

MISSING WHITE WOMEN

There are several interesting pieces of analysis cementing the logic that Obama won and Republicans will continue to lose because there simply aren't that many angry old white men anymore. The WSJ surveys the demographic trends—including the most interesting one, showing Asian voters favoring Obama at almost the same high percentages as Latinos.

The Romney campaign devoted attention to Asian voters, particularly in northern Virginia. Exit polls showed the Asian vote expanding to 3% of the total U.S. electorate—an all-time high—with 75% of those votes cast for Mr. Obama.

And Alec McGillis suggests that Rick Perry's challenge, which forced Mitt to the right of him on immigration—may have cast the lethal demographic blow against Mitt's campaign.

Sure, he wasn't considered the sharpest pitchfork in the barn, but he had never lost an election and, with his brief flirtation with secession, had tapped into the anti-Washington fervor of the moment far better than any other Republican in the field. Premier national political magazines dispatched reporters to do long profiles of him. And the frontrunner for the Republican nomination fatefully decided that Perry was such a threat to his prospects that he would ... try to destroy him by running to his right on immigration.

Mitt Romney repeatedly attacked Perry for his support of in-state tuition for undocumented students at Texas colleges, declaring at one debate that it "made no sense at all" and running what was probably the nastiest ad of the primaries, a Web ad (since disappeared) that concluded with a clip of former

Mexican president Vincente Fox praising Perry, as if that in and of itself was disqualifying.

[snip]

It was left to Perry to utter the defense that arguably sealed his fate even before his debate snafu: "If you say we should not educate children who come into our state ... by no fault of their own, I don't think you have a heart."

But even as Romney was glorying in the move, its risks were plain to see. After vanquishing his foes amid a virtually all-white primary electorate, Romney was going to face a general election in which he could not afford to do worse than John McCain had with Hispanics—a 32 percent share. His harsh rhetoric was, for many voters, going to be inextricable with the litany of Republican callousness on the issue—Tom Tancredo, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, Arizona's draconian anti-illegal immigration law and its copycats in Alabama and elsewhere, and on and on. Hispanic Republicans warned Romney to cool it, but he blustered on.

But one of the most interesting demographic pieces comes from Sean Trende at RealClearPolitics, showing that it wasn't so much that minorities swamped Mitt, but that white voters turned out at lower rates than in 2008.

If we build in an estimate for the growth of the various voting-age populations over the past four years and assume 55 percent voter turnout, we find ourselves with about 8 million fewer white voters than we would expect given turnout in the 2008 elections and population growth.

Had the same number of white voters cast ballots in 2012 as did in 2008, the 2012 electorate would have been about 74 percent white, 12 percent black, and 9 percent Latino (the same result occurs if you build in expectations for population growth among all these groups). In other words, the reason this electorate looked so different from the 2008 electorate is almost entirely attributable to white voters staying home. The other groups increased their vote, but by less than we would have expected simply from population growth.

And contrary to what you might think—certainly, what I thought, at first, as did Trende—this decline didn't come from evangelicals refusing to vote for a Mormon. At least in OH, they instead came from the poor rural areas of the state. That is, at least in OH, they appear to have been poor whites unwilling to vote for Obama but equally unwilling to vote for a rich douchebag like Romney.

Where things drop off are in the rural portions of Ohio, especially in the southeast. These represent areas still hard-hit by the recession. Unemployment is high there, and the area has seen almost no growth in recent years.

My sense is these voters were unhappy with Obama. But his negative ad campaign relentlessly emphasizing Romney's wealth and tenure at Bain Capital may have turned them off to the Republican nominee as well. The Romney campaign exacerbated this through the challenger's failure to articulate a clear, positive agenda to address these voters' fears, and self-inflicted wounds like the "47 percent" gaffe. Given a choice between two unpalatable options, these voters simply stayed home.

Some of this resistance to Mitt showed up in interviews and polls. These people would likely have been resistant to Mitt even before he suggested they refused to take responsibility for their own lives.

But I also wonder whether some of the missing white women (and men) also got caught in a trap of the GOP's own devising. They, like poor people of color, are likely to have IDs at much lower rates than affluent and suburban whites. So it's possible that, in addition to refusing to vote for a rich douchebag, they also had the added difficulties imposed by Voter ID requirements.

That last bit is just my speculation, of course.

But the possibility that poor, predominantly rural, whites stayed home because of Mitt's arrogance and wealth—and perhaps because of his party's policies—suggests that poor white voters might realign in interesting ways at the same time as people of color change the electorate in more obvious ways.