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USA

Looking back at the American election: the oligarchic consensus and its contradictions

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It would be easy to analyse Trump's victory as the result of a slow and inevitable progression of ultra-reactionary and fascist ideas among American voters. We must also analyse Harris's defeat, which ultimately results from the fear of running a campaign in defence of workers.

Donald Trump has just been elected with increased support across the board compared to his first election in 2016. However, he is the one who presided over the murderous management of the Covid pandemic. Let us remember: he fomented the January 6, 2021 riot against the Capitol; he was found guilty (by a unanimous jury) of thirty-four counts of falsification of accounting in a concealed payment case; he was convicted of sexual assault (in 1996) and of defamation of his victim, to whom he had to pay the sum of 5 million dollars (in 2023); he had to reimburse 25 million dollars to the students trapped in the "Trump University" scam; he entertained his audiences at his rallies by simulating fellatio with his microphone or by explicit comments about the genitals of an American golf star; and finally, he spread the most bizarre racist rumours about Haitian immigrants who supposedly ate pets in Springfield, Ohio.

Trump has already decided to surround himself, once elected, with a gallery of characters, each more enchanting than the one before; at the Department of Energy, a fossil fuel industry boss (Chris Wright) who is among the most determined opponents of the fight against climate change; a sexual assaulter (Pete Hegseth) at the Defence Department; another (Matt Gaetz) who is the subject of an investigation for sexual relations with an underage prostitute, drug use and embezzlement of campaign funds [1]; at the Health Department, a declared anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist (Robert F. Kennedy) with fluctuating "convictions" on the right to abortion.

Let us highlight the choice of Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy (a biotech billionaire) to lead a new "Department of Government Efficiency". Musk has already announced his plan to reduce spending in the US federal budget by at least a third (\$2 trillion). However, firing all federal employees (15 per cent of the budget) would not even come close to achieving such a goal. To achieve this, Social Security (including ObamaCare) and unemployment insurance will have to be done away with.

Ambivalence and contradictions of the result

However, the surge in the popular vote in favour of Donald Trump is not itself a reflection of strong support for him personally. A majority of American public opinion declares itself in favour of a lesser role for money in politics (62 per cent); in favour of reducing health costs and improving the education system (60 per cent); and although anti-immigration positions had a significant echo during the campaign, the fact remains that 56 per cent of Americans (against 40 per cent) say they are in favour of facilitating access to legal immigration for undocumented immigrants in the United States [2].

In 2022, according to the Pew Research Centre, 71 per cent of respondents believed that big companies had a "negative effect" on the life of the country, and 56 per cent judged banks and other financial institutions negatively [3]. While the figures vary from one survey to another [4], the generalization of distrust, even hostility, towards the powers of American capitalism seems to be the object of a widely shared opinion.

This explains, at least in part, some of the ambivalence in this election.

In several states, the vote in favour of Trump was accompanied by options that were out of step with his ultra-reactionary orientation. Of the ten states where the question of the right to abortion (to restore it or extend the

period of access) appeared on the ballot, seven voted for the protection of abortion while giving a majority to Trump. In Missouri, 58.7 per cent of voters voted for Trump and, on the same ballot, they voted 51.6 per cent for the amendments to end the ban on abortion in the State Constitution and 57.6 per cent for increasing the minimum wage and extending access to sick leave [5]. It was same thing in Arizona. In Florida [6], the vote in favour of extending the period of access to abortion was 57.2 per cent, almost reaching the 60 per cent threshold necessary for the adoption of an amendment to the state constitution.

Many states put Trump in the lead while choosing Democratic candidates (Senate or Congress) at the local level. From this point of view, the re-election of Alexandria Ocasio Cortez in the 14th district of New York is emblematic: the clearly left-wing candidate was re-elected with 68.per cent, but by an electorate that, for one part, significantly strengthened the vote (+10 points, but still a minority in the state) for Trump for president. This situation was reflected in various ways in Michigan, Wisconsin, Nevada, and North Carolina. Nothing new, of course, but there is enough here to qualify a little the simplistic vision of an America politically polarized as never before.

