

# US election 2016: It's not about racism or sexism, it's about class warfare

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It's the unmitigated disbelief that's telling. Even as the rise of Trumpism broke every barrier that was meant to stop it, no one outside the Fox News bubble thought it could break the final barrier. Not the pollsters, not the pundits, not even Trump's own aides. And certainly not casual observers who just assumed you couldn't attract Ku Klux Klan endorsements, boast about sexually assaulting women, and pledge to build a wall to keep out Mexicans who are "criminals, drug dealers, rapists, etc", and still become the president of the US.

Now glance at the stats saturating American television. Trump did better with black voters than Mitt Romney did in 2012; better with Latinos, too. In the end, he won the vote of white women handily, despite the parade of them who came out in recent months to accuse him of violating them. And that, right there, is the reason for the disbelief. Trump was so repugnant because he violated our sense of identity politics.

In the end Trumpism cannot be reduced to simple, crude identity politics. There's no doubt it's there, just ask all the white supremacists who championed him. And it will almost certainly inspire a truly awful wave of ugliness against women and minorities around the world. But the truth is that crude prejudice is not nearly enough to win an election. Not this one, anyway. And, that's not how many of Trump's voters see him.

Exit polls during the election show 70 per cent of voters were bothered by Trump's alleged treatment of women. The same amount wanted to see illegal immigrants given a path to legal status. Only a quarter wanted to see them deported. Most of them (80 per cent) voted for Trump, but it's not how Trump won. It turns out Trump's vulgarity, his barely unvarnished racism and sexism was, if not a distraction, then highly distracting. Strip them away and you're left with a campaign that would be more at home in the Democrats.

Suspicious of free trade, disparaging of corporate behemoths, preaching that big money is screwing the little guy, thoroughly anti-globalisation. And it's this message that has made a Trump administration possible. Clinton didn't even visit Wisconsin after she won the nomination. She wouldn't even have considered she could lose Michigan until the past fortnight. Pennsylvania? That, too, was part of Clinton's "blue wall" that was meant to give Trump nowhere to go. Trump smashed through it. And he did it with a politics of class.

For some 30 years, that's been heresy. Especially since the end of the Cold War, ours has been a politics of identity, of liberation. Consider the milestones of social progress in the past 50 years: the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, feminism, the digital revolution. All these changes have been momentous. Several of them inspiring and utterly necessary. But none of them has benefited working class whites who have seen no expansion of their rights and no appreciable economic payoff, either. What they've seen is the empowerment of everyone else, including other white people. But they've had no story to tell of their own because contemporary politics gives them no way of telling it. Class went out with Marxism, so if you didn't have a big tech idea to sell or an identity politics to assert, you had nothing to say. You know all those Silicon Valley geniuses working on driverless vehicles and extraordinary robotics that will be able to run entire factories? They're voting Democrat. And they're doing it with plenty of thought for the employers who will add billions in saved labour costs to their profits, and barely any thought at all for the working classes they'll sweep aside.

Something's wrong when a Manhattan billionaire with a record of using illegal immigrant labour and a procession of legal complaints against him for failing to pay his workers becomes the voice of working class America. He can do this because progressives have treated the working class largely as a source of xenophobia, which they are pledged to fight. For years now, classism has been among the last permissible prejudice, which Australians express by routinely lampooning bogans.

. We're watching an epic realignment here. Class is back in politics. We ignore it at our peril. And our almost determined blindness to it is exactly why we're standing here in disbelief now. *[Abridged]*

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