The 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections Revisited: A Research Note on the Exit Polls and Black Voters

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Abstract

This paper examines the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections of the United States of America in relation to the exit polls. It also provides an analysis of the exit polls with special reference to race, ethnicity, sex/gender, college graduates, non-college graduates, and LGBTQ+ status. Additionally, this paper addresses some implications of this research. The research method includes a mixed-methods approach consisting of secondary data analysis method (aka the secondary analysis method) and the case study method. The research technique consists of content analysis of primary and secondary source documents, including reports from CNN, Pew Research Center, and the New York Times based on data from Edison Research. A key finding of this research is that data for the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections were collected by Edison Research and used by CNN, Pew Research Center, and the New York Times. Another key finding of this research is that the data from Edison Research indicate that Black, non-Latino voters were the most progressive of all groups of voters in 2016 and 2020. The data from Edison Research show that Black, non-Latino voters supported Clinton in 2016 and Biden in 2020 at a higher rate than any other demographic group, including White, non-Latino voters; Asian, non-Latino voters; Latino voters; college graduate voters; and LGBTQ+ voters.

Keywords: Race; Ethnicity; Sex; Gender; College Graduates; Non-College Graduates; LGBTQ+ Status; Presidential Elections; Case Study

Abbreviations: USA (United States of America)

Introduction

Exit polls have long been used around the world to provide empirical data on how people voted in elections. As used here, the term exit polls refer to surveys of a small percentage of voters taken after they leave their voting place. Thus, pollsters use this exit poll data to project how all voters or segments of voters sided on a particular race or ballot measure. In the case of the United States of America (USA), the data for national exit polls come from Edison Research. This practice became the norm in 2004[1].

This paper will examine the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections of the USA in relation to the exit polls. It will also provide an analysis of the exit polls with special reference to race, ethnicity, sex/gender, college graduates, non-college graduates, and LGBTQ+ status[2]. Additionally, this paper will address some implications of this research. The research method includes a mixed-methods approach consisting of the secondary data analysis method (aka the secondary analysis method) and the case study method. The research technique consists of content analysis of primary and secondary source documents, including reports from CNN, Pew Research Center, and the *New York Times* based on data from Edison Research[3].

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[1]Edison Research [1] stated that, "Since 2004, The National Election Pool (NEP) and Edison Research have conducted the only national exit polls in the United States. The NEP is the source for projections and analysis for every midterm election, presidential primary and presidential election" (p. 1). Cf. Desilver [2].

[2]Although sex and gender are two different concepts, they have been combined in this paper for the purpose of my analysis. See Theodorson [3] and Jary [4] for sociological discussions of sex, gender, and gender identity. As used in my paper, the acronym LGBTQ+ follows the usage by the United States Census Bureau and refers to self-identified lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transexuals, and queers. See the United States Census Bureau [5].

[3]For a discussion of the research methods and research technique used in this study, see Babbie [6].

Review of the Related Literature

Article 1 Section 2 on the Constitution of the USA mandates that a national census be conducted every 10 years. Since 1790, a national census has been conducted. The most recent census was conducted in 2020. However, the data have still been analyzed by researchers for the Census Bureau. Thus, 2010 is the most recent year wherein complete reports have been released. Reports were released that focused on Black people, White people, Asian people, American Indian and Alaska Native people as racial groups and Latino people as an ethnic group [7].

Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery [8] completed a report titled *The Black Population:* 2010. In their report, Rastogi et al. followed the OMB and related that "Black or African American" refers to people "having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa" (p. 2). They also reported that:

> The Black racial category includes people who marked the "Black, African Am., or Negro" checkbox. It also includes respondents who reported entries such as African American; Sub-Saharan African entries, such as Kenyan and Nigerian; and Afro-Caribbean entries, such as Haitian and Jamaican. (p. 2)

Ratogi et al. found that 42,020,743 reported that they belonged to one race and that race was Black. That figure represented 13.6% of the total population of the USA.

Hixson, Hepler and Kim [9] completed a report titled *The White Population: 2010*. Following the OMB, Hixson et al. stated that "White" refers to people "having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa" (p. 2). Hixson et al. added:

> The White racial category includes people who marked the "White" checkbox. It also includes respondents who reported entries such as Caucasian or White; European entries, such as Irish, German, and Polish; Middle Eastern entries, such as Arab, Lebanese, and Palestinian; and North African entries, such as Algerian, Moroccan having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa." (p. 2)

Hixson et al. reported that 223,000,000 said they belonged to one race and that race was White. As a figure, it represented 73% of the total population in the USA.

Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim, and Shahid [10] completed a report titled *The Asian Population: 2010*. In their report, Hoeffel et al. followed the OMB and related that "Asian" to a people "having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam" (p. 2). They further stated that:

> The Asian population includes people who indicated their race(s) as "Asian" or reported entries such as "Asian Indian," "Chinese," "Filipino," "Korean," "Japanese," and "Vietnamese" or provided other detailed Asian responses. Black people "refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa."

Hoeffel et al. found that 14,674,252 reported that they belonged to one race and that race was Asian. That figure represented 4.8% of the total population of the USA.

Norris, Vines, and Hoeffel [11] completed a report titled The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010. Following the OMB, Norris et al. stated that "American Indian or Alaska Native" refers to people "having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment." Norris et al. also said:

> The American Indian and Alaska Native population includes people who marked the "American Indian or Alaska Native" checkbox or reported entries such as Navajo, Blackfeet, Inupiat, Yup'ik, or Central American Indian groups or South American Indian groups. (p. 2)

Norris et al. reported that 5,220,579 said they belonged to one race and that race was White. As a figure, it represented 1.7% of the total population in the USA.

Hixson, Hepler, and Kim [12] completed a report titled *The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Population: 2010*. In their report, Hixson et al. followed the OMB and related that "*Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander*" refers to people "having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands" (p. 2). They added:

The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population includes people who marked the "Native Hawaiian" checkbox, the "Guamanian or Chamorro" checkbox, the "Samoan" checkbox, or the "Other Pacific Islander" checkbox. It also includes people who reported entries such as Pacific Islander; Polynesian entries, such as Tahitian, Tongan, and Tokelauan; Micronesian entries, such as Marshallese, Palauan, and Chuukese; and Melanesian entries, such as Fijian, Guinean, and Solomon Islander. (p. 2)

Hixson et al. found that 540,013 reported that they belonged to one race and that race was Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. That figure represented 0.2% of the total population of the USA.

Ennis R, Ríos-Vargas, and Nora Albert G [13] completed a report titled *The Hispanic Population: 2010*. Following the OMB, Ennis et al. stated that ""Hispanic or Latino" refers to people "of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (p. 2). Ennis et al. also explained that, "The terms "Hispanic or Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably in this report" (p. 1). They further related that:

OMB requires federal agencies to use a minimum of two ethnicities: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be any race. (pp. 1-2)

Ennis et al. reported that 50,477,594 said they were Hispanic or Latino. As a figure, it represented 16.3% of the total population in the USA. They also noted that 26, 735,713 of the Hispanic or Latino said they belonged to one race and it was White; 1,243,471 said they belonged to one race and it was Black; 685,150 said they belonged to one race and it was American Indian and Alaska Native; 209,108 said they belonged to one race and it was Asian; 58,437 said they belonged to one race and it was Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; 18,503,103 said they belonged to the Some Other Race category; and 3,042,592 said they belonged to the Two or More Races category. According to Ennis et al., the Hispanic or Latino population "predominately identified as either 'white' or 'Some Other Race'"[4] (p. 13).

Definition of Some Key Terms

In this paper, some of the key terms include race; racial group; ethnicity; ethnic group; sex; gender; Black people; White people; Asian people; American Indian and Alaskan Native people; Hawaiian Native and Other Pacific Islander people; Some Other Race category; and the Two or More Races category. Two other key terms used in this paper are LGBTQ people and Latino people. All those terms are social constructions because their definitions can vary from one society to another. Yet another key term used in this study is exit polls.

On the one hand, as used in this paper has followed Harrison [15] and defined race as a social construction based on "biology, physical characteristics, heredity, traits, etc. (p. 1). The terms race and racial group are synonymous in this paper. Every racial group can be divided into ethnic groups based on nationality, language, tribal affiliation, culture, religion, etc. On the other hand, as used in this paper, ethnicity is a social construction based on "a shared cultural identity such as that shared by Cajuns in South Louisiana, and can be accepted or rejected by an individual in the group (p. 1). Harrison has also informed us that, "Sociologists define ethnicity as cultural characteristics that are shared within certain subgroups" (p.1). The terms ethnicity and ethnic groups are synonymous in this paper. Thus, in addition to culture, ethnic groups can be based on culture, nationality, language, tribal affiliation, religion, etc.