Defeat of a right-wing campaign

In 2020, Biden won 81 million voters, compared to 74 million for Trump. Four years later, Trump won 77 million voters, compared to 75 million for Harris. Although the Republican candidate is making progress, it is mainly the Democrats who are losing ground. But the Democratic defeat seems to have led to an epidemic of soul-searching, the most racist of which is to blame the failure on the Arab-Americans of Michigan, who renounced their "historical allegiance" on the altar of American foreign policy and the genocide in Palestine [7].

The Democratic defeat is above all the defeat of a campaign conducted on the right, counting on a presumed captive electorate. Let us first note the way in which Harris reduced her programmatic message to the theme of the danger to democracy represented by the fascist Trump and to the question of reproductive rights. The problem here is that, on the one hand, Trump also campaigned on the question of safeguarding American democracy (without giving up the accusation of the "stolen election" in 2020) and that, on the other hand, many voters had the possibility of restoring or strengthening the right to abortion at the level of their own state. Racism and machismo also played against the black woman candidate.

Nevertheless, Harris was intent on sending signals in her campaign to right-wing voters who might not want Trump back in office, running alongside Liz Cheney and her father, Dick Cheney, George Bush Jr.'s vice president from 2001 to 2009 and a central figure in the fanatically hawkish American neo-conservatism of the early twenty-first century. Harris turned her back on everything that had made Bernie Sanders's candidacies popular in the 2016 and 2020 primaries, and which Biden had been able to capitalize on.

The Democrats focused on macroeconomic indicators [8] (decline in the unemployment rate; GDP growth; inflation control), without taking into account the reality of millions of Americans and having a discourse that was even vaguely social-democratic: working-class and wage issues were almost non-existent in this campaign [9] not to mention no sign of any working-class presence in the social composition of the Democratic candidates across the country. And where had the issues of poverty and climate change gone?

Consensus for a representative oligarchy regime

The Democratic campaign, after having committed to denouncing the oligarchic monopolization served by Trump, quickly came to its senses: the Democratic Party should also be the party not only of the leaders of big companies (88 of whom expressed their support in September), but of billionaires erected as worthy representatives of entrepreneurial success and incidentally donors to a campaign whose cumulative cost amounted to sixteen billion dollars. On the podium of the Democratic Convention in August 2024 and in the immediate entourage of Harris's campaign, billionaires JB Pritzker, Mark Cuban, Reid Hoffman and others came to put at the heart of the Democratic campaign everything that a majority of American public opinion rejects: the power of big companies, unprecedented concentration of wealth, the influence of money on politics.

Cuban and others also demanded that in return for their support, Harris commit to getting rid of Lina Khan, the chairwoman of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), who successfully, for example, banned "non-compete agreements" which allow an employer to prohibit an employee, for a specified period, from going to work for a competing company. The Democratic left immediately rebelled against this big-business blackmail. In September, Alexandra Ocasio Cortez threatened: "Let me be clear, as soon as the billionaires give the [Harris-Walz] tandem a pass: the first one who comes near Lina Khan, there will be an out and out brawl. And that's a promise. It's proof that this administration is fighting for working people". Sanders said, "Lina Khan is the best FTC chairwoman in modern history. By taking on corporate greed and illegal monopolies, Lina is doing an exceptional job of stopping corporate giants from ripping off consumers and exploiting workers. [10]."

Contempt for popular aspirations and anger in the face of the disproportionate power of the behemoths of American capitalism; contempt for the traditionally pro-Democrat popular electorate, presumed captive, condemned to loyalty, and which they therefore believed they could calmly ignore; contempt for all the pro-Democrat youth (and beyond) who spent the year demonstrating against American complicity in the genocide perpetrated by Israel in Palestine; distancing themselves from the main figures of the Democratic left whose enormous scores perhaps make us understand what should have been defended in this campaign – perhaps, and a little late. Without looking at the results of Tlaib, Omar and Sanders, the simple fact that in several states (Montana, Ohio, Pennsylvania), local Democratic candidates (for the Senate, Congress, a governorship) received more votes than Harris herself probably sums things up quite well.

