

Why Didn't Republicans Cost Trump the Election?

How a Surge in Republican Unity and a Collapse in Democratic Unity Put Trump over the Top

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Analysis of the new
[University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll](#)
fielded by Nielsen Scarborough

The University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll is a joint venture between the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development and the Center for American Politics and Citizenship (CAPC). For more information please visit:

Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development: <https://sadat.umd.edu/>

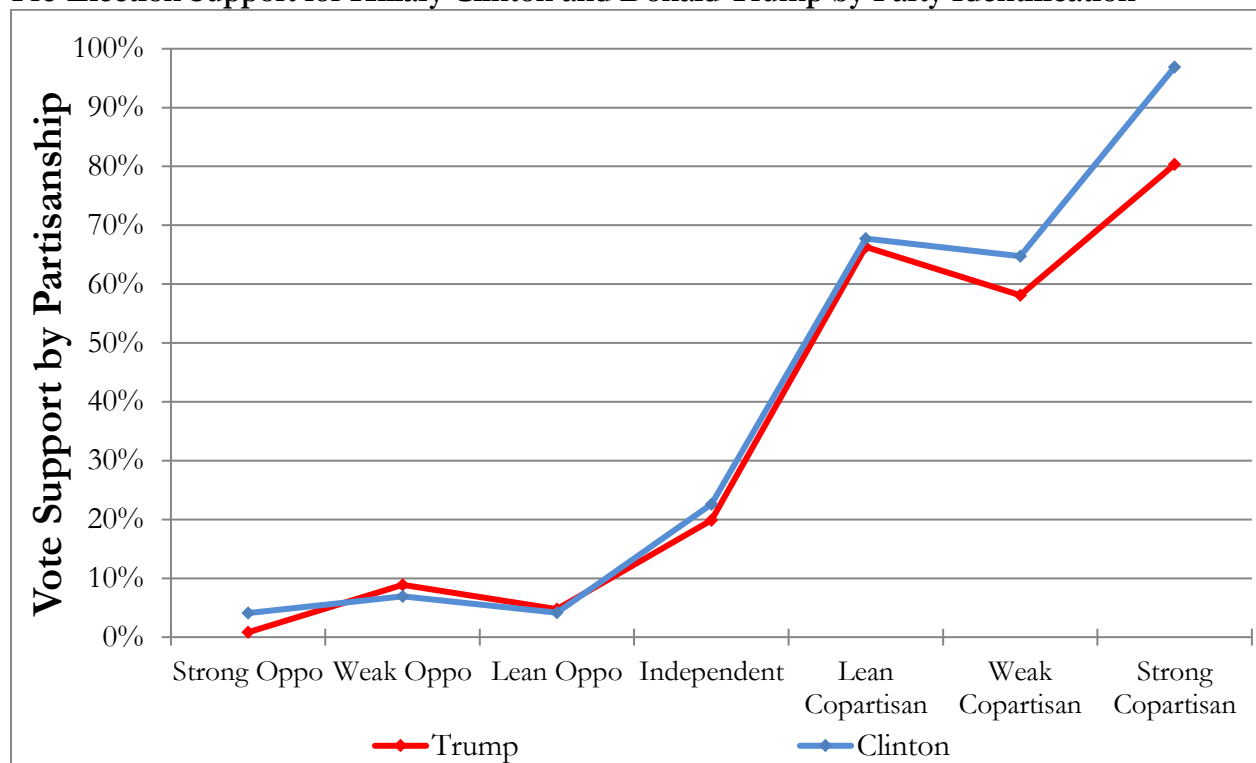
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In the months before the 2016 election, the Trump Campaign and Donald Trump found themselves roundly [criticized](#) by high-ranking Republican officials who distanced themselves from the candidate.¹ As Trump faced several high profile [rebukes](#) from party leaders such as Sen. John McCain, Sen. Mark Kirk, and Rep. Jason Chaffetz, the [pre-election University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll](#) found strong evidence that a lack of support by Republicans for Donald Trump was fueling much of the gap between Trump and Hillary Clinton. Despite this finding, Trump was victorious in the 2016 election. Using data from the [post-election Critical Issues Poll](#) helps explain why much of the pre-election polling was unable to predict Trump’s eventual victory.

October 2016: Copartisans Supported Clinton more than Trump

The figure below represents pre-election vote intention for Clinton and Trump, separating out those respondents who most strongly identify with the party of the candidate from those who identify with the opposing party. Looking at opposing partisans, there was nearly no gap between those supporting Clinton and those supporting Trump. Looking at copartisans, however, the picture changed drastically. Both weak Democrats and strong Democrats supported Clinton at much higher rates than weak Republicans and strong Republicans supported Trump. Focusing on just these two categories (weak copartisans and strong copartisans), Clinton outperformed Trump 87.73%-72.55%, indicating that Democrats were far more united behind their nominee than were Republicans.

