



US presidential elections: Domestic affairs candidate's program Analysis

Arab Forum For alternatives

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Introduction:

The 2016 US presidential elections are quite unique whether in terms of the candidates or the domestic context in which the elections are held. This paper focuses on the most significant domestic challenges that will face the future president of the United States, on top of which are economic issues such as growth rates, international trade, social security, taxes, and unequal pay. This is followed by the issue of citizenship, which has lately been jeopardized following police violations against African American citizens, as well as immigration and woman rights. The two candidates, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, differ in the way they approach and offer to resolve those issues, which feature prominently in their domestic agendas¹.

Several analysts attribute the escalation of domestic problems in the United States to the Administration's focus on external affairs, particularly the Middle East, at the expense of pressing issues on the local level².

First: Economic issues:

The Obama Administration faced a number of economic challenges and managed to deal with some of them while the others are still ongoing, hence need to be dealt with by the upcoming president. Several indicators show that American economy has been remarkably revived following the 2008 financial crisis. These include the addition of around 14 million new jobs in different fields, hence the decline of unemployment rate, which reached 10% in 2009 when Obama took office and now dropped to 5%. The Obama Health Care plan, also known as Obama Care and authorized in 2010, is considered one of the most significant indicators of economic reform in the Obama Administration since it provides affordable health care for millions of American citizens that had previously had no insurance³.

Despite those reforms, the Obama era witnessed the staging of a number of demonstrations known as Occupy Wall Street to protest the unequal distribution of wealth in the United States. In 2010, 1% of the population owned 35.4% of

¹ John Hudak. "What the 2016 U.S. presidential election means for the Middle East." *Brookings*, February 22, 2016: <https://goo.gl/Wq4eDO>

² "Priority Issues of the 2016 Presidential Election." *The Huffington Post*, November 2015: <https://goo.gl/RLK0Es>

³ "What Obama Really Thinks About His Economic Legacy." *New York Times*, April 28, 2016: <https://goo.gl/E8fxAd>

all forms of wealth in the private sector and the top 20% owned 88.9% of wealth. The financial crisis aggravated this discrepancy. In 2012, official census reports indicated that 46 million Americans, that is 15% of the population, are poor. The issue of debts featured prominently at the time as 2011 estimates indicated that 69% of American families are in debt⁴.

This is possibly what paved the way for the emergence of a different discourse in American politics and which was represented by Democratic Party potential presidential nominee Bernie Sanders who later declared his support for Hillary Clinton after she won the party's elections⁵. Clinton's discourse following her victory is obviously influenced by that of Sanders, particularly concerning class distinction, economic and social rights, and the elimination of inequality⁶.

The three debates that took place between the two presidential candidates highlight the difference in the way they deal with domestic economic issues.

Regarding **unemployment and the creation of job opportunities**, Clinton believes that her Administration needs to establish an economic system from which everyone could benefit and through which new jobs are offered and wages are raised. According to Clinton, it is necessary to invest in the middle class and focus on small businesses and renewable energy as well as encourage companies to do profit-sharing. She also wants an economy that is fair: "We also have to make the economy fairer. That starts with raising the national minimum wage and also guarantee, finally, equal pay for women's work." In addition, she wants to support people who are trying to strike a balance between family and work, improve the conditions of schools, and provide affordable childcare and debt-free college⁷. Trump noted that thousands of job opportunities are leaving the United States for China and Mexico and commented on how everything is made China and all big factories are opening in Mexico and believes that these

⁴ Marina Sitrin and Dario Azzellini, *They cannot represent us: Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy*. Verso, 2014.

