Diploma Divide, Rural Revolt, or Racial Realignment? The Working-Class Voter in the Trump Era

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Abstract

The changing partisan loyalties of the American working-class has been a central focus of political scientists and the mass media over the past decade. However, there is considerable disagreement about whether this working-class realignment is a phenomenon exclusive to White Americans, indicative of urban-rural geographic polarization, or reflective of a growing diploma divide that transcends race or ethnicity, class, and geography. Yet, to date, scholarship has mostly failed to formally (and simultaneously) interrogate the relative influence of race, place, and education on the shifting partisan loyalties of American voters or the working-class specifically. I utilize survey data from the Cooperative Election Study (2006-2024) cumulative file as well as the 2016-2024 American National Elections Study Panel survey to explore recent changes in voting behavior. The data reveal that race and place more so than educational attainment are core to understanding the shifting partisan loyalties of American voters and the working-class. There appears to be no “diploma divide" net of race-based and place-based political changes.

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Postmortems of the 2024 presidential election have elevated three group-based explanations for Donald Trump's 2024 victory as well as for the shifting coalitions of the Democratic and Republican Parties. Across all of these depictions has been a focus on the voting behaviors of the American working-class. Some maintain that the "diploma divide," of college-educated voters coalescing in the Democratic Party and the non-college educated in the Republican Party increasingly animates our politics and explains working-class voting behavior (Grossmann and Hopkins 2024; Sosnik 2023). Others have drawn attention to rural voters and the increasing number of rural working-class voters supporting the Republican Party (Frank 2024; Jacobs and Shea 2023; Gimpel et al. 2020; Cramer 2016). At the same time, some–including Trump–have pointed to the shifting voting loyalties of Latino voters as evidence of a larger racial realignment potentially driven by the working-class (Fraga, Velez and West 2024; Medina 2024).

To date, we lack direct and simultaneous tests of these explanations. As a result, we have yet to reach a consensus on whether working-class voters have even come to support the Republican Party in recent elections (Carnes and Lupu 2021; Ogorzalek, Piston and Puig 2020; Piston 2018; Bartels 2006). Further, we do not know if the "diploma divide" or the rural-urban divide explain voting behavior beyond White Americans, much less if these divides explain the behaviors of the working-class generally (Barber and Pope 2024; Brown et al. 2024; Gimpel et al. 2020). Finally, we lack much data on whether non-White voters have truly begun abandoned the Democratic Party despite long-standing support of it (Fraga, Velez and West 2024; Barber and Pope 2024; White and Laird 2020; Dawson 1995).

To explore these questions, I utilize survey data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) from 2008-2024 as well as the 2016-2020-2024 American National Election Study (ANES) panel survey. These data reveal a number of important insights. First, although Black and Latino voters remain majority Democratic in their voting behavior, both of these groups have trended toward the Republican Party since 2016, albeit at differing rates. The 2024 presidential election was the year of the lowest levels of Democratic voting for both groups. Second, White Americans are still the only group in which working-class voters are more likely to support the

Republican Party than upper income members of their racial or ethnic group. Third, White Americans are the only group in which non-college educated voters differ significantly from college-educated ones in their voting behavior (if anything college-educated Black voters are more likely to be Republicans). Fourth, rural voters and rural working-class voters of all races and ethnicities are more likely to support the Republican Party than co-ethnic non-rural voters– though this difference is substantially larger for White voters.

Since 2016, the percentage of working-class members of the Republican Party has grown while it has shrunk for Democrats. Cross-sectional and panel data reveal that this shift is driven by non-White and rural voters voters shifting into the Republican Party during the period. In other words, the is no diploma divide outside of White voters and the shifting composition of the two parties and voting behaviors of the working-class is driven by race and place. Rural voters and non-White voters shifted significantly into the Republican Party over the last presidential elections, shifting the class, place, and race compositions of the two parties.

Place, Race, Education and the American Working-class Voter

For the last twenty years and especially since 2016, scholars and political observers have puzzled over the voting behavior and partisan loyalties of the American working-class voter (Carnes and Lupu 2021; Ogorzalek, Piston and Puig 2020; Bartels 2006; Frank 2004). The first wave of this scholarship questioned popular narratives surrounding the politics of the White working-class, finding no evidence of growing working-class support for the Republican Party (Bartels 2006, 2008; Stonecash et al. 2000). Following the 2016 election, when such narratives again surfaced, notions of the White working-class Republican voter were again disputed (Carnes and Lupu 2021).

Despite this, the elections 2016, 2020, and 2024 point to important changes in the Democratic and Republican Parties' coalitions, much of which are seemingly driven by the changing loyalties of the working-class. Largely, three explanations have been offered by scholars to explain these changes: the diploma divide, rural-urban polarization, and racial realignment.

On educational attainment, scholars have found widening differences in partisanship and candidate support for those who have attained a four-year college degree versus those who have not, with the college-educated trending quickly toward the Democratic Party (Grossmann and Hopkins 2024). Those with college degrees to express more racial and cultural tolerance and these “culture war" differences appear to explain most of the partisan differences (Grossmann and Hopkins 2024; Apfeld et al. 2024; Zingher 2022). Today, counties with more college educated people are firmly more Democratic and individuals with college degrees are more likely to vote Democratic in communities with more college educated people (Zingher 2022). From this perspective, the behavior of the working-class may not really about class at all. Instead, the experience of (or selection into) attending college shapes social attitudes, which in turn shape politics. The fact that a college education also has distributional economic effects has little bearing people’s politics. People who do not attend college, but are relatively well off are just as likely to be Republicans as those who do not attend and struggle (Grossmann and Hopkins 2024). Despite the strong empirical support for these findings on average, scholars have questioned whether this educational divide exists for non-White voters (Barber and Pope 2024), suggesting that the “diploma divide" may actually be capturing other aspects of a person’s identity, experiences, or attitudes.

