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# Confident cascades: a behavioural analysis of the 2016 USA presidential elections and Brexit referendum

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## Introduction

In 2016 two historic events took place: in America, the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the USA, Donald Trump was elected to office, while in the UK a referendum vote saw made the decision of the UK populace to leave the EU. Both outcomes where largely unexpected and spawned a great deal of research seeking to understand the reasons behind the upsets. The following thesis seeks to contribute to this research through the lens of behavioural science, in order to see how this perspective can help better understand the outcome of the two events. This will be accomplished be done by first presenting and analysing behavioural concepts that may prove useful, in order to set a baseline from which to look at the case studies. Said case studies will each be looked at on their own and then compared so as to first give a detailed analysis of each case study, to then "zoom out" and look at them both in more general terms, paying close attention to similarities, differences and possible ways one could enrich the other. Throughout the thesis, existing research will be complimented with other sources such as news websites and with original ideas and analysis serving as the linking element of the discourse. In this manner we shall find out what insights behavioural science can provide and shed more light on two very important and very unexpected events.

## 1. Behavioural concepts

The first step in explaining the selected case studies from a behavioural point of view will be to analyse and highlight relevant behavioural concepts, with a special focus placed on the field of "motivated reasoning". This process will help build a framework that will orient the analysis the 2016 Brexit referendum and American presidential election outcomes, allowing for clear and concise explanations, and, in turn, making the logical connections easier to grasp.

## 1.1. Confirmation bias and availability cascades

A first bias that undoubtably plays a role is confirmation bias: it can be explained as a tendency of people to seek out, interpret, remember, and generally prefer information that will strengthen their pre-held beliefs. It can be seen through many behaviours, but for the sake of the present research we will focus on those of the electorate; indeed, it is useful in explaining, at least in part, why voters are reluctant to change their beliefs even when presented with, apparently, strong counter evidence. Further, it can explain why

voters sometimes do not even have knowledge of said counter evidence, as confirmation bias discourages them from even interacting with information that does not conform to their beliefs. This bias as such has many possible applications in the case studies that shall be examined but shall be primarily viewed under the framework of motivated reasoning, which shall be touched upon later in the chapter.

 Another element that warrants study is what is known as a "availability cascade"[1], an "evolution" of the availability heuristic. An availability cascade occurs when a simple but seemingly insightful argument emerges to explain a complicated problem; it will gain popularity due to its simplicity, and people will eventually begin to adopt it based on the fact that others have. That is to say, each individual will fall prey to an availability heuristic when reasoning about the complex problem and will thus refer to the simple and popular solution that "everyone" seems to subscribe to the implications of this phenomenon in the context of voting are very important. It suggests that if a candidate or idea is "loud" enough, in the sense that they provide simple solutions in a widespread manner, a snowball effect may be kicked off thanks to the availability cascade effect, significantly bolstering the chances of election for whomever or whatever first kicked the snowball down the hill. In both case studies a sound argument could be made as regards to the importance of this effect, specifically when discussing election or referendum campaigns.

## 1.2. The importance of motivated reasoning

"Motivated Reasoning" focuses specifically on how conscious or subconscious goals can lure us into biased collection and processing of information, in an attempt to reach said goal in a "rational" manner. What sets this process apart from typical Behavioural bias is the element of "rationality" that constrains it: we can only hold a Motivated belief so long as we are rationally able, through motivated reasoning, to convince ourselves of its truth[2].

This is an important concept in the framework of this thesis, as it has many applications and implications in the political field; what is of particular interest, however, is how it can assist in understanding voter behaviour, as many of its aspects are well served to

[1] Kuran, T. & Sunstein, C.R. 1999, Availability Cascades and Risk Regulation, Stanford University School of Law, STANFORD.

[2] Kunda, Z. 1990, "The case for motivated reasoning", Psychological Bulletin, vol. 108, no. 3, pp. 482-483.

explaining some peculiarities that will be later observed in the case studies. As such, this section will focus on better elaborating the notion of "motivated reasoning" and some of its specific aspects, in preparation for the analysis to come.

To start, we shall elaborate a better understanding of how motivated reasoning occurs in general terms. Assuming one has in mind a certain goal that she or he wishes to reach, how exactly does one reason in a motivated manner? As alluded to earlier, reasoning becomes biased in the collection and elaboration of information[3]; let us look at both in turn.

As regards the collection of information, there is the tendency of individuals to seek out sources in a non-impartial way, avoiding or discarding sources that could discredit one's goal and cherry pick those that are more favourable[4]. Furthermore, once one is confronted with possible sources, she will tend to ask herself different questions based on whether it reinforces or criticises her goal.[5] When looking at reinforcing sources the question will be framed as "Can I believe this?" whereas criticising sources will be subject to a "Must I believe this?" test. It is clear how this creates a much higher standard for "negative" information to be included in the reasoning process, whereas "supporting" information will likely be able to flow rather freely. Once information has been gathered it must then be processed and here as well there is the possibility for a goal to influence the process, compromising objective reasoning. Indeed, the same piece of information can be interpreted in different manners depending on the underlying motive that guided the collection of said information.[6] Another way in which processing becomes biased is through a phenomena that can be called "reality denial"[7]: this occurs when information about a risk or possible future state that conflicts with my goal or belief is rationalized away or in a distorted manner, in so far as said information is not yet "tangible". As an example, consider the reluctancy of some countries to adopt stringent measures against the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic, so long as it had not yet become a tangible threat on their national territory.

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[3] Epley, N. & Gilovich, T. 2016, "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 136.

[4] Ibid

[5] Gilovich, T., 1991. How We Know What Isn't So. New York: Free Press, pp.46-47.

[6] Epley, N. & Gilovich, T. 2016, "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 137-138

[7] Bénabou, R. & Tirole, J. 2016, "Mindful Economics: The Production, Consumption, and Value of Beliefs", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 144.

Moving on from general terms, we must now begin to look at some more particular implications and aspects of motivated reasoning, with the continual use of a filter designed to gather only what is most pertinent to the case studies that will follow.

## *The implications of a "low cost of wrongness"*

First, we will briefly discuss the impact that a low "cost of wrongness" has on reasoning[8] and explain why it is an essential component of this study. A "low cost of wrongness" means that if the consequences of holding a mistaken belief or failing to reach a certain goal are not severe, there is an increased chance that one will be susceptible to reasoning distortions in the framework of motivated reasoning. For example, when one is choosing what dessert to have after an amazing meal, the cost of not choosing the "perfect dessert" is very low. Indeed, if I have already enjoyed a great meal, and know that any choice I make is likely to satisfice me, I perceive a very low risk in choosing poorly. As such, this is a choice that is more at risk to be taken through motivated reasoning. This is a key insight if we apply it to voting, given that the perceived cost of a wrong vote is proportional to the probability of said vote being "the pivotal vote". Since such probability is very low; this implies that the reasoning that drives the decision of who or what to vote for is, at its core, delicate, and very susceptible to distortions. It is clear why this is an important aspect to highlight in the framework of this thesis, as it serves as a foundation in explaining the "whys" behind distorted voter behaviour.

## *Overconfidence*

Another aspect of voter behaviour that is noteworthy is the tendency of more overconfident individuals to hold more extremist political ideologies, and to have a higher turnout rate in elections.[9] Furthermore, overconfidence does not decrease with higher education levels, and increases instead with age and media exposure.[10] These tendencies are worth exploration in the context of the case studies, as both had discussions regarding far right political ideologies and principles (most notably and

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[8] Bénabou, R. & Tirole, J. 2016, "Mindful Economics: The Production, Consumption, and Value of Beliefs", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 150.
[9] Ortoleva, P. & Snowberg, E. 2015, "Overconfidence in Political Behavior", The American Economic Review, vol. 105, no. 2, pp. 504-535.
[10] Ibid

common to both the principle of Nationalism and national pride) that may have had a role in determining outcomes through their higher likelihood to push individuals to vote.

## *Belief consonance: origins and effects*

Continuing our analysis, we shall now consider belief consonance[11] and its implications in terms of practical applications to the present study. By belief consonance it is meant the tendency of individuals to prefer others to hold beliefs in line with their own, thus creating a ripple throughout said individuals' life by motivating decision-making in such a way as to avoid situations of dissonance. Whilst the implications of this concept are important and widely applicable to the case studies, it is also worthwhile to highlight the two main theories that function as "explanatory variables": cultural cognition and protected beliefs.

Cultural cognition[12] holds that we mould our beliefs in such a way as to conform to the "deep" values of the group we wish to be, or are, a part of. A noteworthy aspect of this theory is the tendency of those holding motivated beliefs (in terms of belief consonance) to develop an internal consistency for them: this essentially means that we believe things to be "good" or "bad" universally, such as believing what is morally good or bad as also being socially beneficial or harmful.

By protected beliefs[13] it is meant the perspective under which we seek consonance due to the presence of individuals with different beliefs being perceived as a threat to our own. A belief is defined as protected insofar as one has "invested" in it in order to convince oneself of the weight it holds in one's life. For example, a devout Christian will go to church every Sunday, go to confession regularly, say a prayer before meals etc.: these actions are all investments into the belief that one is a devout Christian. What is important to note here is the link between the confidence in beliefs and the preference for

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[11] Golman, R., Loewenstein, G., Moene, K.O. & Zarri, L. 2016, "The Preference for Belief Consonance", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 165-187.

[12] Tomasello, M., Tomasello, M., Carpenter, M., Carpenter, M., Call, J., Call, J., Behne, T., Behne, T., Moll, H. & Moll, H. 2005, "Understanding and sharing intentions: the origins of cultural cognition", The Behavioral and brain sciences, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 675-691;691735.

[13] Bénabou, R. & Tirole, J. 2011, "IDENTITY, MORALS, AND TABOOS: BELIEFS AS ASSETS", The Quarterly Journal of Economics, vol. 126, no. 2, pp. 805-855.

belief consonance,[14] which feeds into the earlier observed link between overconfidence and political ideology. Essentially, those who have only an intermediate confidence in their beliefs will display a higher preference for belief consonance, as it is necessary for them to "prove" the value of their beliefs; those who on the other hand have very weak or very strong confidence in their beliefs will not display such a large preference, the former because they are more likely to revise weak beliefs than to strengthen them, the latter because they are unshakeable. This effect can be seen in the zeal that "new converts" display: if one has only recently acquired a belief, she will likely be in a situation in which she needs to "prove her faith" be it to herself or her group, and as such will display a high preference for belief consonance. If we use this insight to compliment what has already been observed we can thus link three variables together: political ideology, confidence, and desire for belief consonance.

