

Understanding the Results of the U.S. Presidential Election: Thoughts and Commentary
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The most ominous part of the U.S. Presidential election is not that Donald Trump won. The real threat is from the cast of characters with whom Trump surrounded himself in order to win and who will now likely make up most of the cabinet. After dismissing his first campaign manager who was charged with assault, he hired Paul Manafort, who had to resign once his lobbying efforts for Ukrainian political leaders with close ties to Russia and work for other dictators around the world became known¹. His final campaign manager and staff are people who have for many years been active on what is called the alt-right (far right wing) of U.S. politics, including Steve Bannon, who was executive chairman of Breitbart News, LLC, notorious for its blatant attacks on progressive politicians and organizations, with Bill and Hillary Clinton their most frequent targets².

In addition to the Russian ties through Manafort and unconfirmed financial ties between Trump and Russia, recent confirmation was provided by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, that Russia has been in contact with Trump insiders throughout the campaign³. And in the post-election, there is increasing evidence of other members of the Trump entourage with financial ties to Russia. The U.S. government found that Russia was behind the hacking of the e-mails of the U.S. Democratic National Committee and of Hillary Clinton's campaign chair, John Podesta⁴. These e-mails have been steadily released through Wikileaks in the final weeks of the campaign, as a strategy to undermine Clinton's candidacy.

Further, there have been reports that New York-based agents of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) were providing information through former NY Mayor Rudolph Giuliani of their efforts to open an investigation into Hillary Clinton's involvement with the Clinton Foundation while Secretary of State, based on a discredited book supported by Bannon through the Government Accountability Institute, which he founded⁵. The agents were said to be in open revolt when the U.S. Justice Department refused to proceed with the investigation against Clinton because of lack of evidence, and some have suggested that pressure from these agents led to the unprecedented decision, against the directives of the Justice Department, by FBI Director James Comey to announce that new e-mails might be pertinent to the investigation of Hillary Clinton's use of a private server while Secretary of State, just 11 days before the election.

¹ <http://time.com/4433880/donald-trump-ties-to-russia/>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/opinion/turn-on-the-hate-steve-bannon-at-the-white-house.html?ref=todayspaper>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/08/18/the-breitbart-alt-right-just-took-over-the-gop/>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/moscow-had-contacts-with-trump-team-during-campaign-russian-diplomat-says/2016/11/10/28fb82fa-a73d-11e6-9bd6-184ab22d218e_story.html

⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/13/politics/russia-us-election/>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/03/fbi-leaks-hillary-clinton-james-comey-donald-trump>; <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/house-democrats-fbi-leak-emails-230756>; <http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow/watch/new-concerns-fbi-is-leaking-to-trump-campaign-800667203987>

Although Comey subsequently announced 2 days before the election that the newly found e-mails were duplicates of what was already examined and that there was nothing to change the previous decision not to charge Clinton with any crimes, the damage was already done to her momentum. She went from being up in the polls by double digits before Comey's announcement to being closely tied with Trump by the time the election took place, and in the interim, early voting was going on in many states.

In addition to the ties to Russia, leaks from rogue members of the NY Office of the FBI, Donald Trump self-proclaimed sexual assault, routinely failed to pay contractors who performed work for him, has ties to organized crime figures, and has failed in one business after another. He would have been out of business years ago if not for the money he inherited from his father, bankruptcy laws, and tax breaks from the public sector for many of his buildings. He is also someone who mocked the handicapped, war heroes and their families, insulted women, immigrants, Muslims, Hispanics, African Americans, and others, someone who lies about almost everything he says, and someone who condones torture, war crimes, plays fast and loose with international law, and is predicted to destabilize markets around the world. And he is said to have a very short attention span, unwillingness or patience to learn, and as was evident on the campaign trail, someone who can't resist responding to what he considers slights to his ego.