Others have noted that much of the observed shift in working-class voting is driven by rural voters shifting into the Republican Party (e.g. Cramer (2016); Jacobs and Shea (2023)). Since the 1990s, rural White voters have increased their support of the Republican Party (McKee 2008; Gimpel and Karnes 2006). Since 2016, much of this shift seems to be among working-class rural Americans (Shepherd N.d.). As a result, today rural voters of all economic classes are more likely to support the Republican Party (Jacobs and Shea 2023; Gimpel et al. 2020). At dispute in this literature is how much of this growing geographic divide is experienced beyond White voters and among members of the non-White working-class specifically (Gimpel et al. 2020; Brown et al. 2024; Shepherd N.d.). Further, due to the exodus of college-educated people from rural communities–the so-called rural brain drain (Carr and Kefalas 2009)–it could

be the case that the rural-urban divide is merely capturing the broader diploma divide.

More recently, while race and racial attitudes have long shaped American politics (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Dawson 1995; Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Schickler 2016; Engelhardt 2021, 2019; Pérez 2021; Anoll 2022; Anoll, Engelhardt and Israel-Trummel 2022; Barber and Pope 2024), some have argued that a larger racial realignment or racial depolarization is occurring. For example, some have found that Latino voters and the Latino working-class has shifted into the Republican Party over the past two elections (Fraga, Velez and West 2024). Indeed, many post-2024 election narratives focused on the changing voting behaviors of the non-White working-class (Medina 2024). Importantly, though, there is assuredly considerable heterogeneity within these groups, perhaps especially for Latino voters. Those who strongly identify as Latino are less likely to support the Republican Party and Latinos who identify as white are more likely to support Republicans (Cuevas-Molina 2023; Pérez, Lee and Luna 2025). Others have questioned whether there has been any change in voting behavior for non-white voters more broadly (Hopkins, Kaiser and Pérez 2023). Further, working-class politics non-White voters has often been ignored (Michener 2017) and canonical scholarship found no consistent class differences for non-white voters and certainly no evidence of a conservative non-White working-class (Dawson 1995; White and Laird 2020).

The influence of each of these theories are further complicated by their collinearity. For example, according to the American Nation Election Study (ANES) the average income of those without college degrees is between $45,000 and $49,000, while those with college degrees have average incomes of $70,000-$79,000, with 43% of non-college graduates having incomes below $40,000 and nearly 20% of college graduates having incomes below that mark. Thus, economic class in terms of income is highly correlated with education, but not completely overlapping. Similarly, the average incomes of non-White Americans is between $45,000 and $49,000 and the average incomes of Whites is between $60,000 and $64,999, with 42% of non-White respondents and 30% of White respondents making under $40,000. Again, though economic class is associated with race and far more non-White Americans are working class

based on income, this is not completely the case. Additionally, the average incomes of rural Americans fall between $50,000 and $54,999 and the average for non-rural Americans between $60,000 and $64,999, with roughly equal percentages of these groups making below $40,000. Once more, although rural Americans are somewhat more likely to be working-class, these two groups are not synonymous. Further, only roughly one-third of rural Americans have college degrees in comparison just under half of non-rural Americans and just over one-third of non-white Americans have college degrees in comparison just under half of white Americans.

All told then, each of the explanations for recent partisan change are overlapping to some degree and important holes generally and for explaining the changing behaviors of the working-class. In percentage terms, the working-class economically is disproportionately not White and people who are not White are less likely to have college degrees, but most academic focus has been on the White working-class (Carnes and Lupu 2021; Michener 2017). White people are more likely to have higher incomes and have college degrees, but rural people have lower incomes and are less likely to have college degrees despite being overwhelming White. Further, the diploma divide, which has yet to be demonstrated for non-Whites, may have nothing to do with economic class and may merely be concealing place- and race-based divides. Geographic polarization may also be driven exclusively by Whites or may simply be a manifestation of the diploma divide. Finally, the racial realignment may not be occurring at all and to the extent that it is, it could be due to geographic polarization, the education divide, or realignment of the non-White working-class.

What even is a Working-class Voter?

My analysis and the previous literature review focuses on the politics of the “working-class." Class generally is a debated and central concept in sociology and political science (Lamont 2009; Bartels 2008) and “the working-class" is clearly pivotal to many narratives surrounding changes in American politics over the last twenty-five years (Frank 2004; Hochschild 2018). Despite its importance, scholars disagree on the best or most appropriate measure of “working-

class."

Some have utilized self-description of working, lower, middle, and upper classes (Franko and Witko 2023*a*). Others, draw attention to particular occupations, such as union laborers or mechanics as members of the “working-class," while bankers and physicians are consider white collar or upper class professionals (Franko and Witko 2023*b*; Carnes 2013; Lamont 2009).

However, the two most commonly used measures are education or income based. In education-based studies, a person is often considered “working-class" if they or their parents lack a four-year college degree (Bartels 2006, 2008; Smeraldo Schell and Silva 2020). For income-based measures of class, those with lower incomes, typically those in the bottom third of reported incomes, are considered working class (Silva and Snellman 2018; Silva 2019; Putnam 2016; Gilens 2012; Kelly and Witko 2012; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Lamont 2009; Page and Jacobs 2009; Bartels 2006, 2008; Stonecash et al. 2000).

