FROM RONALD TO DONALD. WHAT DONALD TRUMP HAS IN COMMON WITH REAGAN AND HOW THE FIRST USE OF NEW MEDIA CHANGED THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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Abstract:The surprising win of Donald Trump in the U.S. presidential elections have provided dramatic confirmation of long-term trends in the way people consume information, providing further evidence that so-called legacy media are now playing an even smaller role in influencing individual choice.
It is in this context that the present paper tries to produce a comparative analysis in the communication styles and public perceptions of the current president Donald Trump and the late president Ronald Reagan. In an age when perception matters more than reality Donald Trump and his communication advisers tried to fashion the campaign as a reflection of Ronald Reagan, by presenting him as a continuator of Mr. Reagan and his down to Earth style.
The paper would analyses the way the both president tried to create their own particular mythology and the way they reacted in regards with the press as well as their relationship with the facts. Having as point of origin a series of analyses that emphasize their similarities the paper would explore the novelties that the Trump campaign and presidency brought to world stage as well his relationship with the press.
One particular point of interest would the how almost all the media analyses tended to ignore the success chances of Mr. Trump and dismissed him as an unreliable candidate.

Keywords: mass-media; populism; democracy; electoral campaign; target audience.
JEL Codes: Z0; Z1







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(Photo credits, clockwise[1])

As of 22 February 2017, Josh Barrow writes: "Donald Trump has already set a record for being the most unpopular new president since the invention of telephone polling.[2]" Yet this is not what Trump should fear (which he could not anyway), but the fact that his capacities as a leader are doubted more and more:

"But as Trump started actually doing stuff — running a transition, hiring people, issuing half-baked executive orders, firing his national security adviser after less than a month — the share of Americans willing to call him a good leader has steadily declined.
From 56% in November, it went to 49% in January, 47% earlier this month — and now 42%, or about 4 points less than his share of the popular vote.[3]"

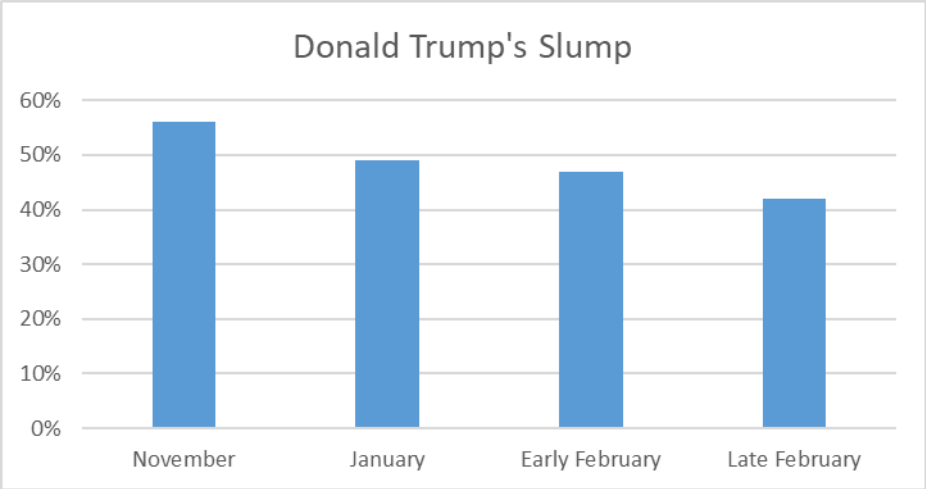


Table 1. *Donald Trump's Slump from November 2016 to 22 February 2017*
Source: Own adaptation after the date provided in Josh Barro, "Trump has a problem: Americans increasingly think he's incompetent", *Business Insider*, 22 February 2017

In his post "The Age of Incompetence[4]", of 27 December 2016, J. Bradford Delong comments that it is unprecedented that "that so few members of the president-elect's own party, and none of the Democratic opposition, consider him to be qualified for the duties of the presidency, apart from serving as Cheerleader-in-Chief." In his opinion "the Trump phenomenon has been gestating for a long period." According to his analysis the last time a fully qualified Republican was elected president happened with Richard Nixon, though flawed in terms of temperament and values.

