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Hillary Clinton's White Male Voter Problem

Democrats fear that their party's declining appeal with white voters, particularly white men, will bite them in 2016 despite strong performance with growing demographics.

S.V. Dáte

@SVDATE

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MANCHESTER, New Hampshire—Karl Savage is the kind of guy that makes top Democrats nervous.

He lives in a working-class neighborhood, with a cigar-store Indian perched on his front stoop and a carved Harley-Davidson sign on his garage. He's voted in Democratic primaries, he's older, he's white—and he does not care for Hillary Clinton (<http://www.nationaljournal.com/hillary-clinton-2016-election>). Not one little bit.

He made this very clear, in fact, to a Clinton campaign volunteer who rang his doorbell recently only to watch the front door close on him just seconds into his pitch. A short while later, his wife, Pamela, offered this explanation before similarly shutting the door: “We’re not interested. We don’t like her.”

So while Republicans fret about their party's outreach to Latinos and other minorities, this one Saturday morning door-knock encapsulates the fear among leading Democrats: Their party no longer speaks to white people, particularly white men, and they could lose the

White House because of it.

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“Democrats are hemorrhaging those voters and need to figure out how to stop the bleeding,” said Mo Elleithee, a former top Democratic National Committee official who now runs Georgetown University’s Institute of Politics and Public Service. “There could come a point where Democrats cannot afford to lose any more white voters. It’s in the interest of Democrats to be taking steps to reverse that now.”

Elleithee pointed to Florida, where President Obama’s 2-and-a-half-point 2008 victory narrowed to a 1-point 2012 win, which then became a 1-point loss in Democrat Charlie Crist’s run for governor in 2014—even though the Crist campaign hit its turnout targets for African-Americans and Latinos.

Steve Schale worked on all three campaigns. He said it makes more sense to increase support from whites just a little bit than trying to boost support from minority groups a lot. “Take Hispanics alone: Every point of white share you lose, you have to win Hispanics by 4 to 5 points more” to make up for it, Schale said. “In ‘08, we knew if we really focused on keeping whites above 40 (percent), we couldn’t lose. To me, that makes more sense than always trying to cobble out a tight win. And at some point we are going to max out (with) Hispanics.”

Meanwhile, Republican pollster Bill McInturff scratches his head while watching all this hand-wringing over a demographic group that will continue to decline in significance. For one thing, he said, the 27-percentage point advantage Republicans built among white men in 2012 is probably about as bad as it can get for Clinton, given that a sizeable percentage of white men are white-collar liberals.

(RELATED: The Rise of Hillary Clinton (<http://www.nationaljournal.com/pictures-video/photos-hillary-clinton-career-20150410?mrefid=related>)

McInturff has prepared an analysis that even increases the Republican advantage with white men, to 31 percent, and decreases the GOP's disadvantage among black and Latino voters slightly. But it still shows Republicans losing the next election by 3 points.

So to him, it's not even worth debating whether Clinton should work to appeal more to white men, which her husband Bill Clinton successfully did 23 years ago, rather than the "Obama coalition" of urban whites, young people, and minorities.

"The hell with it," he said. "For all the trees that have been killed by the press about which strategy she should pursue, her campaign is doing exactly the right thing. There's not a choice. She's pursuing the one strategy that will win the presidency."

Whether Democrats need to worry about Clinton's support among white men or not, her weakness with them is already turning up in polls of early-voting Iowa and New Hampshire, both of which are overwhelmingly white.

(RELATED: What Hill Democrats Want to Hear From Hillary Clinton

(<http://www.nationaljournal.com/2016-elections/what-hill-democrats-want-to-hear-from-hillary-clinton-20150712?mrefid=related>)

Prominent Iowa pollster Ann Selzer cites a May survey that showed Clinton leading Sen. [Bernie Sanders](http://www.nationaljournal.com/bernie-sanders-2016-election) by 40 points among women—but by less than 10 points among men—in the Democratic caucuses. In the New Hampshire primary, Sanders is actually running even with Clinton among men, said Suffolk University pollster David Paleologos.

Why this is happening is less clear. Democratic pollster Peter Hart said that while Latino and black men tend to be firmly in the Democratic fold, white men are typically more conservative and Republican in ideology.

Kathy Sullivan, a former chair of the New Hampshire Democratic Party, suggested it might be the topics Clinton talks about. "Perhaps men are not as interested in early-education issues, or women's-health issues," she said.

Some New Hampshire voters had a much simpler explanation.

“I hate to say it, but I think it’s because she’s a woman,” said Tim Molan, a neighbor of Savage. “I grew up in an age when women were supposed to be seen and not heard. It’s a different world, and she helped forge it.”

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(<http://www.nationaljournal.com/magazine/teresa-ghilarducci-hillary-clinton-adviser-20150626?mrefid=related>)

“I think men have a problem with strong women,” agreed Paula Pierce, another neighbor.

Her husband, Mark, said many of his male coworkers at United Parcel Service, particularly the ones who did not attend college, distrust her and fear Clinton will have little regard for people like them. “She’s got so much money,” he said.

The irony for Clinton is that lesser-educated, working-class whites became her base of support in the spring of 2008, as she won primaries in states like Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia in her last battle for the Democratic nomination. In [one infamous interview](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-05-07-clintoninterview_N.htm) (http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-05-07-clintoninterview_N.htm) with *USA Today*, she focused specifically on white voters: “Obama’s support among working, hardworking Americans, white Americans, is weakening.”

Paula Pierce said that history proves that male dislike for Clinton does not come from a good place. “So it was the lesser of two evils. A white woman over an African-American,” she said of Clinton’s 2008 late spring surge. “We need more women. We’ve got way too much testosterone flying around.