

Forbes

Who Were Donald Trump's Voters? Now We Know

Karlyn Bowman

June 23, 2017

In 2016, the Democracy Fund, a Washington, DC-based foundation, gathered a group of nearly two dozen academics and polling practitioners with diverse political points of view to take a deeper look at important currents in the 2016 election. The ongoing project included a large original survey with many questions about political beliefs, economic and social concerns, as well as basic demographic information. Many people in the sample were first interviewed in 2012, permitting a unique kind of analysis of the 2016 vote. The first four papers from the project, of which I am a part, have just been released. One paper, "[The Five Types of Trump Voters](#)," by the impressive young research fellow at the CATO Institute Dr. Emily Ekins dispels the notion of Trump voters as a monolithic bloc. "Far from there being only one type of Trump voter, there were five unique clusters of them," she says.

Ekins's analysis identified **Staunch Conservatives** as the largest cluster of Trump supporters at 31 percent. They are loyal Republicans, solid fiscal conservatives, have traditional values, and are politically aware. They worry about legal and illegal immigration. They are a little older, more likely to be male than female, and have higher socio-economic status than some of the other groups. They are the group most likely to be NRA members.

Free Marketeers, at 25 percent, are, as their name suggests, confident in market forces. They are free traders, favor smaller government, and have moderate-to-liberal views on immigration and race. Their vote was a vote *against* Clinton and they are loyal GOP-ers (although they have doubts about Trump). They are largely male, middle-aged, most likely to come from the Midwest. They have more formal education than other clusters and higher incomes. Their views on immigration were more liberal than other Trump groups.

American Preservationists (a 20 percent cluster) are the core group that propelled Trump to the nomination. Nearly nine in ten of these voters described their vote as a vote *for* Trump, and more than three-quarters (77 percent) had a *very* favorable opinion of him. The Preservationists have lower levels of formal education and lower incomes than other Trump groups. They favor higher taxes on the rich, back the social safety net, believe the economic and political systems are rigged, and are skeptical of free trade. They are very skeptical about immigration. They vote for both Democrats and Republicans and look like Democrats on many economic issues.

Anti-Elites (19 percent) lean to the progressive end of the economic spectrum and believe the economic and political systems are rigged. Their views on immigration, race, and American

identity are relatively moderate compared to other groups. Nearly half had favorable opinions of Clinton in 2012, but they moved sharply against her in 2016. They are slightly younger than the other Trump groups.

The final Trump group, **The Disengaged**, were 5 percent of his voters. They don't follow politics, they are distant from institutions and are skeptical of immigration. They support a temporary Muslim travel ban. They are younger and are more female than male.

There is some overlap in the groups. As one might expect, Staunch Conservatives and Free Marketeers look like one another on economic issues. American Preservationists are out of step with these two groups on economic issues, but they overlap with Staunch Conservatives on matters of identity. Anti-Elites and Free Marketeers have similar views on a number of issues including immigration.

To give a sense of the diversity of the views of these Trump clusters, take the issue of raising taxes on families with \$200,000 or more in income. Seventy-five percent of the Preservationists and 68 percent of the Anti-Elites favor the idea compared to 12 percent of Staunch Conservatives and 7 percent of Free Marketeers. Thirty-four percent of the Disengaged group gave this response.

Or take immigration. Nearly three-quarters of the Preservationists say it should be much harder for foreigners to immigrate legally as do a bare majority (52 percent) of Staunch Conservatives. Only 10 percent of Free Marketeers gave that response. About a quarter of the Anti-Elites and Disengaged do. On the temporary Muslim ban, Preservationists and Staunch Conservatives are much more likely to strongly favor it than are any of the other groups. Eighty-six percent of Preservationists and 72 percent of Staunch Conservatives say being born in America makes one truly American. Fifty-eight percent of Anti-Elites give that response. Less than four in ten Free Marketeers do.

Given the unique nature of the Democracy Fund survey, Ekins was able to look at movement on issues among people who became Trump's supporters. Solid majorities of Staunch Conservatives and Free Marketeers favor increasing trade, for example, but they were less enthusiastic in 2016 than they were in the 2012 campaign.

This sampling of the complex and contradictory attitudes Trump supporters brought to the voting booth makes it clear that his supporters were far from homogenous. Ekins's careful dissection provides a rich portrait of the Trump coalition. Her findings and the ones from three other initial papers from the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group Project provide much new information on Election 2016. The project continues with another survey in the field in the fall.