



SHAPERS SERIES US ELECTION

EVENT REPORT



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GLOBAL SHAPERS COMMUNITY

An initiative of the World Economic Forum, The Global Shapers Community is a network of Hubs developed and led by young people who are exceptional in their potential, their achievements and their drive to make a contribution to their communities. There are close to 6000 young leaders enlisted in the network.

The Perth Global Shapers Hub was developed in 2013 and is currently led by Abdullahi Alim.

The Shapers Series is a project currently administered by the Perth Global Shapers Hub. These speaking engagements cover matters that have shaped the public discourse and are packaged as intimate sessions with local thought leaders. **The closing session for 2016 covered the 2016 US Presidential Elections.**

Shapers Series 1: Ms. Jan Owen AM, CEO of Foundation for Young Australians
Theme: Social Entrepreneurship (17 Feb 2016)

Shapers Series 2: Mr. John Poulsen, Australian Managing Partner of Squire Patton Boggs (18 May 2016)

Shapers Series 3: Mr. Naveen Unni, WA Managing Partner of McKinsey & Co.
Theme: Fourth Industrial Revolution (2 August 2016)

Shapers Series 4: The Hon Kim Beazley AC, Mr. Tom Switzer, Professor Gordon Flake (19 September 2016)





THANKS

The Perth Global Shapers Hub extends its appreciation to the official sponsor and partner organisations for the Shapers Series on the 2016 US Presidential Elections.

Perth USAsia Centre, US Consulate Perth and Squire Patton Boggs.

The Hub also wishes to thank the following individuals for their persistent support. The Honourable Kim Beazley AC, Mr. John Poulsen (Squire Patton Boggs), Professor Gordon Flake (Perth USAsia Centre), Mr. Tom Switzer (US Studies Centre), Ms. Rachel Cooke (US Consul General), Ms. Sue Gilchrist (Shenton College), Mr. Christopher Hill (Shenton College) and Mr. Jurgen Van Pletsen (NicheInterview.com).

INTRODUCTION

The US political system has long been hailed as the international benchmark for democratic governance. Article Two of the U.S Constitution highlights the very basic conditions required to run for office. A candidate must be at least 35 years old, a natural-born citizen and a resident for at least 14 years.

The 2016 Presidential Elections attracted over 25 candidates and proved to be a juggernaut. Record numbers were observed during televised debates, at rallies and across popular social media platforms.

After a seemingly endless period of campaigning, two of the most known and polarising figures of the past decade rose to the top of the Democratic and Republican tickets.

On the Democratic ticket stands Hillary Clinton who has come under significant heat amid a renewed FBI probe into a series of unaccounted email communications during her tenure as Secretary of State.¹ Voters questioned her trustworthiness as evidenced by Clinton's inability to maintain over 50% in national polling data. Despite this, she holds a stronger favourability rating and her win would go down as a historic moment for women, the US and indeed the world at large.

On the Republican ticket is Donald Trump, a candidate who has never held political office or served in the military. His style of communication has proved popular among working class white voters, while alienating women and minority voters. His supporters have likened him to conservative icon, Ronald Reagan while detractors have expressed concerns around his temperament and lack of policy experience. While it is uncertain if Trump is poised to take the White House, he has undoubtedly influenced the direction of the Republican Party.²

¹ FBI Director, James Comey finds that that no charges were warranted in the newly discovered emails.

² Close to 50% of Republican voters feel that Trump or Pence represent the future of the party, leaving the other half of GOP voters in disarray and in an identity crisis.

GLOBAL EVENTS

1. The rise of white nationalism and anti-establishment fervour across Europe and in Australia has been compared to the appeal of Donald Trump in the United States. In fact, Trump is the favourite of far right figures across the West, many of whom credit his lack of political correctness as refreshing and revolutionary.
2. It is also alleged that state actors have interfered in the US election process. Most recently, US intelligence agencies publically stated that the Russian government directed the hacking of American political groups in order to influence the election outcome, a charge the Kremlin has repeatedly denied.
3. International media interest in the US Elections has also been far reaching. Many networks aired the debates live and during primetime hours in the hopes of garnering high viewership. From neighbouring Mexico to Israel and South Africa, viewers took to Twitter and expressed their thoughts on subjects including national security, immigration and race relations.

