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USA

Class, Race, and Gender in the 2024 elections

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Kamala Harris' loss to Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential elections was due in large part to declining support for the Democratic candidate from union members, African Americans, and Latino/a s suggesting a decline in class consciousness, working class solidarity, and the strengthening of masculinist and white racial identities. These are shocking not only because of Trump's hostility to unions, working class problems, and his overt racism and sexism, but because these groups have long been part of the Democratic party voting bloc.

Elections of course can only imperfectly gauge political opinions and social identities, and in the US even more so. With its two main parties controlled by corporate interests, the US is the only global north country without some sort of mass labor, socialist or communist party with links to unions. This means that elections reflect class patterns even less clearly than they may in multiparty parliamentary systems.

And voters of all classes, genders, and races vote for different reasons. Multiple social identities often compete for a vote. Does one for example, vote Republican as a Catholic opposed to abortion, a worker perceiving that the Democrats better represent their interest, or as a person of color for the Democrats, as most racialized minorities have done for decades? More basically, the two-party structure of the system means that incumbents of either party pay for, while the challenger benefits by unpopular issues like high prices, as was the case in these elections. It would take nuanced qualitative studies to have an accurate sense of exactly why voters from groups who have not traditionally Republican would vote for Trump. But these caveats aside, some raw demographic voting data suggest some notable trends.

Dissolution of the Democratic Party coalition

Clearly, we are witnessing the further deterioration of what is left of the grand Democratic Party coalition of labor and African Americans put together by FDR in the 1930s. Since the 1930s, a rough pattern linked working class voters, most unions, African Americans, and ethnic whites to the Democratic party as part of Roosevelt's New Deal coalition, while the Republican party was seen as the party of business, the wealthy, and small towns and rural areas. The coalition lasted for decades in spite of the little that unions, the working class, and African Americans and other racial minorities received from the Democratic Party in return for their electoral support. The New Deal coalition began to fray in the 1970s with white workers abandoning the DP in favor of the Republican party. The 2024 elections reflected a sharp acceleration to that process.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find a coherent pattern along class lines in recent US elections. Shifts in consciousness and voting behaviors do not of course occur in a vacuum. The steady, decades-long abandonment of a sector of the working class of all races and genders to the Republican party has been fueled by the DP's embrace of neo-liberal austerity and failure to offer solutions to working class aspirations.

There is evidence that perceived race and gender identities eclipsed class considerations among sectors of the working class and racialized communities. To the degree that voting for the Democrats has represented a distorted type of class consciousness, and Trump is heavily associated with the wealthy employing class, working class votes for Trump represent a stunning decline of class consciousness. Most unions remain in the Democratic party camp and officially endorsed Harris in the 2024 presidential elections. So, not only did working class people in general vote for an overtly anti-union figure closely associated with the capitalist class, but many of the ten percent of the workforce that is unionized did so, in most cases, against the official position of their unions. The vitriolic attacks on

immigrants by Trump and Vance, often with a heavy racist tone found an echo among sectors of the working class and oppressed groups susceptible to scape-goating. To this we could add, susceptibility to protectionist impulses around fears of "foreign competition", and more generally the corrosive effect on social consciousness that emerges from sustained neoliberal attacks on social services which have stoked the accentuation of competing social identities such as race/ethnicity, and gender in ways that contradict, rather than emphasize social solidarity. Clearly, all of these played a role.

Gender and Race in the Age of Trump

African Americans have been a particularly loyal part of the DP coalition for decades. Well over 90% of Black voters have voted DP until recently. In the 2024 elections however, a full 24% of Black men voted for Trump (while 9% of Black women did). Black men voted less for Harris in 2024, than for Biden in 2020. This was decisive in Harris' defeat in urban areas in battleground states in the 2024 elections that have been traditionally heavily Democratic like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Similarly, around forty percent of Latinos/as/x voted for Trump, (up from the 30-33% who voted for Republican George W. Bush in 2004), including an astounding 47% of Latino men who voted for Trump in 2024. Trump's reactionary instincts led him to connect with "Bro culture", a celebration of sexist male attitudes. This message resonates with men across racial and class groups, but evidence has indicated that it is particularly strong in communities of color.

This can be seen in part as a reflection of the decline of feminist consciousness in general. Following victories in the 1970s, the women's movement pivoted from mass action to legislative, electoral activity, which eventually eroded first the power of the women's movement and eventually feminist consciousness. It is very likely that in the 2024 elections, some men who may have voted for a male Democrat, voted for Trump or didn't vote at all, rather than voting for a woman, even though she was a Democrat. Sexist attitudes among some men of all racial and class groups therefore certainly played some roles in both Hillary Clinton's defeat in 2016 and Kamala Harris' in 2024-the only two women who have ever been presidential candidates for major parties.

The Dead End of Racist and Sexist Populism

Trump finds much of his support among conservative upper-class layers and working-class voters without college education. But of course, his government can only serve one class and there is no doubt that that class is the 1%. His racist, anti-immigrant populism will only divert attention from the real problems facing the masses of people in the US today for so long.

When his policies of tax cuts and tariffs, and scapegoating of immigrants and transgender people fail to solve the pressing material problems of working people-including high prices and stagnant wages, while the rich receive more tax cuts, his support will erode. The same neo-liberal attacks on working class standards of living that have helped to fracture working class consciousness, unity, and solidarity will stimulate struggles that will involve working class unity in action and the rebuilding of solidaristic impulses.

The lack of a mass labor or socialist party has meant that the steady stream of racist, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric coming from the MAGA right and amplified by Trump's allies Musk and Zuckerberg through their control of Facebook and Twitter is not effectively answered. A mass labor or socialist party would offer an alternative to their racism, sexism, and white nationalism, and the neoliberal austerity of both the Democrats and Republicans, and in doing so reinvigorate class consciousness, and solidarity across race and gender lines.

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The building of that party remains central to any real possibility of progressive social change in an age of looming climate disaster, threats to basic democratic rights, and any gains workers and the oppressed have registered in the past. In his first days in office, Trump issued as promised, a flurry of decrees aimed against immigrants LGBTQI+ people, and DEI initiatives which will remove protections from discrimination against racialized minorities, LGBTQI+ people, women, and handicapped people and abolish worker and environmental safety controls. Anti-union decrees will certainly follow shortly. The labor, women's, immigrant rights, Black, and environmental movements will need to draw on its best traditions of militant mass struggle and solidarity to confront Trump and an employer class encouraged by his anti-regulatory, anti-union policies.

PS:

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