In the USA, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has been delegated with the responsibility by Congress to develop the racial and ethnic categories for the purpose of Federal programs and the census. The OMB has mandated that Federal agencies use these racial groups: (1) Black people; (2) White people; (3) Asian people; (4) American Indian and Alaskan Native people; (5) Hawaiian Native and Other Pacific Islander people; (6) Some Other Race category; and (7) Two or More Races category [7].

Edison Research and Its Research Methodology in 2016 and 2020

During November 2016, Edison Research conducted an exit poll for the National Election Pool (NEP). Edison Research used some 3,000 exit poll interviewers, precinct vote return reporters, call center workers, and analysts to collect data on who voted and how they voted. In total, over 100,000 interviews were conducted and processed. The data were used to provide the NEP with information to help formulate projections for viewers and readers [16].

Similarly, in November 2020, Edison Research did an exit poll for the NEP. Once again, Edison Research used its staff to collect data in who voted and how they voted. As was the case in during the previous national election, over 100,000 interviews were conducted and processed. At over 700 voting locations, data were collected via in-person early-voter exit polls and telephone surveys with absentee

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[4]For the 2010 national census, the United States Census Bureau released a complete breakdown of the Latino people by race. A key limitation or gap in the literature is that the United States Census Bureau has not released the same type of full report for the 2020 national census. Cf. Ennis, Rios-Vargas, and Albert [13] and Jones, Marks, Ramirez, and Rios-Vargas [14].

and early voters all around the country. Just like in 2016, the data in 2020 were utilized to provide the NEP with information to help formulate projections for viewers and readers [1].

Black, Non-Latino Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

During 2016, 8% of all Black, non-Latino voters supported Trump, 89% supported Clinton, and 3% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of Black male, non-Latino voters, 13% supported Trump, 82% supported Clinton, and 5% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding Black, non-Latino female voters, 4% supported Trump, 94% supported Clinton, and 2% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In 2020, 12% of all Black, non-Latino voters supported Trump, 87% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates. Regarding Black, non-Latino male voters, 19% supported Trump, 79% supported Biden, and 2% supported other candidates. In terms of Black, non-Latino female voters, 9% supported Trump, 90% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates. Edison Research reported that Black, non-Latino people were 12% of the voters in 2016 and 13% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

White, Non-Latino Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

In 2016, 57% of all White, non-Latino voters supported Trump, 37% supported Clinton, and 6% supported other candidates or gain no answer. Regarding White, non-Latino male voters, 62% supported Trump, 31% supported Clinton, and 7% supported other candidates or gain no response. In terms of White, non-Latino female voters, 52% supported Trump, 43% supported Clinton, and 5% supported other candidates or gave no answer. During 2020, 58% of all White, non-Latino voters supported Trump, 41% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates. In terms of all White, non-Latino male voters, 61% supported Trump, 38% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding White, non-Latino female voters, 55% supported Trump, 44% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates. Edison Research stated that White, non-Latino people were 71% of the voters in 2016 and 67% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

Asian, Non-Latino Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

During 2016, 27% of all Asian, non-Latino voters supported Trump, 65% supported Clinton, and 8% supported other candidates. In terms of Asian male voters, no data were available. Regarding Asian, non-Latino female voters, no data were available. In 2020, 34% of all Asian, non-Latino voters supported Trump, 61% supported Biden, and 5% supported other candidates. Regarding Asian, non-Latino male voters, no data were available. In terms of Asian, non-Latino female voters, no data were available. Edison Research said that Asian, non-Latino people were 4% of the voters in 2016 and 4% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

Latino Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

In 2016, 28% of all Latino voters supported Trump, 66% supported Clinton, and 6% supported other candidates or gave no answer[5]. Regarding Latino male voters, 32% supported Trump, 63% supported Clinton, and 5% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of Latino female voters, 25% supported Trump, 69% supported Clinton, and 6% supported other candidates or gave no answer. During 2020, 32% of all Latino voters supported Trump, 65% supported Biden, and 3% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of all Latino male voters, 36% supported Trump, 59% supported Biden, and 5% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding Latino female voters, 30% supported Trump, 69% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Edison Research related that Latino people were 11% of the voters in 2016 and 13% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