Which measure best captures the concept is still a lively debate (e.g. Franko and Witko (2023*a*)), including how and whether scholars have appropriately factored race into their depictions of the “working class" (Michener 2017). For my purposes here, I will utilize the typical income-based defintion and measure for two primary reasons. First, income is more commonly used in political science to approximate economic class and the working-class specifically (Bartels 2006, 2008; Gilens 2012; Franko and Witko 2023*a*). Second, education-based measures cannot be used to explore the relative role of the “diploma divide" (e.g. Grossmann and Hopkins (2024)) in shaping voting behaviors within working-class if only people without college degrees can be considered working-class to begin with. With these considerations in mind, I consider Americans and respondents in both surveys I utilize as “working-class" if they report $40,000 in income or less, corresponding to the bottom-third of the income distribution, consistent with scholarly convention (Bartels 2008; Schaffner et al. 2025).

Data and Methods

I rely on two sources of survey data to explore the voting behaviors of the working-class. To document overtime changes in voting behavior, I utilize the Cooperative Election Study (CES) Cumulative File 2008-2024 (Schaffner et al. 2025). The CES is national online survey conducted by YouGov with over 50,000 respondents per wave. The CES has been utilized in numerous studies of political behavior since 2006, including studies of class voting and the rural-urban divide (Vavreck and Rivers 2008; Jacobson 2012; Baccini and Weymouth 2021; Kuriwaki et al. 2024; Brown et al. 2024; Willbanks and Shepherd 2025). The CES Cumulative file from 2008-2024 includes $n = 701,955$ survey respondents.

Additionally, I make use of the 2016-2020-2024 American National Election Study (ANES) panel of repeated interviews with $n = 2,839$ respondents from pre- and post-elections surveys in 2016, 2020, and 2024, finishing with $n = 2,070$ respondents in the final wave. In 2016, respondents completed the survey in both face-to-face and internet modes. In 2020 and 2024, respondents completed the surveys over the internet (ANES 2025).

For each analyses, the dependent variable is a stated vote for the Democratic Party's nominee for president in the most recent election over the Republican Party's nominee (Democrat=1, Republican=0). With each data set, I measure support as a function of race/ethnicity, college educational attainment, and rural urban status. Race and ethnicity are measured with dummy variables for Black or not (1=yes), Hispanic or not (1=yes), and White or not (1=yes). Educational attainment is also measured dichotomously, with those having four-year college degrees scored one and otherwise as zero. Rural-urban status is also measured dichtomously. In the CES, this is measured via self-description to the question, "How would you describe the place where you live?" Respondents who answered "rural" were considered rural (1) and otherwise non-rural (0). In the ANES, this is measured with the item, "Do you currently live in a rural area, small town, suburb, or a city?" Once again, answers of "rural" were considered rural (1) and otherwise (0).

For the CES data, I estimate Democratic Party support from 2008-2024 for the full sample

graphically and in 2024 for working-class voters with the following interactive model:

$$DemSupport_i = \beta College_i + \gamma Rural_i + \sigma Race_i + \lambda(College_i \times Race_i) + \alpha(Rural_i \times Race_i) + e_i$$

Where, $DemSupport_i$ is function of college education ($\beta College_i$), rural status ($\gamma Rural_i$), race/ethnicity ($\sigma Race_i$), and interactions between each racial/ethnic category and college ($\lambda(College_i \times Race_i)$) as well as each racial/ethnic category and rural ($\alpha(Rural_i \times Race_i)$), with White serving as the reference category and omitting “other" race respondents from the analysis.

With the ANES panel, I estimate two models a baseline model and a model with interaction terms. The baseline model takes on the following equation:

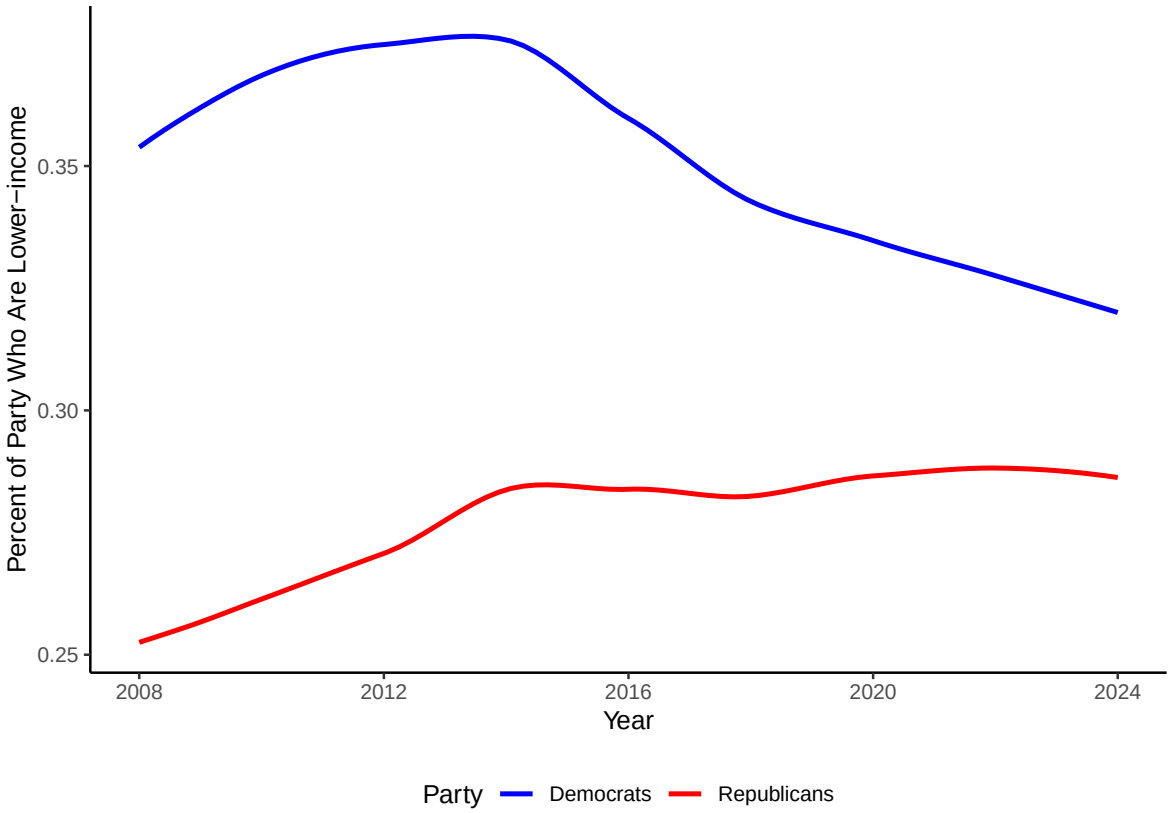
$$DemSupport24_i = \beta College_i + \gamma Rural_i + \sigma Race_i + \alpha DemSupport16_i + e_i$$