In the U.S. electoral system, candidates can win the election without getting a majority of the popular vote, because people vote for "electors" who are allocated across states based on the number of congressional districts. Indeed, Hillary Clinton won the majority of the popular vote, but Donald Trump won the election, because he got a majority of the "electoral college," which is what determines the winner of the election. Only a little more than 100,000 votes separated the candidates across three states that were expected to support Clinton, but ultimately voted for Trump. If these states had "held" for Clinton, she would have won both the popular vote and the electoral college. But alas, they didn't. Not only did Trump win the presidency, but the Republican Party has maintained a majority in both the Senate and the House, and as such, Trump will get to nominate and the Republican-controlled Senate will get to confirm nominees to the Supreme Court for the vacancy currently available (which Republicans have unprecedentedly refused to fill under President Obama). Several members of the court on the progressive side are quite elderly and thus additional vacancies may emerge during his term. Controlling all branches of government and the Supreme Court will make it possible for the Trump administration and the Republican Congress to undo all of the achievements of the Obama administration and to push through a reactionary, Republican agenda that has been in the works for decades, further undermining what is left of the U.S. welfare state, passing along tax cuts to the very rich, and eroding civil rights of minorities and immigrants.

All of the polling data suggested up until election day that Clinton was ahead and likely to win enough states to win the electoral college vote. Further, several of the major pollsters argued that the stability of the data in favor of Clinton was so consistent across the entire campaign that there was a high probability based on previous patterns that Clinton would win. Some gave the probability as high as 99%, which of course, might have reduced the motivation of some of her supporters from making the effort to vote, given that so many experts said repeatedly, "she has this." It also may have further encouraged votes for third party candidates, which were greater in most states that Clinton needed to win than the margin of difference between Clinton and Trump.

Although there were some warnings that Clinton's lead was within the usual margin of error for such polling, the consistency of her lead caused many to dismiss the possibility that all of the polls could be wrong in the same direction, but indeed they were.

So, of course, one of the major questions is how did Trump win the election. According to exit polls (from NBC News and the New York Times), Clinton won 52% of college graduates, while Trump won 52% of non-college graduates, each of whom represented about half of the electorate. Clinton won 54% of women, while Trump won 53% of men (with women 52% of the electorate). Clinton also won the majority of voters under 44 (which were 44% of the electorate), while Trump won the majority of voters 45 and over (55% of the electorate). Clinton also won 89% of Democratic votes (37% of voters), while Trump won 90% of Republican votes (33% of voters), and Trump led Clinton among independent voters 48% to 42% (31% of voters). The racial vote was especially decisive: Clinton won only 37% of the white vote, while Trump won 58% (70% of voters). Clinton won 88% of the black vote, while Trump received 8% (12% of voters). Clinton also won 65% of Hispanic/Latino voters, while Trump won 29% (11% of voters) and the same proportions of Asian voters (4% of electorate). Clinton also won 56% of other voters, while Trump won 37% (3% of electorate). Clinton won just over 50% of those making less than \$50,000 a year, while Trump won a plurality, mostly by a point or two of those making more than \$50,000 a year. Note that the Democratic Party has not won a majority of the white or male vote since Lyndon Johnson's election in 1964.

In previous analyses, Democrats have won the presidency when they get at least 40% of white votes, 90% or more of black votes, and 60% or more of other nonwhite votes, while also getting a majority of female votes (the more, the better). Clinton fell short of the needed white vote, especially among white men and fell short as well on the black votes, especially among black men. While Clinton got a majority of the female vote, it wasn't, as expected, enough to be decisive, and although she exceeded 60% of the Hispanic vote, it wasn't nearly as much as was anticipated, given the expectation that Hispanic voters would turn out big and support Clinton due to Trump's threats to immigrants and especially to Mexicans.

While there were many voter suppression efforts of those who were likely to vote Democratic in states with Republican governors in the wake of the gutting of the Voting Rights Act, it isn't clear how much this affected Clinton's support. It undoubtedly had some effect, but the states that "flipped" from Democratic to Republican were across the Midwest (Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa). The characteristics of all of these states are that they are disproportionately white, working class, and suffered over the last three or four decades, especially in rural and small town areas from the decline of manufacturing jobs, especially unionized jobs that paid a living wage. Despite this, Clinton won a majority of voters who said that they were primarily concerned with the economy (52%) or foreign policy (13%). Clinton won a majority of the 49% of voters who feel that foreign trade either creates more U.S. jobs or has no effect on U.S. jobs. Trump won a majority of the 42% who feel that trade takes away U.S. jobs. In contrast, Trump won a majority of those who said they were concerned about immigration (13%) or terrorism (18%).