⁵ "Sanders Declares Support for Clinton in US Presidential Elections." July 11, 2016:

<https://goo.gl/yNEPRj>

⁶ Nora Stranden Hoel, MA thesis, Challenging Social Class In American Political Discourse: Bernie Sanders, Occupy Wall Street, and the New Discourse of Inequality, University of Oslo, May 2016,

<https://goo.gl/Jwku1R>

⁷ "Read the Full Transcript of the First Presidential Debate Between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump." Fortune, September 26, 2016: <https://goo.gl/RV46Pd>

jobs need to be brought back: “So we’re losing our good jobs, so many of them... And we can’t allow it to happen anymore.”⁸

As for **taxes**, Trump suggests reducing taxes from 35% to 15% for companies, arguing that this will drive the business sector to flourish. Clinton objected to this proposition and stressed that it is important to take fair trade into consideration. She also argued that this tax reduction would mean that the rich will pay less taxes, which is bound to have a negative impact on the middle class and will waste millions of jobs, hence dragging the United States to another recession. That is why Clinton said it is important to find a way to create 10 million new jobs: “we will have 10 million more new jobs, because we will be making investments where we can grow the economy. Take clean energy. Some country is going to be the clean- energy superpower of the 21st century.”⁹

Trump criticized Clinton for wanting to raise taxes, arguing that this will be detrimental for business: “You are going to approve one of the biggest tax increases in history. You are going to drive business out. Your regulations are a disaster, and you’re going to increase regulations all over the place.” Trump argued that his tax reduction plan will create more jobs since businessmen will then be encouraged to expand their businesses, thus hire more people. Clinton said this tax reduction will bring the US back to the 2008 financial crisis and objected to relieving the rich from their duties: “His plan will give the wealthy and corporations the biggest tax cuts they’ve ever had... And, indeed, the way that he talks about his tax cuts would end up raising taxes on middle-class families, millions of middle-class families... He would send us back into recession with his tax plans that benefit the wealthiest of Americans.”¹⁰

Regarding **healthcare**, Clinton thinks the Obama Care program is good but needs a few reforms such as bringing the cost down and making coverage better. Clinton warned that repealing the program altogether will lead to taking away many of the significant benefits it offers such as treating pre-existing conditions and having no lifetime limits “And like I say, 20 million people now have health insurance. So if we just rip it up and throw it away, what Donald’s not telling you is we just turn it back to the insurance companies the way it used to be, and that means the insurance companies get to do pretty much whatever they want,

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Transcript of the Second Debate, the New York times, October 10, 2016, <https://goo.gl/9FKtgO>

including saying, look, I'm sorry, you've got diabetes, you had cancer, your child has asthma..."¹¹ Trump, on the other hand, described the Obama Care program as "a disaster" and expected it to collapse very soon. "You know it. We all know it. It's going up at numbers that nobody's ever seen worldwide. Nobody's ever seen numbers like this for health care. It's only getting worse. In '17, it implodes by itself. Their method of fixing it is to go back and ask Congress for more money, more and more money. We have right now almost \$20 trillion in debt." Trump proposed repealing the program and replacing it with a less expensive plan and called for allowing insurance companies to step in and engage in an open competition. Trump said that Clinton wants a healthcare system similar to that of Canada, which according to him has not been working very well: "And if you haven't noticed the Canadians, when they need a big operation, when something happens, they come into the United States in many cases because their system is so slow. It's catastrophic in certain ways."¹²

Despite the fact that both candidates do not deviate from the Capitalist system, they still have major differences in their approach to economic issues. Clinton follows in Obama's footsteps and is obviously influenced by Bernie Sanders as far as citizens' economic and social rights are concerned whereas Trump adopts an economic model that depends on a free market and tax reduction on business even if at the expense of making the poor poorer and widening the gap between different segments of society.

Second: Citizenship:

The principle of citizenship is currently facing a number of challenges in the light of violations committed by American police against unarmed citizens of African origins and growing hate rhetoric against immigrants. According to the 2016 Human Rights Watch report on human rights in the United States, racial discrimination infiltrates all sectors of the justice system in the country. Despite a federal law that encourages collecting data on deaths in police custody, states are not obliged to submitting such data, which led to lack of proper information on the number of citizens killed by the police: "A new federal law incentivizes the collection of data regarding deaths in police custody, but does not require states to provide that data and so fails to ensure reliable data on people killed by police." The report criticized the detention of immigrants and the deportation of

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

legal residents from the United States¹³. The report notes that despite decades of racial stability following a long struggle by different minorities to get their civil and political rights, citizenship seems to be compromised now in the United States and that is why citizenship is addressed by both presidential candidates.

