

When Two Worlds Don't Collide – Trump in Poland and the Phenomenon of Parallel Universes

Published on 19. July 2017 by Lukasz Pawłowski

Trump's supporters and opponents live in entirely separate universes where the same facts somehow have opposite meanings.

No more than a fortnight ago Donald Trump was welcomed in Poland with great pomp, declared a great statesman and... one of the few remaining defenders of Western civilisation. This process of Trump's 'normalisation' was truly astounding. It was as if the majority of Polish right-wing journalists suddenly had forgotten what kind of a politician they were dealing with. There were talks about the president's grand vision of transatlantic relations and the role Poland will play in this new geopolitical order. It seemed as if the Polish right-wing media had entered a parallel universe, where – to borrow a phrase from Peter Pomerantsev – nothing is real and everything is possible. The American president must have been very pleased.

Soon however, after his return to the US, reality kicked in again. According to an [ABC News/Washington Post poll](#), six months into his presidency Mr Trump is the least popular president since the polling began... over 70 years ago. Only 36 percent of Americans approve of his performance, while 58 percent hold the opposite opinion.

The president for whom the trip to Poland and the following G-20 summit were supposed to provide an opportunity to shake off bad press and cast himself as a global leader, once again found himself on the defensive. The long repeated accusations of collusion between his campaign staff and Russians left the realm of speculation and became a fact. And although we still don't know what exactly Donald Trump Jr, Jared Kushner and Paul Manafort learnt during their meeting with Natalia Veselnitskaya and how this conversation influenced the campaign, we know one for sure – Trump's associates have repeatedly lied on this issue for the last couple of months. Or did they? Just as it this seemed to become clear during his visit to Poland, it turned out that Trump's supporters and opponents in America also apparently live in entirely separate universes where the same facts somehow have opposite meanings.

According to the already mentioned ABC News/Washington Post poll only 33 percent of Republican voters believe Russia tried to influence the US Presidential election and only seven (!) percent believe that the Trump campaign helped Moscow to interfere in the election. In comparison, exactly 80 percent of Democratic voters believe the Kremlin tried to have a hand in the electoral process and over 60 percent say Trump's campaign helped the Russians to achieve this. Even more stunning, however, were the replies to the question if it was appropriate for the president's eldest son and his campaign managers to attend a meeting with a Russian lawyer. While only nine percent of Democrats agreed with the statement, almost half (48 percent) of Republicans saw nothing wrong in Trump Jr's conversation with Veselnitskaya.

These stunning results –six months into the most erratic, controversial and scandalous presidency in modern American history – clearly show how divided the American public has become.

According to FiveThirtyEight – a portal famous for its political data analyses – during the last election, out of 3113 US counties, only in 303 the advantage of one candidate over the other was lower than 10 percent. In 1992, when Bill Clinton won the election, such counties constituted around one-third of them all.

An increasing attachment to one party goes hand in hand with radicalisation of views on both sides of the political scene. After comparing data from 1994 to 2015 the Pew Research Center reported that today almost every Republican (93 percent) is more conservative than the average Democrat, and almost every Democrat (94 percent) is more liberal than the average Republican. Just two decades ago, the same figures stood at 64 and 70 percent respectively.

As political views and party affiliations go in opposite directions there is less and less room for a cross-aisle compromise, and supporters of a given party are ready to support 'their' politician against all controversy. It is precisely because of this increasing polarisation of the electorate that so many GOP politicians who used to publicly warn against Trump during the primaries, today turn a blind eye to the subsequent scandals. Mitt Romney – the Republican front-runner in 2012 – fiercely opposed Trump's candidacy during the entire campaign. And yet he had very little impact on his own supporters. 'More than 90 percent of those who voted for Mr. Romney in the presidential election in 2012 also voted for Mr. Trump this time,' reported *The Economist* quoting the American National Election Studies (ANES).

All this data suggests that removing Donald Trump from the presidency will be far more difficult than his



opponents want to believe. He might be the least popular president in modern American history and yet his approval rating among the Republicans still well exceeds 80 percent. His top advisers might have colluded with Russian government's emissaries and yet less than ten percent of Republican voters believe he helped them influence the election. He might have denied contacts with the Russians, now openly admit them and still be seen as a 'straight shooter' who 'tells it like it is'.

As long as Trump remains popular with the Republican base many Republicans in the Congress are unlikely to distance themselves from 'their' president. And without their support any attempt to impeach the 45th president will be compromised.