

Study shows massive growth of political abstention in 2016 US election

By Eric London
3 June 2017

A study released Thursday by the Pew Research Center revealed that “dislike of the candidates or campaign issues” was the most frequent motive registered voters gave for not voting in the 2016 election. Twenty five percent of registered voters who abstained listed this as their primary reason, double the figure from 2012.

The growth of opposition to both candidates was ubiquitous across all racial, age and education groups.

Among African-American registered voters, the percentage of those citing dislike of the candidates as the main reason for abstaining rose from 3 percent in 2012 to 19 percent in 2016. Among Hispanics, the figure also grew by 16 percent—from 9 to 25 percent.

This 16 percent jump was the largest among racial groups, but dissatisfaction rose among all races. Among white registered voters who abstained, 26 percent listed dissatisfaction with the candidates as their main reason, up nine points from 15 percent in 2012. The figure also grew among Asian registered voters, by 14 points, from 8 to 21 percent.

Dissatisfaction rose among all age groups. Among millennial registered voters (those born in the 1980s or 1990s), 24 percent said opposition to both candidates was their primary reason for abstaining in 2016, up from 11 percent in 2012. The highest rise in opposition was among Generation X (those born in the 1960s and 1970s), growing from 12 to 27 percent from 2012 to 2016. Opposition grew by about 10 points among older voters as well.

Among US-born registered voters who abstained, 25 percent listed dissatisfaction with both candidates as their primary reason, up from 13 percent in 2012. Among foreign-born registered voters, the figure grew from 8 percent of registered abstainers to 22 percent in 2016.

These figures once again explode the lie, advanced by the Democratic Party, the pseudo-left and the Democratic Party-affiliated media, who claim that Donald Trump won the 2016 election because of the racism of the white working class. In reality, voting statistics demonstrate conclusively that Hillary Clinton lost because of a sharp downturn in turnout for the Democrats among all races, particularly among young people. According to the Pew report, racial minorities made up 34 percent of registered abstainers, up 9 points from 25 percent in 2012.

Clinton herself has attributed to her unexpected loss to supposed interference by the Russian government, combined with white racism and misogyny and the intervention of then-FBI Director James Comey. Speaking Wednesday in California, she again blamed Russia for her electoral defeat and broadly hinted at collusion by the Donald Trump election campaign.

She said: “The Russians in my opinion, and based on the intel and counterintel people I've talked to, could not have known how best to weaponize that information unless they had been guided by Americans and guided by people who had polling and data information.”

She also blamed misogyny among working class voters: “And at some point it sort of bleeds into misogyny. And let's just be honest, you know, people who have a set of expectations about who should be president and what a president looks like, you know, they're going to be much more skeptical and critical of somebody who doesn't look like and talk like and sound like everybody else who's been president.”

While psychologists could keep themselves busy analyzing Clinton's delusions, socialists understand the objective significance of the gap that separates the Democratic Party's own understanding of the election

and reality, which reflects the material chasm separating the ruling class and upper-middle class from the rest of the population.

Clinton did not lose because of unsupported claims of Russian collusion with Trump, but because she appealed only to the most affluent voters, ignoring altogether the concerns of working class voters and denouncing as “deplorables” the less educated, mostly white voters who supported Trump.

The fact that political abstention grew especially among African-American and Hispanic voters shows that Clinton’s campaign strategy—based on appealing to voters on questions of racial and gender identity—turned working class minority and white voters away from the Democratic Party. The orientation to questions of individual identity is aimed primarily at appealing to wealthier voters of all racial categories.

Clinton’s orientation to more affluent voters produced a dramatic shift in the landscape of American two-party politics in 2016. According to data from the American National Election Survey (ANES), the Democratic Party won a majority of votes from the wealthiest 5 percent of the white population for the first time since ANES began collecting data in 1948. Not only did the Clinton campaign win amongst the wealthiest 5 percent of whites, she won by an overwhelming margin, slightly greater than 10 percent. The Democrats won by wide margins among wealthier sections of all racial groups.

On the other side, the poorest two-thirds of white voters supported the Republican candidate, also for the first time in the ANES poll’s 70-year history. The chart below shows the shift, with the Republican margin of victory appearing higher on the Y-axis and the income percentile groups listed from left to right on the X-axis, with the wealthiest 5 percent listed on the right of each graph. The fact that the chart for 2016 has a downward trajectory highlights the degree to which the Democratic Party has become the primary party of the affluent upper-middle class.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously noted, the wealthy of all races are now more likely to support the Democratic Party because it has proven itself a worthy custodian of the affairs of the financial oligarchy, promoting its wars, bank bailouts, domestic spying operations, deportations, tax windfalls and cuts

to social programs, all under the foil of identity politics.

The growth in politically motivated abstention also shows that Clinton was not the victim of “apathy.” To the contrary, each new poll confirms that the working class in the US is moving to the left, coming into conflict with the political establishment and registering its opposition with varying levels of political clarity.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>