Progressive proposals for the turbulent times:

How to boost the political, organizational and electoral potential

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PROGRESSIVE PROPOSALS FOR THE TURBULENT TIMES:

How to boost the political, organizational and electoral potential

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When their Communication Trumps Your Policy: What Progressives Must Learn in the Age of Populism

Keywords

Political communications, relational rhetoric, campaign strategy, networked organising, virtual campaign, relational organising

Abstract

In many ways, American and European politics could not be more different. But is there anything that European Progressives can learn from Joe Biden's campaign? And what about Trump's communication style – does it teach us anything valuable about political rhetoric in the time of social media? In this chapter, we examine the principles behind Trump's rhetoric and Biden's successful campaign. We argue that – despite being on opposite sides of the aisle – Trump's communication style and Biden's approach to campaigning suggest that there is an emerging shift in political communications. This leads us to propose that European Progressives should implement what we call a relational and networked approach to communications and organising.

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Donald Trump has been defeated. But his communication style has created acolytes around the world, who use to their own advantage the logic of social media and the weaknesses of a media system that is increasingly dependent on clicks. Despite this paradigm shift, which makes political positioning and communication strategies increasingly indissociable, some progressives continue to work under the assumption that the strength of their policies alone will win them elections. In doing so, they run the risk of being squeezed out by communication-savvy populists on the one hand, and energised green actors on the other hand. If this scenario is to be avoided, progressives must be open to learning both from their opponents (especially, the best communicator of them all: Donald Trump) and from innovative progressive campaigning methods (Biden's 2020 successful approach).

There is an increasing body of research focused on combatting disinformation, regulating big tech and redefining ownership of personal data (eg Aho and Duffield, 2020; Arogyaswamy, 2020; Rochefort, 2020). However, until new policies are implemented, politics must operate within this technological and communicative structure. The potential of such tools is something that populists understand – and is their main if not their only strength. If progressive actors are to maintain relevance in a changing media landscape, they must *also* be more strategic in how they approach communications. We argue that they can – and should – learn from Trump's and Biden's strategies.

The paper will begin by identifying the main characteristics of Trump's communication style and strategy. First, we discuss his rhetorical style, which combines push and pull tactics to disturb the opponent, occupy the centre of the political and media debate with attacks and fait divers,

and thereby redefine the communicative (and political) landscape. This is followed by a discussion of the central role of supporters in the success of Trump's media strategy and politics, which leads us to see his approach as fundamentally relational. That is, contrary to what polarisation and the reinforcement of social silos by social media might lead one to conclude, Trump recognised that political identities are flexible, and that the organic dissemination of political content helps to generate trust among dissatisfied or politically orphan voters. Therefore, a smart use of social media is one that sees existing supporters not only as voters but also as actors central to the growth and success of political campaigns. Progressives must learn this lesson.

Then, the paper will identify areas in which progressives can best combine their values and strengths with recent and emerging technological developments as well as traditional communication tools, and therefore counter the Trumpian way of communicating and making electoral gains. US presidential campaigns always break new ground in the field of digital communication, organising and social media. This section will include lessons learned in the Biden Presidential campaign 2020, including how to detect and counter misinformation – an area where vast improvements were made compared to 2016. The increased use of relational organizing – how to make full use of your personal networks as COVID-19 made door-to-door canvassing less common – will be described. Other technological improvements to communicate more directly with voters will also be covered, for example through traditional text messaging, but also via platforms such as Instagram and Twitch. The role of digital partnerships and micro influencers will also be discussed.

The final section connects the findings of the first two sections – the analysis of Trump's communication style and the lessons taken from Joe Biden's virtual campaign – to identify a number of fundamental principles that could help progressives develop a relational and

networked approach to communication and, in doing so, win hearts and minds in the age of post-Covid populism.

Trump's Relational Rhetoric

If progressives are to take any lessons regarding political rhetoric from Trump's years in power, they must understand the main characteristics of Trump's communication style and strategy.

These include: simple messaging, the clear rhetorical positioning of his campaign (in his case, as anti-establishment), and the deployment of rhetoric to support the organic dissemination of his content (e.g. by being suggestive or entertaining). Finally, Trump understood that communication is no longer exclusively content-based; rather, it is now also (if not mostly) energy-based. This explains his repeated efforts to divert attention towards (and disturbing) the opponent, e.g. by making personal attacks rather than focusing on policy.

Rhetorical Demagoguery

Recent work by Jennifer Mercieca, an historian of American political rhetoric that has analysed Trump's communication style, provides further detail regarding the main rhetorical tricks used by Trump in his 2016 campaign. In the 2016 campaign against Hillary Clinton, Trump's language was highly effective. "Make America Great Again" was simple and full of energy, and this slogan was regularly accompanied by catchy soundbites. Charismatic, and a good communicator with dozens of years of experience in the media, Trump also recognised the power of social media to disseminate his messages.

In *Demagogue for President: The Rhetorical Genius of Donald Trump* (2020b), Mercieca describes the former American president as a rhetorical genius that uses suggestive language to gather public support and avoid accountability. Progressives have nothing to learn

from this. But his use of rhetoric is only one part of the paradigmatic shift in political communications whose potential populists identified and subsequently unleashed.

To be clear, our use of the term populism in this chapter is aligned with Cas Mudde's definition of the term as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, 543). The oversimplification of political challenges on the one hand and its exclusionary approach to the citizenry on the other hand is in opposition to the values of progressives. Therefore, we understand and engage with populist rhetoric as a topic that is worthy of critical examination rather than political support.

Mercieca identifies six central rhetorical strategies used by Trump since 2016: three to gather support from his followers (creating what one can call a pull effect) and the other three to alienate such supporters from everyone else (which we will call a push effect). On the one hand, the supportive strategies used by Trump were *Ad populum* (through which he suggested that the crowd's wisdom had more value that the elite's); *Paralipsis* (statements made as jokes, sarcasm, rumour, allowing the speaker to maintain plausible deniability); and a narrative of American exceptionalism that redirected his supporters' feeling of pride towards Trump as "the apotheosis of American exceptionalism". On the other hand, Trump's alienating strategies aimed to divert attention towards and disturb the opponent. They were *Ad hominem* (attacks on people rather than on their arguments, delegitimising the latter); *Ad baculum* (threats of force or intimidation used to silence opposition), used when he suggested that Democrats were going to take away the guns of Trump supporters; and *Reification* (treating people as non-human), which he repeatedly used when addressing his opponents.

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These strategies combined "to unify his followers against everyone else and to make Trump the fulcrum for all political discussion and debate. All of the strategies are used to set the nation's agenda, distract the nation's attention and frame how we understand reality" (Mercieca, 2020a).

The ethics of this approach, which Mercieca describes as authoritarian, are abhorrent. Trump directed (or, as others would say, manipulated) the frustration and emotions (including hatred) of his followers towards support for his campaign. This handbook is being followed step-by-step by European populists. If progressives are to not allow them to win, the former must understand the rules of the new communication landscape.

The six rhetorical tactics identified above served Trump's broader strategy: to increase polarisation and distrust in policy solutions. He used simple messages to energise his supporters towards him and against his opponents. Progressives and, more broadly, liberal politicians and experts have been divided in how to respond. Some think that demagogue rhetoric requires constant responses. However, this strategy runs the risk of reinforcing the language and therefore the grounds of populists. The work of British political scientist Alan Finlayson (1998) helps us understand how such a response can backfire. Analysing speeches by Tony Blair, Finlayson argues that New Labour's rhetoric of modernisation aimed to:

> "legitimise modernisation as a political object [and to] locate the impetus for it […] in the British people themselves. Thus any potential conservative argument that reform necessarily foists unwarranted change on the nation is trumped in advance by the construction of a story where change, renewal and modernisation are intrinsic to the tradition of the nation" (Finlayson, 1998, 14).