We can now look at some of the implications of when one's beliefs are challenged, how this affects behaviour, and, in particular voter behaviour. The first insight comes from the famous Asch experiment (1951) and it concerns motivated belief formation. When I am placed in a situation of belief dissonance one option is to adjust my own beliefs in a motivated manner in order to conform. An argument that can be raised here is that people only superficially adjust their beliefs, whilst internally remaining convinced of their prior ones, in order to avoid conflict. In the context of this study this is worth analysis, as the dissonance between belief reporting and actually held belief may help understand a reason that polls can fail to accurately predict the outcome of a vote: this too will be looked at in more detail in following chapters.

A second, and opposite, implication is the phenomena of proselytizing: when confronted with an individual that holds different views than mine, instead of conforming I may attempt to change said individuals' beliefs to be in line with my own. What then, are the conditions that will lead to choose proselytization over conforming? They are essentially two: the gravity of the perceived threat that dissonance places on deep held beliefs[15] and the level of confidence one has in the beliefs in question.[16] What is important to note

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[14] Visser, P.S., Krosnick, J.A. & Simmons, J.P. 2003, "Distinguishing the cognitive and behavioral consequences of attitude importance and certainty: A new approach to testing the common-factor hypothesis", Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 118-141.

[15] Gal, D. & Rucker, D.D. 2010, "When in Doubt, Shout! Paradoxical Influences of Doubt on Proselytizing", Psychological Science, vol. 21, no. 11, pp. 1701-1707.

[16] Visser, P.S., Krosnick, J.A. & Simmons, J.P. 2003, "Distinguishing the cognitive and behavioral consequences of attitude importance and certainty: A new approach to testing the common-factor hypothesis", Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 118-141.

here is that once again confidence plays an important role in determining behaviour and that we are beginning to have many variables linked to it.

As such, we can create an "ideal type" of a confident voter: such a voter will be more likely to vote in the first place, consume a large amount of media, will likely hold an extreme political viewpoint, be less concerned with situations of dissonance said viewpoint could illicit and be more likely to attempt to proselytize others rather than conform. We shall use this ideal type in the case studies, as it may likely be a key factor to understanding them.

A further aspect of belief consonance regards selective information seeking, or rather the tendency for people to seek information and consume media content from sources that are unlikely to challenge their beliefs.[17] This means that in general people will not expose themselves willingly to information that may force them into the uncomfortable situation of dissonance, and will thus only have a partial and biased view of any given situation. This is in line with what has been said at the start of this section as regards the selection of news sources that are likely to support and not refute one's pre-held thesis.

Yet another effect will regard the tendency of people to attempt to interact only with others that hold the same or similar beliefs to their own.[18] This a very simple consequence to infer, as it is logical that if there is a preference for consonance, we will seek not to place ourselves in situations in which interaction with others could force us into a confrontation of beliefs. As such, democrats will tend to befriend democrats, devout Christians will avoid talking to atheists if they can help it (unless of course their belief is strong enough to push them to attempt to proselytize), fans of a particular football team will group together and so on.

As such, society will tend to divide itself into groups based on shared beliefs, and again this a straightforward implication that is easy to observe; what is interesting here is the tendency of members of any given group to display in-group favouritism, and out-group

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[17] Gentzkow, M. & Shapiro, J. 2006, "Media Bias and Reputation", Journal of Political Economy, vol. 114, no. 2, pp. 280-316.; Gentzkow, M. & Shapiro, J.M. 2008, "Competition and Truth in the Market for News", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 133-154.; Gentzkow, M. & Shapiro, J.M. 2010, "What Drives Media Slant? Evidence from U.S. Daily Newspapers", Econometrica, vol. 78, no. 1, pp. 35-71.
[18] Golman, R., Loewenstein, G., Moene, K.O. & Zarri, L. 2016, "The Preference for Belief Consonance", The Journal of Economic Perspectives, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 177-178.

hostility.[19] This is important for the present study when applied to politics: indeed, the tendency of those belonging to a given party to blindly support candidates of their own party and to blindly condemn those external to it, on the basis not of policy content but only group membership, is a key feature to this case study when connected to the earlier commented upon zeal of new converts. This is due to the fact that a new convert, in displaying a higher preference for consonance, will as a consequence more blindly follow in-group favouritism, meaning that if one has only recently joined a political party he will be more likely to blindly support any candidate or idea in order to prove his adherence to the group. In the American case study, it will be argued that this effect played a key role in the election of President Trump to office.

## 2. Case study introduction

Having elaborated an understanding of the main concepts that are needed in order to behaviourally analyse the case studies, we can move on to the "heart" of the present thesis.

The two selected case studies that shall be looked at shall be, as has been anticipated, are the 2016 American presidential elections and the Brexit referendum vote of the same year. Before delving into them, however, it is a good idea to explain the motivations behind the analysis that is to follow. The first and main element that serves as a motivator is common to both cases, and it concerns the unexpectedness of the results: both the presidential election[20] and the Brexit referendum[21] had unexpected outcomes, in the former with the election of President Trump and the later with the UK populace voting to leave the EU. Further, both events took place in the same time period, which opens up the possibility of a cross study between the two to seek out similarities, dissimilarities, particularities etc. Finally, the case studies lend themselves to a behavioural analysis due their being vote based: this means that a core feature of both is the decision of individuals on whom or what to vote, a decision, as has been anticipated,

[19] Brennan, J. 2016, Against Democracy: New Preface, Paperback edn, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey;Oxford, [England], pp. 39-43.

[20] Katz, J., 2016. 2016 Election Forecast: Who Will Be President?. [online] Nytimes.com. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/upshot/presidential-polls-forecast.html> [Accessed 12 May 2020]; fivethirtyeight.com. 2016. 2016 Election Forecast | Fivethirtyeight. [online] Available at: <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-election-forecast/?ex_cid=2016-forecast> [Accessed 12 May 2020].

[21] Ig.ft.com. 2016. EU Referendum Poll Of Polls - Financial Times. [online] Available at: <https://ig.ft.com/sites/brexit-polling/> [Accessed 12 May 2020].

that is susceptible to bias. As such, it is very probable that a behavioural analysis will allow for important insights as to why the votes yielded such unexpected results. Having thus motivated the selection of the case studies, let us, without further ado, move on to their analysis.

## 3. 2016 USA Presidential Elections
### 3.1. Overview and data

The 2016 American presidential elections took place on November 8th and was the 58th quadrennial election of the united states. The two main candidates, barring independents and write-ins that had little relevance, were Donald Trump representing the republican party and Hillary Clinton representing the democrats.

The election resulted in the appointing of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America, with a total of 304 electoral votes as compared to Hillary Clinton's 227. [22] It is noteworthy, however, that Mrs. Clinton actually won the popular vote, obtaining a 48.18% of votes (65,853,514) whereas Trump obtained 46.09% of the popular vote (62,984,828)[23]. How then did Donald trump manage to win?

In order to more effectively use the massive amount of available data, the behavioural analysis will be limited to a selection of states in which the outcome was most surprising and/or the candidates devoted a great deal of energy and campaign resources. As such, two important research areas emerge: the first focuses on Trumps victory in three key states: Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin. These states used to be a part of what was known as the "blue wall"[24], a group of states that had voted democrat in every election since 1992 and were assumed to be under lock for Hillary Clinton. Trump however managed to squeeze out close victories in all three: 47.50% to Clintons 47.27% in Michigan, 48.18% to 47.46% in Pennsylvania, 47.22% to 46.45% in Wisconsin.[25] The second area of research is Florida. Indeed, Florida had been pegged as a primary

[22] FEC.Gov. 2017. Federal Elections 2016 - FEC.Gov. [online] Available at: <https://www.fec.gov/introduction-campaign-finance/election-and-voting-information/federal-elections-2016/> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

[23] Ibid.

[24] The Atlantic. 2016. Is Donald Trump Outflanking Hillary Clinton?. [online] Available at: <https://amp.theatlantic.com/amp/article/506306/> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

[25] FEC.Gov. 2017. Federal Elections 2016 - FEC.Gov. [online] Available at: <https://www.fec.gov/introduction-campaign-finance/election-and-voting-information/federal-elections-2016/> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

battleground for the presidential race[26] due to its nature as a swing state and its 29 electoral votes. In line with the predictions both candidates spent a great amount of money advertising in the state[27] as well as spending a number of days in it hosting rallies and other events[28]. However, despite having spent far more money in the state than Trump, Clinton lost the state by a small margin (47.82% to 49.02% of the popular vote) and as such lost 29 key electoral votes.

As such, the behavioural analysis shall focus primarily on these 4 states, as they were arguably the most difficult for Trump to win over; this means they will serve well in highlighting key particularities that would have pushed an individual to vote for Donald Trump. Using insights gained from the analysis of these states, a more general picture shall be painted, in order to explain the behavioural reasons underlying the results of the 2016 presidential elections.

## 3.2. Behavioural analysis

A key element of Trump's 2016 campaign was his tendency to hold large rallies to garner support, and these can be used as a tool to understand the "dialogue" between him and his supporters or potential supporters. As such, the first step in our analysis is to list and break down rallies held in the 4 proxy states selected before. The information presented in this step is drawn primarily from a Wikipedia article[29], a choice that, given the controversial nature of this source, requires a brief defensive argument. This source is to be understood as a reference sheet in order to count and track the rallies that Donald Trump held, and no normative content is to be drawn from it. Any information that pertains to the presentation of the content of the rallies will primarily be drawn from the sources that Wikipedia provides in the article and not Wikipedia itself: these are primarily news websites that document interviews and quotes from individual rallies. If a

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[26] SHEPARD, S., BRESNAHAN, J., EVERETT, B. and CAYGLE, H., 2016. The 11 States That Will Determine The 2016 Election. [online] POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/06/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-battleground-states-224025> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

[27] Adage.com. 2016. State-By-State Map: How The Clinton And Trump Camps Spent $595 Million On TV, Radio Ads. [online] Available at: <https://adage.com/article/campaign-trail/how-clinton-trump-camps-spent-595-million-TV-radio/306496> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

[28] News, A., 2016. Hillary Clinton's And Donald Trump's Campaigns By The Numbers. [online] ABC News. Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trumps-campaigns-numbers/story?id=43356783> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

[29] En.wikipedia.org. 2020. List Of Rallies For The 2016 Donald Trump Presidential Campaign. [online] Available at:
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rallies_for_the_2016_Donald_Trump_presidential_campaign> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

source provided by Wikipedia is unavailable due to regional restrictions deriving from the EU GDPR or other technical or legal factors, an alternative source is provided as necessary. Further, utilizing the article as a source will avoid unnecessary cluttering of the bibliography with excessive online news articles, since, even if the study is limited to 4 states, there is a large number of rallies that will be taken into consideration.