Pre-Election Support for Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump by Party Identification



Source: October 2016 University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll (Weighted Averages)

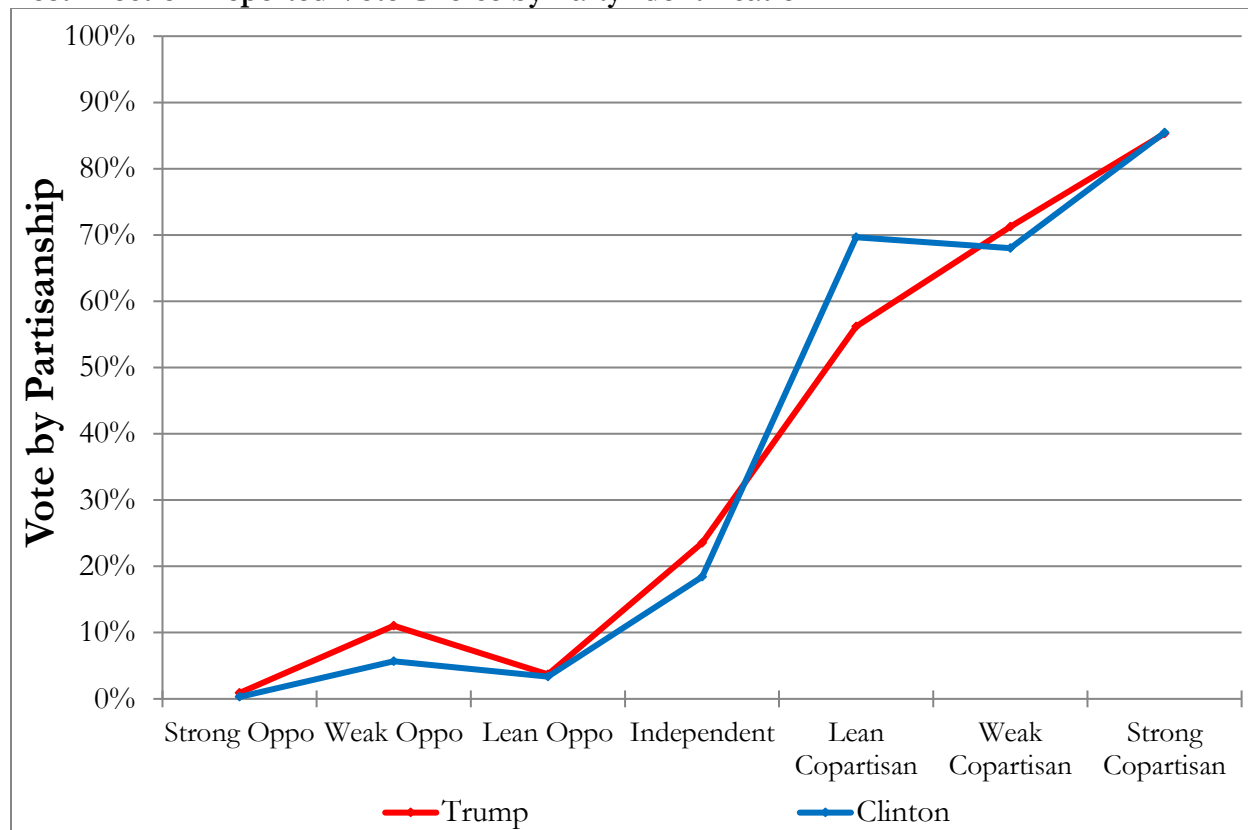
¹ On October 11, Donald Trump tweeted, “Our very weak and ineffective leader, Paul Ryan, had a bad conference call where his members went wild at his disloyalty.” This was followed quickly by, “Disloyal R’s are far more difficult than Crooked Hillary, They come at you from all sides. They don’t know how to win – I will teach them!”

November 2016: Copartisans Support Clinton more than Trump

In the post-election edition of the Critical Issues Poll, we asked respondents who they voted for in the election. Contrary to the results we found just one month earlier, Republicans supported Trump to roughly the same degree that Democrats supported Clinton. This was fueled both by strong Democrats becoming somewhat less supportive of Clinton and strong Republicans becoming more supportive of Trump.

While strong Democrats supported Clinton in the pre-election poll at a rate of nearly 97%, that rate dropped to just more than 85% after the election. Republicans, conversely, surged in support of Trump, from 80% in the pre-election poll to 85% after the election. This, coupled with independents moving more toward Trump in the time between the two polls (from 20% to 24%), made up much of the gap between the two candidates in the pre-election survey.