That is, Blair's narrative of modernisation forced his opponents to position themselves in relation to it. With his demagoguery, and

despite having opposing political aims to those of Blair, Trump's communicative strategy had the same goal: to redefine political discourse. Focusing politicians' or the media's attention on populists can contribute, even if unwittingly, to reinforcing the perceived legitimacy of their statements.

Redefining Political Rhetoric

This is why a second approach, focused on creating the conditions to tell a different story, and hence to be proactive rather than reactive, is to be preferred. This leads us to a second, more direct lesson, that progressives can take from Trump's communication style. Twentieth century rhetoric studies were structured around a central debate: whether the success of rhetoric is to be explained by the rhetorical situation (Lloyd Bitzer, 1968), that is, the political context, or by the rhetor (Richard Vatz,1973), that is, the politician.

Barbara Biesecker's work (1989) aims to overcome the classic deadlock. She states that meaning is neither fully discovered in situations (as argued by Bitzer) nor fully created by the individual rhetor (as argued by Vatz). Instead, she argues that rhetorical discourse contributes to establishing the identities of both rhetor and audience – and defines successful rhetoric as being able to influence or redefine the relations between them. That is, the audience is not a "sovereign, rational subject" with a predefined identity (Biesecker, 1989, p. 123); rather, rhetoric is "a complex interactive process whereby persons and collectivities articulate their shifting identities to each other within changing historical circumstances" (Biesecker, 1989, p. 126). This analysis is influenced by Jacques Derrida (1981), whose work of deconstruction demonstrated that meaning is always established within an economy of relations (*différance*).

In this relational framework, the rhetorical situation co-creates audiences. "If the subject is shifting and unstable […], then the

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rhetorical event […] marks the articulation of provisional identities and the construction of contingent relations" (Biesecker, 1989, p. 126). Deconstruction has an inherent politics of relations and affinities and social media is its privileged site. Sadly, this political potential was grasped by Trump and other populists long before progressives.

Social Media and Relational Rhetoric

Social media is more than technology alone. At its best, it can raise and extend conversations beyond interest and activist groups – as was the case with Black Lives Matter or the Me Too movements. At its worst, it can be used to foster division, doubt, hatred.

Trump recognised the potential of social media, but he combined it with a populist, demagogic rhetorical handbook. This allowed him to reject the idea that the context – political reality – is fixed and unquestionable. Rather, in Trump's world facts can be interpreted, questioned and even denied as required by politicians – a strategy that can only be successful with the active support of citizens as disseminators of messages first and, subsequently, as co-creators of narratives supporting the populist leader (as exemplified by QAnon, a self-organised conspiracy theory and cult). In this context, the rise of the concept of fake news is to be seen as a symptom of a broader paradigmatic change in the relation between politicians and supporters. Politicians can no longer be effective on their own. Rather, political communication is increasingly a relational practice, which requires the active contribution of the public to be effective.

To summarise this section, Trump's communication style (using pull and push rhetorical strategies to develop strong affective relations with his supporters, which he subsequently used to disseminate disinformation and lies about his opponents) stresses the increasing interdependence of politicians (as effective communicators) and the

audience (as active contributors to political campaigns via their use of social media).

* * *

This context provides several challenges for progressives. As is now well known, the algorithms that structure social media support a polarising logic of clicks, likes and dislikes, often for purposes that are at the opposite of dialogue (Zuboff, 2019). This logic is increasingly important in the economic model of traditional media, which also chases the attention and the clicks of viewers as its funding model – known as the attention economy (Simon, 1971). More, research shows that algorithms support polarisation by privileging content with which users are likely to agree, reinforcing echo chambers (Takikawa and Nagayoshi, 2017) that not only exclude but also discredit different voices. Navigating this context requires a strategic approach focused on bursting the inward movement of (social) media feedback loops. To do so, progressives should combine the relational approach to rhetoric mentioned earlier with a broader, networked understanding of communication suggested by Joe Biden's campaign, which we will now discuss.

This paradigmatic shift has consequences for the governance of campaign organising. In practice, it requires a more decentralised approach to political communications. The following section will identify specific ways to implement this approach in terms of campaign organising and management.

Learning from Joe Biden's campaign: How do you get 81 million votes in a pandemic?

The US Election in 2020: A view from February

As the election year of 2020 started, the overall situation looked rosy if your aim is to be re-elected as president of the United States. In February, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics reported that the unemployment rate was 3.5 percent. Economic growth was solid; the real gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 2.9 percent in 2018, and by 2.3 percent in 2019. [1]

When Gallup conducted their regular Presidential Approval Poll in the beginning of February 2020, the polarized nature of American politics was evident. 49 percent of US voters approved of the way Donald Trump was handling his job as president, while 48 percent disapproved.[2]

Donald Trump's re-election campaign had already been launched in June 2019, and as a sitting president he had the platform and power that comes with the White House. He was about to reach 80 million followers on Twitter and used his account to dictate the public discourse. Together with his allies in the conservative media universe, Trump had created an impressive ecosystem that combined traditional media (not least cable television) and social media (using Facebook "like a Swiss Army knife to raise money, amplify his message and mobilize voters"). He had an energized grassroots army of followers, and 93 percent of Republican voters approved of him as president.[3]

Within the Democratic Party, a record number of no less than 29 major candidates had declared their interest in becoming a candidate

for president and challenging Trump. On February 3rd 2020, the Democratic primary season began with chaos and controversy in Iowa, where a technical breakdown delayed the vote report by three days. The large Democratic field had no clear star or frontrunner, and the party who wanted to govern the nation looked inept to even arrange a caucus in a state with only around three million inhabitants.[4]

History has proven that most often a sitting US president gets re-elected. If 2020 was to become an exception, the race needed to change dramatically.

COVID-19 and the size of a victory

Hindsight is a beautiful thing, and we now know that COVID-19 – and the economic recession and rising unemployment that followed – totally changed the US Presidential election campaign of 2020.[5] Trump mishandled the response to the pandemic – and most other challenges – and Joe Biden emerged as an empathic and experienced leader in the Democratic primaries. Moreover, the team around Joe Biden ran a smooth campaign, and won the election convincingly.

But the time required to count the record number of votes tended to give the impression that the election result was a close call. The nature of American media coverage – constant, dramatic, and polarized – enhanced the feeling of a close election. And the outgoing president famously and repeatedly questioned the legitimacy of the election result, which eventually led to the riot and violent attack on the US Capitol on January 6th, 2021 – just as Congress was about to certify the election results.[6]

There was never any "steal", of course. But US Presidential elections have often been very close affairs – for example in 2000 and 2016 when the losing candidate won the popular vote but lost the electoral college. So, how close was 2020?

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Given the outlook in February 2020, it is interesting to note the rather impressive size of Joe Biden's victory in November that very same year. The turnout was a record high: 66.6 percent of eligible Americans voted. Biden won the popular vote by a large margin; he received over 81 million votes – the highest numbers of votes ever – compared to Trump's 74 million. Biden's margin of 7 million votes is bigger than the entire state of Massachusetts. He won the electoral college very solidly: 306-232.

In total, Biden got 51,3 percent of the votes cast. That is the largest percentage of votes won against an incumbent president since Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932. If we look at Biden's popular vote margin by percentage, his victory over Trump is bigger than Barack Obama's over Mitt Romney in 2012: 4.4 percent margin for Biden, 3.9 percent for Obama.