To start, there were 8 rallies held in Michigan, 3 of which before the primary elections and the other 5 leading up to the general elections. From analysing this first set of rallies what emerges is a tendency of both Trump and his supporters to speak in terms of a common group: Trump frequently used "we" when speaking about campaign promises and his supporters used "us" when speaking about why they support him. This is a clear sign of the fact that Trump sought to create a sense of belonging to a "family", as it were, if one chose to support him. Thus we can already begin to apply the earlier discussed behavioural insights to the present case study: Trump created a tightly knit group of supporters that would vote for him regardless of policy plans or promises, but instead vote based on the sense of belonging to a new and distinct group. This is further proved by how Trump and his supporters reacted to hecklers, protesters or dissenters present in these rallies: when a belief non-consonant to the group appeared Trump would without fail single them out, calling them "losers", having them escorted out, all the while the crowd would cheer and chant against the "intruders". This is a clear case of a preference for belief consonance being displayed within Trump's supporters, and that makes sense if we consider the earlier described "new convert zeal". Michigan, as stated earlier, was formerly part of the "blue wall", and had consistently voted democrat since 1992: as such the support that Trump gathered in this state was largely the support of people that were aligning themselves with a "new" set of beliefs as opposed to what was historically expected of them in their state. It thus makes sense that there was so much zeal in the Michigan rallies. Furthermore, as seen earlier, there is a link between holding more extreme political beliefs and being overconfident, and in turn in being overconfident and being more likely to vote. Thus the new supporters in Michigan, in adopting new and more extreme political beliefs likely became very close to the ideal type of a confident voter that was anticipated in chapter 2, with the only difference being their distaste for situations of dissonance born form a lower level of confidence in their beliefs than a "diehard" republican voter. As such the highted propensity to vote of this type of voter may have been the final straw in Michigan's democratic streak. Does this

argument hold for the other 2 ex-blue wall states? Let us continue the analysis of the rallies held in these states in order to find out.

Trump held 18 rallies in Pennsylvania, 4 leading up to the primaries and 14 before the general elections. This jump in numbers as compared to Michigan can be explained by the fact that Pennsylvania holds 20 electoral votes as compared to Michigan's 16, and was as such a more important state to win. Once again, Trump and his supporters speak as though they were part of the same "team", but what is new is the discourse of "bringing back jobs"[30] to the state, such as for example Appalachian coal mining.[31] Another new element is the criticism of the current establishment, and the promise of fixing it as soon as he is elected to office.[32] The final new element that appears is the famous promise to build a border wall between Mexico and America, and make "Mexico pay for it".[33] These new elements can be boiled down and understood as discourses pertaining to nationalism and populism, and the promise of simple solutions to complex problems; drawing from chapter 1 we can thus make two observations. First, the more extreme political views that when expressed are vigorously cheered on by the crowd once again give credit to the argument that many of Trump's supporters conform closely to the "confident voter" ideal type. This is due to the fact that said confident voter has as a characteristic the holding of more extreme political beliefs. The second observation connects to the availability cascade, and specifically how it can be initiated by simple solutions. Indeed, Trump presented 3 complex problems, and presented 3 easy solutions: bring jobs back, elect him to office, and "build a wall". These are simple and easy to explain (and understand) solutions to very complex and multifaceted problems of labour outsourcing, corruption, and immigration. As such, these are three excellent kick-starters to availability cascades: once those who were present at his rallies (or watched them live) began to subscribe to and repeat them, "second-hand" audiences would then adopt those arguments as well, since they seemed to be the dominant opinion. As such, this

[30] Factbase. 2016. Transcript Quote - Speech: Donald Trump In Chester Township, PA - September 22, 2016 | Factbase. [online] Available at: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-chester-township-pa-september-22-2016> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

[31] Nytimes.com. 2016. Donald Trump Invades Scranton, Hoping To Wrest Pennsylvania From Democrats. [online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/29/us/politics/trump-scranton-pennsylvania.html> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

[32] Factbase. 2016. Transcript Quote - Speech: Donald Trump In Chester Township, PA - September 22, 2016 | Factbase. [online] Available at: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-chester-township-pa-september-22-2016> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

[33] Times Leader. 2016. Crowd Roars At Donald Trump'S Second Appearance In Wilkes-Barre Township | Times Leader. [online] Available at: <https://www.timesleader.com/news/local/595662/crowd-roars-at-donald-trumps-second-appearance-in-wilkes-barre-township> [Accessed 17 May 2020].

second set of rallies not only further strengthens the confident voter argument, but also introduces an availability cascade argument as a further explanation to Trump's victory.

In the last of the ex-blue wall states, Wisconsin, there were 15 rallies, 10 in the primary election phase and 5 in the general election phase. In these rallies much the same is presented in terms of content, with the repetition of the same easy nationalist and populist solutions to complex problems, thus further confirming the availability cascade proposition. Further, there are again instances of protesters during the rally being "chanted down" by Trump's supporters[34], once again putting the desire for belief consonance on display. This, complemented with the same "we" discourse described earlier, once again paints the picture of a fiercely zealous group of new supporters that feel as though they are a part of a "movement" of sorts, that are on the cusp of securing massive change and that do not have to tolerate any dissent; a perspective that Trump himself directly endorses.[35] New elements that are more present than in other, rallies are the demonizing and insulting of Trump's rival Hillary Clinton[36], and the sentiment of his supporters that Trump is honest and always says what he thinks.[37] As regards to the first element, the continuous criticising of Hillary Clinton fits in well as another case of availability cascade, only this time it is negative. Rather than repetition made to convince his supporters to endorse his ideas, here Trump is using repetition in order to undermine his rival. Once his direct supporters begin to subscribe to the idea of "Crooked Hillary" as Trump frequently puts it,[38] and begin themselves to repeat the notion over and over, other individuals that are not informed on the situation might adopt the idea simply because it appears to be the dominant opinion. The second element, on the other hand can be interpreted as a prime example of in-group favouritism, the last behavioural concept presented in chapter 1. Indeed, the absolute trust that Trump's supporters place

[34] Eu.greenbaypressgazette.com. 2016. Trump Backers Give Green Bay Speech High Marks. [online] Available at: <https://eu.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/10/17/early-line-forming-trump-rally-green-bay/92060564/> [Accessed 18 May 2020].
[35] Factbase. 2016. Transcript Quote - Speech: Donald Trump In Green Bay, WI - August 5, 2016 | Factbase. [online] Available at: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-green-bay-wi-august-5-2016> [Accessed 18 May 2020].
[36] Ibid
[37] Eu.postcrescent.com. 2016. Trump In Appleton: Vote For Me Or Don't Vote. [online] Available at: <https://eu.postcrescent.com/story/news/politics/2016/03/30/trump-supporters-flock-appleton-rally/82419792/> [Accessed 18 May 2020].
[38] Factbase. 2016. Transcript Quote - Speech: Donald Trump In Green Bay, WI - August 5, 2016 | Factbase. [online] Available at: <https://factba.se/transcript/donald-trump-speech-green-bay-wi-august-5-2016> [Accessed 18 May 2020].

in him fits this perspective and is once again supported by the fact that it is a tendency that is more accentuated in "new converts", as has been said before.

The final set of rallies that shall be taken into consideration occurred in Florida, which was not a part of the ex-blue wall but was instead a swing state. It is taken into consideration due to the fact that it was a primary focus of both presidential candidates' campaigns, as it holds 29 electoral votes: the most of any of that year's election's swing states. There were an impressive 34 rallies held by Donald Trump in Florida, 8 before the primary elections and 26 before the general elections. Much of the content of these rallies are the same as those seen before: undermining of Hillary Clinton, Populist anti-establishment rhetoric, enthusiastic supporters etc. As these topics have already been extensively covered, we shall instead focus on what is new, and seek to explain it. First, a new availability cascade topic is common to almost all Floridian rallies: an anti-media sentiment.[39] The new element can be understood by keeping in mind that a portion of the media was indeed contrary to the idea of a Trump presidency: this can be seen in some of the sources that have been provided so far, as they contain a disapproving tone regarding the rallies. Further, it is worth noting that Donald Trump's strategy involved far less spending on television ads as compared to Hillary Clinton's[40], especially in Florida, where the Democratic nominee spent approximately $93,754,436 as compared to Trump's $34,972,672.[41] It seems logical then, that Trump would seek to undermine the media, especially in Florida where Clinton was focusing most of her efforts. As such his strategy was not to spend more on ads, but to host more rallies, and set up an availability cascade convincing people that the ads, and the news reports that they were being run between, were false. This is a strategy that the Republican nominee used throughout the whole country, and also functions in the framework of a populist strategy: speak "directly to the people" and convince them of the corruption of the establishment and the media. The final new element that appears will function well as a segue into the next section of the analysis that shall "zoom out" and confront what has been seen so far to the Clinton campaign: it is the "Deplorable" issue. On September 9th 2016, during a fundraising event, Hillary Clinton made a controversial statement, in which she labelled

[39] miamiherald.com. 2016. Seething Trump Says Female Accusers Are Lying. [online] Available at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/election/donald-trump/article107992952.html> [Accessed 19 May 2020].
[40] Adage.com. 2016. State-By-State Map: How The Clinton And Trump Camps Spent $595 Million On TV, Radio Ads. [online] Available at: <https://adage.com/article/campaign-trail/how-clinton-trump-camps-spent-595-million-TV-radio/306496> [Accessed 15 May 2020].
[41] Ibid

half of Trump's supporters as a "Basket of deplorables".[42] This was a rather large mistake, as it effectively demonized a large part of the electorate, something that should be avoided if one is seeking to be elected. What is interesting here is how this incident helps to highlight just how fervent Trump's group was: many supporters embraced the label[43], and began to use it in a positive manner. Trump caught on to this and in his rallies he inserted the new topic into his list of repeated points, which resulted in a further strengthening of the positive image his supporters held of him.

As was anticipated, this final point allows a transition away from the focus solely on Trump's rallies and we shall now begin a more general discussion before moving on to conclusions, beginning with an analysis and comparison of Hillary Clinton's campaign.