Where support for Kamala Harris over Trump in 2024 is a function of college education ($\beta College_i$), rural status ($\gamma Rural_i$), race ($\sigma Race_i$), and previous Democratic Support or voting for Hillary Clinton in 2016 ($\alpha DemSupport16_i$). The second model, like the CES analysis, includes interaction terms between each racial/ethnic category and college as well as each racial/ethnic categor and rural status.

Working-Class Voting Patterns (2008-2024)

I start with bivariate graphical analyses of the voting behaviors of the working-class from 2008-2024. Figure 1 plots the proportion of the Democratic and Republican Party that is working-class during this period. As late as 2012, roughly 40% of Democratic supporters and only about 25% of Republican supports were working-class. After 2012, the parties' coalitions vis-à-vis the working-class began to shift. By 2024, the proportion of Democrats who were working-class shrunk to just over 30% and the proportion of Republicans who working-class climbed to just

Figure 1: Percent of Each Party That is Working-Class 2008-2024 (CES)

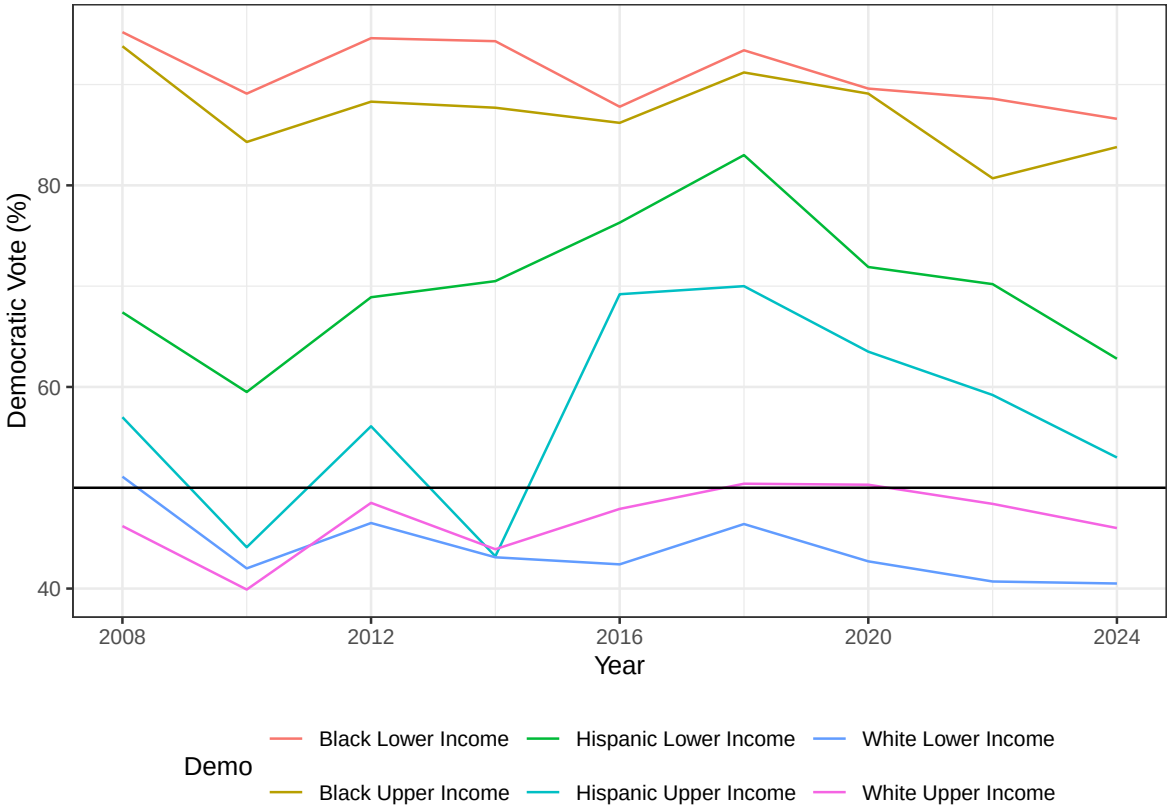


Notes: Figure 1 presents the proportion of each party that makes under $40,000 per year from 2008-2024. *Source*: Cooperative Election Study.

under 30%. In other words, what was once over a ten percentage point gap was halved and nearly erased during the Trump era.