In comparison with the gold standard of modern presidential elections – Obama's victory in 2008 – Biden's vote total outdistanced Obama by over 11 million votes. And compared to Hillary Clinton in 2016, Joe Biden won over 15 million additional votes. [7]

But how do you mobilize, convince, and incite voter turnout in the middle of a pandemic, in a country where it is notoriously difficult to vote? How do you get 15 million new votes in the middle of COVID-19?[8]

How to analyse a presidential campaign operating under COVID-19

One of the aims of this chapter is to contribute to the discussion about what can be learnt from Joe Biden's 2020 presidential campaign. The focus of this section will be on how the campaign adapted its operations due to the pandemic, and developments in the general field of communication and social media.[9]

To structure the analysis, five basic questions about campaigning were formulated. The nature of the questions has been developed and formulated by the present author. For obvious reasons, there is (yet) no

manual for how a presidential election during a pandemic should be analysed. Instead, the main questions often addressed in the literature describing presidential campaigns provided a base.[10] Thereafter, previous experiences of US political campaigns were added.[11] Finally, observations of the presidential campaign were considered. The result was a list with the following five questions:

1. Political campaigns are often built on physical voter contact and door-to-door operations. How did the Biden-campaign adapt its operations and main strategies to a reality where voters could not be contacted face to face?
2. The on-going pandemic underlined the necessity to both mobilize voters and inform them about the actual act of voting (*how, when, where*). How did the Biden-campaign use digital developments within the fields of communication and social media to increase voter turnout?
3. In 2016, Hillary Clinton's campaign was a constant target of online attacks and accusations. How did the Biden-campaign handle online misinformation?
4. Presidential campaigns are huge operations where new ways to communicate and use social media are tried, developed, and used. What are the main additional and positive lessons learnt for future campaigns?
5. Presidential campaigns are huge operations where mistakes are made, and there is always room for improvement. What went wrong in 2020, and what are the current trends that should be observed for future campaigns?

To be able to answer these questions, four post-elections seminars were attended. These seminars lasted for around 360 minutes in total and featured ten key persons who worked in senior positions in the Biden campaign or for the Democratic National Committee (DNC).[12]

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All four seminars have been transcribed, whereafter relevant information to the questions above could be analysed and grouped together as tentative answers. Where indicated, additional research and information from written sources have been added. The information gained through this method, will then contribute to the analysis in the concluding section of this paper.[13]

Question one: How did the campaign adapt its operations and main strategies?

As the pandemic swept across the US during the spring of 2020, all in-person campaigning had to be stopped. Joe Biden had won the Democratic primary but was mostly confined to his basement in his home state of Delaware. As the "Joe Biden for President" campaign was being reinforced and better staffed, major issues had to be addressed. One of the major issues was the following: how do you organize a campaign when you cannot meet voters face to face?

As a result, three principles were adopted. First, it would have to be a *virtual campaign*, which implied a larger scope than a campaign that is *only digital*. Phone calls and text messaging would play an important part, given that in-person meetings would only take place once absolutely safe to do so.[14]

The "pole star" of any American election campaign – your overall aim – has always been knocking on as many doors as possible. To meet the challenges of a virtual campaign, the second principle needed to define a new goal. The solution became a new concept: having as many *meaningful conversations* as possible, regardless of whether they took place on phone calls, text messages, or through social media.

A natural ingredient in any American campaign is the colourful bars written on large chunks of paper and put on the wall in the local

campaign office. They show how many doors that had been knocked the very same day, and how many phone calls that the volunteers at the phone bank within the office had completed. Now, the trend towards digital data measurements was complete. The *meaningful conversations* were done by volunteers through their own phones and apps in the digital world, wherever they chose to campaign.

The first time a volunteer engages in a political campaign, he or she tends to have a specific candidate or specific issue in mind. When the volunteer returns to help out again, it is normally because of how much fun it was. The challenge, thirdly, was therefore to create a sense of belonging – a very difficult task in a virtual campaign.

The solution was to create virtual election offices using the Slack app. Through this channel – called "Victory 2020" – volunteers could meet, exchange experiences, and get to work, while a small team of employed election workers were in the background to help when needed. Slack became the campaign office for no more than 200 000 volunteers.

In conjunction with these basic principles, two traditional campaign strategies melded into one: community organising, often associated with Barack Obama, and distributed organising, which is associated with Bernie Sanders.

Community organising is dependent on specific geographical confines: campaigners team up with other community members under the guidance of a local organiser/captain. Distributed organising, on the other hand, is driven by self-starting campaigners in multiple locations, who coordinate through technology across geographical boundaries.

Thanks to the virtual Slack-offices, volunteers could choose the campaign model they preferred and were used to, with the level of guidance they needed. The Slack channel "*Victory 2020*" simply became a digital field office.

This meant that many volunteers virtually campaigned in the states where they lived. The national campaign kept in close touch with

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these in-state campaign organisations. Volunteers who did not chose to campaign in a specific state were brought together in a national team called *the fire hose*. In October this group was made up of over 150,000 volunteers whose efforts – engaging voters primarily through phone calls and text messages – could be directed to any area within 17 key states where the campaign required additional effort.

In a country with around 230 million eligible voters, 700 million attempts were made to contact all the voters – of which 332 million were telephone calls. The goal was to find and contact every single voter at least once, and to do so every volunteer needed to find their own place and focus-area in the campaign, regardless of where they lived.

In this context, the digital platform Mobilize must be mentioned. During the last couple of years, Mobilize has been the digital tool for progressive grassroots and volunteers to arrange all kind of physical meetings. Now it became the foundation for online activism and virtual meetings; during the four days leading up to the election 8,000 Mobilize-events were organized by volunteers in the Biden-campaign.

If a virtual campaign with meaningful conversations became the answer to the challenge posed by the pandemic, the buzz word to remember from the 2020 campaign is relational organising. Instead of knocking on doors and talking to strangers, you were now – with the pandemic as a backdrop – encouraged to talk to your relatives, friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances. Having a meaningful conversation with someone you know was found to be three times as effective as knocking on doors, and it could be done while social distancing.

To make this happen practically, the volunteers were advised to use the campaign app called "VoteJoe". A trust gap that needed to be bridged was to get volunteers to share their private contacts with the app. This was supposedly done in a secure way, and only with

the volunteer's consent. Thereafter, the opportunity arose to match these personal contacts with voters who, according to the campaign's other data, were important and in need of a *meaningful conversation*. In the app, volunteers could see which of their contacts lived in a battleground state, because the symbol of a little ballot would appear next to that contact. If the name of your contact had also requested a ballot, a green star would be attached to the name.

To summarize: Relational organising was able to overcome the campaigning limitations imposed by COVID-19 and social distancing. The framework was a virtual campaign organised through the *Victory 2020* channel on Slack, the "*Vote Joe"* app and the program *Mobilize*. The new pole star was meaningful conversations – phone calls, text messages, interaction in social media – which aimed at informing voters (and possible acquaintances) about how to vote, and vote for Joe Biden.

Question two: How did the campaign use digital to increase voter turnout?

The fight for the right to vote is as old as the United States itself – and it is an ongoing battle. The eligibility to vote is regulated by the United States Constitution, federal laws, and state laws; voting regulations and procedures can vary substantially between different states. The most important task for the virtual campaign – due to COVID-19, the increase in both early voting and postal voting, and the different election laws – was to educate state volunteers so that they in turn could help people to vote.

One notable development in this election cycle was that The Democratic National Committee – the governing body of the United States Democratic Party – had recovered after the scandals in 2016 when Russian hackers infiltrated their computer network. The DNC had invested in its digital infrastructure and was ready to work closely work

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with Joe Biden's presidential campaign. Moreover, the DNC digital organizing program had a crown jewel: the website iwillvote.com.

The main goal with iwillvote.com was to create a one stop shop for every voter who needed any kind of information about their individual voting process in the area where they lived. And when you chose your home state and entered your personal information on the website, you were treated as if you were visiting an advanced e-commerce website.

The webpage was built as a very specific and detailed chase system. If you entered the system without finishing what you intended to do – check if you are registered, register, or proceed to vote in your state – automatic e-mails and text messages would encourage you to proceed. The system had what is called different "layers programs": depending on the action the voter took or did not take different automated responses would be sent out. Similar systems are of course used by commercial firms.

If you got stuck on how to vote, instructions could also be sent to your home with pre-paid postage. At that point, the postal service could be tracked, and the voter received an SMS or a call if the campaign noticed that the mail-in ballot had still not been sent in. This kind of *ballot chasing* may have been crucial in states that were won by small margins.

