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## Faith Matters? How Religion Shaped American Presidential Election 2016<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Religion is one of the most important social institutions in the United States of America, and Americans are among the most religious nations in the world. In this paper I explore how religion shaped the American presidential election in 2016. Although the significance of religion in the United States has been acknowledged since the time of Tocqueville, it seems that religion was, once again, overlooked as a factor in pre- and post-elections analyses. The starting point of my paper is the fact that 80% of born again/evangelical Christians say they voted for Donald Trump, while only 16% of them voted for Hillary Clinton. This paper builds on existing empirical data and polls, as well as the analysis of the role and use of religion in the presidential campaign, to show that religion was a important factor in the final results of the election. Besides, in this paper I argue that religion has become an important factor in the United States foreign policy by analyzing the first year of Trump's presidency.

**Key words:** religion, politics, elections, United States of America, Trump, Clinton

### Introduction

One of the most important lessons you will learn as a political science student is that “elections are interesting because they are precarious”<sup>3</sup>.

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However, the 2016 presidential election in the United States announced everything but precariousness. A majority of estimates announced the victory of Hilary Clinton, a Democratic Party nominee. America surprised the world in 2016. The presidency of Donald Trump, a Republican candidate, is a result of numerous factors, including economic and international politics at the top of the bucket list. However, in this paper I will try to answer the question *how did religion shape the 2016 presidential election?*

Therefore, the starting point of this paper is the fact that religion (still) matters in politics regardless of region or a specific religious tradition (Jevtić 2007a: 59-69). The United States is no exception to this; moreover, one can argue that the United States is actually a vivid example of how religion and politics mix and how religion can influence politics, political behavior and political outcomes. In this paper I describe the role of religion in the American presidential election 2016. According to the available pre- and post-election analysis, religion in the American presidential election 2016 was quite important. Beside the tendency of certain religious groups to vote Democratic and other Republican, it seems that religion shaped 2016 election in other ways too. In this paper I shall focus merely on the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in order to answer the question how did religion shape the American presidential election in 2016? Furthermore, I will briefly analyze the first year of Donald Trump's presidency with a focus on how, if at all, religion influenced some of his most important political decisions as the President of the United States.

## **Theoretical Rationale**

The importance of religion in the United States and for Americans in general is a well-known fact. In Tocqueville's seminal work on *Democracy in America* (1835; 1840), he argues that "alongside each religion is found a political opinion that is joined to it by affinity" (Tocqueville 2002: 249), and that "religion in America... must be regarded as the foremost of the political institutions of that country" (Ibidem: 336). Following Tocqueville, while investigating the importance of religion for United States' presidents, Jevtić claimed that religion "played a huge role in the creation of the United States of America and continues to do so today" (Jevtić 2007b: 43). Consequently, the role of religion in the previous presidential election was a subject of many studies. For example, Green argues that religion "has long mattered in American elections...

Furthermore, the presidential candidates and their allies used extensive religious appeals to mobilize voters. In fact, much of the commentary and coverage of the campaign recognized the crucial links between religion and politics” (Green 2007: 1). Moreover, Chapp’s research focuses on religious rhetoric and argues that the, “extent to which an election takes on a religious character depends on how successfully elites use religious language to activate emotions and identities” (Chapp 2012: 4). His argumentation is that the religious character of American politics “is shaped by a confluence of three factors: the religious makeup of the U.S. electorate, the psychological basis of persuasion, and the political demands imposed by competitive winner-take-all elections” (Ibidem: 5). Thomma’s research on religion and political preferences of religious voters in the United States came up with a simple conclusion: “Want to know how Americans will vote next Election Day? Watch what they do the weekend before – If they attend religious services regularly, they probably will vote Republican by a 2-1 margin. If they never go, they likely will vote Democratic by a 2-1 margin” (Green 2007: 3; Thomma 2003). What is important to mention here is that the work Robert Putnam and David Campbell actually showed that it is not religious affiliation that matters, but rather religiosity. In their seminal work on religion in the United States, they claim that the best predictor of vote choice is religiosity, a “God Gap” (Putnam 2012). On the other hand, many empirical studies on how religion can influence political behavior actually use the example of electoral behavior in United States. For example, a study of Geoffrey C. Layman shows that in the period of time from 1980 to 1994 “the influence of doctrinal conservatism on partisanship and presidential vote choice is growing over time” (Layman 1997: 288). Although his study tends to empirically prove this correlation, he too claims that there “is already a good deal of evidence that political activists and voters with orthodox beliefs and affiliations tend to support the Republican Party while the Democratic Party draws its activists and voters disproportionately – ately from the ranks of religious liberals and secularist” (Ibidem: 289). The backdrop of these studies mentioned above highlights the influence of religion behavior in voting practices, which propels the United States up the chart of the most religious nations in the world (Putnam, Campbell 2012; Wald, Calhoun and Brown 2011).