The first major difference that can be observed in Clinton's campaign as compared to Trump's is the lower number of rallies held, with a focus of energy in other areas instead. One of the main differences was spending on TV ads, as the republican candidate consistently spent less than her across the country.[44] Given the significant investment made by the democratic nominee in the sector, it is worth analysing these ads.[45] A very important observation must be made first and foremost, and it regards ads run in the three ex-blue wall states that were analysed in terms of Trump's rallies: in all three the Clinton campaign did not start advertising until the final weeks of the election, in which a large volume of ads flooded tv networks in the states. From this we can gain two main insights. First, this distribution of advertising over time in the ex-blue wall states explains why, in the rallies analysed in said states, there was little to no mentions made by Trump to "Lying tv ads", a rhetoric that is instead heavily present in Florida, a state in which Clinton had been advertising in full force since the beginning. The second insight, and the most important one, provides a further motive for Clinton's loss in the states under scrutiny. What is key here is that Trump, in these three states, through his

[42] BBC News. 2016. Clinton: Trump Supporters 'Deplorables'. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/election-us-2016-37329812/clinton-half-of-trump-supporters-basket-of-deplorables> [Accessed 19 May 2020].

[43] Eu.naplesnews.com. 2016. 8,000 Trump Supporters Pack Germain Arena. [online] Available at: <https://eu.naplesnews.com/story/news/politics/2016/09/19/trump-supporters-arriving-germain-rally/90432632/> [Accessed 19 May 2020].

[44] Adage.com. 2016. State-By-State Map: How The Clinton And Trump Camps Spent $595 Million On TV, Radio Ads. [online] Available at: <https://adage.com/article/campaign-trail/how-clinton-trump-camps-spent-595-million-TV-radio/306496> [Accessed 15 May 2020].

[45] Franklin Fowler, E., Ridout, T. N., and Franz, M. M. (2016). Political Advertising in 2016: The Presidential Election as Outlier?. The Forum 14, 4, 445-469, Available From: De Gruyter<https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2016-0040> [Accessed 22 May 2020]

rallies got his messages across before Clinton could communicate hers: why is this important? If we keep in mind the behavioural concepts that were illustrated in chapter 1, and the behavioural analysis done as regards Trump's rallies, we can use this last piece of information in order to conclude our explanation as to how Trump won the analysed states. We have already explained how availability cascades and belief consonance would be important factors in determining the outcome, what we must analyse now is why they "stuck" despite the oversaturation of counter arguments in the form of ads being run by the Clinton campaign in the last week. First, in chapter 1 we can find many behavioural insights that help explain the non-adjustment: confirmation bias and the "Can I/Must I" information acceptance test certainly played a role in this sense, as they will have contributed to insufficient weighting of information contrary to what an individual has already accepted; second, it can be argued that in attending Trump's rallies, individuals invested in the belief that Trump and his policies are deep values to them, thus becoming protected beliefs and being difficult to change; third, selective information seeking may have led people to avoid or switch off of anti-Trump ads, thus leaving them blind as to the opposition. Another interesting factor that is that the majority of ads aired by the Clinton campaign were negative and personal, in the sense that they critiqued Donald Trump on the basis of his character and personality.[46] This follows a general trend of the Democratic nominee's ads being almost completely devoid of policy discussion, save for the 30% share that comprised pro-Clinton ads. However, these ads where not the ones being played in the states under examination: indeed, throughout the country, during the final weeks of the election cycle the Clinton campaign was running mostly anti-Trump ads. As such, voters where not actually being presented with many arguments as to why Trump was wrong in terms of policy, and given the already elaborated reluctancy to shift beliefs, the ads the Clinton campaign was running where much easier to be discarded as false and slandering, a rhetoric that Trump himself pushed, as we have seen, in Florida.

Thus, we are left with one final question: why did the polls fail to predict the outcome of this election? A study carried out by Courtney Kennedy and colleagues in 2017 provides many insights as to this matter.[47] A first insight concerns insufficient weighting by education, as most polls did not account for education levels when selecting who to

[46] Ibid
[47] Kennedy, C., Blumenthal, M., Clement, S., Clinton, J.D., Durand, C., Franklin, C., McGeeney, K., Miringoff, L., Olson, K., Rivers, D., Saad, L., Witt, G.E. & Wlezien, C. 2018, "An Evaluation of the 2016 Election Polls in the United States", Public Opinion Quarterly, vol. 82, no. 1, pp. 1-33.

interview, and thus overrepresented college graduates. This is a method that had worked in past elections but failed here due to a higher correlation between education level and candidate voted for, with the lower education population voting for Trump. Second, many pollsters who were undecided veered toward Trump in the last week of the election in the states that have been analysed, after many polls had been concluded. A theory that on the other hand, was disproved by the research is the so-called "Shy-Trumper" hypothesis, that holds that many lied about supporting Trump as they perceived it a socially undesirable position. This disproval can be further supported by the confident voter model that has been elaborated, as such a voter will not be concerned with situations of dissonance that holding an undesirable opinion would place her in. It thus seems that in the 2016 election the reasons behind polling inaccuracy where more statistical than behavioural, save for the "Shy-Trumper" disproval, that finds behavioural support in the present thesis. As such we can now move on to sum up the findings of the first case study.

The main strategy of the Trump campaign was to host rallies in order to speak directly to the people; this is in line with the populist tendencies that Donald Trump demonstrates. From analysing the rallies held in 3 ex-blue wall states, and the most fought over state (Florida), what emerged is the presence of few, frequently repeated political points and policy ideas, that initiated availability cascades among supporters. Said supporters can be classified as "newly converted confident voters" in the three ex-blue wall states and "staunch confident voters" in Florida, due to behaviour observed in the rallies. The new converts display a higher preference for belief consonance through stronger reactions to protesters, born from a desire to prove the value of their beliefs as they are not fully confident in them yet. On the other hand, staunch voters do not react as strongly to protests as they are unshakable in their beliefs and not bothered by situations of dissonance. In both cases the voters display a higher tendency to support more "extreme" political views, with the new converts demonstrating perhaps more zeal in their support and had a higher turnout in the election. Further, due to their participation in rallies (Some even attending multiple rallies) they can be seen as investing in their beliefs, and as such are much less likely to change opinion thanks to effects such as confirmation bias and selective information seeking.

On the other hand, the Clinton campaign had a few critical shortcomings, beginning with the "deplorables" comment that backfired as it weakened her support and only increased her opposition's supporter's zeal. A higher focus on advertisements as a medium was

inefficient, due to a lack of focus in the three states that "turned red" that were assumed to be non-competitive in favour of Clinton. When the ads were run in said states it was too late, as the availability cascades had already locked in a large amount of support for Trump and were set up to discard the media as false; the fact that the ads lacked policy content did not help, as their focus on the critique of Trump's person only lent support to his claim that it was "slander". These factors combined with a late swing of voters pushed to a narrow republican victory that the polls were unable to predict, due also in part to an insufficient weighting by education that turned out to be more key than in previous election cycles.

As such, it can be said that Trump's victory was behaviourally due to his supporters being "Confident voters" that display specific tendencies and biases that the republican nominee was able to leverage through availability cascades in his rallies. On the other hand the Clinton campaign did not place sufficient importance on key states until it was too late and committed a few mistakes that where accentuated by the specific biases that Trump's supporters demonstrate, resulting in narrow victories in the analysed states that gave a small yet decisive push toward Donald Trump's victory.

# 4. 2016 Brexit referendum
## 4.1. Overview and data
The second case study that we considered is the 2016 Brexit referendum vote, held on June 23 of that year, and which brought about the historic decision by part of the United Kingdom's populace to leave the European Union. The decision was somewhat close, with the "leave" option winning over "remain" by 3.8%[48], and was, much like the USA presidential elections of the same year, largely unexpected. Once again, then, the question is how did this "upset" occur in terms of a behavioural framework; what were the individual's behavioural particularities that helped push the decision of the UK to leave the EU?

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[48] The Electoral Commission. (2016). Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?. Statista. Statista Inc.. Accessed: May 29, 2020. https://www.statista.com/statistics/570118/eu-referendum-results/

In this case study two elements appear to be key in answering this question: the first surrounds the issue of immigration[49], whereas the second concerns the issue of political trust.[50] From these two cores other aspects come into play, and as such our behavioural analysis will use them as anchors to guide reasoning.

## 4.2. Behavioural analysis

The first step in this analysis is to investigate what role immigration played. A key argument that was pushed heavily by "leave" (the EU) advocates was indeed the issue of unregulated immigration brought by membership in the EU. Research has shown that those that voted to leave believed a decrease in immigration would come about if Brexit were to be realized[51]; it is clear then that the message was well received.

The negative views on immigration that were key were primarily expressed by lower income, lower education groups, with a main concern being the large amount of unskilled labour that immigrants provided putting British national's jobs at risk.[52] This insight allows us to begin to apply a behavioural lens to the issue. Indeed, what we can see here is a clear case of out-group hostility: many leave voters placed themselves inside a "British" group and identified immigrants as external threats to the group's well-being. This can be confirmed by research that asked those interviewed to what degree they identified as "European"[53]: the harsher views on immigration were almost always expressed by those that did not feel a part of a European community, meaning that those who saw themselves as British were more concerned than those who saw themselves as European. It seems thus plausible that in pushing the issue of immigration, the leave campaign sought to reach these more "Nationalist" voters.

Said voters clearly express more extreme political views, which, as has been argued before, is a reliable way to identify confident voters. This could help explain a reason

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[49] Goodwin, M. & Milazzo, C. 2017, "Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit", The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 450-464.

[50] Abrams, D. & Travaglino, G.A. 2018, "Immigration, political trust, and Brexit – Testing an aversion amplification hypothesis", British Journal of Social Psychology, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 310-326.

[51] Clarke, H.D., Goodwin, M. & Whiteley, P. 2017, "Why Britain voted For brexit: An individual-level analysis of the 2016 referendum vote", Parliamentary Affairs, vol. 70, no. 3, pp. 439-464.

[52] Hobolt, S.B. 2016, "The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent", Journal of European Public Policy, vol. 23, no. 9, pp. 1259-1277.

[53] Abrams, D. & Travaglino, G.A. 2018, "Immigration, political trust, and Brexit – Testing an aversion amplification hypothesis", British Journal of Social Psychology, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 310-326.

why the referendum saw such a large turnout among voters, given that as is known confident voters are more likely to vote, and may have as such contributed in raising the total turnout. It may be reasonable to assume then, that the motive behind the leave campaign's focus on immigration was a desire to rally a nationalist sentiment to secure more zeal and thus a higher turnout in their favour.