But an advanced webpage is one thing – directing traffic to it is something else. During the first presidential debate, Joe Biden told the viewers to "*go to iwillvote.com, decide how they are going to vote, when they are going to vote, and what means by which they are going to vote*". As the campaign took the opportunity to instruct its candidate to promote the webpage in front of 73,1 million people, you must only ensure that the site does not crash (it did not).

But as a matter of fact, iwillvote.com received even more traffic during the vice-presidential debate between Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris. A fly landed on Mike Pence's

head during the debate – and decided to stay there. The fly was very visible against the Vice President's white hair; the Internet exploded – and the Biden campaign acted quickly. A tweet was sent from Joe Biden's official Twitter account, formulated as an active link: flywillvote.com – which led to iwillvote.com. The tweet spread quickly, and the impressive amount of traffic to the site during and after the Vice-Presidential debate was only achieved again during the actual Election Day – beating all presidential debates and the final night of the Democratic convention.

These two examples – mentioning iwillvote.com during the first Presidential debate and reacting quickly during the Vice-Presidential debate – underlines how important it is to have a clear goal (increase voter turnout); to use your most important moments to achieve that goal (73 million viewers during a presidential debate); and to remember your overriding goal when the heat is on and something unexpected happens – while being creative at the same time (flywillvote.com).

But in all campaigns, there are voters who do not watch debates. They are difficult to reach, especially when you cannot knock on doors. These voters do not reply to phone calls and text messages, and the campaign might lack all forms of traditional contact information to reach the voter.

One solution was to run targeted Facebook ads that with one click led users to Messenger. The ads could be formulated as a quiz, or just with a question asking the Facebook user about the most important issue in the up-coming election. This led to a new question about the actual act of voting.

In these conversations the voter would start talking about the election with an AI-programmed bot. Are you going to vote? When, where and how? Important data was collected. If the voter asked a question that the bot did not understand, or if the voter answered in Spanish, a volunteer would take over the conversation. This way, there

were 250 000 additional cases of voter engagement for those voters that could otherwise not be reached.

But the most interesting possibility arose – as has already been explained – when the data from the volunteers who had shared their private contacts with the campaign, could be matched with data from prioritised voters who had not yet completed their act of voting.

No less than 10 million synchronizations of this kind were made during the final month of the campaign. And 84 percent of the *meaningful conversations* during the last 10 days were with voters in key battle ground states, conducted by volunteers living in non-battle ground states.

The main goal was to ensure that the right voters voted for Joe Biden. 81 268 924 people did so.

Question three: How did the campaign handle online misinformation?

How could Hillary Clinton lose to Donald Trump? One of many explanations is that rumours, slander and pure conspiracy theories influenced the outcome of the election. The Biden-campaign wanted to avoid the mistakes of 2016, and the antidote was internally called *The Malarkey Factory*.

Online misinformation should primarily be handled by the platforms that spread the lies and hatred, of course. But the Head Quarters of the DNC did not dare to wait. After 2016, important investments were made in social listening tools that monitor the online discussions. The infrastructure that had been built up was integrated with the Biden-campaign.

The most effective countermeasure is to quickly flag misinformation and force the platforms to remove the content, for example by demonstrating how the specific post is not compliant with terms of use. Educating those who work for the campaign, and all volunteers,

regarding how to handle disinformation, is a must. The campaign had an ongoing dialogue with journalists who covered the elections. Representatives working for tech giants were constantly reminded of the need for further actions.

But a major task at *The Malarkey Factory* was to combine *social listening* with research and traditional campaign work. False narratives that had many mentions and interactions online were immediately included in the campaign's own opinion polls. Analysts could then assess which groups of voters were affected by the data, and in what way. Is the data just circulating in a right-wing bubble? Or are important constituencies affected?

To be able to back-up the campaign's analysis and to design various effective counterarguments for each affected group of voters, focus groups as well as existing knowledge about voter behaviour were used. The results formed the basis of a *digital remediation campaign* that also considered the websites and keywords that the relevant target group usually uses. The campaign's counter-message could then be directed in real time to relatively narrow groups of voters who were receptive to the disinformation that had begun to spread.

Take for example the attempts to create a scandal surrounding Joe Biden's son, Hunter, or the claim that Osama bin Laden could still be alive. The campaign's analysis showed that such conspiracies did not affect undecided voters, and the motivation among core voters was unchanged. The decision was simple: the campaign would not waste any time and energy on this matter.

If an attack turned out to be harmful, the principle of *do not treat the hit, treat the wound* was applied. So, when Biden was accused of being controlled by left-wing radical forces, or when his age and mental health were questioned, the answer was not to get into polemics about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or the public view of the elderly. The campaign would not repeat, and therefore risk reinforcing, the false messages in

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the eagerness to respond to false claims, and fact checks would just lead to more rounds of finger-pointing.

Instead, messages, images and films were produced with Biden represented as an alert, strong, experienced, and genuine leader who speaks clearly about political reforms and makes his own decisions. The campaign's research showed that a voter who could be influenced by an attempt at mudslinging, but who at the same time had *not* made up his or her mind, was receptive to a positive and holistic message.

If the campaign analysis showed that it was appropriate, the *digital remediation campaign message* could also be conveyed to a relevant group of voters via one of the 5,000 influencers with a large social media following that the campaign collaborated with.

The combination of politics and the Internet will never give you the possibility to go to bed at night once you have answered everyone who has written something bad about your candidate in social media. But the Biden-campaign offered a method in principle with regards to how you can start addressing online misinformation in politics.

Question four: What are the main additional and positive digital lessons learnt?

All campaigns are different, but huge American Presidential campaigns can serve as buffet tables where one ingredient can be very interesting – or totally irrelevant – in your own political context. However, no buffet table could ever offer a complete view of lessons learnt during these enormous campaigns. But let us put some experiences on the table.

One development that will impact many spheres of our societies is AI-robots, which were used in several parts of the campaign. During the days following Joe Biden's announcement of Kamala Harris as his

Vice President, there were 10,000 new Slack accounts created every day. Because of the rapid growth of new accounts, each new volunteer received a first *artificial* guide into the world of campaigning.

Through the digital tool Mobilize, volunteers created around 100,000 events on their own. Zoom was used for all meetings and training sessions, as well as during roundtable discussions for outstanding volunteers in key states. The purpose here was to anchor the work with *relational organising* and *ballot chasing*, as well as to get these star-volunteers to grow and involve more people. The key was to educate, empower and trust volunteers to organise activities on their own.

Trusting the volunteer was also the foundation of the massive and important text message program – a traditional but still important communication channel: research showed that 90 percent of text messages are read within three minutes. As a start, volunteers were allowed to contact voters in a more allowing way compared to the Clinton campaign in 2016. The 160,000 volunteers ended up sending more than 300 million text messages. Eventually there was bigger demand from volunteers to text voters, than there were texts to send.

With the help of Soapbox, an app which works as a free webcam and screen recorder, volunteers and voters could easily record their own video stories. Some were so authentically engaging that they were used as paid ads in local media markets. Others spread organically and became news articles in traditional media (so-called earned media).

Twitter was Donald Trump's scene, and the main ambition was *not* to engage or compete with the sitting President there. Joe Biden's presence on Twitter was operated by a team separated from other social media teams, and the ambition was to treat it as a "calm strategy platform". Other actors were engaging and fighting with Trump on Twitter – Joe Biden's presence was supposed to be Presidential, thus creating a contrast with Trump. You need to pick your fights and accept that the back seat might be better sometimes, also in the digital world.