College Graduate Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

During 2016, 42% of all college graduate voters supported Trump, 52% supported Clinton, and 6% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding all White college graduates, 48% supported Trump, 45% supported Clinton, and 7% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of all non-White college graduates, 22% supported Trump, 72% supported Clinton, and 6% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In 2020, 43% of all college graduate voters supported Trump, 55% supported Biden, and 2% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of all White college graduates, 48% supported Trump, 51% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding all non-White college graduates, 27% supported Trump, 70%

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[5]Gramlich [19] reported that a Pew Research Center survey conducted in December 2019 found that, "Only around a quarter of U.S. Hispanics (23%) have heard of the term 'Latinx,' and just 3% say they use it to describe themselves" (p. 1). He explained that, "Among Hispanics aware of the term, 65% say "Latinx" should not be used to describe the nation's Hispanic or Latino population, while 33% say it should" (p. 1). According to Gramlich, "The gender-neutral, pan-ethnic term, which is used to describe the nation's Hispanic population, has gained traction in recent years among some corporations, local governments, universities and news and entertainment outlets" (p. 1).

supported Biden, and 3% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Edison Research reported that college graduate people were 50% of the voters in 2016 and 41% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

Non-College Graduate Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

In 2016, 51% of non-college graduate voters supported Trump, 44% supported Clinton, and 5% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of all White non-college graduate voters, 66% supported Trump, 29% supported Clinton, and 5% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding all non-White non-college graduate voters, 20% supported Trump, 76% supported Clinton, and 4% supported other candidates or gave no answer. During 2020, 50% of all non-college graduate voters supported Trump, 48% supported Biden, and 2% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In terms of all White non-college graduate voters, 67% supported Trump, 32% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Regarding all non-White college graduates, 26% supported Trump, 72% supported Biden, and 2% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Edison Research stated that non-college graduate people were 50% of the voters in 2016 and 59% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

LGBTQ+ Voters in the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

During 2016, 14% of LGBTQ+ voters supported Trump, 77% supported Clinton, and 9% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In contrast, 47% of non-LGBTQ+ voters supported Trump, 47% supported Clinton, and 6% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In 2020, 27% of LGBTQ+ voters supported Trump, 64% supported Biden, and 8% supported other candidates or gave no answer. In comparison, 48% of non-LGBTQ+ voters supported Trump, 51% supported Biden, and 1% supported other candidates or gave no answer. Edison Research said that LGBTQ+ people were 5% of the voters in 2016 and 7% of the voters in 2020 [17,18].

Turnout Rates and the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

The overall turnout rate for the 2016 presidential election was 61%. As for race and ethnicity, the turnout rates were as follows: 65.3% for White, non-Latino voters; 59.6% for Black, non-Latino voters; 49.3% for Asian, non-Latino voters; and 47.6% for Latino voters. The percentages of actual voters by race and ethnicity included the following: 73.7% for White, non-Latino voters; 11.9% for Black, non-Latino voters; 3.6% for Asian, non-Latino voters; and 9.2% for Latino voters[7].

On January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an Executive Order that delayed the release of 2020 presidential election data related to (1) the percentage of actual voters by race and ethnicity, and (2) turnout rates by race and ethnicity. It was titled "Executive Order on Ensuring a Lawful and Accurate Enumeration and Apportionment Pursuant to the Decennial Census." The Edison Research Center and the Pew Research Center announced that the data would be released in the later in 2021. The Pew Research Center also announced that the data would be released later in 2021 by the Census Bureau [24,25,26]. On April 29, 2021, the turnout rates data were released by the Census Bureau. The data were broken down by race and ethnicity. The overall 2020 turnout rate was 66.8% which represented an increase from 61.4% in 2016. In terms of race and ethnicity, the turnout rate was 71% for White, non-Latino voters compared to 65% in 2016; 63% for Black, non-Latino voters compared to 60% in 2016; 59% for Asian, non-Latino voters compared to 49% in 2016; and 54% for Latino voters compared to 48% in 2016. The percentages of actual voters by race and ethnicity included the following: 73.7% for White, non-Latino voters; 11.9% for Black, non-Latino voters; 3.6% for Asian, non-Latino voters; and 9.2% for Latino voters [24,26,27].

Some Implications of This Research on the 2016 and 2020 Presidential Elections

This research has at least two significant consequences. One significant consequence is that it sheds light on the process wherein the data for the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections were collected in relation to the exit polls. This paper provides evidence that the data for both polls were collected by Edison Research. The data was used by CNN, Pew Research Center, and the *New York Times* [1,16].

