016 primaries ended up voting for Trump in the general election (Kurtzleben, 2017), either because they approved of Trump’s platform or anti-immigration rhetoric, feeling ideologically closer to him, or simply because they loathed Hillary Clinton.

Last but not least, her campaign was riddled with errors of judgement throughout. The fact that some of the people who had initially supported Sanders, especially working-class whites and millennials, did not end up endorsing Hillary, can also be attributed to her overall campaign reasoning. During the primaries, due to anxiety over money, Robbie Mook, her campaign manager, had tried to spend just enough for Hilary to take a lead, without making further efforts to flip Bernie supporters and win over undecided voters. “During the primaries, Mook’s obsession with efficiency had come at the cost of broad voter contact in states that would become important battlegrounds in the general election”. (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 307) Therefore, while focusing on specific target groups during the primaries in an endeavour to win with the lowest possible costs, the Clintons lost touch with other social categories. Also, “white voters punished her for running a campaign so focused on minority voters”. (Allen and Parnes, 2017: 307) Unlike Obama, who had managed to score beautifully with working-class whites while preserving his African American voter base, Hillary alienated the former in the attempt to project herself as the candidate of the minorities. In other words, broadly speaking, her strategy in the general

elections continued the approach taken in the primaries, that is, it aimed at turning out voters who already supported her and overlooked drawing in others (either Bernie supporters or undecided voters).

6. Conclusions

In our paper, we have provided an overview of the main factors leading to Hillary Clinton's loss in the 2016 presidential elections. We have shown that the lack of vision of her campaign, her gender, the strong antipathy against her, the negative campaigning against Trump alongside other significant oversights have managed to overturn poll results and led to an against-the-odds victory of the Republican candidate. Her second bid for the presidency started under the right auspices and was thought to be a sure win; in fact, it is exactly this certainty that was considered responsible for the serious errors of judgement of her staff. In the beginning, she was rated as the overwhelming favourite, and no trustworthy analyst would have predicted Trump's victory; subsequently, throughout the campaign, her edge decreased gradually, though polls still forecast her winning shortly before the elections. Nevertheless, she lost, for reasons that seem to pertain to emotion more than they do to reason. Voters who had previously supported Obama (women, minorities, college-educated whites) failed her, primarily because she was unable to absorb these people's economic anxieties. Overconfident in her demographic and institutional advantage, she alienated significant number of voters by attempting to cast herself off as a candidate of the minorities, by appealing to various social groups instead of putting forth a clear economic and reform message. Along the same lines, she was perceived as the *status quo* in an era when people wanted change, she appeared to lack a clear vision, a selfless motivation for running as well as personal rather than professional credibility. She was thought to be deceitful and corrupt, she failed to connect with voters emotionally, and, last but not least, the strong misogyny still prevalent in society worked against her.

Hillary Clinton did not win the 2016 presidential elections, nor will she run again. She has not managed to shatter the highest, hardest glass ceiling of all, a woman's access to US Presidency. However, she has accomplished several outstanding feats, which will undoubtedly ensure her a permanent presence in history books of the future, as their importance and impact transcend her own persona. If anyone has ever managed to challenge the all-pervasive mentality that smart women are unwomanly while femininity equals incompetence, that women cannot exercise their brain and succeed in their personal lives, Hillary Clinton is that person. True, she is not above reproach, nor is her life a fairy-tale. However, her personal and professional pursuits intertwine, casting her off as one the most influential personalities in the United States ever. She had an outstanding career as a lawyer and diplomat, she was First Lady of Arkansas and First Lady of the United States (the most empowered First Lady aside from Eleanor Roosevelt), she was Secretary of State under President

Barack Obama and a US Senator, to name but a few of her achievements. She may not have won the Presidency. But she has brought the world one step closer, she has reshaped mentalities and changed the way people look at politicians, and she has made women worldwide see beyond the glass ceiling and hope that someday soon, one woman will be President of the United States of America.

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