

THE UNITED STATES IS NOT VERY UNITED

By

Grant G. Murray

Donald J. Trump, on his journey to be elected President of the United States, tossed many very large grenades into the political fabric of his country. He exposed to the whole world how deeply Americans are divided on so many issues... issues where considerable unity and a high degree of common purpose among the electorate is crucial for the smooth functioning of a modern democracy.

The results of the Presidential election have confirmed how badly the country is divided. In many cases, the opposing views are rather evenly split. In other cases, the results are very lopsided in favour of one view or the other.

While collecting and analyzing the election data for this paper, I also became increasingly concerned that the current model of American democracy is at great risk and that all of us should be very worried even those of us who live beyond the U.S. borders.

But let me begin with an analysis of some of the many divisions currently plaguing the United States before turning to the future.

The following is a list of many of the most obvious demographic differences and other issues where division in the electorate is rampant and not just between staunch Republicans and staunch Democrats but among other major stakeholders in American society.

- White people vs. people of other colours and races
- Rural voters vs. urban voters.
- Men voters vs. women voters
- Millennial voters vs. Gen X voters
- Liberals vs. conservatives

- Religion vs. pragmatism
- Less educated voters vs. more educated voters
- Citizenship vs. immigration
- Free traders vs. protectionists

While the analysis of the November 8th election is still ongoing, there is already sufficient data to draw conclusions on the impact of many of these issues on voting patterns and, hence, the electoral results. Much of the data has been gathered at the exit polls and is, therefore, subject to some further analysis. It should also be noted that the percentages do not always add to 100% due to non-responses to some of the questions.

White people vs. people of other colours and races

It is well known, of course, that there are major political and cultural differences between the white population and people of other colours and races. It was anticipated by many people that because of the shift in the demographics since the last election, this latter group could come together in some kind of an informal voting bloc that would overcome the dominance of the white electorate. This did not come to pass. White voters continued to dominate. Also, unexpectedly the voter turnout by the other groups, particularly African-Americans, was way below expectations. This has been attributed to voter suppression and also Clinton's failure to address their concerns or to offer new programs or other measures to address their concerns. In any event, this drop off benefited the white population and gave it proportionately more clout.

That being said, the total vote was also low. It is expected to be about 50% of the eligible electorate. That compares to 53.6% in 2012 which has been the historical average for many previous elections.

70% of the total vote was by white voters. Of this number, Trump had 58% and Clinton had 37%. The breakdown of the 30% non-whites was 21% for Trump vs. 74% for Clinton.

So, Trump attracted significantly more white voters than Clinton. However, Clinton attracted more than a third of the white voters. She also had three-quarters of the non-white voters. This shows there is a considerable difference based on race. It also shows there is still a significant bloc of white voters in each camp and each party will have to

continue to cater to their needs in any future campaign and this could cause further division across party lines. As well, the Clinton crowd will not only have to work harder to keep the non-white voters in their camp but, more importantly, to get them to the polling booths.

Looking ahead, there is another potentially major factor at play. If Trump puts the lid on future immigration as he has promised to do, the ratio of whites to others could remain more or less the same. It could even increase the ratio of whites. If this happens, the non-whites could feel even more disenfranchised and if they continue to reside on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, this could spell trouble for the white majority. For instance, they could become motivated to create a political bloc of their own.

Rural voters vs. urban voters.

In this election, the gulf between rural voters and the urban voters was very much wider than anyone expected and this split had a major impact on the outcome. And, it should be kept in mind, that in 2014, 81% of the population lived in the cities and suburbs. The migration from the farms to the cities is predicted to continue which means the discrepancy could be even greater by the time of the next election. Some post-election polling in the farm belt shows there was a strong feeling rural folk were being ignored and too much emphasis was being placed on minorities in the urban centers. This view could lead to further feelings of disenfranchisement in the rural communities as they become a minority themselves.

By far the majority of observers agree that Trump won the election because of the rural vote and, since the election, much has been written about this major divide. However, to this point, there is no aggregate data to measure the exact impact but there are 3 states where the results clearly portray that the divide did impact the outcome.