Regarding **police violations**, Clinton said that trust between the people and the police should be restored and officers have to be well trained so that they only use force when it is absolutely necessary. She also underlined the necessity of introducing reforms to the criminal justice system to ensure that citizens are not discriminated against based on their origins or race. Trump accused Clinton of attempting to protect illegal immigrants and noted the danger they pose to the security of the United States: “We don't take care of our veterans. We take care of illegal immigrants, people that come into our country illegally better than we take care of our vets. That can't happen. Our policemen and women are disrespected. We need law and order, but we need justice too. Our inner cities are a disaster. You get shot walking to the store. They have no education. They have no jobs.”¹⁴

On **the conditions of ethnic Americans**, especially of African origins, Trump believes that they are always taken advantage of by politicians who only use them for making political gains and accused Clinton of doing the same: “All she's done is talk to the African-Americans and to the Latinos, but they get the vote and then they come back, they say ‘we'll see you in four years.’” Clinton objected to Trump's accusations and mentioned Trump's racist remarks on Obama when he said he is not American. Clinton noted that the slogan of her campaign, “stronger together,” means overcoming the race issue and brining Americans together and she stressed that she will be a president for all Americans regardless of their race and ideologies¹⁵.

As for **immigration**, Trump argued that granting amnesty to all people waiting to get a residence is disastrous and that there is no country if there are no borders. Clinton, on the other, supports taking refugees and opening the borders and is against the deportation plan Trump is intending to implement: “I don't want to rip families apart. I don't want to be sending families away from children. I don't want to see the deportation force that Donald has talked about in

¹³ “United States: Events of 2015.” *Human Rights Watch*: <https://goo.gl/ujsRsU>

¹⁴ “Full transcript: Third 2016 presidential debate.” *Politico*, October 20, 2016: <https://goo.gl/V9mkBA>

¹⁵ Ibid.

action in our country. We have 11 million undocumented people. They have 4 million American citizen children. 15 million people.” In the meantime, Clinton said that she is all for secure borders, but she also wants to introduce immigration reforms so that resources can be enough for immigrants. Clinton criticized Trump for insulting Mexican immigrants when he started his campaign and noted that they do contribute to the American economy: “Half of all undocumented immigrants actually pay federal income tax. So we have undocumented immigrants in America who are paying more federal income tax than a billionaire. I find that just astonishing.” Despite this, she added, they live under unfair conditions as they are constantly threatened by their employers to be dismissed and that is why they need to be legalized. Only then can the United States have secure borders, she added¹⁶.

When it comes to **the right-to-carry law**, Clinton said she supports the second amendment and respects “the tradition of gun ownership that goes back to the founders of our country,” yet she also supports the introduction of regulations to the use of guns. She noted that 33,000 are killed annually by guns and that is why it is important to do background checks on people who own and buy guns and to monitor the purchase of guns. Trump also said that he supports the second amendment, but objected to introducing modifications to the rights-to-carry law¹⁷.

Conclusion:

While the two candidates constitute part of the American system and are representatives of its values, they differ in their approach to a number of major domestic affairs. Several analysts see Trump’s approach as a threat to the values on which the United States was founded and to the fact that it is primarily a country of immigrants from all sorts of colors and races. Clinton, on the other hand, focuses more on bridging the gap between Americans and achieving a reasonable level of equality as well as solving the problems of immigrants with relative flexibility.

If Trump wins, the American economy might witness a boom as far as growth rates are concerned, but economic and social gaps will be widened even more. Trump’s discourse is likely to compromise the principle of citizenship since he is less tolerant to diversity, which foreshadows a series of racist policies against

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

African Americans and Latinos as well as more restrictions on immigration and tougher border control. This is bound to jeopardize the stability of the American society and deal a fatal blow to the principles of citizenship. That is why several analysts predict that Trump's victory will be accompanied by the rise of the far-right like what already happened in a number of European countries.

While Clinton does not propose a radical transformation of the American economy, she is expected to follow in Obama's footsteps, which means she will take into consideration the social and economic rights of Americans while still operating under the dominant capitalist system. Her policies might, therefore, alleviate the tension resulting from the widening gaps between different segments of the American society. Her moderate approach to the issue of immigrants and refugees is also expected to consolidate the principles of citizenship and promote diversity.

