



Man Bites Dog: Trump Did Better With Minorities In 2016 Than Mitt Romney Did In 2012

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Throughout 2016, pundits were reasonably certain that Hillary Clinton would beat Donald Trump. But they were even more certain about one thing: that Trump's rhetoric would alienate minorities to an unprecedented degree. In what is arguably the biggest surprise of 2016, that didn't happen. Indeed, Donald Trump outperformed Mitt Romney's 2012 campaign on minority vote share. How did this happen?

White share of the electorate continues to decline

While Trump won the Electoral College, he lost the popular vote. That makes 2016 the sixth time in seven presidential elections that a single party has lost the popular vote: an unprecedented feat. And these losses are increasingly driven by GOP losses among minorities.

The first thing to note, as the above chart shows, is that while Trump dominated white voters—as Republicans have usually done of late—the white share of the electorate has continued to decline. It was 77 percent when George W. Bush ran for reelection in 2004; it was 70 percent this year. Latinos and Asians now represent a combined 15 percent of the electorate, compared to 10 percent in 2004.

It has become a cliché to say that Republicans can't continue to lose minorities by the margins they are losing them. But for this election at least, they could.

Minority support of Republicans was weak, but stable

The chart below tracks how whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, and the rest voted in the last four presidential elections. You'll notice that George W. Bush was the best-performing GOP nominee with minorities, capturing 11 percent of the black vote, 44 percent of the Hispanic vote, and 44 percent of the Asian vote. Mitt Romney did 5 points worse with blacks, 17 points worse with Latinos, and 18 points worse with Asians.

But, remarkably, Donald Trump captured slightly more of the minority vote share than Romney did. To be sure, by "slightly more" I mean "slightly less disastrously." Trump captured 8 percent

Minority support for Hillary Clinton eroded

A big part of the story is that Hillary Clinton did much worse among minorities than Obama did. Not only was her share of the minority vote worse than Obama's, but minorities turned out less for her than they had for him.

For example, in Michigan, Hillary Clinton received 50,000 fewer votes in Detroit's Wayne County than President Obama had in 2012. Trump's margin of victory in Michigan over Clinton was about 11,000.

Can Democrats win without Barack Obama on the ballot?

Until we can get a more detailed look at the exit polls, all we can do is speculate as to why Clinton's margins with minorities were lower than expected.

Here's one theory: Hillary Clinton has earned a reputation for serving the well-connected and the wealthy. The \$300,000 speeches before Goldman Sachs; the millions donated to the Clinton foundation by third world dictators; the hidden emails; and on and on. Some minority voters may have looked at that and saw Trump as a better advocate for them.

But the simplest explanation may be that Hillary isn't as attractive to minority voters as President Obama has been.

"You have to remember, these exit polls are surveys... They have margins of error," cautions Cato Institute pollster Emily Ekins on my *American Wonk* podcast at Ricochet.com. But "part of it was Barack Obama wasn't on the ballot this time around. And Hispanics have a very favorable view of Barack Obama... Hillary Clinton didn't connect with them in the same way," despite record Hispanic turnout.

That may also explain why black voters didn't turn out for Hillary, and why Republicans have been more successful in the midterm elections of 2010 and 2014. Democrats do well when Barack Obama is on the ballot—and poorly when he isn't.

If that's true, theories of an emerging Democratic electoral majority may be premature. And we'll be in for more competitive elections that we had anticipated, for years to come.

Update: Harry Enten at FiveThirtyEight discusses the Latino data on Trump vs. Romney here, noting that some left-wing Latino groups are expressing doubt about the accuracy of the exit polls, on the premise that many Latino voters don't respond to English-speaking pollsters. But as Enten notes, that would also have been true in 2012 surveys. Here is a chart Enten compiled of how Clinton and Obama performed in heavily Hispanic counties.

Enten concludes:

The evidence, then, suggests that Clinton fell short among Latinos in one of two ways: Either she didn't win as large a share of them as Obama, or she didn't convince as many of them to turn out to vote. Since both the exit polls and Latino Decisions agree that turnout among Latinos was up, the latter explanation doesn't seem likely.