That being said, religious influence on political behavior and particularly voting preferences is a well-known fact. It is therefore surprising that there are only a few studies on the role of religion in American presidential election 2016. For example, authors in a special issue of *Serbian Political Thought* (Vol. 12, No. 2, 2016, pp. 7-120), dedicated

to the phenomena of the 2016 election, focused on different factors in the election. However, none of them found religion to be an aspect of interest to explore except for Nedeljković and Dašić who briefly mention the voting patterns of religious people in previous U.S. elections (Nedeljković and Dašić, 2016: 81-82). On the other hand, another Serbian journal, *Politics and Religion*, has published a special issued titled “Religion and Politics in contemporary United States of America” (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2013, pp. 229-395), gathering a number of scholars interested in the field of religion and politics. This issue represents a valid and a high-qualitative source for studying religion and politics in the U.S., but when it comes to the 2016 elections, we need to rely more on recent sources and available data.

Mostly relying on the above mentioned facts, Corwin E. Smidt argues that “religion serves to shape the political behavior of the American people in at least three different ways” (Smidt 2017: 134), due to its regarded position in American life and society. First, based on the work of Warner (1993), he indicated that religion is the fundamental category when it comes to identity and association in America. Therefore, Smidt claims that “religion shapes patterns of social interaction and perception among the American people that, in turn, serve to color their political preferences, mold their partisan identities, and affect their voting decisions” (Smidt 2017: 134). That is why many authors points out the association between religious affiliation and voting preferences. Secondly, religion can influence political behavior through specific forms of “constraints or parameters” within which political life in America operates. As an example, Smidt argues that even though there is a clear separation of Church and state in America, most of the people actually favor religious involvement in political life (Ibidem: 135-136). And lastly, Smidt claim that religion can serve “as a building stone for the mobilization of different voters on Election day” (Ibidem: 136). What is interesting here is that mobilization usually goes in both directions: political party leaders are using religion, specific religious rhetoric and issues in order to mobilize voters on one hand, but religious leaders and organizations can mobilize their adherents to vote specific candidate through public statements or speeches, on the other hand. Importantly, all the ways Smidt argues religion shape the political behavior of the American people have been empirically proven. When it comes to the 2016 election, Smidt analyzed change and continuity in American electoral politics and a specific relationship between presidential candidates, religion and their religiosity. He finally concludes that the 2016 election showed that the “voting patterns of those affiliated with the major American reli-

gious traditions basically reflected their past voting patterns – with the political alignment of the major religious traditions – and the strength of those alignments – largely remained unchanged” (Ibidem: 153). However, although this article gives useful insight into the relationship between religious affiliation and political behavior of Americans, with a solid and well developed theoretical framework, I believe that it is possible to develop its argument further.

### **How did Religion shape American presidential election 2016?**

In order to answer this question, I propose a three-level analysis. In the first level, I will focus on the religious affiliation of the presidential candidates, namely Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, and their attitudes towards religion in general. In the second level, I will try to analyze if one or both used religion in their campaign, and if so, how? The third level of my analysis will focus on the empirical data provided by relevant polls and data, which can help us understand how religious affiliation influenced political choices in the American presidential race in 2016.

When it comes to the religious affiliation of the presidential candidates in America, it is of utmost importance to mention the fact that there is a certain pattern in America when it comes to the religious affiliation of the president of this country: approximately one-third of Americans think that it is important for a president to have strong religious beliefs. It is quite the same when it comes to the Congressional members; polls show that more than a three-fifths of Americans claim that “it is important to me that members of Congress have strong religious beliefs” (Ibidem: 136). These data show us that an atheist is not likely to become the president of the United States, at least not in the near future. Therefore, it is logical to presume that it is important for the candidates to express their religious affiliation to the voters. There is also one more interesting fact which should be mentioned here: in the entire history of the United States presidents, only one U.S. president has been Catholic, namely John F. Kennedy. The other forty four presidents were affiliated with one of the protestant denominations (Jevtić 2007b: 39-60). When it comes to the 2016 election, the Republican Party nominated Donald Trump as their candidate, who had to face Hillary Clinton, a Democratic Party nominee. Trump’s religious affiliation is, however, paradoxical. What is paradoxical here is the fact that Trump was seen as the least religious when compared to all the other Republican Party candidates