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The platform that had some of the most impressive growth in terms of both audience and engagement in 2020 was Instagram, not least because of the ability to create Instagram stories and reels. One lesson learnt is that you constantly need to ask your candidate to make content that will work in these formats. But the campaign also had more informal "Team Joe-accounts" on both Twitter and Instagram, and one story is especially interesting. The @TeamJoeBiden-handle on Instagram was already taken by a young person in California, who created content that mimicked in an edgy way what the official campaign was doing. The solution? The campaign asked if they could take over the account – and if the young person who was running it would like to join the campaign as an intern? He accepted and continued to handle the account when he was done in school every day – but as a part of the campaign's Social Media and Audience Development team. Moreover, the name of the account was changed to @VoteJoe.[15]

Video content has been growing for a long while, and in 2020 YouTube had 2 billion active monthly users. One observation made by a journalist at Bloomberg was that "at times, YouTube is so inundated with election ads that it has been unable to place as many as three quarters of the amounts campaigns would like to spend on a given day". Among other trends were that the most requested ads by the campaign were the ones that you as the viewer cannot click through; that YouTube has improved its targeting abilities, but that it is still somewhat limited compared to other platforms; and that the new system "Instant reserve" allowed you to purchase and reserve ad-time early and electronically.[16]

A Presidential candidate needs their own presence on all major social media platforms. Joe Biden even joined Snapchat in July 2019, and the campaign used Snapchat's geotargeting tool to target voters in battleground states, encouraging them to vote. Images of wildfires in California, combined with an attack on Trump's lack of policies on

climate change, was also used – as were clips of Biden's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. This mix supposedly engaged the platform's young audience, while also introducing Biden as a candidate.[17]

Another area that is likely to grow is to promote your candidate in the enormous area of online video games. This time around, the Biden-campaign had its own Fornite map ("Build Back Better with Biden") with 20-30 minutes of content to play. In Animal Crossing: New Horizons players could decorate their lawn in front of their virtual house with Biden-Harris yard signs, and you could also visit a Biden-themed island. Most importantly the players could visit a complete Biden HQ – a virtual field office – where you could learn about why and how you could vote for Biden in the real world.[18]

In 2020, the platform Twitch had 15 million daily active users. This is a platform on which you broadcast yourself playing video games to a live audience. Joe Biden never visited Twitch, but Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez did, playing *Among Us* – a multiplayer social deduction game that grew rapidly during the pandemic. Ocasio-Cortez played the game for some 3.5 hours, talking about healthcare and instructing viewers to "make a voting plan" on iwillvote.com. 430,000 people watched the stream.[19]

Just when you think you have an overview of the major social media platforms, there might be new ones emerging. Through digital partnerships the campaign worked with digital spaces where they did not have their owned presence. One example is TikTok, where the campaign did not have an official @JoeBiden channel. The solution was instead to work with a distributed creator approach – to work with existing actors and digital publishers and provide them with pro-Joe Biden messaging.

To work with digital partnerships, or content partnerships, is thought to have been very successful. A message from your candidate

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on a digital platform can often be regarded as expected propaganda. To search, find and build relationships with digital outlets, accounts and actors who can support you – and who have large audiences of their own – is a strategy that might take time, but the reward can be substantial. Within this large category you can find examples such as having Demi Lovato as your supporter and validator, promoting iwillvote.com to her 118 million followers of Instagram. These celebrity endorsements were gathered under the hashtag #TeamJoe and saw – for example – Ariana Grande and Taylor Swift encourage their followers to vote for Joe Biden. Their posts on Instagram gained 7.36 million and 2.89 million likes respectively.[20]

But more important is the trend to work with micro-influencers (1,000-40,000 followers) in prioritized geographical areas, vis-à-vis a specific demographic group, or around a particular policy issue. There are several digital tools that can be used to find micro-influencers which might be of interest for your digital strategy. The real work is to go through the results and reach out to the right micro-influencers who will agree to support you. Once there, the campaign provided content that looked like material that an influencer would use. And with regards to political issues, the campaign was happy to provide influencers with talking points and policy positions.

One concrete example of a partnership that has been described as successful was with the digital news outlet Buzzfeed. Kamala Harris made an interview with the presenter Curly Velasquez (who cooked with his mum) on Pero Like; a channel popular among the Latino audience. The campaign also used the trademark of Buzzfeed: quizzes, most often targeted to battle ground states. If you took the quiz: "Five ways you really know you are from Pennsylvania", you could be sure to run into information about how early voting or the system with mail-in ballots works in the Granite State – or how to vote if you have moved elsewhere.

The campaign started its own podcast – "Here's the deal" – since a format based on the candidate talking was likely to suit Joe Biden. Only a few episodes were recorded. Another official podcast – "Biden's Briefing" – offered content (news stories) from selected news outlets that Biden supposedly had chosen. None of them gained much traction. Something that proved more successful was to appear on popular podcasts that already had a large audience; the discussion with Brené Brown on the podcast "Unlocking us" about empathy, unity and courage is a good example.

A final, telling story is the polling the campaign did across all demographics – not specifically politically engaged voters – asking them who they would like most to hear a message from. The internal betting was on the likes of LeBron James, Demi Lovato, and George Clooney. But the actual winner was Barack Obama – a reminder that you often can settle with a simpler solution when one exists.

Question five: What went wrong, and what are the trends in the future?

Many Presidential campaigns are remembered by their mistakes, and 2020 will go down in the history books. Donald Trump ignored warnings about COVID-19, proposed ultraviolet or "just very powerful light" and "disinfectant" as a potential remedy, before contracting the virus himself and ending up in hospital. An estimation done by researchers at Stanford University concluded that Trump's 18 physical election rallies led to "more than 30,000 additional cases and at least 700 deaths." [21]

In retrospect, the Joe Biden-campaign can look back in relief and conclude that no major gaffes or scandals occurred. The avoidance of blatant own goals is largely attributed to a robust internal approval process. But many parts of the campaign could and should have been much better, of course.

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One common thread when the campaign is analysed in retrospect with regards to digital and social media, is time and investments. Many of the key persons in the campaign team worked for other Democratic candidates even during the early spring of 2020. In a re-election campaign, you can build your whole campaign team and invest in technological tools and platforms much earlier. More time, planning and early investments would have improved a virtual campaign that had to be assembled very quickly once Joe Biden emerged as the candidate for President.

In the beginning of the Biden-campaign, just putting a 78-year-old in a digital context did not work particularly well, as this summary explains:

"Biden's first virtual town hall was riddled with embarrassing technical problems and his podcast failed to find listeners and only lasted seven episodes. Livestream events and interviews recorded in basement that were posted to YouTube typically only received a few thousand views, a paltry number compared to those of Trump and his Democratic primary opponents."[22]

As we saw earlier, the campaign found ways to organise an impressive virtual campaign, but the initial challenges and the disadvantage to Trump in the digital sphere must be underlined.

A concrete example where the campaign failed was in South Florida, where Trump and the Republican party made strong inroads with Latino and other minority voters.[23] Here, it is acknowledged that the nut was not cracked in terms of how the Biden campaign ought to have worked with digital targeting, persuasion, mobilization – and not least misinformation and counter-messaging, as the accusation of Biden as a "Trojan horse for socialism" won substantial ground among voters.

One observation made is that the work done with distributed content partnership is only likely to grow in the future, both in political

campaigns and in the private sector. Another interesting area is the field of Virtual reality/Augmented reality. The campaign tried it to a certain extent, primarily on Snapchat and Facebook, and are supposed to have witnessed positive results. But the campaign is supposed to have had a shortage of enough producers, videographers, and designers with the right skillset to implement a bigger effort.

Within the field of fundraising, one point in the rear-view-mirror could be applicable to campaigning in general: individuals who donate regularly to the campaign could also be empowered and educated to become fundraisers themselves. This was tried during the end of the campaign, but should have been done earlier.

One major point of debate, which only can be touched upon here, is Facebook. This discussion has only grown after Election Day, not least due to the attack on the US Capitol on January 6th and the "Facebook files" leaked by a whistle-blower. One should also note the general debate about the need for regulations to address problems such as misinformation, polarization, hate speech – but also harmful effects on teenagers and the possible fanning of ethnic conflicts.

If we restrict ourselves to the Biden campaign, it spent $85.2 million on advertising through Facebook properties – an amount of resources that is impossible to describe and judge fairly. One ingredient in the discussion about Facebook and what can be understood and done better is the "black box of Facebook algorithms"; how to use the platform in the right way to achieve what you have planned, and how to accurately measure the impact you had.