A second significant consequence is that it sheds light on provides an analysis of the 2016 and 2018 exit polls with special reference to race, ethnicity, college graduates, non-college graduates, and LGBTQ status. The Edison Research exit poll for 2016 shows that Clinton was supported, instead of Trump, by most Black, non-Latino voters; Asian, non-Latino voters; Latino voters; and LGBTQ+ voters. That same 2016 exit poll indicates that Trump was supported, instead of Clinton, by most White, non-Latino voters; White college graduate

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[6]From September 30, 2020 to October 5, 2020, according to Krogstad and Hugo [20], the Pew Research Center conducted a survey of registered Latino voters which found that 63 percent of them were leaning towards Joe Biden and 29% of them were leaning towards Donald Trump. An earlier Pew Research Center survey conducted from July 27, 2020 to August 2, 2020 revealed that 65% of Latino voters identified as Democrats and 32% as Republicans, Krogstad [21] noted. Cf. Krogstad and Hugo [22],

[7]File [23] related that the turnout rates have varied regarding race and ethnicity. According to File, "In 2012, voting rates for non-Hispanic blacks (66.6 percent) were higher than non-Hispanic whites (64.1 percent) for the first time in this series. In 2016, turnout increased to 65.3 percent for non-Hispanic whites, but decreased to 59.6 percent for non-Hispanic blacks" (p. 1). Although the turnout rate for Black, non-Latino voters was not higher than White, non-Latino voters in 2016, it was higher than that of Latino voters and Asian, non-Latino voters. The same was true in 2020, according to the data released by the Census Bureau. See Fabina [24].

voters; and White non-college graduates. As for the Edison Research exit poll for 2020, it shows that Biden was supported, instead of Trump, by most Black, non-Latino voters; Asian, non-Latino voters; Latino voters; college graduate voters; and LGBTQ+ voters. In contrast, the exit polls for 2020 reveal that Trump was supported, instead of Biden, by most White, non-Latino voters and non-college graduate voters. The analysis of the exit polls for both years provides evidence that Black, non-Latino voters were the most progressive of all groups of voters in 2016 and 2020. The data reveal that Black, non-Latino voters supported Clinton in 2016 and Biden in 2020 at a higher rate than any other demographic group, including White, non-Latino voters; Asian, non-Latino voters; Latino voters; college graduate voters; and LGBTQ+ voters [17,18].

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections in relation to the exit polls. It has also provided an analysis of the exit polls with special reference to race, ethnicity, college graduates, and LGBTQ+ status. Additionally, this paper addressed some implications of this research. The research method included a mixed methods approach consisting of the secondary data analysis method (aka the secondary analysis method) and the case study method. The research technique consisted of content analysis of primary and secondary source documents, including reports from CNN, Pew Research Center, and the New York Times based on data from Edison Research.

On the one hand, Donald Trump captured the presidential election in 2016 when he won 304 electoral college votes in comparison to Hillary Clinton's 227. Some four years later, there was a different outcome. Joseph Biden captured the presidential election in 2020 when he won 306 electoral college votes in comparison to Donald Trump's 232. With the help of Black voters as a base, Joseph Biden managed to win the following key swing states in 2020: Georgia (16 electoral votes); Michigan (16 electoral votes); Pennsylvania (20 electoral votes); and Wisconsin (10 electoral votes). Donald Trump managed to win those four swing states in 2016 [24,28,29,30,31,32].

In the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election, a big question confronting Black voters and President Biden was whether he will follow-through on his campaign promises to them. Under pressure from Black voters, Biden, as a candidate, touted a "Lift Every Voice Program for Black America." However, the record shows that after he was sworn in as the president, Biden signed 37 executive orders between January 20, 2021 and March 25, 2021. None of those executive orders addressed or mentioned his Lift Every Voice Program for Black America. Similarly, none of those executive orders focused solely on Black people as was the case with other groups. He also appointed only two Black men to his cabinet, namely Lloyd Austin as the secretary of defense and Michael Regan as the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. This type of behavior may very well have disastrous consequences for the midterm elections in 2022. It is imperative that politicians like Biden keep their campaign promises to Black people or suffer dire consequences, including, but not limited to, a withdrawal of support from a "base" group [33,34].

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