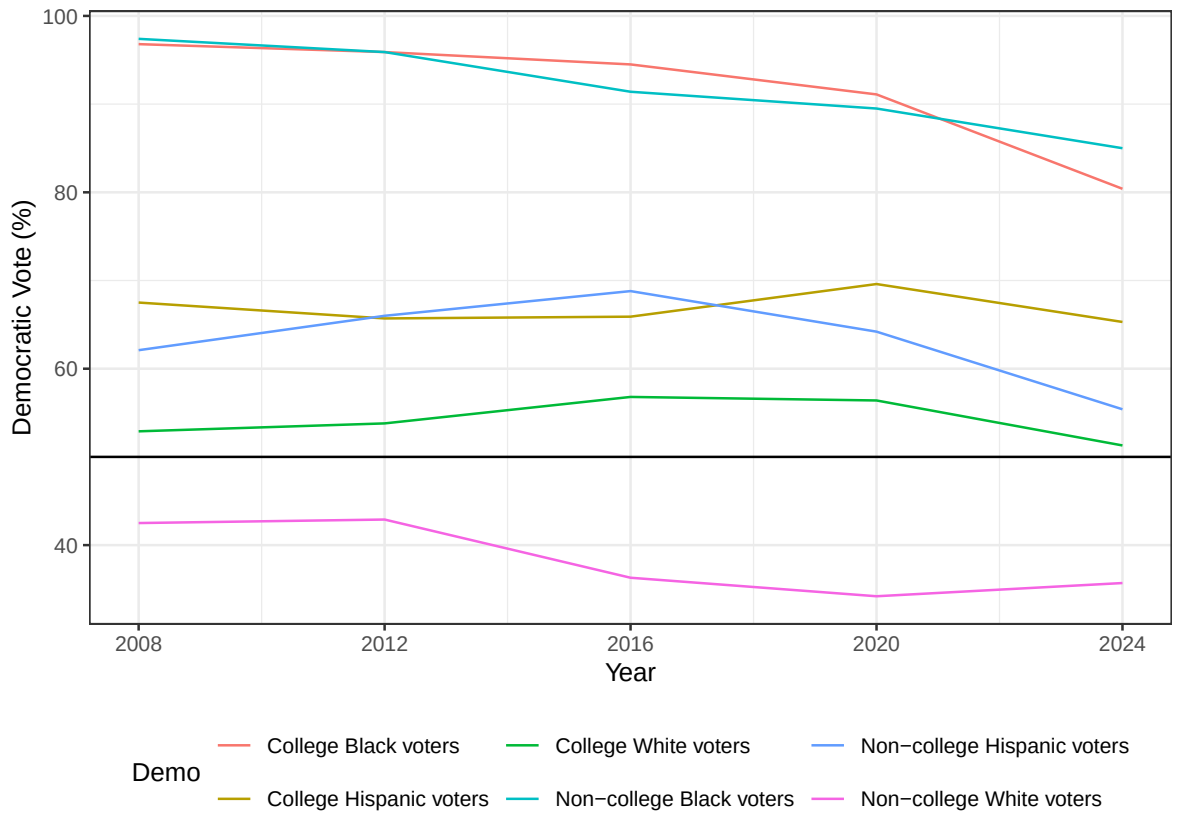
Figure 2 plots trends in working-class support for the Democratic by the race and ethnicity of the respondent. To do so, I compare Democratic voting for those who make $40,000 and under to those making $100,000 and over for Black, Hispanic, and White voters. The trends reveal that the White working class has trended toward the Republican Party since 2016. Similarly, the Hispanic working-class has also gravitated toward the Republican Party since 2020, though all Hispanic voters have done so since 2018. The Black working-class has maintained consistent support for the Democratic Party throughout the period. White voters are the only group that we observe majority Republican support among the working-class. However, Hispanic and Black voters have trended toward the Republican Party by varying degrees overall since 2018.

Figure 2: Lower-Income Voting by Race and Ethnicity



Notes: Figure 2 presents the percentage of respondents reporting voting for the Democratic nominee for president from 2008-2024 by the race and ethnicity and relative income of the respondent. *Source*: Cooperative Election Study.