In this analysis, it is imperative to differentiate between your objectives when planning your activities on Facebook and other digital platforms: persuasion, support building, and get out the vote (GOTV). And when you make a strategy, you must separate between which audience you want to reach, accordingly which channel you should

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use, and how the right content then must be produced. Moreover, you ought to work with a strategy template and a tactical calendar. And before you even start, you should arrange how you measure the impact of your time, efforts, and your money spent.

Parallel with the need to understand how to make strategies in the digital landscape, a few trends can be observed. With regards to content, video is likely to expand further. Livestreams became more popular during the pandemic and will most likely continue to grow. An increase can also be noticed among content that disappears within 24 hours (InstaStories, Snapchat). Facebook will launch Project Aria – a research device that is worn like regular glasses – in the near future, which will stimulate the development within VR/AR and its presence on social platforms.

Younger generations – including many volunteers and voters in this campaign – have grown up online. They are likely to expect future campaign to be digital, transparent, and easy to take part in. And they will not only demand that digital has a seat at the table where decisions are taken – digital should be at the absolute core of future campaigns.

Most political campaigns operate with limited resources. Facebook is still the giant, but a giant in turbulence. Already, smaller actors offer campaigns to use programmatic advertising: to target digital ads versus very specific audience without using Facebook or Google Ads. In this way, you are supposed to be able to achieve better results with your digital campaigns at a lower cost.

One possible and likely trend is therefore, once the pandemic is under control, the total integration of traditional political "offline-activities" such as meetings, rallies, and canvassing, with digital platforms and online tools. And when almost all parts of our political lives become a hybrid reality, the lessons of the 2020 Biden campaign can hopefully serve as an inspirational toolbox for progressives across the world.

* * *

The question we all need to ask is how this successful virtual campaign will affect Europe. The answer is that the novelties of American presidential campaigns – for better or worse – always find their way into our political life.

But will all of this still be relevant when we are vaccinated against COVID-19, and everything hopefully can go back to "normal"? While we cannot know what the new normal will be, the art of convincing, communicating and courting your audience will inevitably remain at the core of successful European political parties and campaigns.

Progressive Communication in The Age of Populism

Before we conclude our paper, we want to address a potential point of criticism. Why do we think that European progressives have something to learn from American politicians like Trump and Biden, who were successful in a political and socioeconomic context that differs significantly from European countries? Although we acknowledge those differences, we also want to highlight two important patterns that are common to both sides of the Atlantic. Such patterns make the analysis of recent innovations in American political communications relevant to the European context.

First, the communication landscape in which American and European progressives operate are more similar than dissimilar. That is, American and European politicians and citizens use the same social media platforms, which are increasingly important in the media ecologies of both sides of the Atlantic. Additionally, the expansion of the attention economy into the functioning of traditional media is also evident in Europe.

Second, Europe has witnessed the slow but steady emergence of Trumpian politicians throughout the continent. In making this statement,

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we have in mind populists and celebrity politicians – that is, technology-savvy operators willing to do whatever it takes to gain visibility through social media, acquire platforms in traditional media, and be perceived as legitimate political actors by citizens.

This said, we do recognise a fundamental difference between the American and the European contexts: the gradual erosion of catch-all parties in Europe has contributed to the loss of support by most centre-left parties to centrist parties on the one hand and to green parties and the radical left on the other hand. In the United States, the electoral system has slowed down this process to a significant extent. The increasingly complex relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and voting behaviour that can be witnessed in most European countries remains far from becoming the political norm in North America.

Nonetheless, the relational and networked approach to communications suggested by Trump and Biden provides an important solution to the challenging context in which European Progressives operate. If they are to speak to diverse constituents that do not identify as a common group, progressives must establish and employ effective but flexible systems to engage multiple groups in meaningful relationships while also keeping those relationships and content connected by a positive, holistic message that provides a hopeful alternative to the reductionist and reactionary worldview of populists.

* * *

Any European political party would like to know more about how to find 15 million new voters. To find them, it is important to be heard in times of populism, polarisation and social bubbles. To do so, we have identified a set of key principles below.

- **Less is more:** "Lock her up", "Make America great again", "Take back control". Like any populist, Trump always had a key message.

Progressives should create catchy slogans that summarise what they stand for and are easy to grasp and disseminate. Also note the obvious link between a perceived problem (migration, closed factories) and a "solution" (build a wall/rip trade deals) in Trump's way of communicating.

- **Communication as storytelling:** the communication of all specific policies should be framed within a positive, holistic story.
- **Know and speak with the audience:** in difficult races, investing resources into developing targeted (and, if needed, long) conversations is more likely to be a good use of resources than in creating ads for the general audience. To segment your audience and use targeted communication to "core voters" on the one hand, and "switchers" on the other, will only grow in importance.
- **Relational organising:** encourage supporters to have meaningful political conversations with relatives, friends, co-workers, and other acquaintances. This shouldn't replace traditional knocking on doors but, rather, accompany traditional campaigning approaches.
- **Understanding social media:** social media is an amplifier. In campaign times, it should be used not to repeat/retweet/repost/ respond to criticism but to disseminate positive content – both organic and from the campaign.
- **Conviction, energy and the power of authenticity:** this applies not only to the content of political communication but also to the management of the campaign in terms of timing, building momentum, etc.
- **From centralised, top-down to distributed organising**: supporting self-starting campaigners distributed throughout the territory by giving them tools without establishing targets. This is also connected with the recognition and deployment of existing relationships (e.g. in terms of existing volunteers and their own networks).

- **Building and maintaining trust:** considering ongoing discussions regarding privacy and data-ownership, this is an increasingly important principle. Progressives should recognise the challenges associated with this issue and be open about their chosen technical and political solutions.
- **Addressing disinformation in real time:** this is important but should only be used when there is evidence that voters are likely to be influenced; additionally, responses should be directed at relevant groups of voters to avoid reinforcing the message of opponents.
- **Social media as networks:** the networks created by progressives and their allies distribute content and energy throughout social media platforms. Future campaigns should incorporate social network analysis in their planning. This would allow them to identify the main nodes of such networks and support the tailored distribution of content as needed.
- **Follow every campaign cycle:** political communication and campaigning are currently being reshaped both by technological developments and the ways we are forced to live our lives during the pandemic. Progressives are encouraged to learn from every major European election and campaign cycle in the US – the next major one being the midterm elections on 8 November 2022 – in order to learn from the emergence of news models to win elections.

Endnotes

1   Unemployment: www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/19-point-2-percent-of-the-unemployed-had-been-jobless-for-27-weeks-or-more-in-february-2020.htm. GDP: www.bea.gov/news/2020/gross-domestic-product-fourth-quarter-and-year-2019-advance-estimate
2   Gallup: news.gallup.com/poll/203198/presidential-approval-ratings-donald-trump.aspx
3   Re-election campaign: www.npr.org/2019/06/19/733973677/trump-launches-reelection-campaign-with-familiar-themes. Twitter: www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/05/28/trump-twitter-by-numbers/. Conservative ecosystem and Facebook-quote. "The social media campaign of 2020" by John Allen Hendricks and

Dan Schill, p. 83 in "The 2020 Presidential Campaign. A communications perspective" by Robert E. Denton Jr. (2021).

4　Iowa:　www.nytimes.com/2020/02/04/us/politics/what-happened-iowa-caucuses.html. According the 2020 census, the population of Iowa is 3 190 369.

5　The US economy contracted 19.2 percent during the first phase of the pandemic recession (the fourth quarter of 2019 through the second quarter of 2020). Many issues impact an election campaign, and the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matters movement, as well the extensive forest fires and concerns about climate change, should also be mentioned. www.reuters.com/business/us-economy-contracted-192-during-covid-19-pandemic-recession-2021-07-29/

6　The events of 6 January 2021 – and president Trumps role in the build-up – are portrayed in the documentary "Four hours at the Capitol", directed by Jamie Roberts (broadcasted by HBO and BBC, among others).