(Pew Research Center 2016). Although he claims to be a member of the Presbyterian Church (Stebenne 2017), many would actually question his dedication to religion based on his lifestyle, especially in terms of his previous marriages and reportedly questionable business ethics. Trump's Presbyterian affiliation alongside his slogan „Make America Great Again“ would bring to the minds of his supporters nostalgic memories of the days after WWII, when Americans attended church regularly and religion was a central to social life.

On the other hand, Hillary Clinton was affiliated with the United Methodist Church, and had been since she was a child. According to David Stebenne, her religiosity became more complicated when she married Bill Clinton, a lifelong Southern Baptist (*Ibidem*). These facts are important for political preferences of the American voters, according to the above stated data. However, even though the religious affiliations of Trump and Clinton is important for the voters, from the aspect of politology of religion it is even more important on how presidential candidates used religion as an instrument of drawing voters support. This brings us to the second level of my analysis.

If we try to put it simple, Trump's campaign was mostly based on the criticism of the Obama's administration, while Clinton's campaign was mostly based on the fact that she was a far competent and qualified candidate. Where then does religion fit in their campaigns? There were no substantial religious dimension of their campaigns; however, Trump's campaign was more religiously inspired than the Clinton's campaign, due to several reasons. This, however, does not mean that religion was a key factor in his campaign, but one of his most stressing messages were actually related to religion. Starting with his slogan “Make America Great Again”, which was endorsed by many Evangelicals as a call to make American Christian Again. Although there have been disputes over this question, there is also a potential religious note in this slogan. That is why many Evangelicals openly endorsed Trump's candidacy. In the middle of the presidential campaign, in June 2016, Trump and his team decided to form the “Evangelical Executive Advisory Board”. Members of this Board met a couple of times with Trump during the campaign. Although the very purpose of this board remained fairly unclear, it is logical to presume that Trump tried to make an additional impact on the church goers. What is important to note here is the fact that some of the most influential Evangelicals joined this board, including Jerry Falwell Jr., president of the Liberty University; Gary Bauer, president of the American Values association; Mark Burns, CEO of the NOW Television Network, followed with Tim Clinton, James Dobson, Jack Graham etc.,

making a total of 25 members. It is a fact that religious leaders in America, as well in other parts of the world, are at the same time political figures who tend to give direct political statements or even calls to their believers to vote in a specific manner. For example, Jerry Falwell Jr. openly endorsed Trump's presidency, surely making a strong impact on the voting preferences of his believers. However, one of the most striking pieces of evidence of the role religion in Trump's campaign is his proposal for the shift in immigration policy. Namely, he called in his campaign, and later on confirmed in the speech after accepting a Republican Party nomination, for a travel ban on Muslims entering the United States. He tried to defend this position with the fact that the travel ban should be imposed only to the countries affiliated with terrorism and that it had nothing to do with religion itself. More importantly, he tried to support his position with data and polls, indicating that the American were in favor of such a policy. Thus, this was another example of how religion was used, both directly and indirectly in Trump's campaign in order to attract voters. This is based on the fact that even though America is a multicultural society, there are still significant differences in the country based in racial, and above all, religious affiliations. Compared to Trump, there is a little evidence that Hillary Clinton used religion extensively in her campaign. However, she did make an interesting statement after the acceptance of the Democratic Party nomination when she said that American society has to change its "deep-seated cultural codes, religious beliefs and structural biases". Some of the reporters even regarded this statement as a war on religion (Thiessen 2016). Despite this and a couple of other remarks by Clinton regarding religion, it seemed that her and her team did not regard religion as an important factor in the campaign. As already mentioned, Clinton's campaign was mostly based on emphasizing her political experience and Trump's lack of, which they believed would resonate with most Americans and lead to a substantial increase in voters support. Besides, Democrats counted on their traditional voters: religious but not affiliated with any religion, other social groups, such as African Americans and women, Jewish community. Therefore, Clinton's campaign was more focused on these voters, rather than religiously affiliated Americans.

