

Clinton and Trump “Neck to Neck”. The Ghosts Haunting Hillary: Her “War Hawk” Position, The TPP Trade Deal, The Hispanic Vote, The 1.2 Trillion “College Debt”

By [Dr. Jack Rasmus](#)

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[Jack Rasmus](#) 26 September 2016

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In what are two of the three ‘bellweather’ states—Ohio and Florida (the other is Pennsylvania)—Trump appears ahead going into the first televised debate on Sept. 26. As of last week’s mid-September polling, he leads in Florida by 43.7 percent to 42.8 percent for Clinton. Other polls show him with a similar modest lead in Ohio. Should Trump win Florida and Ohio, it is highly likely he’d get the 270 electoral college votes necessary to win; and should he take Pennsylvania as well, it’s virtually assured he would.

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The remaining states are safely in either the Clinton or the Trump camp. The swing states, sometimes called the “battleground” states, are: Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, Virginia, Colorado, and maybe North Carolina this year. The largest in terms of potential electoral college votes are Florida and Ohio. Pennsylvania is also significant. Whoever wins Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania—the bellwether states—will almost assuredly carry the other five as well; and whoever wins most of the swing states, wins the election.

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The outcome in the swing states will be determined in turn by which candidate can mobilize its constituencies and get out the vote. And that's where “Clinton's Ghosts” will play an important role, that is, reducing her ability to “turn out her vote” more than Trump is able to mobilize his.

Trump's key constituencies are middle-aged and older whites in general, high school or less-educated white workers, religious conservatives, wealthy business types and investors, and the Tea party, radical and religious right. The Democrats' constituencies are African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, the college-educated, urban women, trade unions in public employment and what's left of the industrial working class, students and millennial youth under 30. This is the “Obama Coalition” created in 2008, that was barely held together in 2012, and is now in the process of fragmenting in 2016. The consequences of that break up may be determinative in the coming election.

The Ghost of Free Trade

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The first ghost haunting Clinton is her historic, long-term advocacy of free trade deals from NAFTA to the current Trans-Pacific Partnership. Clinton has said she does not agree with the TPP, but only in its present form. She promises to “take a look” at it if elected. But that’s waffling that won’t fool union and white working class voters in the Ohio-Pennsylvania-Michigan-Wisconsin swing states that have seen their good jobs offshored and sent to other countries as a direct result of free trade deals from Bill Clinton’s NAFTA to Barack Obama’s TPP.

Nor will this former Democrat constituency forget how Obama in 2008 pledged, similar to Hillary, to take a look at changing NAFTA, but then went on to become the biggest advocate of free trade ever—cutting deals with Panama, Colombia, bilaterally with other countries and is now pushing hard for TPP and a similar deal with Europe.

Union workers in the Great Lakes area of Ohio-Pennsylvania-Michigan played a major role in carrying those swing states for Obama in 2008. The majority have likely already gone over to Trump, who’s position on free trade deals is more directly opposed than Hillary’s carefully worded ambivalence. If they turn out to vote, it will be for Trump.

The War Hawk Ghost

Another ghost haunting Clinton is her repeated and consistent war-hawk positions assumed while in the senate and then as secretary of state. Hillary voted for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was at the center of initiating war in Libya, and favored more direct U.S. military action in Syria.

As secretary of state, she also allowed—unchecked—her neocon-ridden state department, led by Undersecretary Virginia Nuland, to actively help provoke a coup in the Ukraine in 2014. No matter how hard she tries at the eleventh hour, Clinton cannot shed the war-hawk image she nurtured for more than a decade. This will cost her votes with millennials, who already deserted her for Sanders for her pro-war history.

The Ghost of Abandoned Millennials

College educated millennial youth are also abandoning Clinton as a result of the Obama administration’s failure to do something about their more than \$1.2 trillion college debt and the long-term underemployed in part-time and temporary jobs with no benefits and little prospects for the future. The Obama administration may brag of the jobs it has created since the last recession, but most millennials languish in low pay, no benefit service employment, with more than a third living at home with parents and unable to start families or independent lives.

They may not like Trump but their resentment will likely translate into not voting for Clinton. Attempts to lure millennials back with promises of free college tuition are too late for those already indebted; and a few weeks of paid maternity leave for new parents appears as a token alternative for more generous childcare tax cuts proposed by Trump.

The Ghost of the Hispanic Vote

The constituencies of union labor, youth, and people of color were the voters that gave Obama his second chance in 2012 and returned him to the White House. He rewarded trade unions with the TPP and millennials with debt and underemployment.

Obama carried key swing states like Florida, Virginia, Colorado, Iowa and others largely as a result of the Hispanic vote as well. He promised them, in exchange for their vote in 2012, immigration reform, the Dream Act, and direct executive action. What they got was the largest mass deportations in modern U.S. history and broken families. Trump may insult Mexican-American voters with stupid off-the-cuff remarks and silly promises to build walls. But the deportations have had a far more devastating effect on Latino families and voters in key states in the Midwest, southwest and Florida.

Florida is a must-win swing state. Whoever loses Florida would have to win virtually all the remaining swing states. Obama carried more than two-thirds of the Latino vote Florida in 2012. Clinton has barely 50 percent support of that constituency today. In addition, a majority of the youth vote now favor Trump, not her. The ghost of past mistreated Latinos under Obama thus hangs heavy over Clinton in the present in that state—just as free trade and job loss do in the other key swing state of Ohio. Losing both means virtual defeat.

These ghosts hang heavy over the Clinton campaign in the swing states. Trump will have trouble with establishment Republicans and some Tea party types will certainly go to the Libertarian candidate, Gary Johnson. But Clinton may have even bigger problems with mobilizing white union workers, youth, and Hispanics—the very voter constituencies that made the big difference in giving Obama one more chance in 2012.

How the two candidates perform in the upcoming presidential debates will also weigh heavily on the election outcome. Can Clinton offset her voter turnout disadvantage by clearly prevailing in the upcoming debates? The election may be scheduled for November, but it may be all but over by October if she clearly doesn't.

Jack Rasmus is the author of the just-released book, "Looting Greece: A New Financial Imperialism Emerges," and the previous, "Systemic Fragility in the Global Economy." He blogs at jackrasmus.com.

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