7　Victory　margins:　www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/12/04/size-bidens-win-matters-it-is-huge/

8　It should be noted that many Republican lawmakers have responded to the highest voter turnout ever by making it more difficult to vote. The aim is supposedly to suppress turnout among groups – for example ethnic minorities – that tend to vote for Democratic candidates. According to the Brennan Institute for Justice, "at least 19 states enacted 33 laws that make it harder for Americans to vote" (as of 2 September 2021). Other states have responded to the eagerness to vote by making it easier. See the regular updates:　www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-october-2021

9　It should be noted that the Trump campaign had a bigger presence in almost all parts of the digital landscape. For example: During the last 100 days of the campaign, Trump had 354.4 million interactions on his official Facebook-page, compared with 52,2 million for Biden. However, this chapter is based solely on the Biden campaign.

10　Relevant books on US Presidential campaigns and the role of data and social media in campaigns: "The boys on the bus" (Robert Crouse, 1973); "What It Takes: The Way to the White House" (Richard Ben Cramer 1992); "The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns" (Sasha Issenberg 2012); and three books by John Heilemann & Mark Halperin: "The way to win: Taking the White House in 2008" (2006); "Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime" (2010); "Double Down: The explosive inside account of the 2012 presidential election" (2013).

11　The present author has followed US Presidential elections on American soil in different states in 2000; 2004; 2008; 2012; and 2016. In addition, congressional and gubernatorial races were followed in various parts of the US in 2002; 2006; 2010; 2014 and 2018.

12　The four online post-election seminars featured the following staff from the Biden/Harris campaign: Rob Flaherty (Digital Director); Caitlin Mitchell (Senior Advisor for Digital); Jose Nunez (Director of Digital Organizing); Becca Rinkevich (Director of Digital Rapid Response); Timothy Durigan (Data Security Analyst, DNC); Clarke Humphrey (Deputy

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Digital Director for Grassroots Fundraising); Sarah Galvez (Director of Social Media and Audience Development); Christian Tom (Director of Digital Partnerships); Aalok Kanani (Digital Communication Director); Patrick Stevenson (Chief Mobilization Officer, DNC)

13 The two most important books were: "The 2020 Presidential Campaign: A communications perspective" (2021), edited by Robert E. Denton Jr; and "Battle for the soul: Inside the Democrats' campaigns to defeat Trump" by Edward-Isaac Dovere.

14 The Biden campaign started to knock on doors only in October 2020, and only in a limited number of states.

15 www.theverge.com/2020/9/7/21426090/joe-biden-campaign-instagram-votejoe-teen-animal-crossing-stories-memes

16 "The social media campaign of 2020" by John Allen Hendricks and Dan Schill, p. 81 in "The 2020 Presidential Campaign. A communications perspective" by Robert E. Denton Jr. (2021).

17 Ibid, p. 87.

18 www.polygon.com/2020/11/2/21545771/joe-biden-fortnite-campaign-creative-map, and "The social media campaign of 2020" by John Allen Hendricks and Dan Schill, p. 83 in "The 2020 Presidential Campaign. A communications perspective" by Robert E. Denton Jr. (2021).

19 Ibid pages 86-87.

20 Ibid p. 86.

21 Trump and COVID-19: www.newsweek.com/fact-check-did-donald-trump-suggest-people-inject-poison-cure-covid-1619105. Trump rallies including quote: www.latimes.com/science/story/2020-10-31/super-spreading-trump-rallies-led-to-more-than-700-COVID-19-deaths-study.

22 "The social media campaign of 2020" by John Allen Hendricks and Dan Schill, p. 86 in "The 2020 Presidential Campaign. A communications perspective" by Robert E. Denton Jr. (2021).

23 Joe Biden had a lead in the opinion polls in Florida leading up the election, averaging around 3 percentage points. But Trump won by 3.4 points, which was the largest margin since 2004, and a larger margin than when Trump beat Hillary Clinton in Florida in 2016.

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←NEXT LEFT→

Election seminars:

The four online post-election seminars featured the following staff from the Biden/Harris campaign: Rob Flaherty (Digital Director); Caitlin Mitchell (Senior Advisor for Digital); Jose Nunez (Director of Digital Organizing); Becca Rinkevich (Director of Digital Rapid Response); Timothy Durigan (Data Security Analyst, DNC); Clarke Humphrey (Deputy Digital Director for Grassroots Fundraising); Sarah Galvez (Director of Social Media and Audience Development); Christian Tom (Director of Digital Partnerships); Aalok Kanani (Digital Communication Director); Patrick Stevenson (Chief Mobilization Officer, DNC).

Biographies

← NEXT LEFT →

László ANDOR is a Hungarian economist, and former EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2010-2014). Since stepping down from the Commission, he has been head of department of economic policy at Corvinus University (Budapest), Senior Fellow at Hertie School of Governance (Berlin) and a visiting professor at ULB (Brussels) as well as Sciences Po (Paris). He also became member in various think tanks (EPC, RAND Europe, Friends of Europe) in an advisory capacity.

Between 1991 and 2005, Andor taught political science and economic policy in Budapest, and was editor of the progressive social science journal Eszmélet. He was also a regular columnist for the weekly business magazine Figyelő and the daily Népszava. He has authored, edited or co-edited a dozen books in Hungary, including on economic and political history, comparative economics and globalization. Andor has also taught at Rutgers (State University of New Jersey, USA) as Visiting Fulbright Professor (1997-8) and worked as an adviser for the World Bank on SAPRI (Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative). He also worked as an adviser for the Budget Committee of the Hungarian Parliament (1998-9) and the Prime Minister's Office (2002-5). From 2005 to 2010, he was a Member of the Board of Directors of the EBRD (London), representing the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia.

Andor holds a degree in Economic Sciences from Karl Marx (now Corvinus) University, an MA in Development Economics from the University of Manchester, and PhD from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1995). He was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa at Sofia University of National and World Economy and the Legion of Honour by the French President in 2014.

Attila ANTAL (1985) is holding a PhD in political science. He is a senior lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Law Institute of Political Science. He is a coordinator at the Social Theory Research Group at Institute of Political History. He is doing his contemporary research in political theory of populism, social and critical theory, theory of democracy, green political thought, constitutionalism, political history. He is an editor at Eszmélet (a leading a Hungarian quarterly journal for social critique). His latest book: *The Rise of Hungarian Populism: State Autocracy and the Orbán Regime*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2019.

David J. BAILEY is Associate Professor in Politics at the University of Birmingham. His teaching and research focus on social democratic and other left parties, critical political economy, protest, and developments in contemporary capitalism. He has recent or forthcoming publications in *Environmental Politics, Comparative European Politics*, and *British Journal of Political Science*. He is currently on the editorial boards of the journals *Global Political Economy* and *Capital and Class,* as well as being convenor of the Critical Political Economy Research Network of the European Sociological Association, and a member of the FEPS Next Left Focus Group.

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Cornel BAN is an associate professor of International Political economy at Copenhagen Business School. Prior to this he was a Reader at City University of London, assistant professor at Boston University and research fellow at Brown University in the United States. He wrote two books and two dozen articles and book chapters on the politics of economic expertise, policy shifts in international financial institutions and the politics of capitalist diversity in Brazil, Spain, Hungary and Romania.His book (Ruling Ideas: How Neoliberalism Goes Local, Oxford University Press, 2016) received the political economy award for 2017 of the British International Studies Association. Currently, Cornel works on growth regimes, the role of state and finance in decarbonization and the political economy of industrial policy.