In the third level of this analysis, I shall focus on several available sources and data on how the faithful voted. Exit poll conducted by Pew Research Center, Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and CNN claimed that religion did matter in the 2016 presidential election in United States. For example, exit poll by Pew Research claim that "eight-in-ten self-identified white, born-again/evangelical Christians say they



voted for Trump, while just 16% voted for Clinton” (Smith, Martinez 2016). This is very interesting report, indicating that Trump succeed to win the votes of the Evangelicals, which supports the pattern from the previous elections about the support of the religiously affiliated Americans to the Republican Party candidate. However, it is important to mention that this 65% margin of victory within this group “matched or exceeded the victory margins of George W. Bush in 2004, John McCain in 2008 and Mitt Romney in 2012” (Ibidem).

Table 1. Presidential vote by religious affiliation and race

	2000		2004		2008		2012		2016		Dem change '12-'16
	Gore	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Obama	McCain	Obama	Romney	Clinton	Trump	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Protestant/other Christian	42	56	40	59	45	54	42	57	39	58	-3
Catholic	50	47	47	52	54	45	50	48	45	52	-5
White Catholic	45	52	43	56	47	52	40	59	37	60	-3
Hispanic Catholic	65	33	65	33	72	26	75	21	67	26	-8
Jewish	79	19	74	25	78	21	69	30	71	24	+2
Other faiths	62	28	74	23	73	22	74	23	62	29	-12
Religiously unaffiliated	61	30	67	31	75	23	70	26	68	26	-2
White, born-again/evangelical Christian	n/a	n/a	21	78	24	74	21	78	16	81	-5
Mormon	n/a	n/a	19	80	n/a	n/a	21	78	25	61	+4

Note: “Protestant” refers to people who described themselves as “Protestant,” “Mormon” or “other Christian” in exit polls; this categorization most closely approximates the exit poll data reported immediately after the election by media sources. The “white, born-again/evangelical Christian” row includes both Protestants and non-Protestants (e.g., Catholics, Mormons, etc.) who self-identify as born-again or evangelical Christians.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of exit poll data. 2004 Hispanic Catholic estimates come from aggregated state exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool. Other estimates come from Voter News Service/National Election Pool national exit polls. 2012 data come from reports at NBCnews.com and National Public Radio. 2016 data come from reports at NBCnews.com and CNN.com.

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Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/>, accessed January 4<sup>th</sup> 2017.

Table 1 clearly indicates Trump’s victory over the religiously affiliated Americans. Besides the major gap in the votes from white, born-again Evangelicals, Trump also gain support from American Catholics, but not within the Hispanic Catholic community though. This was rather expected, due to Trump’s views and attitudes towards Hispanic immigrants in general, alongside his views on foreign policy towards Mexico. He also gained significant support from the Mormon community, which was as well expected. On the other side, Clinton gain support by a significant margin from the Jewish community, Hispanic Catholics, other faith and religiously unaffiliated. All of these groups in America are traditionally voting Democrats, and by that there is nothing new in



the 2016 election. That being said, according to this data, there are no significant change in the pattern on religion and political preferences in elections 2016.

Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) indicated that there were no significant changes in voting patterns of religiously (un)affiliated in the 2016 election. According to PRRI “the religion vote broke along strikingly familiar lines” (Cox 2016). It means that, compared to the elections in 2004, 2008 and 2012, 2016 election were actually no different in a major way. Table 2 shows that voting preferences of major religious groups, and those who describe themselves with no religious affiliation, share almost the same pattern described in the theoretical rationale of this paper. Namely, religiously affiliated Americans, particularly Evangelicals, tend to support Republican candidate, while Jewish people, minor religious groups and those with no religious affiliation tend to support Democratic candidate. As mentioned above, this is a clear evidence of the “God gap” in American politics.

Table 2. Presidential Vote by Religious Affiliation (2004 – 2016)

	2004		2008		2012		2016		% of electorate
	John Kerry	George W. Bush	Barack Obama	John McCain	Barack Obama	Mitt Romney	Hillary Clinton	Donald Trump	
	48%	51%	53%	46%	51%	47%	48%	48%	100%
White born again Christian	21	78	24	74	21	78	16	81	26
Catholic	47	52	54	45	50	48	45	52	23
White Catholic	43	56	47	52	40	59	37	60	-
Hispanic Catholic	65	33	72	26	75	21	67	26	-
Mormon	19	80	-	-	21	78	25	61	1
Jewish	74	25	78	21	69	30	71	24	3
Unaffiliated	67	31	75	23	70	26	68	26	15

Note: 2004 Hispanic Catholic estimates came from aggregated state exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool.