In Michigan, Trump won the election by 13,107 votes. In the Michigan cities, Clinton won 230,000 votes more than Trump. But in rural areas and small towns, Trump won 240,000 more votes than Clinton, enough to carry the State. This is the first time the Republicans have won Michigan since 1988.

In Wisconsin, Trump won by 27,257 votes and even though Clinton outpolled Trump by more than 125,000 votes in the cities, Trump won the State. This is the first time the Republicans have won Wisconsin since 1984.

In Pennsylvania, Trump won by 68,236 votes even though Clinton beat him by more than 215,000 votes in the cities.

As I said, forecasts make it clear that the shift from the farms to the cities is going to continue. As rural voters see themselves becoming a minority and watch their influence diminish, they could very easily decide to organize their own political party and, if they chose to do so, they could wield considerable clout. As we know, when organized, they already have considerable clout on agriculture policies and on trade matters.

As a Canadian, who can forget the United Farmers of Canada which was a political party from 1926 to 1949? And, in 1932, another western Canada political party supported by the agricultural community and known as the CCF was formed. In 1961, it changed its name to the National Democratic Party, and is popularly known today as the NDP. So, it can happen.

Men voters vs. women voters.

It was widely expected that given Trump's rants and his behaviour, women would support Clinton in droves. It did not work out that way.

White women comprised 37% of the electorate. Surprisingly, of this group, 53% voted for Trump and only 43% voted for Clinton.

It should also be mentioned that Latino voters made up 11% of the electorate. In this grouping, only 62% of the men and 68% of the women voted for Clinton. That means that about one-third of the Latino voters supported Trump which is many more than predicted.

Once again, these results show that women and Latino voters are deeply divided, and much more so than anticipated. These results also suggest that today a number of factors are involved in the voters' decisions and that the outcome is no longer played out primarily along party lines. Quite often voters become caught up in other causes which take precedence over party loyalty even if it means crossing party lines.

Millennials vs. Gen Xers

It was anticipated that, on the assumption Millennials represented a higher percentage of the population this time, they would play a more pivotal role in the election and this would help Clinton. Not so.

In the 18 to 29 age group, which represented 19% of the electorate, 55% voted for Clinton and 37% voted for Trump. In the 30 to 44 age group, which represented 25% of the electorate, 50% voted for Clinton and 42% voted for Trump.

Both in terms of the demographics and the percent of votes, these results were not very different from the results in the 2012 election. In that election, the 18 to 29 age group, which also represented 19% of the electorate, 60% voted for Obama and 37% voted for Romney. In the 30 to 44 age group, which represented 27% of the electorate, 52% voted for Obama and 45% voted for Romney. So, despite the expectations, the Millennials did not vote overwhelmingly for one candidate or the other but, nevertheless, remained divided, often quite deeply.

The question becomes....what will happen in the next election because there is a general belief that Millennials will demographically become a larger segment of the population?

In my view, this is not a certainty. North American birth rates have continued to decline for some time, and even in the short term, there will be proportionately fewer young people. So, sooner rather than later, the balance could well shift to older people who, of course, have very different views on many things. Further, if Trump clamps down on immigration, this will have a very dramatic effect on the country's demographics. For instance, younger immigrants of military or near military age will not be very welcome because in Trump's world they will be perceived as terrorist threats. Also, as other countries develop, there will be opportunities in those countries to keep young people at home.

If this is the case, the demographics for Millennials could change and their influence, unless they take action, could even decline.

Liberals vs, conservatives

These labels no longer have the same meanings they traditionally had and, in my view, are now virtually meaningless and, worse, misleading.

Today, a “conservative” can be anybody from a moderate progressive, to an adherent of the Tea Party, to a devotee of the Alt.right movement. A “liberal” can be anyone from a fiscal conservative to a socialist.

Under the cloak of the Republican banner, Trump at times claimed to be a conservative but he is anything but. I doubt that he has read the Republican Party’s platform or would understand it if he did. Cruz is a strong supporter of the Tea Party but has been trying to keep that under wraps these days. Steve Bannon is the flag bearer for the Alt.right and a self-proclaimed white supremacist. All these people continue to portray themselves as good old fashioned conservatives which is certainly a misnomer. Bernie Sanders portrays himself as a liberal under the Democratic banner but he is a socialist through and through.