Figure 3: The Diploma Divide Across Race and Ethnicity

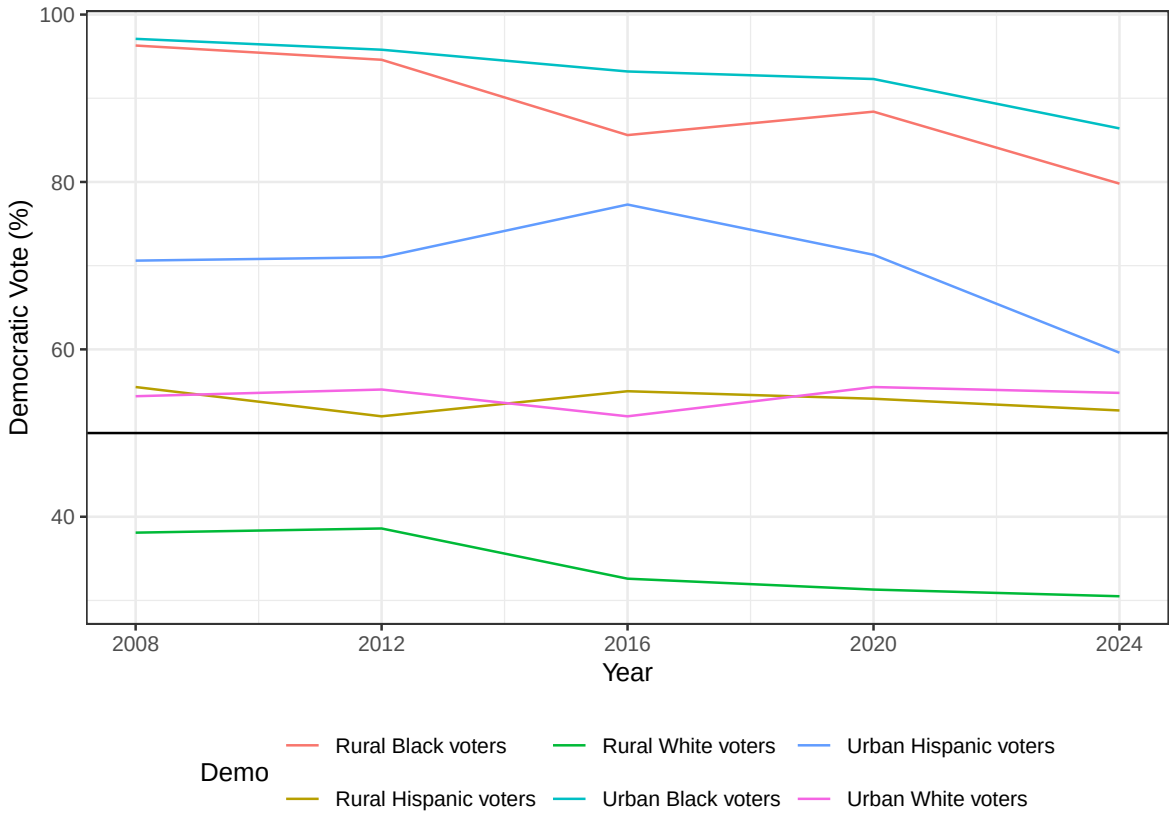


Notes: Figure 3 presents the percentage of respondents reporting voting for the Democratic nominee for president from 2008-2024 by the race and ethnicity and educational attainment of the respondent. *Source*: Cooperative Election Study.

Patterns for college-educated versus non-college educated are largely similar. Non-college educated White voters have shifted into the Republican Party since 2012 and are the only group that support Republicans on a majority basis. As of 2020, there was no education divide between Hispanic voters, but in 2024 small gap emerged with non-college educated Hispanic voters shifting toward the Republican Party. There is no diploma divide among Black voters. If anything, non-college educated Black voters were more likely to support the Democratic Party than college educated Black voters.

The urban-rural divide is the only consistent difference in voting we see observed for all three groups. Rural voters have been shifting into the Republican Party since the 1990s (McKee 2008; Gimpel et al. 2020; Jacobs and Shea 2023; Brown and Mettler 2023; Shepherd

Figure 4: The Rural-Urban Divide Across Race and Ethnicity



Notes: Figure 4 presents the percentage of respondents reporting voting for the Democratic nominee for president from 2008-2024 by the race and ethnicity and place of residence of the respondent. *Source*: Cooperative Election Study.

N.d.). The geographic divide has increased substantially in recent elections. Rural White voters shifted further toward the Republican Party from 2016 to 2024, now with a roughly 30 percentage point gap. Additionally, rural Hispanic voters were just under 10 percentage points more supportive of Republicans in 2024 than urban Hispanic voters, though urban Hispanic voters shifted the most from 2016-2024. Rural Black voters were just over 5 percentage points more likely to support Republicans in 2024 relative to urban Black voters, a gap that has been slowly developing since 2016.

Working-Class Voting in 2024 Regression Analysis

To explore the potential influence of race, place, and education on working-class voting simultaneously, I subset the CES data to just the working-class (i.e. those with incomes below $40,000). Then, I estimate support for Kamala Harris over Donald Trump has a function of race, place, education, as well as interactions between race and place and race and education. Figure 5 presents the results of this analysis.

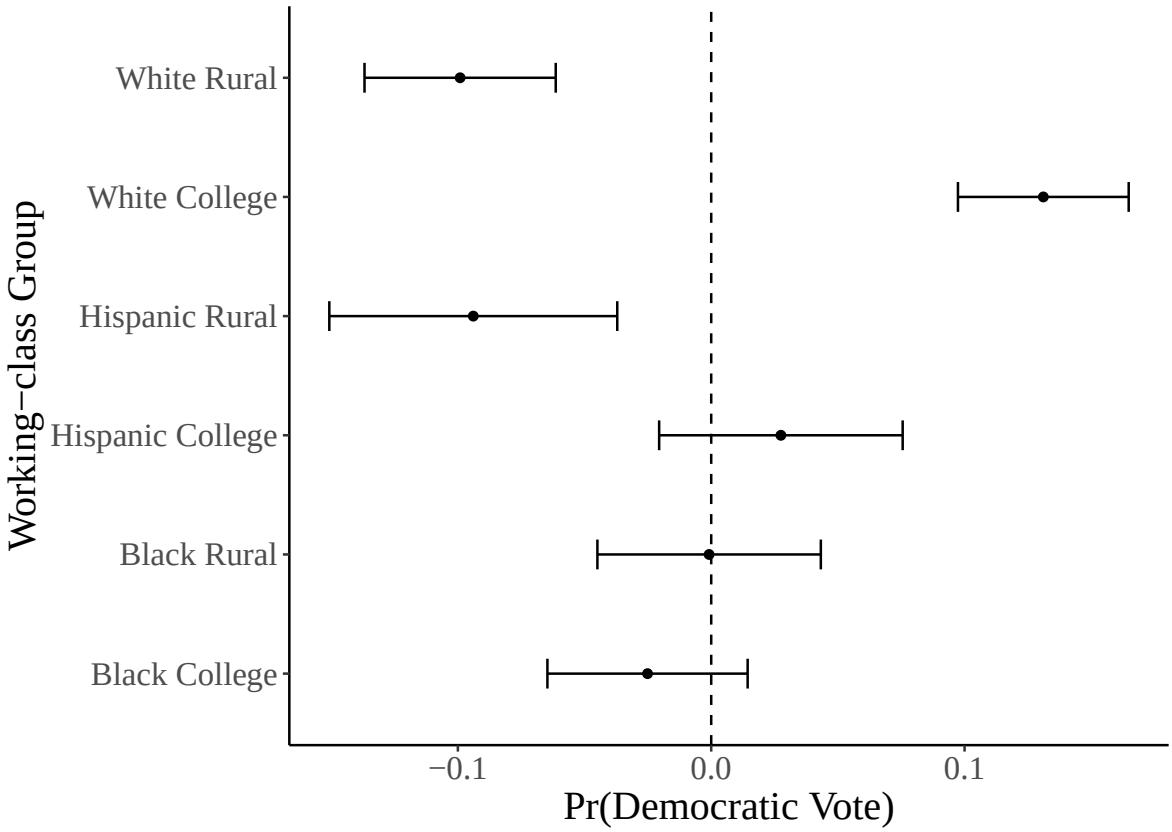
The results of this analysis provide several important insights. First, consistent with the graphical analysis and previous scholarship (e.g. Barber and Pope (2024); Zingher (2022), there appears to be no diploma divide for non-White working-class voters even in 2024. Although college educated white voters were about thirteen percentage points more likely to support Harris, there are no statistically or substantively significant differences by education for Black or Hispanic voters. Looking at voters of all incomes, and not just the working class, also reveals no evidence of a diploma divide for Hispanic and Black voters.