Sources: National exit polls, 2004-2016.

Source: Public Religion Research Institute, available at: <https://www.prri.org/spotlight/religion-vote-presidential-election-2004-2016/>, accessed January 8<sup>th</sup> 2018.

Table 2 shows there is a clear empirical support for the above mentioned tendency between religious affiliation and voting preferences in American presidential elections. That being said, it seems that support from Christian Evangelicals for Trump, a Republican candidate, is not something new in American elections. However, he won their votes with the highest margin since 2004. What is important to mention here is the issue of race and religion. Support from white Evangelicals



margin. For example, Trump won 50% of Catholic votes (compared to Clinton's 46%) and 54% of votes of other Christians (compared to 43% of them who voted for Clinton). However, Clinton won support from the Jewish community with a high margin (71% voted Clinton, while 23% voted Trump), as well as support from the people affiliated with other religions than Christian (Clinton 58%, Trump 32%) and particularly of those with no religion (Clinton 67%, Trump 25%), according to CNN Exit polls (CNN 2016). What is also interesting is the fact that we can trace a pattern in the relations between the church service attendance and voting preferences, as it was states in the theoretical framework of this paper. To put it simply, it is expected for a person who visits church's more often to vote Republican, and vice versa, those who do not attend church often are more likely to vote Democrats. According to the CNN data, we can see that those who attend church "weekly or more" voted Trump by 55%, and Clinton with 41%. Similar data are shown for those who attend church monthly or more. On the other hand, Clinton won support from those who attend church less often. For example, those who never attend church said they voted 62% Clinton, and 30% for Trump (Ibidem).

The question which arises is: why is the support of America's white Evangelicals so important? One of the main reasons is, of course, in the numbers. According to the organization "Lift to vote", white Evangelicals are estimated at 26% of eligible voters in the United States, which makes it about 52 million (Lift the Vote 2016). This organization has a goal to mobilize the Christian voters around America, in order to make their voice heard. In the 2016 elections, they were particularly interested in several "battleground states" (or the swing states), namely Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina, Florida and Wisconsin.<sup>4</sup> According to them, Evangelicals support Trump in these very important states, and that is why Trump's tried to get closer to these voters in his campaign. Trump's stands on abortion, alongside with his views on fighting religious extremism and terrorism, immigration policy and same-sex marriage. Also, one important thing should also be stressed. Trump won the large margin support within white Evangelicals, which is a significant fact as it indicates a specific racial problem which still exist in the U.S. And last but not the least, according to polls, most Evangelicals said that they are mostly concerned about economy,

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4) "Battleground states", or the "swing states", includes, besides these, Ohio, New Hampshire and Iowa. They are of mass importance in the U.S. elections due to the fact that either party has a chance to win the elections in it, making it of great importance for the final elections outcome.

which is the first driving force for them in the elections day (Renaud 2017). That is why it is important to understand that Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign succeeded to involve all of these issues and to target specific group of people.

### **Religion and the first year of Trump's presidency: the saga continues**

First year of Trump's presidency was rather turbulent. However, when it comes to religion, it seems that religion was very present in his first year of his presidency, particularly in the foreign policy. According to several different authors, "this is a significant break from the Obama administration, which tended to view other factors as more significant drivers of foreign policy" (Green 2017). What is very important to point out is the fact of how religion is differently treated by Obama's and Trump's administration. On one side, during the Obama's mandate, it seems that religion was rather considered as a one of the factor which can influence politics, economy, or conflict, while Trump's administration sees religion as a significant contribution to violent extremism (Ibidem). However, as many other things under Trump's presidency, role of religion in his first year of presidency has been paradoxical. On one hand, president Trump shut down the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs, which was intended to work with international religious groups. On the other side, Trump managed to expand relations with Saudi Arabia, even though this country is well-known for banning religious right to minorities and other religious groups other than Sunni Muslims. Besides, Trump's rhetoric is often based in religion, and religious terms. The implementation of a "travel ban" or "Muslim ban", and recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital by the United States of America were two significant political decisions made by Trump and his administration in 2017 which had certain, or even dominant, religious dimension. The appointment of several conservative federal judges and Trump's decision to allow employers not to cover contraception for their employees is also related to religion.