Trump, the pandemic and the irony of history

But beyond these manoeuvres, there also remains, and above all, as Ben Davis explained in *The Guardian*, this very real fact: the anti-Covid measures at the end of Trump's term, in counterpoint to the government's catastrophic management of this crisis, resulted in the establishment of a form of "welfare state" that most Americans had never experienced. Hence, for 73 per cent of the public, the priority given to "the economy". This analysis deserves to be quoted at length.

"The massive expansion," writes Davis, "almost overnight of the social safety net and its rapid withdrawal, almost overnight, represent, in material terms, the greatest policy changes in American history. For a brief period, and for the first time in history, Americans had a real safety net: strong protections for workers and renters, extremely generous unemployment benefits, rent controls, and direct cash transfers from the U.S. government. Despite all the suffering caused by COVID, between late 2020 and early 2021, Americans briefly experienced the freedom of social democracy. They had enough cash to plan for the long term and make decisions based on their own wishes, not just to survive. [...] By the end of Trump's term, American living standards and levels of economic security and freedom were better than when he began, and with the loss of this expanded welfare state, the situation was worse by the end of Biden's term despite the real successes of his reforms for workers and labour. This is why voters see Trump as someone more capable of looking after the economy," [11].

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So it is the same Trump who is preparing to launch a phase of social violence whose scale is likely to prove unprecedented. The big American bosses absolutely need to monopolize public social spending to maintain their profits and their economic place in the world. This is also what is happening in France where various political leaders, such as Kasbarian or Péresse, are now expressing their enthusiasm for the appointment of Musk and his liquidation project. The French government will change, but this fantasy of destruction remains.

11 January 2025.

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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[1] Gaetz finally resigned his seat in Congress in mid-November

[2] Anna Jackson, "State of the Union 2024: Where Americans stand on the economy, immigration and other key issues". Pew Research Centre, March 7, 2024. Amina Dunn and Andy Cerda, "Anti-corporate sentiment in US is now widespread in both parties". Pew Research Centre, November 17, 2024.

[3] Paul Wiseman and Hannah Fingerhut, "Americans' faith in banks low after failures": AP-NORC poll. AP, March 22, 2023.

[4] See the results of the Confidence in Institutions poll, at [news.gallup.com](#) and Beth Kowitt, "How Americans' Trust in Big Business Went From Bad to Worse". [Bloomberg.com](#), September 25, 2024.

[5] In Missouri, in addition to the many national and statewide choices of candidate choices, there were approximately thirty-five additional statewide propositions up for vote.

[6] Amy O'Kruk, Annette Choi, Lauren Mascarenhas, Kaanita Iyer and Piper Hudspeth Blackburn, "Seven states vote to protect abortion rights, while efforts to expand access in Florida, Nebraska and South Dakota fail. [CNN.com website](#), November 6, 2024.

[7] Raja Abdulhaq, "Instead of looking inwards, white liberals are -blaming Arab-Americans for Trump's victory." *Middle East Eye*, November 7, 2024.

[8] Laurence Nardon and Abigail Labreck, "Kamala Harris's Economic Agenda". IFRI Briefing, October 7, 2024.

[9] Jared Abbott, Fred DeVeaux, "Democrats Aren't Campaigning to Win the Working Class". [Jacobin](#), April 22, 2024.

[10] Julia Shapero, "Ocasio-Cortez promises 'brawl' if 'billionaires' force out Lina Khan. *The Hill*, September 10, 2024.

[11] Ben Davis, "None of the conventional explanations for Trump's victory stand up to scrutiny." *The Guardian*, 9 November 2024. I thank Vasant Kaiwar for drawing my attention to this text.