Thus, feelings of fear and threat from outsiders were more consequential in the election outcome than concern about the economy, given the distribution and margin of votes on these issues. This

is further supported by the fact that Clinton won a 60% majority among voters who feel that illegal immigrants should have a chance to apply for legal status (70% of voters), but Trump won an even larger majority, 84%, of those who think immigrants should be deported (25% of voters).

Another clue to the election outcome is that the deciding factor for those who voted for Clinton was the belief that she “cares about people like me” (15% of the voters), “has the right experience” (21% of voters), and “has good judgment” (20% of voters), but her strong majorities on these dimensions were outweighed by the even more lopsided support for Trump among those who wanted a candidate who “can bring needed change” (39% of voters).

Several conclusions are evident from these exit polls. First, there is a great deal of continuity between the voting patterns in the 2016 election and the 2012 election, although Clinton did not get quite the support that Barack Obama did in the 2008 or 2012 elections. Larry Bartels, a political scientist from Vanderbilt, did an analysis of the vote totals by state from 2012 and 2016 and found that there is close alignment between the votes for Romney in 2012 and for Trump in 2016, so there are no major realignments evident in this election. According to Bartels, given the “fundamentals” of incumbency and the state of the economy, this election and the last one were basically a “coin toss.” Obama won narrowly in 2012, and Trump won narrowly in 2016.

Second, where there are differences, they seem to reflect divisions by race and sex. Historically in the U.S., there has been a trade-off between the white and black vote, with either party giving strong attention to the black vote losing more white votes than they gain, while parties that emphasize the white vote, face the prospect of black voters staying home. Although when Hillary Clinton ran against Barack Obama in the 2008 primary election, she was the one who won the white working class vote, when she ran in the 2016 presidential election in close association with Barack Obama and emphasizing the rights of women and minorities, she especially lost the white working class vote. She also failed to mobilize enough of the women’s vote to offset the loss of votes from white men. Trump ran a campaign primarily about fear of immigrants and minorities that mobilized white working class voters, and white working class women voted similarly to their husbands. Clinton won the majority of votes of single women and men and nonwhite women and men (although she did less well with minority men than with minority women). So the marginal differences in her vote totals in 2016 with the last several elections seem to reflect the politics of race and sex.

Unfortunately, the consequences of this very close election are likely to be extraordinary. With power across all branches of the U.S. government, the Republican Party can wreak havoc both in the U.S. and globally.

There will be a lot of soul searching and organizing in the U.S. around how to fix the Democratic Party, and it is too soon to know what directions that will take. But it is clear that unless the Democratic Party is able to bridge the tensions between politics based on class versus those based on race, they will not be able to hold together a winning coalition in future elections. Since the Reagan revolution, when Democrats in the U.S. South moved to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party has been made up of three major groups, the white working class, race and ethnic minorities, and white collar professionals. The New Deal coalition from the 1930s through

the 1960s emphasized class politics to garner the support of the white working class while keeping racial issues off the table, but once the Democratic Party became the Party of civil rights, with black interests competing with those of white workers especially for access to jobs, there has been an exodus of white working class voters from the Democratic Party, either to vote Republican or not to vote.

At the same time, white collar professionals (including students) left the Republican Party because of the influence of the Christian right and moved into the Democratic Party, often in support of civil rights issues. An interesting reversal took place, though, during the 2016 Democratic Primary, when white collar professionals and students supported Bernie Sanders' emphasis on the economy and inequality. They adopted the issues of the white working class and often criticized Hillary Clinton for having "only" won votes from blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities, highlighting the class versus race conflict within the Democratic Party.