Another argument that was a focus of the leave campaign, closely related to that of immigration, regarded that of sovereignty and national pride and its undermining on the part of the EU.[54] Indeed, a slogan for the campaign was "Take back control", a phrase that implied that the nation was not fully in control of its own affairs under the EU. This is an argument that further focuses in on out group hostility, attempting to frame the EU as a hostile outsider that interferes with British affairs and from whom the populace needs to reclaim its sovereignty. Given that we have already seen that leave voters are predisposed to this sort of group mentality it makes sense that this argument was effective, as it very close to how the leave campaign was talking about in terms of immigration. It can be thus said that the main message of the leave campaign was that the British nation (the group) was being threatened by the EU's disregard for its sovereignty and excessive immigration (external elements) and as such action was required.

The next question that must be answered, then, is how the leave campaign communicated its message to the electorate, given that the method of communication is another important area in which behavioural insights may be applied, as seen in the case of the availability cascades initiated by Trump's rallies.

The main form of communication carried out by the leave campaign was through targeted online advertising, primarily on social media websites.[55] This is interesting, as it is a form of communication that is largely "invisible"; it is near impossible to track how many people were targeted by "leave" ads, as it will vary from person to person. As an example, a voter who frequently visited conservative websites is more likely to have been targeted than one who voiced his support for the EU in the comments section under a Facebook post. Further, these targeted ads steer a voter into a filter bubble. In order to gain "clicks", in fact, advertising systems will continue to push conservative ads, that

[54] Hobolt, S.B. 2016, "The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent", Journal of European Public Policy, vol. 23, no. 9, pp. 1259-1277.
[55] Buchanan, T. 2019, "Brexit behaviourally: lessons learned from the 2016 referendum", Mind & Society, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 13-31.

will then "steer" the voter into an area of the internet in which it seems that the dominant opinion is that Britain needs to leave the EU: thus begins an information cascade. An information cascade occurs when a person lacks information on a given topic, so in order to form an opinion she relies on the dominant consensus, putting faith in others as if "everyone says so, it must be true". The difference between an information and an availability cascade is that the latter is not kicked off by a dominant opinion, but rather an easy solution to a complex problem; once initiated, however, they are rather similar, in that they are both cascades that create a snowball effect.

The next question to be addressed is that of political trust: indeed, it is a key element in this thesis given its importance in the context of populism, a prominent feature of both case studies. In the context of the UK, it has been observed that those who were more likely to vote leave, aside from identifying more as English or British than European and having heightened concerns about immigration, also displayed a low level of trust in politics and politicians.[56] This is significant for a number of reasons. First, it can fit in the frame of out-group hostility that was seen for immigration, as the distrust signals that those who voted leave did not perceive the "establishment" as being on their side. Second, it lends yet more support to the idea of a populist sentiment being a core of the leave campaign, as anti-establishment discourse is a central point of populism. Third, it helps understand why targeted ads and discussion on social media were an effective method of garnering support. Indeed, a message that is delivered by "the populace" online, through conversations and advertisements is much more likely to stick if one embraces a more populist political stance, leading to the earlier illustrated information cascades. Finally, in lending more support to the notion that a large portion of leave voters hold more populist tendencies, the observed low political trust pushes said voters even more into the confident voter archetype elaborated in the first case study: this is a point that shall be elaborated further in the next chapter.

Having thus looked at the leave campaign and its success in capturing an area of the electorate that was particularly zealous, nationalist and populist and steering it through information cascades that primarily focused on the dangers of EU born immigration, we must now analyse the remain campaign, and attempt to understand why it failed to sway the electorate in its favour.

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[56] Abrams, D. & Travaglino, G.A. 2018, "Immigration, political trust, and Brexit – Testing an aversion amplification hypothesis", British Journal of Social Psychology, vol. 57, no. 2, pp. 310-326.

The main message of the campaign to remain in the EU focused on highlighting the negative economic impact that a successful Brexit would cause, citing potential losses in household earning, national budget and GDP.[57] They were rational arguments, and were backed by high profile figures such as the then president of the USA Obama warning of negative impacts Brexit would have on USA-UK trading[58], but the issue is that the voters that commanded a majority in the referendum were not disposed to listen to such arguments for a number of reasons. The first is that many economic arguments were too complicated for the average voter to understand in full, and the way they were framed did not help. As an example, the household income loss that the remain campaign framed as £4300 per house hold per year amounted in total to a £116.1 billion loss per year, but was by in large perceived by voters to be lower than the loss resulting from the £350m per week the leave campaign clamed was being sent to the EU, which amounted to a much lower £18.2 billion per year. This is due to the fact that the former argument required a level of mathematics that many were unwilling to invest, and as such when comparing with the second argument they merely looked at the £4300 versus £350m figures, using it as a proxy and thus underestimating the weight of the first figure.[59] Another reason for the ineffectiveness of the messages of the remain campaign is related to the messengers that relayed the information, as they were largely comprised of "elite" figures, such as the then Prime Minister David Cameron. This put the remain campaign at a disadvantage, as there was an already noted anti-establishment anti-elite populist sentiment that was pervasive in the leave voters that commanded the majority. Indeed, if one does not trust the messenger it is very unlikely one will believe the message. On the other hand, the leave campaign was sponsored by anti-system forces such as UKIP and "politically-incorrect" figures such as Boris Johnson, that heavily pushed the "people versus the elite" argument.

The last question that must thus be answered is why the outcome was a surprise, or rather why the polls were unable to predict the decision the UK populace made. Many explanations could be advanced in this regard, but the main focus here is to understand what pushed the majority of undecided voters to vote to leave, as at a glance it seems status-quo bias should have pushed them to remain. The argument for status-quo holds

[57] Clarke, H.D., Goodwin, M. & Whiteley, P. 2017, "Why Britain voted For brexit: An individual-level analysis of the 2016 referendum vote", Parliamentary Affairs, vol. 70, no. 3, pp. 439-464.
[58] Ibid
[59] Buchanan, T. 2019, "Brexit behaviourally: lessons learned from the 2016 referendum", Mind & Society, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 13-31.

that in a situation of risk and uncertainty, individuals when presented with a choice will gravitate toward "how things have always been"; in the context of Brexit, this means that most voters that had declared themselves undecided should have gravitated toward remain. As has been shown however, this was not what happened: the reason for this, as we will see, is that another bias "overrode" status-quo, namely availability. The argument for availability override comes from the earlier mentioned targeted ads[60] with another variable taken into consideration, said variable being the fact that most of these ads were run in the last week of the campaign.[61] This additional piece of information allows for the creation of a behavioural explanation as to the lack of a status quo swing: the overflow of targeted ads in favour of leaving the EU, focused in a short timeframe before the referendum day, triggered availability bias in undecided voters, thus making them choose the option that they had "seen the most of" in recent memory and pushing many voters that had previously polled as undecided to vote to leave and therefore reaching a result that was unexpected due to the "invisibility" of targeted online ads.

However, whilst this explanation certainly makes sense it raises a question: why did an overflow of ads in the last week of campaigning work for the leave campaign in Brexit, but not for Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign in America? This question allows us to move on to the final section of this thesis, in which we shall compare the two case studies in order to highlight similarities and differences, whilst using insights from one to enrich the other.

## 5. Comparative analysis

To start this final chapter, we shall answer the question posed at the end of the previous one: why did two seemingly equal strategies produce different results? The answer is that in reality they were not equal, and that they were enacted in two different contexts. To start, the Clinton campaign ran ads on TV, whilst the Brexit leave campaign ran ads on social media online; the different mediums used required different types of ads, with the Clinton campaign using short minute or so long videos whilst the leave campaign used what could be called "digital posters", images that are placed inside of websites

[60] BBC News. 2018. Targeted Pro-Brexit Facebook Ads Revealed. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-44966969> [Accessed 3 June 2020].
[61] the Guardian. 2017. Vote Leave Donations: The Dark Ads, The Mystery 'Letter' – And Brexit'S Online Guru. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/nov/25/vote-leave-dominic-cummings-online-guru-mystery-letter-dark-ads> [Accessed 3 June 2020].

with at most a few seconds of animation and an exhortation to click on the ad to "learn more" about what is being advertised. Here is the first difference: Clinton's ads required a short degree of time investment to get their message across, while leave ads were near instantaneous in communicating a point; whether one clicked on an ad or not is not important, what is important is that the ad was seen, and seen repeatedly. Another element that contributed to the success of one "ad flood" and failure of the other is the audience. In both cases the potential audience can be boiled down to three types: those who support the campaign running the advertisements, those that oppose it, and those that are undecided. The first group is of no interest to the advertiser, as they have already been convinced, while the second has already chosen another side; the advertisements must then try to speak to the undecided audience and sway them, and here is where leave succeeded while the Clinton campaign stumbled. To start, as has been said, the Clinton campaign ads were devoid of policy and focused instead on attacking Trump, thus giving undecided voters little substance, while the leave campaign ads would present a small sample of information, such as immigration rates, and follow it up with a call to action. This small amount of policy content gives an initial edge to leave ads but is not by any means the only difference. What must be remembered is that the Clinton ads where being shown to an audience that had largely seen nothing else of the democratic nominee up until that point, as she had barley campaigned at all in the ex-blue wall states up until that point. Trump on the other hand had been active in the states through his rallies since the beginning, and had set up cascades that undermined any message that Clinton attempted to push in the end: indeed, Clinton's cascades failed because Trump's had already taken hold. The leave ads on the other hand, where complementary to a larger campaign that had been run in a consistent manner, and as such were more effective. However, the main reason for the success of the leave ad-flood versus the Clinton campaign ad-flood lies in the fact that the former were targeted ads; this means that the ads were being shown only to people that an algorithm had determined as wanting to leave the EU or swayable to this position, ignoring those that were unlikely to change their views from wanting to remain in the EU. The Clinton campaign on the other hand, had no such targeting systems: there is no way to tailor ads to only be shown to certain viewers, so the only way to reach undecided voters is to run an enormous amount of ads trusting that they will eventually see them, but there are no guarantees. It is an even less reliable strategy if one keeps in mind that the timeframe for this strategy was very compressed, meaning that the target audience may not have seen the ads enough times in

order to be convinced. The two strategies can be visualised as the leave campaign investing in sniper rifles and the Clinton campaign in shotguns, with the former thus zeroing in on the targets and the later covering a wide radius hoping that of the large amount of pellets enough will hit their mark; hindsight allows us to see which was a more effective strategy for its context.