However, there are large place-based differences, especially for White and Hispanic voters. White rural working-class voters and Hispanic rural working-class voters were both over ten percentage points more likely to support Trump over Harris in 2024. Looking at rural-urban differences overall reveals that while the rural Black working-class was not more likely to support Trump, rural Black voters were a bit more supportive of Trump overall. In other words, though rural working-class support is largely confined to White and Hispanic voters, wealthier rural Black voters were also more likely to support Trump.

ANES Voting Panel Analysis, 2016-2024

I further probe these changing voting patterns by race, place, and education with the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel survey. The ANES interviewed just over 2,000 respondents multiple times between 2016 and 2024. For the 2016, 2020, and 2024 presidential elections we have the reported vote choices of these respondents and can, thus, evaluate changing political pref-

Figure 5: 2024 Working-Class Presidential Voting by Race and Ethnicity (CES)



Notes: Figure 5 presents the probability of respondents reporting voting for the Democratic nominee for president in 2024 by the race and ethnicity and place of residence of the working-class respondent. *Source*: Cooperative Election Study.

erences *within* individual. This design allows us to account for unmeasured time-invariant features of individuals as well as observe genuine change in political support without risking the chance that the overall changes we observed across waves of the CES was due to sampling or non-response bias from particular groups of respondents.

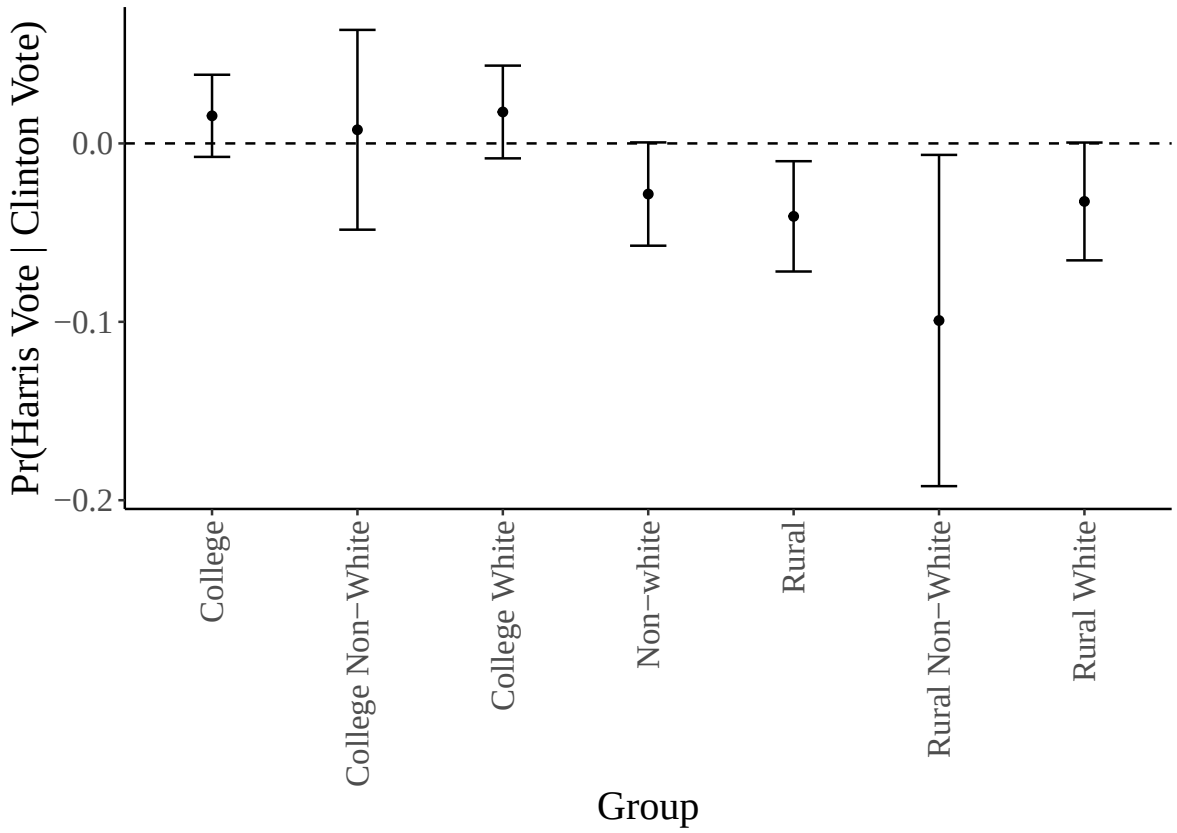
For this analysis, I examine the probability respondents voted for Kamala Harris in 2024 controlling for whether the voted for Hillary Clinton. As a result, I am essentially exploring who shifted into supporting Democratic Party between 2016 and 2024. I estimate these changes among college educated respondents relative to those without four-year college degrees as of 2016, those who lived in rural areas (measured in 2020), and those who do not identify as white versus those who do (measured in 2016) in the base model. In an interactive model, I allow the relationships of college-education and rural status to vary by the race/ethnicity of the respondent. Figure 6 present the results of this analysis.