[1] Ronald Reagan: http://cdn.thedailybeast.com/content/dailybeast/articles/2011/09/01/ronald-reagan-might-have-tough-time-winning-in-today-s-gop/jcr:content/image.img.2000.jpg/1314885364413.cached.jpg
Donald Trump: http://media.salon.com/2016/01/donald_trump69.jpg
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Ronald McDonald: http://i0.kym-cdn.com/entries/icons/original/000/017/931/ronald-mcdonald-profile.jpg
[2] Josh Barro, **"**Trump has a problem: Americans increasingly think he's incompetent", *Business Insider*, 22 February 2017, Available online at **http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-poll-approval-rating-incompetent-2017-2** Last visited on 13 October 2017
[3] Josh Barro, "Trump has a problem: Americans increasingly think he's incompetent", *Business Insider*, 22 February 2017, Available online at http://www.businessinsider.com/trump-poll-approval-rating-incompetent-2017-2 Last visited on 13 October 2017
[4] J. Bradford Delong, "The age of incompetence", *Project-Syndicate*, 27 December 2016, Available online at: https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/donald-trump-incompetent-republican-presidents-by-j--bradford-delong-2016-12#comments Last visited on 13 October 2017

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Quite often, Margaret Thatcher, though on very good terms with Ronald Reagan, is quoted to have said about the late US president: "Poor dear, there's nothing between his ears.[5]"

On the other hand, J. Bradford Delong[6] comments that: "Still, Reagan's temperament and values (generally speaking) were well suited to the presidency. He fully understood that being the star did not mean that he was the boss. Both as a Hollywood actor and as a US president, Reagan had smart, dedicated, and trained professionals writing his lines and directing his moves. He knew that his job was to be on screen, and not to interfere with the people behind the camera and in the post-production editing room, who were responsible for the finished product."

While about Trump, he says: "He knows that he is the star, but he also wrongly believes that he has the knowledge and intelligence to be the boss. He seems unaware that his campaign is over, that he could fail catastrophically and permanently in his new role, and that it is in his own interest to ensure that his proposals are sound, not just as slogans, but as actual policies that will keep the US safe and create prosperity."

Donald Trump trumpeted (pun intended) his "landslide" Electoral College victory which, at a closer look and putting it into a historic context, was not.

John J. Pitney, Jr.[7], professor of politics at Claremont McKenna College, put Trump's (fake) landslide victory into perspective and the result is not quite something to boast about as it ranks 46 out of 58.

Presidential Election Winners, Ranked by Percentage of Electoral Vote

1.	1792	George Washington	100%
2.	1789	George Washington	100%
3.	1820	James Monroe	99.57%
4.	1936	Franklin D. Roosevelt	98.49%
5.	1984	Ronald Reagan	97.58%
6.	1972	Richard Nixon	96.65%
7.	1804	Thomas Jefferson	92.05%
8.	1864	Abraham Lincoln	90.99%
9.	1980	Ronald Reagan	90.89%
10.	1964	Lyndon B. Johnson	90.33%
11.	1932	Franklin D. Roosevelt	88.89%
12.	1956	Dwight D. Eisenhower	86.06%
13.	1852	Franklin Pierce	85.81%
14.	1940	Franklin D. Roosevelt	84.56%
15.	1816	James Monroe	84.33%
16.	1928	Herbert Hoover	83.62%
17.	1952	Dwight D. Eisenhower	83.24%
18.	1872	Ulysses S. Grant	81.95%
19.	1912	Woodrow Wilson	81.92%
20.	1944	Franklin D. Roosevelt	81.36%
21.	1840	William Henry Harrison	79.59%
22.	1988	George H. W. Bush	79.18%
23.	1832	Andrew Jackson	76.57%
24.	1920	Warren G. Harding	76.08%

[5] Peter Jenkins, *Mrs Thatcher's Revolution: the Ending of the Socialist Era*, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 210

[6] J. Bradford Delong, "The age of incompetence", *Project-Syndicate*, 27 December 2016, Available online at: https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/donald-trump-incompetent-republican-presidents-by-j--bradford-delong-2016-12#comments Last visited on 13 October 2017

[7] Available online at http://www.epicjourney2008.com/2016/11/trumps-victory-ranks-46-of-58-in.html Last visited on 13 October 2017