Another thing happened in the campaign. The candidates largely avoided the terms liberal and conservative to describe themselves. They also avoided the terms Democrat or Republican.

Instead, they adopted an approach to promote themselves not their party. In other words, their own name became their brand. You may have noticed that most of the TV ads featured the candidate and his or her name only. There was seldom any mention of the party unless the ad was being aired by the party itself. In this way, the candidates hoped to avoid being associated with their party or their leaders or with any other political labels for that matter.

I’m not sure this worked to the extent they hoped it would. To the contrary, it probably left the poor voter more confused than ever. Beyond confusing the voters, I doubt it is an issue weighing heavily on voters’ minds but it does open the door for voting blocs void of any identity or affiliation with the old line parties.

Less educated voters vs. more educated voters

There are a number of results that try to slice and dice this category of voters. The following numbers provide one overview.

College grads in total voted 52% for Clinton vs. 43% for Trump. Voters without college degrees voted 44% for Clinton and 52% for Trump.

White college grads voted 45% for Clinton and 49% voted for Trump so the difference was not that great. But, when it came to white voters without a college degree, the difference was substantial i.e. 28% for Clinton and 67% for Trump.

When it came to non- white voters, the differential was very significant for both voters with a college degree and voters who did not have a college degree. For non-white voters with a college degree, 71% voted for Clinton and only 23% for Trump. For non-white voters without a college degree, 75% voted for Clinton and just 20% for Trump.

When it comes to women, white women with a college degree voted 51% for Clinton and 45% for Trump. White women without a college degree, voted 34% for Clinton and 62% voted for Trump.

Based on these results, which I know can be confusing, it is difficult to draw very many general conclusions save that non-white voters, whether with a college degree or without a college degree, voted overwhelmingly for Clinton. Her problem was that enough of them did not turn out to vote.

Religion vs. pragmatism

The exit polls produced very little information about the role of religion in the election or how divisive it was across the electorate. However, the exit polls did produce the following data about one religious segment which was very informative.

According to the poll, 26% of the electorate identified themselves with the born again and evangelical Christian religious faiths and this was a not insignificant percentage of the total electorate. In this segment, 16% voted for Clinton and 81% for Trump. It is surprising, given

Trump's moral shortcomings during the campaign, that he would enjoy this much support compared to Clinton. One can only conclude that the voters decided Trump's transgressions were considerably less serious than Clinton's transgressions. Also, given the fervor of these religions, it is surprising that so many of the faithful were even prepared to forgive and forget.

Citizenship and immigration

As we know, the moment Trump threw his hat into the ring, the issue of immigration became the centerpiece of his campaign and dominated the discussions and debates until election day.

This issue is so complex and there are such a variety of models on the table that it almost impossible to find many meaningful aggregate statistics. Moreover, the information coming from the 2016 election exit polls is very scant. However, the few numbers that are available confirm that the Americans remain very divided on 2 issues.

On the question of legal status for immigrants, 70% of the electorate favour granting legal status to immigrants. Of this number, 60% are Clinton supporters and 34% support Trump. However, the differential is very different among the remaining 30% who want immigrants deported to their home countries. Here, only 14% of Clinton supporters favour this approach whereas 84% of Trump are in support. Unfortunately, the results do not make any distinction among documented immigrants, undocumented immigrants or immigrants who have committed a criminal offence.

On the question of the wall between Mexico and the U.S., 40% support it and 54% oppose it. For supporters of the wall, only 10% are Clinton supporters whereas 80% are Trump. For opponents of the wall, 76% are Clinton supporters and 17% are Trump supporters.

Free traders vs. protectionists

This debate was another hot button issue during the campaign. Certainly, most voters understood there were winners and losers but it was also a very complex issue for individual voters to understand. As is the case with so many of these very complex issues, voter literacy was a major problem. To sell your point of view, it is very difficult to come up with sound bites that are educational as opposed to inflammatory. Therefore, it was almost

impossible to undo the rhetoric of the protectionists especially when two of the presidential candidates weighed in on the protectionist side. Eventually, because of the campaign rhetoric, most voters concluded there were more losers than winners because of free trade agreements.