In both case studies two main political elements contributed to the success of bias inducing campaign strategies, namely populism and nationalism. The reason they were pivotal in the case studies boils down to the fact that they are particular mindsets that overwrite an individual's personal decision making in favour of an external element: the nation or the populace. In doing this, it can be seen how rational behaviour can be distorted in a motivated manner, motivated toward the goal of serving the greater good of one's country. Once a goal has been set, all the biases seen in chapter 1 come into effect and, as we have seen, individuals become "confident voters", albeit with slight differences based on their context. In the ex-blue wall states there is more zeal and a heightened distaste for dissonance as a consequence of many rally-goers being new converts, elements that are mitigated in Florida and with the issue of dissonance disappearing almost altogether in the Brexit case.

Before discussing these differences however, let us remind ourselves of what is meant by a confident voter: it is an ideal type of voter, created by piecing together various biases that interconnect in such a way as to allow us to reliably predict one type of behaviour based on the observation of another. As an example, if we observe that a voter has a more extreme political ideology such as populism, we can reliably predict that he will be more likely to go vote on election or referendum day by applying the confident voter model.

Once again it must be emphasised that it is not a fool proof prediction method, as we have seen that links between confident voters behaviour are flexible; remember the lower confidence that led to a higher distaste for dissonance in the ex-blue wall states. However, no matter the deviation the central element is that of confidence, thus the name of the model, as it is the main predictor of behaviour: the higher the confidence, the closer a voter will adhere to the model. As confidence drops, deviations from the model begin to occur and if it drops too low the model ceases to be descriptive of the individual being considered.

This is not an issue in the case studies however, as even the lowest confidence voters that were considered were still considerably more confident in their beliefs than average. In America, this is likely due to the fact that in participating in rallies people where investing in the belief that they supported Trump, making it a protected belief and increasing confidence in it. In the UK rather than confidence coming from physical participation in rallies led by a charismatic leader it came, instead, primarily from a more "grassroots" sentiment of the people against the establishment and immigrants; in other words it came from populism and nationalism. As such we can see a slight difference between USA and UK: while in the USA populism and nationalism were present, they were less pronounced than in the UK, until Trump was able to capitalize on them and increase them through availability cascades in his rallies, and steer them in is favour; in the UK on the other hand, nationalism and populism were already more pronounced, and did not require as much "stirring up" as was needed in USA, all they needed was guidance, which is exactly what the referendum and leave campaign provided.

Of the features analysed in the case studies, an interesting one that was noted in the UK but not in the USA regards political trust and resentment: however, it undoubtedly played a role in the 2016 elections, and is an element that can enrich the American case study if reflected upon. The reason for this stems from the two candidates that were fighting for the US Presidency: Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Mrs. Clinton was and is very tied to politics, being a senator and even First Lady for a time, and this was in fact a key aspect of her campaign strategy: emphasize her leadership qualities born from political experience, qualities that the USA needed if it wanted to excel. Trump, on the other hand, had little to no link to politics; he was first and foremost a businessman but also a celebrity of sorts and he emphasized his lack of political experience and links as valuable, due to the fact that the "establishment" was corrupt and had "failed the people". Indeed, it was very much a fight between establishment and anti-establishment discourse, with the latter being more in touch with the popular sentiment. The fact that the electorate had any form of political resentment in it was enough for Trump to capitalize on and utilize in order to snowball his campaign alongside his other repeated points. The republican nominee was adept at initiating cascades in his favour, and political resentment was no different, joining the earlier seen points of bringing jobs back, building a wall, Hillary's corruption etc.

Regarding this last point, Trumps repeated arguments used as cascade starters can provide another insight into the Brexit case study if we understand them for what they

are: simple solutions to complex problems. This strategy was core to the leave campaign, as they were essentially advocating one easy solution to many complex and multifaceted problems of immigration, sovereignty, globalization etc.: leaving the EU would fix everything. There were many arguments presented to support this thesis, as was seen in the chapter dedicated to the Brexit case study, but the they were all ancillary to the notion that leaving the EU was the end goal to aim for if the UK populace wanted to fix all its issues. As such it is easy to understand why the leave campaign gained so much traction and why the advertisements were able to initiate information cascades among social media users. If Trump was an advocate of simple solutions to USA's problems, the leave campaign was an advocate of "the" solution to the UK's problems.

The final factor that must be considered is that of the different ways in which Trump and the leave campaign capitalized on confident voters in order to push themselves to victory. First what was common to both of them? The answer is simple: the "enemy". This is not to be understood in a literal sense, but a more logical one; both campaigns were fighting against a "traditional" campaign carried out by representatives of the establishment. Having explored this extensively already, the aim here is not to retrace the details already highlighted, but rather "zoom out" and look at how the two campaigns responded in different manners to the "enemy" in general terms.

In America Trump chose to enact a hands-on, rally centric campaign, placing himself at the head of a movement and leading his supporters against his opposition: it was a campaign similar to classic political campaigns, but with a much heavier focus on rallies. This was done in order to leverage political resentment, by getting as close to the electorate as possible to create the image that Trump was an everyday man and also in order to create the sensation among his supporters that they were part of something "special". Once this was done, the rallies further served as opportunities for the republican nominee to drive home his few political points in order to begin availability cascades: after this was achieved, his supporters took care of the rest, and an inefficient classic campaign focused on interviews, debates and tv ads carried out by his rival Hillary "sealed the deal".

The leave campaign in the UK, on the other hand, carried out a campaign that was much more digital, being less hands-on than was the case in the USA. We have seen that this was due to the fact that political resentment, nationalism and populism were more pronounced and already manifest in the country before the referendum was announced:

indeed, why else would the referendum have come into play if there were not forces that wanted to leave the EU? For this reason the leave campaign merely guided the electorate, only on the surface with classic strategies such as interviews, press conferences, tv and radio appearances and so on. However, they also carried out a hidden and pervasive digital campaign, targeted at swaying undecided voters in the last phases of the campaign and at solidifying what support was already present. Among other things, the lack of a strong digital presence, especially on social media on the part of the remain campaign weakened its hold on undecided voters, and status-quo bias failed in favour of the leave campaign induced information cascade, causing thus the historic decision of the UK populace to leave the EU

With this final section in which we have looked over both case studies and reflected upon similarities, differences and ways in which one complements the other we have fully concluded the case studies; it is now time to move on and reflect upon what has been learned and draw conclusions.

## Conclusions

The research question of the present thesis was how behavioural insights could help better understand the outcome of the selected case studies and has been answered drawing primarily from the perspective of motivated reasoning. Analysis of the case studies has revealed that said answers are multifaceted and interlinked.

The 3 main behavioural elements that contributed to the outcomes of the case studies are the "confident voter" model, information and availability cascades and populist and nationalist group identities. The confident voter model was introduced in chapter 1, applied to the American case study in chapter 3, and helped understand some "leave" voter's behaviour in chapter 5. It is a core motive behind the behavioural explanation of the case studies, as it is useful in understanding the behaviour of those who supported the "winners" of each case study. The main variable of the model is the level confidence, and, specifically confidence in the beliefs that would align a voter with the candidate or cause he would support. A way to infer the level of confidence that has been used in this study is to divide voters among those that are "die-hard" and those that are "new converts" to a belief; this division allows to see such things as a preference for belief consonance in new converts and a higher tendency toward extreme political views in die-

hard supporters. To sum up, we can say that the confident voter model is a behavioural explanation behind the electorate's actions, but what of those that campaigned?

Cascades were the main behavioural strategy used by Trump and the leave campaign in order to "speak" to the confident voters. Both are born from simple solutions to complex problems that are repeated many times, allowing for voters to easily understand them and thus be able to repeat them, creating the cascade. Something to note is that both sides used few cascades, meaning they had few political points that were repeated: Trump focused on the border wall, corruption in the establishment and his rival and bringing back jobs to America, whilst the leave campaign focussed on the issues of immigration and national sovereignty. This was the case for the same reason as before, keeping things simple; the goal was that supporters would have few and easily understandable arguments that could be reliably re-transmitted to others, thus allowing for the cascade effect to propagate. In America Trump used rallies in order to voice the cascade starting arguments, whilst the leave campaign in the UK used traditional campaign methods with an online ad program to voice theirs. In both cases the strategy was successful thanks to it being supported by confident voters both newly converted and long-time supporters, but not only this. One final element played a role, and functions as the main linking element to all arguments presented thus far.

Nationalist and Populist group identity is the final behavioural element that answers our research question. It is the main motive behind confident voter motivated reasoning, and the key trait that allows them to identify those belonging to their group and those external to it. Those that campaigned used both aspects of this element as guideposts for their cascade topics, and in doing so became leaders of the group that confident voters had identified. Voters wish to pursue the goals that those they support voice on the bases of this common identity and as such reason in a motivated manner, collecting and processing information in faulty ways, and becoming unable to reason without bias. The group identity that is formed on the basis of nationalism and populism make it so that immigrants and politicians become external to the group and thus enemies, allowing the cascades against these enemies such as "leave the EU" or "Crooked Hillary" much more effective.

Understanding these aspects allows the final piece of the behavioural puzzle to be placed, and we can thus say that the behavioural sciences can help us to understand the 2016 USA presidential elections and the Brexit referendum of the same year in three

ways. First, the confident voter model provides an explanation as to the behaviour of those that voted for Trump and to leave the EU, explaining the increased zeal, higher turnout rate and more extreme political views. Second, availability and information cascades were the main tools used in order to increase support and undermine opposition, comprised of few simple arguments repeated many times that allowed undecided voters to be swayed in favour of those that initiated them. Third, nationalism and populism played key roles in creating group identity, serving as bridges of understanding between the electorate and the campaigns that incorporated them, as well as being sources of motivated reasoning that deviated voters from logical reasoning. Thus, behavioural insights allow us to grasp a better understanding of the analysed issues on the level of the electorate, the political campaigns carried out and the ideologies behind everything: it is clear how this is noteworthy. These cases, more than ever, demonstrate the importance of understanding behaviour in the context of elections and voting in general, both if one is an analyst seeking to understand a given situation or a politician seeking to be elected.