When it comes to the travel ban, President Trump issued an Executive order 13769 (officially titled as "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States") shortly after his inauguration in January 20<sup>th</sup> 2017. This decision caused mass protests among the USA, claiming that religious tolerance, which is one of the corner stones of the USA, is under threat and that this ban presents a religious discrimination. Two important questions arise here. First, does this ban

have anything to do with religion in the first place? And second, why did Trump decided to make such a move? When it comes to the first question, religion was often used as one of the key arguments in supporting this decision. The very idea was to temporary ban immigration from “terror-prone regions”, which could affect security in the USA. However, this ban became known as the “Muslim ban” while most of those regions are actually dominantly inhabited by Muslims.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this political decision was at the very beginning related to religion. On the other side, imposing a travel ban to certain countries was one of the Trump’s promises to the voters in his campaign. What is particularly important here is that many of the white Evangelicals, who actually gave a significant contribution to his victory, supports this idea. According to the Pew Research, 76% of white Evangelicals approve the travel ban, while black Protestants (84%) and 74% those with no religious affiliation (74%) disapprove this (Smith 2017). After a debate on of this ban was constitutional, the United States’ Supreme Court ruled that Trump’s order “could be immediately imposed while multiple court cases challenging the ban are resolved” (The Guardian, December 4<sup>th</sup> 2017).

However, one of the most captivating evidences of how religion shaped the first year of Trump’s presidency is the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, on December 6<sup>th</sup> 2017. It is well known that the status of Jerusalem if the key issue in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. The value of Jerusalem lies completely in religion, as it represents a holy place of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. That is why recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital is a tricky question. Trump’s recognition caused many negative statements from the Muslims leaders and people, and has a tendency not to drive towards the reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, but rather toward the future conflicts. However, if we once again have a look into the support that Trump received from specific religious people in the USA, we would see that this political decision was related to it. There is a strong support from the conservative Evangelicals for supporting this decision. For example, two Evangelical groups, namely the “My Faith Votes” and “American Christian Leaders for Israel”, had influenced this move. Besides, there is also a significant influence of Trump’s conservative Evangelical advisors. For Evangelicals, the significance of Jerusalem is solely based in theology. Jerusalem was a place where Solomon’s temple was built. After two demolitions of the Temple (first one in 587 BCE, and the second one in 70), there is a

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5) There were three “travel bans” issued by President Trump. First one included Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen. Second one took Iraq off, while in the third one added Chad and North Korea to the list.

strong Biblical message on restoring the Temple which is connected to the second coming of Jesus. This message is mostly accepted within the Evangelical Christians, which was transformed in the movement called “Christian Zionism” (Clark 2007; Jevtić 2013). Therefore, this political decision is strongly based in religion, thus making understanding of religion very important for understanding political outcomes and behavior.

### **Concluding remarks**

The American presidential election in 2016, as well as evidences from the first year of Trump’s presidency, showed that religion still matters in politics. Even though it would be wrong to label religion as a key factor in the final outcome of the American presidential race in 2016, it would be equally wrong to ignore and neglect its role. Presidency of Donald Trump is a result of numerous factors, mostly based in domestic and foreign policy, but in this paper I argued that religion gave a significant impulse to his campaign and moreover, in his first year of presidency.

Trump’s campaign had an important religious dimension, compared to the one of Hilary Clinton. Trump succeeds to gain support from White/born-again Evangelicals, which represented one-fifth of the eligible voters in 2016 election and, according to available data, 8 in 10 of them voted for him in 2016. Moreover, White Evangelicals represents the dominant group in many “swing states”, such are Wisconsin, Michigan or Pennsylvania, where he won support and, consequently, the presidency. On the other side, Hillary Clinton won support from traditional Democrat voters, religious unaffiliated, Jewish community and African Americans. That being said, the pattern between religious affiliation and voting preferences in United States has been once again proven. It is likely that religiously affiliated will vote Republican, while religiously unaffiliated will vote Democrat. Besides the role of religion in presidential election 2016, it was important to stress the fact that religion continued to play a significant role in Trump’s first year of presidency. This fact can be seen in numerous examples. In this paper, I used cases of a “travel ban” and recognition of Jerusalem as a capital of Israel to illustrate this interesting aspect of the first year of Trump’s presidency.

Evidences from the 2016 presidential election in United States, as well as from the first year of Trump’s presidency, show that political science should not ignore religion and its importance for politics. Religion has a potential to influence politics, political behavior and outcomes, and therefore, it should not be neglected. At the same time, it is equally

important not to overestimate its influence. Religion is just a piece in a complex puzzle of politics, „a nut or bolt“ (Elster 2015) for political scientist, which can be seen from the experience of United States, as this paper argued.

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