
Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press vii, 333 pp. (\$29.95 cloth).

Millions of Americans found themselves stunned on the night of November 8, 2016. As election returns rolled in, it became increasingly obvious that Hillary Clinton would not handedly win the seat in the White House as most pollsters had predicted. Beyond turning to or blaming the existence of the Electoral College for making Clinton's 3 million popular vote lead completely moot, scholars, pundits, pollsters, and the like would need to uncover helpful explanations for the outcome of the 2016 presidential election. Some suggested that the shape of the economy was to blame; Americans were still feeling economically anxious and were not impressed by the speed of post-recession improvements. Still, others focused on the effect of former FBI Director James Comey's October surprise—a publicly announced re-opening of an investigation of Clinton's emails—or the leaked information of the DNC's efforts to put Bernie Sanders' campaign to rest. Not unlike the Republican Party's response to the 2012 presidential election, the Democratic Party found itself doing an "autopsy" of the election of a man who many would characterize as a politically inexperienced, financially irresponsible, xenophobic sexual predator. John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck dissect nearly every potential explanation of the election's unexpected outcome.

Identity Crisis provides a play-by-play of every significant moment between the silent stages of the primaries and election night in the authors' effort to pinpoint the most important factors that resulted in Donald Trump's ascendance to the White House. In doing so, they rely on a wide array of data sets, such as the American National Election Studies, Gallup and Pew Research Center polls as well as a particularly unique data set, the Views of the Electorate Research (VOTER) Survey. The VOTER Survey allows them to disentangle whether having certain beliefs caused people to vote for Trump, or whether people who preferred Trump chose to adopt certain beliefs; the first round of the data was collected well before Trump was a salient figure in the minds of most Americans, thus providing a clean-cut opportunity to assess which previously held attitudes help to explain support for Trump in the primaries, and which do not. They leverage all of these data to not only deductively reason that it was not the shape and condition of the economy that led so many white Americans to vote for Trump, but also to put forth and support an argument that the election can best be understood in terms of Americans' racial sentiments.

To be sure, this book is primarily about white Americans' racial attitudes, political behaviors, and policy preferences. The term "identity crisis," here, is not necessarily a reference to whether white folks had an existential crisis about whiteness and white identity, per se, but instead how white Americans responded to a highly racialized campaign, whereby the two major party candidates came down in very distinct ways on racial matters. What they find and show is that "even before 2016, group identities and attitudes were becoming more aligned with partisanship;" specifically, people of color as well as racially liberal whites were migrating toward the Democratic Party, meanwhile whites who

feel less favorable toward underrepresented racial groups as well as religious minorities were shifting toward the Republican Party (pg.4). Ultimately, they argue that it is not that Trump's racist rhetoric led people to "become racist," as one dominant narrative suggests, but instead he was simply able to dip into an already existing reservoir of racial antipathy at the right moment.

The other identity crisis that Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck bring to light is that which exists in the Republican Party. First, they note that the best way to understand and predict white partisanship in a post-Obama era is through the lens of racial attitudes broadly speaking—not just bigotry towards racial minorities, but also in whites' explanations of racial disparities, preference for social distance, sentiments towards immigrants as well as attitudes towards Muslims. This becomes a problem—or identity crisis—for the Republican Party because while Republican elites are not necessarily bastions of racial liberalism, the authors show that the base of the Republican Party has been chomping at the bit for more (racially) conservative candidates. The Tea Party represents the prequel of Trump's rise, in some ways. The introduction of Trump to a line-up of conservatives who had strong connections to various parts of the "establishment" was welcomed by a significant portion of everyday white Republicans, and the media helped quite a bit to push him to the front of the pack.

The three authors write a sweeping account of the 2016 primary and general elections and do so by putting a journalistic spin on an otherwise academic endeavor. The evidence adjudicates between several possible explanations of white political behavior. This is an important effort given the ramifications that white Americans' political and policy preferences have on everyone else. Needless to say, it is curious how little the authors consider the attitudes, preferences, and responses of people of color or religious minorities to the racial and racist rhetoric of the Trump campaign.

In the aftermath of the 2016 election, political thinkers not only looked to the white-centered explanations that the book explores, but they also questioned why people of color, and Black voters in particular, did not turn out at the same rates as they had done in the two previous elections. It is surprising that the authors did not also delve into whether and the extent to which either candidate's treatment of issues around racial inequality or discussion of underrepresented groups produced a different kind of "identity crises" for voters of color. Of course, hindsight is 20/20; scholars are becoming more aware of the role that Black women play in electoral outcomes, particularly at the state and local level, and others have already noticed the way that Latinx Millennials and youth can be galvanized by anti-immigrant rhetoric—the same kind of rhetoric that marked the announcement of current president's campaign announcement.

Taken together, *Identity Crisis* provides a longitudinal analysis of white American racial attitudes and their effects on the contemporary political landscape. It will be interesting to see whether the insights provided here will help us to understand the dynamics of future elections, especially considering the racial diversity in the Democratic Party's 2019-2020 primary line-up.

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