Bill and Hillary Clinton became targets of the left wing of the Democratic Party when the Clintons responded to the realignment of the South from the Democratic to the Republican Party by trying to escape the class versus race conflict with a focus on economic growth and innovation, the "bridge to the 21st Century." But this strategy was viewed as corporatism by some on the left and as being too cozy with business, including Wall Street and as the abandonment of the white working class. Many of those voting in 2016, especially through the Democratic Primary, were not old enough to remember the successes of the Bill Clinton administration, and in combination with the right, they created their own narrative about Hillary and Bill Clinton that was pretty far removed from the facts of her history and the Bill Clinton administration economic successes.

In 2016, the left used charges of centrism and corporatism against Hillary Clinton, which also contributed to the "lack of enthusiasm" and charges of her being inauthentic or not trustworthy. There is a narrative that has been accepted by many on the left of the Democratic Party that Bernie Sanders would have won against Trump, because he was more progressive than Clinton. Yet, the data in this election, as previously, show that only 26% of U.S. voters think of themselves as liberal, while 39% identify as moderate and 35% as conservative. The efforts of left/liberals in the Party to push the party even further left are likely to be unsuccessful if in doing so they are constantly trading off the interests of the white working class and race and ethnic minorities, especially over economic policies and access to jobs. The Democratic Party has to bridge this class versus race divide, and it has so far been unable to do so.

One final thing needs to be considered. Most of those who voted for Clinton, especially in large cities and from the two coasts, where Democratic affiliation is more concentrated, cannot understand how the white working class across the rest of the country could vote for someone like Donald Trump, who has shown himself to be bigoted, vulgar, dishonest, and with no public record of charity or good works, especially as he revealed more of his unsavory and unstable self during the campaign. Too many among Democrats have written off these workers as "stupid" or "racist." There have been several analyses by political scientists and political sociologists that have found that those with higher levels of "racial resentment" are more likely to be Trump supporters, but this is still not the majority of the white working class. These voters are not stupid, but they are uninformed, as indeed, are most U.S. voters.

The data show that few voters know much about the candidates, policy positions, or how the policies of incumbents are likely to affect their lives. While those on the liberal coasts may spend a lot of time watching the news and following major news outlets, those in most of the country do not. When watching TV, they often watch sports or entertainment shows rather than the news, and the news that they watch is usually Fox, the right-oriented station built up under Roger Ailes, a long-time Republican strategist (who was recently fired following charges of sexual harassment against female employees). Most people in the U.S. vote primarily by party identification and group identity, with vague notions of how well they are doing in the few months before an election, and they blame the party in power if they feel they are not doing well, leading to a “throw the bums out” type of election, as was true in 2016.

In interviews I did with whites in three parts of the U.S. for my book, *The American Non-dilemma: Racial Inequality without Racism* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2013), I found that few of the people I interviewed knew much at all about specific public policies. They were antagonistic toward “government,” because they thought of it only in terms of transfer payments, like welfare, which they thought represented the government taking their money to give to “those people.” My interviewees generally celebrated the rich for being smart and competent, while denigrating the poor (whom they thought of as blacks and other nonwhites, not themselves). Although most claimed to believe in civil rights and giving everyone a chance, they also sought out an inside edge from family members and friends to get jobs that pay a living wage, provide benefits, and have a future, all the while believing that whatever successes they obtained were due to their own effort.

My analysis in the book of post-civil rights politics and the competition between the Democratic and Republican Parties for segments of the white vote suggested that the outcome of presidential elections in the U.S. would depend on whether the white working class in Midwestern states vote primarily in terms of their class interests, at which point they usually vote for Democrats, or in terms of their racial interests, at which point they usually vote for Republicans (because they believe Democratic administrations are giving too much away to minorities). In both 2008 and 2012, Barack Obama won Midwestern states and the presidency. He won in 2008 after the Republican incumbent nearly crashed the world economy and in 2012 when the Republican candidate was caught denigrating 47% of the population as “takers” instead of “makers.” In 2016 Clinton lost Midwestern states primarily because of white working class voters who perceived Hillary Clinton as caring more about women and minorities than about them and their jobs. They apparently voted based on racial politics rather than class politics, and hence, the Democratic Party lost, albeit narrowly.