Consistent with the trends we observed over time with CES data, non-White voters and rural voters were more likely to shift away from the Democratic Party between 2016 and 2024. The baseline model suggests that rural voters shifted 4 percentage points away from the Democrats and non-White voters shifted just under 3 percentage points away from the Democrats over these years. We observe limited evidence of a growing diploma divide. Those with college degrees shifted about 1 percentage point toward the Democrats, but this result was not statistically significant.

Allowing for interactive relationships provides more support for the trends observed with the CES data. Rural White voters shifted three percentage points away from the Democratic Party and rural non-White voters shifted 9 percentage points away from the Democratic Party from 2016 to 2024. Further, although college educated White voters shifted about 2 percentage points toward the Democratic Party (not significant), there is no evidence that non-White college educated voters did the same, with a parameter estimate of essentially zero.

Just as we observed with the CES cross-sectional surveys, rural White and non-White voters have shifted away from the Democratic Party over the last decade. Further, the so-called

Figure 6: Presidential Voting Panel Analysis 2016-2024, (ANES)



Notes: Figure 6 presents the results from two regression analyses predicting the probability a respondent voted for Kamala Harris in the baseline model as a function of having voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016, rural residency (in 2020), college education (in 2016), and race/ethnicity (in 2016) as well as in an interactive model allowing the parameters for rural residency and college education to vary by race and ethnicity. *Source*: American National Election Study 2016-2024 Panel.

“diploma divide" only seems to (modestly) hold for White voters. To the extent that the working-class has turned away from the Democratic Party it has been primarily through rural voters and the non-White working class–especially the Latino working class–shifting toward Republicans.

Conclusion

Over the passed thirty years and especially the last ten, the coalitions of the Democratic and Republican Parties have significantly changed. While the Republican Party was once overwhelmingly the party of wealthy White Americans and the Democratic Party the party of the working-class and racial and ethnic minority voters, class differences and to lessor degree racial and ethnic differences between the parties are decreasing (Dawson 1995; Bartels 2006, 2008; Pacheco and Ojeda 2020; White and Laird 2020; Carnes and Lupu 2021). With data from the CES and the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel survey, I show that since 2012 working-class voters have shifted significantly into the Republican Party and wealthier voters into the Democratic Party. Additionally, although the Republican Party is still primarily White, Black and especially Latino voters have been gradually shifting into the Republican Party. The changing voting behaviors of rural voters as well as members of racial and ethnic minority groups explain the shifting politics of the working-class and the composition of the two parties. Contrary to many post-2024 narratives, the 2024 election did not appear to further divide Americans based on college educational attainment and there still appears to be no “diploma divide" among non-White voters (Zingher 2022; Barber and Pope 2024).

These findings have implications for numerous literatures in political science and for party politics more broadly. First, these findings speak to scholarship on the rural-urban divide. While scholars have debated whether “rural identity" or the shifting politics of rural voters applies to non-White voters (Gimpel et al. 2020; Jacobs and Shea 2023; Brown et al. 2024; Shepherd N.d.), coming out of the 2024 election it is clearer now that the rural-urban divide is indeed likely to due to aspects of rural identity, rural culture, or unique rural economic

experiences and does not only hold true for rural Whites (Shepherd, Lunz Trujillo and Lockman 2026; Shepherd 2025; Jacobs and Shea 2023; Cramer 2016).

Second, these findings speak to the literature on the politics of the working-class. Going into the 2016 election, many maintained that the working-class was still solidly in Democratic hands (Franko and Witko 2023*a*; Carnes and Lupu 2021, 2017; Gelman 2009; Bartels 2006, 2008). These findings show that especially since the 2016 election the working-class has been shifting away from the Democratic Party, including the non-White working-class who have been ignored in many previous appraisals (Michener 2017).

Third, these findings speak to the partisan politics of non-White voters. Although considerable scholarship has shown racial solidarity among non-White voters and substantial support for the Democratic Party as a result (Pérez, Lee and Luna 2025; Hopkins, Kaiser and Pérez 2023), the 2020 and 2024 elections provide evidence that this is likely changing. While Black voters have long been heavily supportive of the Democratic Party and although this is still true in absolute terms (Dawson 1995; White and Laird 2020), Black voters and especially rural Black voters shifted somewhat into the Republican Party from 2020 to 2024. Further, Latino voters, especially in rural areas, shifted considerably toward the Republican Party between 2016 and 2024. While race has long been the important dividing line in American politics and still is the largest (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Schickler 2016; Barber and Pope 2024), these voting trends demonstrate that this divide may be diminishing.

Finally, these findings speak to the growing literature on the “diploma divide" (Grossmann and Hopkins 2024). Although many post-election narratives have focused on the diploma divide (Sosnik 2023), there is no evidence that the educational divide expanded or was newly important in 2024. Moreover, there is still no evidence that the diploma divide applies to groups beyond White voters (Zingher 2022; Barber and Pope 2024). To the extent educational attainment is correlated with changes in American politics it has seemingly been spuriously related through rural-urban, income, and/or race driven changes.

These findings have also have important implications for modern party politics. While

the Democratic Party has turned its attention to becoming a “metro coalition" (Hacker et al. 2024), this focus has seemingly not resonated with metro racial and ethnic minority voters and has further turned rural voters and the rural working-class away from the party. At the same time, the Republican Party has inherited representational challenges as it has gained support from working-class and non-White voters. The party’s policy agenda is largely still plutocratic and pro-business in nature (Shepherd N.d.; Grumbach 2022; Grumbach, Hacker and Pierson 2022; Hacker and Pierson 2020, 2018; Bartels 2016). To this point, the party has gained support through its focus on cultural war and identity politics (Shepherd N.d.; Hacker and Pierson 2020). With recent cuts to the social safety net that many working-class and rural voters depend on, the party may face difficultly maintaining support for these groups.

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