

# White with rage

Trump vote is not primarily born of globalisation anxieties. It is the outcome of white nationalism.



President-elect Donald Trump pumps his fist during an election night rally on Nov. 9, 2016, in New York. (AP Photo)

How did Donald Trump, defying all pollsters and projections, manage to win the US presidential elections? And what does it say about American politics today? The first question requires that we reconstruct the voting data and assess how it is distributed over key demographic categories. The second would take us to the larger conclusions.

As is well known, it is possible to win the popular vote in the US, but lose the presidential election. This is because the presidential elections are decided in the electoral college, where states are the building blocks of victory, not the

popular vote. Hillary Clinton had to win 270 out of 538 electoral college votes. As of this writing, even though she is about 2,81,000 votes ahead of Trump, a lead eventually expected to rise above a million or more, she has only 228 votes of the electoral college, whereas Trump's tally is 279. She has already conceded defeat. In 2000, Al Gore also lost in a roughly similar fashion.

Given how the electoral college works, the so-called battleground states were critical. A few days before the elections, it was widely believed that there were nine battleground states, accounting for 130 votes. Since the reliable Democratic states outnumbered the safe Republican states, Clinton seemed to require only 40-50 of these battleground votes for victory. In contrast, Trump needed 80-90 votes, if not more. In the end, Clinton won just two battleground states, Colorado and Nevada, securing a mere 15 swing votes, whereas Trump won six battleground states, including the much bigger Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina and Arizona, clinching 115 votes. How could something so unanticipated happen?

This is where America's ethnic and racial demography begins to count. The minorities — Hispanics (12 per cent of the electorate), blacks (12 per cent) and Asians (5 per cent) — were expected to vote heavily for Clinton. Trump's campaign was hostile, or condescending, towards them. It was also surmised that the white community (70 per cent of the electorate) would be split between the college-educated and the non college-educated. Beneficiaries of globalisation, substantially if not wholly, the college-educated whites, constituting 36 per cent of the white community, or a quarter of the total electorate, were believed to favour Clinton. The non-college educated are 64 per cent of the white community and 45 per cent of the total electorate. They were supposed to vote heavily for Trump for they, it was argued, were badly hurt by globalisation, especially as millions of manufacturing jobs migrated to China.

As should be very clear from this, the key electoral calculus was: Would the minority vote for Clinton, plus her college-educated white vote, more than neutralise the non college-educated white vote for Trump? Women's vote, cutting across ethnic/racial categories, was another critical issue. They were presumed to prefer Clinton by a huge margin, especially because Trump had made outrageously sexist remarks about women. Thus, the four critical determinants of the election outcome were: The college-educated and non college-educated whites, the ethnic and racial minorities, and the women.

How did these categories vote in the end? The exit polls help us answer these questions.

The non college-educated white vote for Trump was much larger than expected (67 per cent for Trump, 28 per cent for Clinton, giving Trump a whopping 39 per cent lead). Moreover, surprising many, even the college-educated whites voted more for Trump (49 per cent) than for Clinton (45 per cent). As for the minorities, their vote for Clinton was not as high as anticipated: Blacks were 88 per cent for Clinton (as opposed to 93 per cent for Obama in 2012); Hispanics 65 per cent for Clinton (compared to 71 per cent for Obama in 2012); Asians 65 per cent for Clinton (as against 73 per cent for Obama in 2012).

Let us now turn to how the women voted. They provided Clinton a 12 per cent lead over Trump, barely higher than the 11 per cent lead they had given Obama in 2012, and hardly enough to counter Trump's huge lead among the non college-educated white men. Indeed, most puzzlingly of all, white women voted significantly more for Trump (53 per cent) than for Clinton (43 per cent), even though women as a whole, both white and coloured, preferred Clinton. Trump's demeaning portrayal of women did not decisively alter the vote of white women.

To summarise, all demographic subcategories of white Americans — men and women, college-educated and non college-educated, rich and poor — preferred Trump. The minorities favoured Clinton, but not as much as they did Obama and certainly not by margins that could have undermined Trump's white lead. Finally, white women preferred Trump over Clinton, whereas women of minority communities voted hugely for Clinton.

Had Trump been primarily supported by non college-educated whites, one could have said that it is his anti-globalisation rhetoric and the anger of less privileged whites that finally drove the election results. However, since the college-educated white men and women — both likely beneficiaries of globalisation — also preferred Trump, the conclusion is inescapable that white anxiety about the kind of society America is becoming also contributed significantly to the outcome. This signals the re-emergence of white nationalism.

Demographically, the US is 63 per cent white today (electorally 70 per cent). By 2040-45, the US is expected to lose its white majority. A more racially plural US is now a cause of concern for much of white America. Indeed, one can be more precise. The Northeast and West Coast are not where this anxiety is deeply felt. The South and the Midwest are its primary sites.

Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric, especially targeting Hispanics and Muslims, appears to have tapped into this anxiety. White women, despite being troubled by Trump's sexist rhetoric, also seem more concerned with the evolving racial map of the country, especially in the Midwest and South.

Since a plurality of the country is already racially diverse and the non-white share of the population will only go up, where lies the balance between majoritarian anxiety and anger on one hand and legitimate minority aspirations on the other? Other than the distributive consequences of

globalisation, this is the most important question the 2016 elections have thrown open for American politics.

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