## Riassunto in italiano

La presente tesi cerca di capire come le scienze comportamentali possano aiutare a comprendere meglio gli esiti di due eventi chiave del 2016. Il primo è l'elezione americana, che vide Donald Trump eletto presidente degli Stati Uniti d'America, mentre il secondo è il referendum "Brexit", che risultò nella decisione del popolo inglese di lasciare l'Unione Europea.

Il primo capitolo elenca "errori" comportamentali, detti bias, che potrebbero risultare utili allo scopo della dissertazione, concentrandosi soprattutto sull'ambito del "motivated reasoning", ovvero quei "bias" che nascono da ragionamenti non razionali ma che sono volti ad uno scopo, sia che esso sia conscio o che sia subconscio.

Il primo bias che viene esposto è il "confirmation bias", ovvero una falla logica per la quale le informazioni che vanno a supporto di una idea di un individuo sono preferite a quelle che la disputano. Successivamente si espone "availability cascade", un elemento che si rivelerà chiave per rispondere alla domanda di ricerca: esso descrive la situazione in cui una spiegazione semplice di un concetto complesso diventi più facilmente popolare, e quindi inneschi nei soggetti che vi entrano in contatto una reazione detta "availability heuristic", per la quale, piuttosto che prendere una decisione in modo

logico, si ragiona sulla base di quello che si ricorda più facilmente, ovvero, in questo caso, la spiegazione semplice ad un problema complesso.

Si procede, quindi, con la sezione dedicata al "motivated reasoning" sopracitato, cominciando con una breve descrizione di questo in termini generali. Si argomenta come esso agisca principalmente sulle fasi di raccolta ed elaborazione delle informazioni, in cui un obbiettivo personale fa sì che questi processi vengano eseguiti in modo "biased", quindi influenzati da una serie di variabili, ma pur sempre razionalmente. Infatti, il "motivated reasoning" funziona solamente se colui che lo sta eseguendo riesce a convincere sé stesso che stia ragionando in modo razionale e senza "bias"; qui risiede la differenza tra esso ed i "bias" classici.

Dopo aver descritto il fenomeno in generale, si comincia ad analizzarne sfaccettature più specifiche, cominciando con il descrivere come, trovandosi dinanzi ad una decisione con poche (o nessuna) ripercussioni negative se si fa una scelta sbagliata, sia più alto il rischio di scegliere basandosi su di un ragionamento motivato. Si evidenzia, quindi, come la scelta su chi o cosa votare faccia parte di queste decisioni più a rischio; fattore che funge da spiegazione al perché molti "bias" che verranno descritti saranno seguiti da una manifestazione concreta nei casi studio analizzati.

Si prosegue evidenziando il legame che esiste tra l'eccessiva fiducia in sé e l'estremismo nelle ideologie politiche che costituisce il primo tassello di un elemento centrale di questa tesi: il modello del "confident voter". A seguire, si descrive il concetto di "belief consonance": quel fenomeno per cui si cerca di porsi in situazioni sociali nelle quali tutti condividano le stesse idee. I motivi per cui questo può accadere sono essenzialmente due: o si sta provando ad avere le stesse idee di un gruppo in cui si vuole entrare a far parte, oppure si sta tentando di evitare che siano messe in discussione idee "protette", che si ritengono centrali alla propria persona. Attraverso questa teoria si può spiegare il fervore di persone nuovamente convertite ad un'idea, le quali, avendo solo una "confidence" media in essa vogliono dare la prova, a sé stessi ed agli altri, della loro dedizione. Al contrario, individui che hanno pochissima o tantissima fiducia in un'idea appaiono meno propensi a questo tipo di azioni, e si può quindi aggiungere un altro elemento alla nozione di "confident voter": la confidence e la preferenza per il "belief consonance".

Si prosegue analizzando, dunque, le ripercussioni pratiche di quello che è stato definito "belief consonance", partendo dalla tendenza dei soggetti a conformare le proprie idee a

quelle dominanti nella società in cui ~~ei~~ si trovano, evidenziata dal famoso esperimento di Asch. È possibile contrastare questa abitudine con la tendenza opposta, ovvero quella di provare a convincere gli altri a cambiare opinioni affinché si conformino alle proprie, tipica di persone fortemente sicure di sé stesse. Nel capitolo si utilizza quest'ultimo fattore per creare il tipo ideale di "confident voter", per poi proseguire evidenziando di nuovo la tendenza al raccogliere informazioni in modo "biased", questa volta per evitare di dover mettere in discussione le proprie idee "protette". Si conclude, infine, notando come il desiderio di trovarsi in situazioni sociali ove tutti condividono le stesse idee porti necessariamente alla creazione di vari gruppi, che sfocia inevitabilmente nel favoreggiamento dei membri interni ad essi e nella sfiducia verso gli esterni.

Il secondo capitolo funge da breve introduzione ai casi studio, motivando la scelta di questi in base ai risultati inaspettati, la loro prossimità temporale e il loro basarsi sul voto, un'area che si è già evidenziata essere particolarmente a rischio di "bias".

Il terzo capitolo riguarda il primo caso studio, incentrato sulle elezioni presidenziali americane del 2016. La prima parte espone i dati salienti dell'elezione, per poi utilizzarli per indirizzare la ricerca a 3 principali Stati, ove si credeva che la vittoria sarebbe andata alla rivale presidenziale di Trump, Hillary Clinton, ma che alla fine hanno rivelato una votazione di tipo repubblicano, seppur con margini minuscoli. Essi sono il Michigan, la Pennsylvania ed il Wisconsin, ai quali si aggiunge un quarto stato, la Florida, scelto perché entrambi i canditati hanno combattuto arduamente per guadagnarne i voti, risultando nella vittoria finale di Trump. L'analisi si concentra inoltre perlopiù sui comizi politici di Trump, dato che erano il suo strumento di campagna politica più usato.

Nello primo stato, il Michigan, si comincia con il notare, innanzitutto, come il linguaggio usato da Trump e i suoi sostenitori sia volto al creare un gruppo, che già richiama quelle dinamiche di preferenza per i membri di uno stesso gruppo viste nel primo capitolo. Si nota anche come, quando compaiono contestatori nei raduni, vi è una chiara manifestazione di preferenza per "belief consonance", resa evidente dai fischi del pubblico e dai festeggiamenti che iniziano quando Trump segnala alla sicurezza di allontanarli dalla sala. Questa preferenza può essere spiegata con la tendenza dello Stato al voto democratico nelle precedenti elezioni; è plausibile, quindi, che molte delle persone presenti ai comizi fossero "nuovi convertiti" alla causa di Trump e, come spiegato precedentemente, dato il desiderio di dar prova della propria fede, questi soggetti appaiono mal disposti a confrontarsi con persone con idee contrastanti, in questo

caso i contestatori. Inoltre, si specifica come le nuove credenze politiche più estreme, tinte di nazionalismo e populismo, abbiano avvicinato gli elettori al modello del "confident voter", più propenso all'andare a votare il giorno dell'elezione. Ulteriore motivazione per la vittoria di Trump nello Stato.

I rally del secondo Stato analizzato, la Pennsylvania, supportano ulteriormente la tesi del "confident voter", nello stesso modo dello Stato precedente. Un elemento nuovo che compare, però sono elementi di discorso ripetuti in ogni comizio da parte di Trump, riguardo un ipotetico muro di confine con il Messico, l'importanza del dare priorità al lavoro degli americani e del rimuovere la corruzione; tutto possibile attraverso la sua elezione. Questi argomenti ricorrenti vengono quindi individuati come incipit ad "availability cascades", dato che rappresentano soluzioni semplici a problemi complessi, che il candidato repubblicano ribadisce frequentemente, con l'obiettivo che essi ripetuti anche da chi lo supporta in modo da incrementare i potenziali voti a suo favore.

I raduni in Wisconsin presentano le stesse caratteristiche di quelli negli altri due Stati, reiterando e confermando le argomentazioni riguardo i "confident voter" e gli "availability cascades". Nuovi elementi che appaiono sono la demonizzazione da parte di Trump di Hillary Clinton etichettata come corrotta, ed il sentimento, comune tra i sostenitori di Trump, riguardo l'onestà di quest'ultimo. Il primo fattore rientra all'interno della categoria degli incipit di "cascade" grazie alla sua costante ripetizione e alla sua semplicità come spiegazione al perché gli americani non dovrebbero votare per Clinton; mentre il secondo elemento evidenzia di nuovo la mentalità di gruppo istaurata nei sostenitori di Trump, che lo vedono come un leader onesto e propenso ad aiutarli.

L'ultimo Stato che si analizza dal punto di vista dei comizi di Trump è la Florida, la quale presenta gli stessi elementi dei precedenti 3 stati visti, ma con due novità. La prima è un nuovo incipit di "cascade" per quando riguarda le "bugie" dei media, un argomento che ha senso se si considera che Florida è dove la campagna della Clinton ha investito di più in termini di pubblicità televisive. È quindi logico il desiderio, da parte del candidato repubblicano, di screditare questa forma di comunicazione nello Stato, essendo essa la principale forza della sua concorrente. Il secondo elemento che si presenta in questo caso riguarda lo scandalo "Deplorable" di Hillary Clinton: la candidata democratica, infatti, definì, durante un evento, la metà dei sostenitori di Trump come deplorevoli, attraendo molte critiche. Ciò che risulta interessante è il modo in cui i sostenitori di Trump si appropriarono del termine derogatorio e cominciarono ad usarlo per definire il loro

gruppo in senso positivo. Questo fenomeno evidenzia ancora di più il fervore dei "fan" di Trump, i quali appaiono contenti di autodefinirsi con un termine derogatorio dato loro dal "nemico", in modo da sentirsi più uniti.

Si procede, quindi, analizzando la campagna di Hillary Clinton, concentrandosi principalmente sulle pubblicità politiche, strategia centrale della sua campagna. Queste pubblicità erano perlopiù prive di informazioni su posizioni politiche o proposte di policy, preferendo prendere di mira Donald Trump e screditarlo a livello personale e caratteriale. Inoltre, nei 3 Stati in cui la vittoria della Clinton era scontata, basandosi sui precedenti, non sono state avviate campagne pubblicitarie fino all'ultima settimana di campagna presidenziale. Questi due elementi contribuirono al fallimento della strategia pubblicitaria, avendo Trump già innescato dei "cascade" in quegli Stati, rendendo inefficaci le pubblicità come strumento sulla base del "confirmation bias" e simili, che frenarono l'elettorato dal cambiare posizione in favore della Clinton (freno accentuato dall'assenza di messaggi politici nelle pubblicità stesse).