PERTH GLOBAL SHAPERS HUB

The global interest in the 2016 US Election process is undeniable. To help support discussions around the local and regional implications of a Clinton or Trump presidency, the Perth Global Shapers Hub hosted its final Shapers Series on the US Presidential Elections.

An audience of 100 including Former Foreign Minister of Australia, The Honourable Stephen Smith and current Member of Federal Parliament, Madeleine King descended upon the Squire Patton Boggs office to hear from an expert panel moderated by the Curator of Perth Global Shapers Hub, Abdullahi Alim. The US Consul General, Rachel Cooke provided the opening address.

Speakers:

1. The Honourable Kim Beazley AC, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia and Ambassador to the United States
2. Tom Switzer, Editor of The American Review, Host of Between the Lines (ABC)
3. Professor Gordon Flake, CEO of Perth USAsia Centre

The discussions were also made available via livestream to the 6000+ young leaders in the World Economic Forum Global Shapers Community. As such, questions were sourced from viewers in Latin America, mainland Europe, the Middle East and across Australia and the United States.

The questions from the audience and online viewers highlighted the unpopularity of both candidates, though significantly more criticism was directed at Donald Trump. In particular, audiences were troubled by the rampant undertones of racism and sexism in the Trump campaign as evidenced by his immigration plans and treatment of women.

A member of the live audience asked if the US was actually ready to elect a female president and if the reservations levelled against Clinton potentially reflected a bias against women in leadership. The speakers were quick to affirm this bias though Mr. Switzer added that her low levels of trustworthiness reflected substantive concerns. Professor Flake also added that racism 'trumps' sexism and that a country that can elect a black president can also elect a female president.

Later in the evening, an online viewer from Ukraine asked if and how the US elections may impact the ongoing crisis in her country while another viewer in Colombia questioned the practicality of Trump's proposed deportation of over 10 million undocumented immigrants.

Professor Flake closed the panel with a timely assessment. In spite of the dangerous rhetoric observed during the '08 and '12 Obama and the '16 Clinton campaign, the world will look back to the past decade as a time when the first black and potentially the first female presidents were elected to the most influential posting in the world.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR AUSTRALIA?

US Consul General, Rachel Cooke reinforced the strong and long standing diplomatic ties between Australia and the United States. In her opening address, Cooke highlighted the four key issues that will inevitably define the course of action for the next US president. A review of these points (below) highlight the overlapping priorities for Australia.

1. Provision of opportunity and security in the new economy.
2. The use of technology in combatting issues including climate change.
3. National security and global terror threats.
4. Creating a political landscape that represents the best of a nation.

Regardless of the election outcome, Cooke also added that the US will continue to work closely with its partners in the Asia Pacific including Australia on issues ranging from trade to security.

For young Australians, the US remains one of the most promising travel and relocation destinations. With its leading educational, commercial, sporting and cultural facilities, young Australians, particularly those in international relations see value in the US-Australia relationship and wish to see this through in spite of the pending election outcome.

For many Australians, the media saturation of the US Presidential Elections was inescapable. It became grounds for offline discussions with colleagues and family and helped voters solidify their positions on similar issues discussed in the Australian election this year. The disproportionate media coverage and political commentary surrounding Donald Trump may have also given fuel to candidates and parties running on comparable platforms in the recent Australian elections.

To prompt discussions with Australian teenagers, Mr. Alim, Ms. Cooke and consular staff visited Shenton College where lively discussions were observed and matters including international trade agreements, foreign policy and the increasing role of China in the Asia Pacific were discussed. The Perth Global Shapers gives thanks to the friendly teaching and management staff at Shenton College for hosting this exchange.

THE NEXT 24 HOURS

Two New Yorkers, namely Hillary Clinton & Donald Trump have dominated the public discourse in 2016. On Tuesday, November 8, 2016, roughly 120 million Americans will go to the polls to determine whether Democrat Hillary Clinton or Republican Donald Trump will become the 45th President of the United States of America.

For the first time since World War II, Australia may have to reconsider its future security in a new world order. Mr. Trump has repeatedly made the case that NATO is obsolete and that he is willing to walk away from current arrangements that limit nuclear proliferation in the Asia Pacific. Australia may also have to consider the ramifications of increasing political populism and the increased demands that a Clinton presidency may bring.