Andrius BIELSKIS is Director of Centre for Aristotelian Studies and Critical Theory at Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, and Professor of Philosophy at Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania. He is the founder of the progressive social movement 'New Left 95' and the director of DEMOS Institute of Critical Thought. Andrius is the author of several books including *Towards a Postmodern Understanding of the Political* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), *The Unholy Sacrament* (Demos, 2014), *On the Meaning of Philosophy and Art* (MRU, 2015), *Existence, Meaning, Excellence* (Routledge, 2017), and the (co-)editor of *Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Aristotelianism*: *Modernity, Conflict and Politics* (Bloomsbury, 2020), *Virtue and Economy: Essays of Morality and Markets* (Ashgate, 2015), *Debating with the Lithuanian New Left:*

Terry Eagleton, Joel Bakan, Alex Demirovic, Ulrich Brand (Demos, 2014) and *Democracy without Labour movement* (Demos, 2009). He was an International Onassis Fellow at the University of Athens in 2017 pursuing research on the critique of natural inequalities, especially the notorious argument for the existence of natural slaves, in Aristotle's *Politics*. Currently, he is working on the research project "Human Flourishing and Non-Alienated Labour in the Era of Automation" funded by the Research Council of Lithuania.

Felix BUTZLAFF is an Assistant Professor at the Institute for Social Change and Sustainability (IGN) at Vienna University of Economics and Business. A political scientist by training, he holds a doctorate from the Georg-August-University in Göttingen/Germany. His research interests revolve around political parties, social movements, changing notions of democratic participation, and how the institutions of representative democracy might react to shifting demands and expectations. He has published his research at an international and national level in journals such as Democratization, Political Research Exchange, the European Journal for Social Theory, Critical Policy Studies, etc.

Mafalda DÂMASO is a Cultural Policy lecturer and researcher interested in the intersection between culture, policy, European affairs, and international relations. She is currently Lecturer in Cultural Industries and Policy at Erasmus University Rotterdam, Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries of King's

College London, and Visiting Lecturer at the Institut Catholique de Paris. Previously, among other roles, she was Culture and Foreign Policy expert at the German Institute of Foreign Cultural Relations, worked as expert for the European Commission's Joint Research Center, and co-authored commissioned research for the European Parliament with the network Culture Action Europe.

André KROUWEL (1964) teaches political science and communication at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and is the founder and co-owner of Kieskompas (Election Compass), a leading developer of Vote Advice Applications across the globe. Krouwel's research focuses on political parties, elections, voting behaviour, public opinion, populism, Euroscepticism, extremism (versus political moderation) and conspiracy belief. He wrote his PhD on the transformation of political parties in Western Europe.

Maria MALTSCHNIG serves since 2016 as Director of Karl-Renner-Institut, which is the political academy of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. She is graduated from Vienna University of Economics (having a degree in socioeconomics) and she has an extensive political experience, having started her involvement in VSSTÖ (Federation of Socialist Students) – of which organisation she also was elected a chair of in 2008 -2009. Subsequently, she had worked as consultant for Chamber of Labour and for Federal Ministry of Finance, after which she had been appointed as the Head of

the Cabinet of the Austrian Chancellor in 2016. In parallel with the diverse responsibilities, she also was a member of the supervisory board of the publishing house 'Facultas Verlags-und Buchhandels AG' in 2014 -2016.

Gerassimos MOSCHONAS, PhD University of Paris II, is Professor of Comparative Politics in the Department of Political Science and History, Panteion University of Political and Social Sciences, Athens. He has held visiting positions at Free University of Brussels, University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, SciencesPo, Paris, Princeton University, Yale University, University of Leicester, University of Paris 8, Montpellier 1 University, and the University of Paris II.

He is the author of *In the Name of Social Democracy, The Great Transformation: 1945 to the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) and *La Social-démocratie de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Montchrestien, 1994). Recent publications (selection): 'European Social Democracy, Communism and the Erfurtian Model' (chapter, SAGE, 2018); 'Superficial Social Democracy: PASOK, the State and the Shipwreck of the Greek Economy' (chapter, Palgrave 2020), "The anti-SYRIZA current: Composition, scope and dynamics" (with Angelos Seriatos, Chapter, Gutenberg 2022, in Greek).

Fields of research: Social Democracy, Radical Left, History of the European Left, European Union and Political Parties, Europarties, Elections, Greek Politics.

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Bartosz RYDLIŃSKI is a chair and co-founder of Ignacy Daszyński Center, member of the board of the "Amicus Europae" Foundation, established by former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski. Rydliński holds a doctorate in political science from Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University in Warsaw (2013), teaches at the Institute of Political Science at CSWU. Rydliński is a former EASI-Hurford Next Generation Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Rydliński was a visiting scholar at Georgetown University's Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies (CERES) during 2014 and 2022.

Andreas SCHIEDER is a member of the European Parliament and the Head of the Austrian SPÖ-EU-Delegation. Before that, he served as parliamentary leader of the Social Democratic Party in the Austrian Parliament. He was also state secretary in the Ministry of Finance from 2008 to 2013. Andreas Schieder holds a master's degree in economics from the University of Vienna. In the European Parliament, Andreas Schieder is Chair of the Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, Member of the Conference of Delegation Chairs, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation , the Delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo and Substitute Member in the Transport Committee and the Delegation for relations with the United States. Additionally, his engagement for a progressive way forward brought

him to being Co-Chair of the Progressive Forum and Chair of the FEPS Next Left Program.

Maria SKÓRA is a political analyst and advisor with focus on Poland and the Visegrád countries. She has a proven track record of successful research on Polish-German relations and European affairs. She regularly comments on these topics in the European media. She is 2018 Alumna of Young Leaders Program of Aspen Institute Central Europe in Prague and 2019 Visiting Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States and AICGS, Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC. She holds a master's degree in Sociology and a PhD in economics.

Ania SKRZYPEK, (Skrzypek-Claassens), PhD, is Director for Research and Training at the Foundations for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). She obtained her Ph.D. cum laude in political sciences from the University of Warsaw, her thesis "*Cooperation of the socialist and social democratic parties in uniting Europe. From Liaison Bureau to PES. 1957 – 2007.*" (also published in book format in 2010). Before joining FEPS in 2009, A. Skrzypek worked as a PhD researcher and taught at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Sciences at the University of Warsaw (2003 – 2009). In parallel, she served as twice consecutively elected Secretary General of Young European Socialists (ECOSY, 2005-2009).

She is an author of over 100 published pamphlets, papers and articles, available in English, German, French, Spanish, Bulgarian, and Polish.

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She is an academic reviewer for "Przeglad Europejski" of Warsaw University and regularly appears on the radio (TOK FM) as the expert on EU affairs. She is also a member of the High-Level Advisory Board on international affairs for Nowa Lewica in Poland.

Eric SUNDSTRÖM works as a research fellow and communication strategist at LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation. He previously served as Political Advisor to the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, and as the Prime Minister's speech writer. His professional background is found at the intersection where international politics meets journalism and communication. He has been editor-in-chief of newspapers and magazines produced in Stockholm and Berlin; worked with think-tanks in Washington DC and Brussels; studied at universities in Stockholm, Glasgow and Montpellier; and holds an MA from Johns Hopkins University SAIS (Bologna/WashingtonDC). He has followed five Presidential campaigns and five Congressional campaigns on the ground in various states in the USA.

Konstantin VÖSSING is Associate Professor (Senior Lecturer) of Comparative Politics in the Department of International Politics at City University of London. He was a student at University of Bonn and the University of Reims, and he received his PhD from the Ohio State University. He has had previous appointments at Humboldt University Berlin, the European University Institute, Harvard University, and Ohio State. He studies how people form preferences about controversial issues, how elites shape

opinions and the behavior of citizens through mobilization, persuasion, and information in different political environments, and how these processes relate to critical episodes of major political conflict, such as class politics, regional integration, the transformation of the welfare state, and the current challenge to democracy.

Bradley WARD is a Teaching Fellow at the Department of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Birmingham. His recently completed PhD research explored the intersection between Momentum, the Labour Party, and Corbynism. He also researches left parties, their relationship to social movements, and the evolution of left ideologies. He has recently published in *Political Studies*, *British Politics*, and the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*.