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25.	1868	Ulysses S. Grant	72.79%
26.	1924	Calvin Coolidge	71.94%
27.	1904	Theodore Roosevelt	70.59%
28.	1996	Bill Clinton	70.45%
29.	1808	James Madison	69.71%
30.	1992	Bill Clinton	68.77%
31.	1828	Andrew Jackson	68.20%
32.	2008	Barack Obama	67.84%
33.	1908	William Howard Taft	66.46%
34.	1900	William McKinley	65.32%
35.	1892	Grover Cleveland	62.39%
36.	1844	James K. Polk	61.82%
37.	2012	Barack Obama	61.71%
38.	1896	William McKinley	60.63%
39.	1860	Abraham Lincoln	59.41%
40.	1812	James Madison	58.99%
41.	1856	James Buchanan	58.78%
42.	1888	Benjamin Harrison	58.10%
43.	1880	James A. Garfield	57.99%
44.	1836	Martin Van Buren	57.82%
45.	1948	Harry S. Truman	57.06%
46.	**2016**	**Donald Trump**	**56.88%**
47.	1960	John F. Kennedy	56.42%
48.	1848	Zachary Taylor	56.21%
49.	1968	Richard Nixon	55.95%
50.	1976	Jimmy Carter	55.20%
51.	1884	Grover Cleveland	54.61%
52.	2004	George W. Bush	53.16%
53.	1800	Thomas Jefferson	52.90% (tie with Burr, went to House)
54.	1916	Woodrow Wilson	52.17%
55.	1796	John Adams	51.45%
56.	2000	George W. Bush	50.37%
57.	1876	Rutherford B. Hayes	50.14%
58.	1824	John Quincy Adams	32.18% (draw, went to House)

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Photograph by **Benedict Evans**[8]

It is way below Ronald Reagan, with whom Trump claims to have been on good terms:
"I helped him," he said of Reagan on NBC last fall. "I knew him. He liked me and I liked him.[9]"

Over the years, Ronald Reagan remained an iconic figure at least for the Republicans, Trump is in line with some former would-be presidents:

"John Kasich, gesturing toward the Air Force One on display at the Reagan-library debate, said, 'I think I actually flew on this plane with Ronald Reagan when I was a congressman.' Rand Paul claimed to have met Reagan as a child; Ben Carson said he switched parties because of Reagan; Chris Christie said he cast his first vote for Reagan; Ted Cruz cheered Reagan for having defeated Soviet Communism and vowed, for nonsensical good measure, to 'do the same thing.' And then there was Donald Trump, never one to be outdone by the nobodies in any competition,[10]" is Frank Rich's commentary and goes on dismantling the (fake) story showing that" Trump doesn't appear in the president's [Ronald Reagan] voluminous diaries."

Despite that, in his post for *New York* magazine, "What The Donald Shares With The Ronald", Frank Rich shows that there are some similarities between Reagan and Trump:

1. [Reagan] "ended up leading the 1980 GOP ticket at the same age Trump is now (69) and who, like his present-day counterpart, was best known to much of the electorate up until then as a B-list show-business personality.
2. Trump's tenure as an NBC reality-show host is comparable to Reagan's stint hosting the highly rated but disposable *General Electric Theater* for CBS in the Ed Sullivan era. Trump's embarrassing turn as a supporting player in a 1990 Bo Derek movie (*Ghosts Can't Do It*) is no more egregious than Reagan's starring opposite a chimp in Hollywood's *Bedtime for Bonzo* of 1951.
3. Trump has owned tacky, bankrupt casinos in Atlantic City, Reagan was a mere casino serf — the emcee of a flop nightclub revue featuring barbershop harmonizing and soft-shoe dancing at the Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas in 1954.
4. Trump [is] the first president to have been married three times, here, too, he is simply updating his antecedent, who broke a cultural barrier by becoming the first White House occupant to have divorced and remarried."
5. Similar campaign slogans: Reagan - "Let's Make America Great Again," while Trump - "Make America Great Again," which he, not incidentally, trademarked[11] right away.
6. Both mythologized their own personal histories: Reagan as the soldier coming back home from the front, while he never left the USA, "Trump has purported that his enrollment at the New York Military Academy, a prep school, amounted to Vietnam-era military service."

From Frank Rich's extensive analysis we have a quotation that appropriately adepts to Trump's campaign as they did for Reagan:

[8] Frank Rich, "Ronald Reagan was once Donald Trump", *Daily Intelligencer*, 1 June 2016, available online at http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/05/ronald-reagan-was-once-donald-trump.html Last visited on 13 October 2017

[9] James V. Grimaldi, « Records show scant Reagan – Trump ties", *The Wall Street Journal*, available online at https://www.wsj.com/articles/records-show-scant-reagan-trump-ties-1442359829 Last visited on 13 October 2017

[10] Frank Rich, "Ronald Reagan was once Donald Trump", *Daily Intelligencer*, 1 June 2016, available online at http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/05/ronald-reagan-was-once-donald-trump.html Last visited on 13 October 2017

[11] See the full history of this campaign slogan at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Make_America_Great_Again Last visited on 13 October 2017

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"Lastly, and perhaps most important of all, you should never get involved, Governor, in responding directly to charges about your use of facts. If Carter or his crew can ever structure the campaign so that you are spending time in answering their charges rather than developing your own case against them, at that juncture they will have won the election."