Post-Election Reported Vote Choice by Party Identification



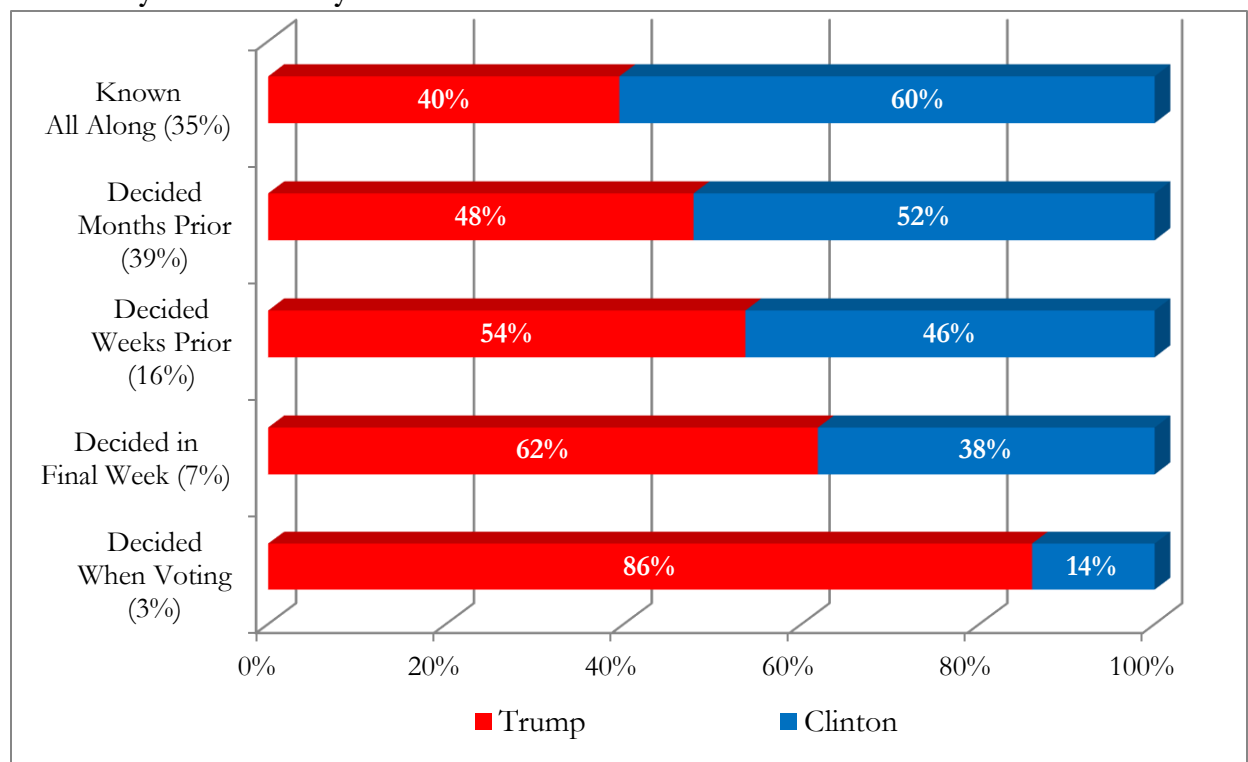
Source: November 2016 University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll (Weighted Averages)

What Changed? Late-Election Deciders

While we can tell from party unity in the post-election survey that Republicans rallied behind Trump while the Democrats became less unified behind Clinton, the question remains as to whether Clinton supporters changed their minds to support Trump, or whether previously undecided voters broke heavily for Trump.

The results of the Critical Issues Poll suggest that late-deciders are largely the reason for the surge in support for Trump. In our pre-election poll, a full 15% of respondents claimed they had not made up their mind about who to support. In our post-election survey, we find that upwards of a quarter of the electorate made up their mind in the final month before the election. According to the results presented here, those who decided later were far more likely to support Trump.

Two-Party Vote Share by Time of Decision



Source: November 2016 University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll (Weighted Averages)

In all categories encompassing the final month before the election, Donald Trump holds an advantage, yet when we look just at those who decided in the final days before the election, we see that he gains a huge lead among the roughly 10 percent of voters who decided in the final week or while voting. The tendency of these late-deciders to break so overwhelmingly for Trump helps explain, to some degree, why so many polling experts erroneously suggested Clinton would win easily.

Appendix: Actual Poll Results (Weighted)

October Pre-Election Poll			November Post-Election Poll		
	Trump	Clinton		Trump	Clinton
Strong Oppo	0.83%	4.09%	Strong Oppo	0.90%	0.30%
Weak Oppo	8.91%	6.92%	Weak Oppo	11.02%	5.66%
Lean Oppo	4.76%	4.18%	Lean Oppo	3.67%	3.36%
Independent	19.90%	22.60%	Independent	23.52%	18.41%
Lean Partisan	66.31%	67.71%	Lean Partisan	56.20%	69.66%
Weak Partisan	58.13%	64.76%	Weak Partisan	71.24%	68.02%
Strong Partisan	80.33%	96.89%	Strong Partisan	85.29%	85.46%