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ELECTION 2016

WE SHOULD resist the temptation to over-interpret Trump's election victory. Progressives who think they've woken up in another country should calm down, take a stiff draught and reflect on the actual results from the swing states. First, with the exceptions of Iowa and Ohio, there were no Trump landslides in key states. He merely did as well as Mitt Romney had in 2012, compensating for smaller votes in the suburbs with larger votes in rural areas to achieve the same overall result. His combined margin of victory in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania was razor thin, under 78,000 votes. The surprise of the election was not a huge white working-stiff shift to Trump but rather his success in retaining the loyalty of Romney voters, and indeed even slightly improving on the latter's performance amongst evangelicals. Thus economic populism and nativism potently combined with, but did not displace, the traditional social conservative agenda.

A key factor was Trump's cynical covenant with religious conservatives after their own candidate in the primaries, Ted Cruz, dropped out in May. He gave them a free hand to draft the party platform at the Convention and then married one of their popular heroes, Mike Pence of Indiana, a nominal Catholic who attends an evangelical megachurch. At stake, of course, was control of the Supreme Court and a final chance to reverse *Roe vs Wade*. This may explain why Clinton, who unlike Obama allowed herself to be identified with late-term abortions, underperformed him amongst Latina/Latino Catholics by a margin of 8 points or more.

The defection of white working-class Obama voters to Trump was a decisive factor mainly in a lakeshore rim of industrial counties in Ohio and Pennsylvania—Ashtabula, Lorain, Erie and so on—which are experiencing a new wave of job flight to Mexico and the Southern states. This region is the epicentre of the revolt against globalization. In other depressed areas—the coal counties of southeastern Ohio, the former anthracite belt of eastern Pennsylvania, the Kanawha Valley of West Virginia, the piedmont textile and furniture towns of the Carolinas, Appalachia in general—the pro-Republican blue-collar realignment in presidential politics (but not necessarily in local or state politics) was already the status quo.

The mass media has tended to conflate these older and newer strata of ‘lost Democrats’, thus magnifying Trump’s achievement. A fifth of Trump voters—that is to say, approximately 12 million Americans—reported an unfavourable attitude toward him. No wonder the polls got it so wrong. ‘There is no precedent’, wrote the *Washington Post*, ‘for a candidate winning the presidency with fewer voters viewing him favourably, or looking forward to his administration, than the loser.’ It will be interesting to see if a disaggregation of this segment of the Trump vote is possible.

Losing the Midwest

Even the Cato Institute seems to believe that the election must be interpreted as Clinton’s loss, not Trump’s win. She failed to come close to Obama’s 2012 performance in key Midwestern and Florida counties. Despite his strenuous last-minute efforts, Obama could not transfer his popularity (higher by 2016 than Reagan’s in 1988) to his old opponent. The same went for Sanders. A crucial cohort of college-educated white Republican women appeared to have rallied to Trump in the last week of the campaign. This has been attributed by several commentators, including Clinton herself, to the FBI’s surprise intervention and renewed scepticism about her honesty. Disgust at Trump, moreover, was counterbalanced by disgust at Bill Clinton and Anthony Weiner. As a result, Clinton made only modest gains, sometimes none at all, in the crucial red suburbs of Milwaukee, Philadelphia and so on. Flush with funds, her campaign compounded a disastrous strategy. She failed to visit Wisconsin after the Convention, despite warnings that Scott Walker’s fired-up followers were fully enlisted behind Trump. Likewise

she disdained Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's advice that she set up a 'rural council' such as had served Obama so well in his Midwestern primary and presidential campaigns. In 2012, he managed to add 46 per cent of the small-town vote to his urban majority in Michigan and 41 per cent in Wisconsin. Her desultory results were 38 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively.

Although the findings are controversial, the Edison/*New York Times* exit polls indicated that, relative to Romney in 2012, Trump achieved only the slightest improvement amongst whites, perhaps just one per cent, but 'bested him by 7 points among blacks, 8 points among Latinos and 11 points among Asian Americans'. Whether or not that was actually the case, the lower black turnout in Milwaukee, Detroit and Philadelphia alone would explain most of Clinton's defeat in the Midwest, as would the lack of enthusiasm amongst millennials in Wisconsin—where Jill Stein's vote was larger than Trump's margin of victory. In south Florida a massive effort improved the Democratic vote, but was offset by reduced turnout (largely black voters) in the Tallahassee, Gainesville and Tampa areas. Voter suppression undoubtedly played a role: Louisiana, Alabama, Texas and Arizona all reduced the number of voting locations. There is also evidence that discriminatory voter ID requirements—the jewel in the crown of Scott Walker's counter-revolution—significantly depressed the vote in low-income precincts of Milwaukee.

David Axelrod claimed that it took only a week for the Republicans to fully 'capture' Trump after 8 November. Perhaps. Certainly, Trump will attempt to honour his commitment to the Christians and give them the Supreme Court. Likewise Peabody, Arch and the other coal companies will get new permits to destroy the Earth, immigrants will be sacrificed to the lions, and Pennsylvania will be blessed with a right-to-work law. And, of course, tax cuts. But on social security, Medicare, deficit spending on infrastructure, tariffs, technology and so on, it's almost impossible to imagine a perfect marriage between Trump and the institutional Republicans that doesn't orphan his working-class supporters. This points to the real shift in American politics: the Sanders campaign. The downward economic mobility of graduates, especially from working-class and immigrant backgrounds, is the major emergent social reality, not the plight of the Rustbelt—even recognizing the momentum given to economic nationalism by the loss of five million industrial jobs over the last decade, more than half of them in the South. But Trumpism,

however it evolves, cannot unify millennial economic distress with that of older white workers, while Sanders showed that heartland discontent can be brought under the umbrella of a 'democratic socialism' that reignites New Deal hopes for fundamental economic rights. With the Democratic establishment in temporary disarray, the real opportunity for transformational political change ('critical realignment', in a now archaic vocabulary) belongs to Sanders and Warren.