So far, the data coming from the exit polls is very limited. The only major finding related to jobs.

The exit polls found that 38% of the electorate believed the trade agreements created jobs, 42% felt they took away jobs and 11% said they had no effect on jobs. In the first group, 59% were Clinton supporters and 35% Trump supporters. In the second group, 31% of Clinton supporters believe the agreements took jobs away but a much greater number of Trump supporters, namely 65%, believed this to be the case.

There are several recent opinion polls, not related to the election results, which provide some additional perspective on this controversial issue. As you might expect, there were literally hundreds of polls conducted over the past several months, some credible and some not so much, and, if one searches long enough, you can find a poll which supports your personal point of view. Also, some polls only skim over the surface and can be misleading. For instance, a couple of polls found that people were very supportive of free trade but when asked were very opposed to the free trade agreements and that skewed the findings.

But some of the credible recent polls do present an overview of the voters' thinking.

In general, they show that the American electorate continues to strongly support free trade. In September, 2016, well along in the campaign, the NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll found that 55% of the electorate felt free trade was good for the country and 38% felt it was bad. Another recent credible poll (The Chicago Council On Public Affairs) found in September, 2016 that 65% favour free trade and 34% do not. Although Americans still favour the Trans Pacific Trade deal, support is 60%, down from 64% a year ago.

Finally, polls show that in the past 10 years, support for free trade among Democrats has increased while support from Republicans has declined. This seems odd since, up until this election, the Republican platform has always been strongly in favour of free trade.

So, on this very important issue, the U.S. electorate is not only divided but I suggest very confused.

In summary, as I said at the beginning of this paper, the U.S. electorate is badly divided on a great number of important issues. As well, the American political system has become very fractured.

After digesting the flood of data and opinion coming out in the aftermath of the 2016 election, it is my view that one fundamental pillar of the U.S. democratic model is very much at risk. I believe that the shelf life of the two party system has become very much shorter as one fallout of this unfortunate election. Let me explain.

There is general agreement that prior to the next election, both the Republican Party and the Democratic party must make significant changes within their own parties and must also support meaningful changes to the electoral system. During this process, all the dirty laundry and the divisions in the party will be brought to light. Given the number of issues and the rifts within the membership it is most unlikely, that either party can build a tent large enough to accommodate and resolve all these issues to the satisfaction of all members.

Already, there are a number of party leaders who profess to be loyal to their party but have their own agendas. As I said, many are also shying away from flouting any party affiliation at all and building their brand in their own name. This is a trend which can lead to voting blocs loyal to an individual candidate.

Currently, there are well-known voting blocs which could become formidable political parties organized around particular issues. The Libertarians could recruit more effective leaders and become a stronger player. The Green party could mobilize the increasing number of Americans who want stronger action against climate warming. The Tea Party could find new life under the leadership of someone like Ted Cruz. The Alt.right movement could morph into a political party and give a powerful voice to the far right. The supporters of Bernie Sanders who feel they were betrayed by the hierarchy of the Democratic party and who also believe Clinton cost them the election, could break away from the mother ship and organize a political party. The millennials could feel they have lost their voice and choose to organize. The farmers, like the farmers in western Canada, who feel they have become disenfranchised by city folk, could organize their own party. And, the list goes on.

It must also be remembered that in a world with pervasive communications, intrusive social media and new techniques such as crowd funding, it is certainly much easier to organize motivated people.

Such an outcome would be both traumatic and chaotic. The U.S. Constitution is not designed to function within a pluralistic form of government and there are very many impediments to the implementation of a multiparty system. How would the country elect a President? How could the Electoral College function? How could the process to appoint Supreme Court judges work? How would the system be able to accommodate coalitions? How would the Government ratify international treaties?

These problems are just the tip of the iceberg.

Clearly, this situation, if it should happen, would not fully develop overnight. However, if one of the major players becomes a political force and starts the ball rolling, it could unfold rather quickly and there could be a rush to get on the band wagon early in the new game.

I may be too pessimistic. But one thing is sure. If you live in the United States, you better fasten your seat belt very tightly because there is a very rough road ahead.