That was suggested by Ronald Reagan's strategist Richard Wirthlin in May of 1980, in his memo, "Strategy for the Doldrums", and it seems that largely he abode by that:

"When asked about conservatives' frustration with him, Reagan kindly insisted it was only a 'very few' critics. He said: 'There are some people who think that you should, on principle, jump off the cliff with the flag flying if you can't get everything you want.' Reagan recalled that 'If I found when I was governor that I could not get 100 percent of what I asked for, I took 80 percent.' So far, Mr. Trump, the political amateur and sputtering demagogue, has lacked Reagan's magnanimity or his flexibility. Can the reality-show star turned president-elect mimic the actor turned president?[12]"

Reagan also had his crunches with the press, but nothing to be compared to what is happening right now in the USA. Larry Schwartz in his article "The 7 Biggest Liars in Presidential History[13]" points out that in 1985, during Reagan's second term, Iran offered to free the hostages in exchange for missiles. A plan was for Israel to ship missiles to Iran, the USA would resupply Israel with the missiles, and the reimbursed cash Iran paid for the missiles to go to Nicaragua, to fund the *contras*, portrayed by Reagan as, "the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers," who were fighting to take down the elected Sandinista government.

"When details of the exchange leaked in 1986, Reagan was forced to explain why America was selling missiles to a sworn enemy, while intervening in Nicaragua, which Congress had forbade. Reagan's response was to deny that arms had been traded for hostages. 'We did not, I repeat, did not trade weapons or anything else [to Iran] for hostages, nor will we.' A few months later he admitted, 'A few months ago, I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true, but the facts and evidence tell me it is not.'" A disingenuous way of saying, "I lied" is Schwartz's commentary.

That is what Reagan did, and what does Trump, his follower, do? According to the BBC "Donald Trump savages media at Florida rally"[14], and "[s]tanding on stage, he said reporters 'are part of the corrupt system'. When he attacked the media, people in the audience screamed their support."

On Twitter, Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump) posts the following:

"The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People!"

Before being edited it read: "The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @CNN, @NBCNews and many more) is not my enemy, it is the enemy of the American People! SICK"[15]

In 1972, in a discussion with John Kissinger, Richard Nixon is also quoted to have said about the press that it is "the enemy.[16]" Grynbaum cites Carl Bernstein, the journalist who helped to uncover the Watergate scandal, that the president's language "may be more insidious and dangerous than Richard Nixon's attacks on the press."

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[12] Gil Troy, "The Example of Ronald Reagan", *The New York Times*, 2016, Available online https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/opinion/election-night-2016/the-example-of-ronald-reagan Last visited on 13 October 2017

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[14] "Donald Trump savages media at Florida rally", *BBC News*, available online at http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39018096 Last visited on 13 October 2017

[15] Michael M Grynbaum, "Trump Calls the News Media the 'Enemy of the American People'", *The New York Times*, 17 February 2017, available online at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-enemy-of-the-people.html?_r=0 Last visited on 13 October 2017

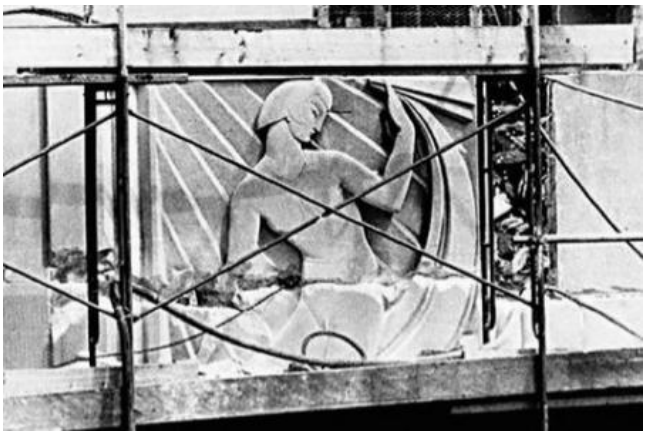
[16] *Ibidem*

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Two stone bas-relief sculptures high on the façade of the Bonwit Teller Building under demolition on Fifth Avenue — pieces that had been sought with enthusiasm by the Metropolitan Museum of Art — were smashed by jackhammers yesterday on the orders of a real estate developer.
- New York Times (June 6, 1980)[17]