Nell'ultima sezione si cita una ricerca precedentemente condotta da altri studiosi in materia, per spiegare come mai i sondaggi non fossero riusciti a prevedere la vittoria di Trump, e si nota come gli errori commessi fossero perlopiù statistici, negando la teoria denominata "shy-trumper" secondo la quale coloro che avrebbero voluto votare per Trump fossero poco propensi all'ammetterlo, percependo la loro come una posizione sociale non accettata. Si contribuisce a questa negazione richiamando il modello del "confident voter", il quale non mostrando una preferenza per il "belief consonance" non avrebbe motivo di voler evitare situazioni in cui la sua opinione non fosse condivisa da coloro che lo circondano. Si conclude quindi il caso studio, con un riassunto di quanto esposto, evidenziando l'importanza del modello del "confident voter" e gli "availability cascades", i quali, insieme agli errori commessi dalla campagna Clinton per quanto riguarda le pubblicità e lo scandalo "Deplorable", hanno contribuito alla vittoria di Trump.

Il secondo caso studio comincia con una breve introduzione in cui si presentano i dati essenziali, per poi spostare il focus della ricerca su due ambiti specifici: l'immigrazione e la fiducia in ambito politico. Quindi ci si concentra sul primo punto, notando come l'immigrazione sia stata condannata principalmente da coloro che si identificano più come inglesi che come europei e che ritengono che gli immigrati mettano a rischio i loro posti di lavoro. Questo rappresenta un chiaro caso di ostilità a membri esterni ad un

gruppo, qui identificato come il "popolo inglese" in modo marcatamente nazionalista, che rimanda sia alla nozione di mentalità di gruppo, sia al principio del "confident voter" descritti nel corso del primo capitolo. È quindi plausibile che la campagna per lasciare l'Unione Europea si concentrasse proprio sul tema dell'immigrazione per mobilizzare quei "confident voter", calcolando la loro presenza più probabile il giorno della votazione. Un linguaggio simile a quello usato per l'immigrazione venne anche adoperato nella "leave campaign" a proposito della sovranità inglese minacciata dall'Unione Europea. In questo modo non solo i migranti, ma anche l'intera UE veniva rappresentata come una minaccia alla nazione inglese, alimentando ulteriormente il nazionalismo dell'elettorato.

Dopo aver discusso circa i messaggi principali della campagna per lasciare l'Unione, questa tesi esamina il metodo di trasmissione di questi, focalizzandosi su pubblicità mirate diffuse sui social media. Ciò che è interessante a proposito di questo mezzo è come possa innescare un processo di "information cascade": il modo in cui le pubblicità mirate riescono a stimolare costantemente un individuo fa sì che egli possa poi convincersi della validità del messaggio pubblicitario, solamente grazie alla sua ripetizione nel tempo. In questo modo inizia un nuovo "cascade", similmente a quanto visto nei raduni di Donald Trump.

La questione della fiducia politica è il secondo elemento chiave del caso studio, considerando il legame diretto tra coloro che hanno votato per uscire dall'Unione e un basso livello di fiducia. Questa bassa fiducia può essere compresa se si tiene presente che una parte dell'elettorato percepisse le istituzioni politiche come "nemiche" ed esterne al proprio gruppo. Inoltre, questa sfiducia spinge quella porzione dell'elettorato in una direzione di stampo più populista, fornendo ulteriore supporto, quindi, alla nozione che il gruppo degli elettori sia composto da "confident voters" per via delle ideologie politiche più estreme. La presenza di questo elemento di populismo aiuta anche a capire perché le pubblicità sui social media abbiano funzionato, tenendo conto della loro funzione di alimentare un dialogo "tra il popolo" sui social, di gran lunga più effettivo di messaggio unilaterale trasmesso sui media classici dai "politici nemici".

Si passa quindi ad un'analisi della campagna per rimanere nell'Unione Europea, e si nota come essa fosse concentrata su discorsi relativi ai rischi nel lasciare l'UE, in particolare quelli economici, e sull'utilizzo di messaggeri prestigiosi, tra cui addirittura il presidente degli USA del tempo, Obama. I problemi con questa strategia, dato il contesto del

referendum Brexit, erano due: innanzitutto le argomentazioni economiche non furono comprese da molti, richiedendo esse un livello di preparazione matematica che l'individuo medio non è disposto a dedicare ad un'argomentazione sentita solamente di sfuggita, rendendo inefficaci molti dei messaggi. Il secondo problema è che i messaggeri prestigiosi usati dalla campagna risultavano ai "confident voter" come emblema delle istituzioni politiche, attivando quindi la sfiducia politica vista in precedenza, e rendendo ancora meno decisivi i concetti che si cercava di trasmettere.

L'ultima questione che si affronta nel caso studio riguarda la causa delle predizioni sbagliate riguardo i risultati del caso Brexit, attraverso un'ottica comportamentale. Concordemente con il caso americano, molti soggetti che secondo i sondaggi risultavano indecisi, alla fine hanno votato per lasciare l'UE, il che risulta inusuale nell'ambito delle scienze comportamentali. Infatti, una teoria, basata sullo "status-quo bias" indicherebbe che, alla fine, gli indecisi avrebbero dovuto preferire il voto che meglio avrebbe evitato grandi cambiamenti. Ciò non avvenne perché un "availability bias", nato da un'ondata di pubblicità mirate online durante l'ultima settimana di campagna, fece sì che molti indecisi votassero per ciò che più facilmente si presentava alla loro memoria, ovvero lasciare l'UE. In questo modo, quei soggetti indecisi sono riusciti a compromettere l'accuratezza dei sondaggi, considerando il numero notevole di coloro che hanno preso una decisione inaspettata per via di messaggi largamente invisibili sui social media online.

L'ultimo capitolo contiene un confronto tra i due casi studio, volto ad un'ultima analisi finalizzata ad una conoscenza completa dei due eventi. La riflessione inizia spiegando perché l'ondata di pubblicità della campagna per lasciare l'UE abbia funzionato solamente per la campagna Brexit e non per la campagna Clinton. Una prima ragione è da ricercare nella bassa soglia di attenzione necessaria per capire e processare le pubblicità online più semplici e dirette del caso Brexit rispetto a quelle televisive della Clinton. Nonostante quest'ultime non durassero quasi mai più di 90 secondi, era comunque un lasso di tempo troppo lungo per lo spettatore medio, specialmente se lo si confronta ai pochi istanti che servivano per leggere tutte le informazioni su una pubblicità digitale Brexit. Si nota anche come i contenuti delle pubblicità della Clinton erano, come visto nel capitolo 3, quasi del tutto privi di contenuto politico o proposte di policy. Le pubblicità Brexit, invece, contenevano piccoli spezzoni di policy, facilmente memorizzabili, che rappresentavano il minimo necessario per stimolare nuovi sostenitori. Inoltre, le pubblicità Brexit erano complementari ad una campagna più estesa e costante,

che utilizzava anche mezzi classici, mentre quelle Clinton, nei 3 Stati ritenuti voti democratici assicurati, erano l'unica forma di campagna presente, oltre ad essere concentrati solamente nell'ultima settimana di campagna elettorale. In confronto, Trump aveva già provveduto ad eseguire una campagna più costante nelle zone prese in considerazione, rendendo, come visto in precedenza, le pubblicità meno efficaci. L'elemento più importante, però, risulta essere che le pubblicità Brexit fossero mirate a persone individuate come potenziali votanti a favore della campagna per lasciare l'UE da degli algoritmi; quelle Clinton non erano mirate in questo modo, e quindi risultarono meno efficaci.

Si procede evidenziando come, sia populismo che nazionalismo compaiono come ideologie centrali in entrambi i casi studio, fungendo da motivatori del "motivated reasoning", che permette ai bias del primo capitolo di entrare in azione, e facendo sì che gli individui diventino più simili al modello del "confident voter". Si ribadisce, quindi, l'importanza di questo modello, ricordando i suoi tratti essenziali e analizzando le diverse forme in cui compare nei casi studio.

Tornando, quindi, al discorso del populismo e del nazionalismo, si specifica come nel caso americano queste tendenze necessitassero di una spinta maggiore per poter essere sfruttate da parte della campagna Trump, mentre in Inghilterra fossero già abbastanza accentuate da dover essere solo guidate.

La sezione seguente applica la logica della sfiducia politica elaborata nel capitolo 4 al caso studio americano, notando come in tutti i discorsi utilizzati da Trump vi fosse un sottotesto di sfiducia verso le istituzioni politiche, che le descriveva come corrotte. Inoltre, si evidenzia come i due rivali principali delle elezioni, Hillary Clinton e Donald Trump, fossero emblematici l'una delle istituzioni attuali e l'altro delle forze antistituzionali e populiste; considerato quindi il sentimento populista diffuso durante il periodo di campagna elettorale, si presenta un'altra ragione della vittoria di Trump: il suo essere lontano dalla politica e più vicino al "popolo".

Ci si concentra, poi, sul discorso dei "cascade", più precisamente su come in America fossero stati avviati da soluzioni semplici a problemi complessi. Si nota quindi come l'intera campagna Brexit in realtà non era altro che una soluzione semplice a diversi problemi complessi riguardo immigrazione, economia, sovranità nazionale, etc. Si può dire, quindi, che tutta la campagna Brexit si basasse su un "cascade", rendendo ancora più comprensibile il suo successo.

Infine, si riflette su come entrambi i casi studio abbiano come centro campagne politiche alternative, che competono con campagne incentrate su mezzi tradizionali. Nel caso americano, la campagna centrata sui raduni di Trump, volta allo stimolare sentimenti nazionalisti e populisti tramite "cascade", competeva con la campagna classica di Hillary Clinton. Nel Regno Unito, invece, la campagna Brexit utilizzò un misto di campagna classica e digitale per guidare più che stimolare l'elettorato, sempre però competendo con una campagna classica che, come quella americana, si rivelò inefficace.

Nelle conclusioni si espone, quindi, una risposta tripartita alla domanda di ricerca, individuando 3 spiegazioni comportamentali chiave agli esiti dei casi studio. La prima è il modello del "confident voter", che spiega il comportamento al livello dell'elettorato. La seconda sono i "cascade", attivi al livello delle campagne vincenti come strategia principale di mobilitazione dei sostenitori. Infine, le ideologie nazionaliste e populiste svolgono il ruolo di "collante" delle identità di gruppo e di motivatori nel deviare ragionamenti razionali.

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