Before demolition



While demolishing

According to Callum Borchers that piece of news or, to be more to the point, the destruction of the two scupltures triggered Trump's "war on the media", since it was Trump who smashed those sculptures to pieces and so a fine piece of history, of Art Deco vanished, to make place for the boastful Trump Tower. Michael Leccese, of *Preservation News*, cites architect Der Scutt, who designed the glass tower, saying that he was overruled by Trump when he intended to use the sculptures to decorate the new lobby, and something "more contemporary" was brought in.[18]

When questioned about the demolition of the panels, John Barron[19] (sometimes Baron or John Miller[20] aka Trump himself and not a real Trump's spokesman, but an alias) argued that "three independent appraisers had declared them to be 'without artistic merit' — an assessment that flabbergasted Ashton Hawkins, vice president and secretary of the board of trustees of the Met.[21]" (NB Trump Sr also used an alias "Mr Green[22]", as "his spokesman.")

"What followed was a display of arrogance, excuse-making and avoidance of tough questions that is familiar to anyone who has observed Trump's interactions with the media throughout his campaign for the White House," concludes Borchers.

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[17] Callum Borchers, "Donald Trump hasn't changed one bit since his first media feud in 1980", *The Washington Post*, 18 March 2016, available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/18/donald-trumps-first-media-controversy-is-a-really-great-story-just-a-really-fabulous-story/?postshare=5251458315517113&tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.44eb9858c112 Last visited on 13 October 2017

[18] Michael Leccese, "Developer smashes panels" in *Preservation News*, Volume 20, Number 8, 1 July 1980, http://prn.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/cornell-prn?a=d&d=PRN19800701.2.10&e=----en-20--1--txt-IN----# Last visited on 13 October 2017

[19] Callum Borchers, "The amazing story of Donald Trump's old spokesman, John Barron — who was actually Donald Trump himself", *The Washington Post*, 13 May 2016, available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/21/the-amazing-story-of-donald-trumps-old-spokesman-john-barron-who-was-actually-donald-trump-himself/?utm_term=.7c03c12a7733 Last visited on 13 October 2017

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[22] Michael D'Antonio, Never *Enough: Donald Trump and the Pursuit of Success*, Macmillan, 2015, p. 133

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Instead of conclusions

In the chapter *Get the Word Out* of his book *Trump – The Art of the Deal* we are given the answer to why Donald was and is acting as he was and he is:

"You need to generate interest, and you need to create excitement. One way is to hire public relations people and pay them a lot of money to sell whatever you've got. But to me, that's like hiring outside consultants to study a market. It's never as good as doing it yourself.[23]"

And he goes further on:

"I'm not saying that they necessarily like me. Sometimes they write positively, and sometimes they write negatively. But from a pure business point of view, the benefits of being written about have far outweighed the drawbacks. It's really quite simple. If I take a full-page ad in the *New York Times* to publicize a project, it might cost $40,000, and in any case, people tend to be skeptical about advertising. But if the *New York Times* writes even a moderately positive one-column story about one of my deals, it doesn't cost me anything, and it's worth a lot more than $40,000.[24]"

On 24 February 2017 "White House press secretary Sean Spicer banned reporters from CNN, the *New York Times*, *Politico*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *BuzzFeed* from attending a "gaggle," a non-televised briefing, but gave access to a number of other reporters, including those representing conservative outlets.[25]"

And correlating the above citation with the news that travelled worldwide, we can assume that any kind of news is not bad for Trump; he is visible, and as a post-truth specialist manipulator, he could not act in a different way.

And the "war" goes on. On 26 February 2017, "Trump declines to attend White House correspondents' dinner.[26]" Byers reports:

"The last president to miss the dinner was Ronald Reagan, who sat out because he was he recovering from an assassination attempt in 1981, although he still delivered remarks by phone."

It looks like even if Donald tries to walk (awkwardly, but still) in Ronald's shoes, they are a size or two a bit too much for Donald and he might trip. And here he seems to be closer to Richard (Dick) Nixon and his Watergate (not watertight) affair as a Kremlingate affair might develop in time.

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[23] Donald J Trump, Tony Schwartz, Trump – *The Art of the Deal*, Ballantine Books, New York, 2005, p. 56

[24] *Ibidem*, p. 56-57

[25] Paul Farhi, "CNN, New York Times, other media barred from White House briefing", *The Washington Post*, 24 February 2017, available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/cnn-new-york-times-other-media-barred-from-white-house-briefing/2017/02/24/4c22f542-fad5-11e6-be05-1a3817ac21a5_story.html?utm_term=.c2aa39859114 Last visited on 13 October 2017

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