

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

5 on 45:

On new Census data and a divided America

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PARTICIPANTS:

Host:

ADRIANNA PITA

Contributor:

WILLIAM H. FREY

Senior Fellow, Metropolitan Policy

The Brookings Institution

Research Professor, Population Studies Center, Institute for Social Research

University of Michigan

PITA: You're listening to 5 on 45 from the Brookings Podcast Network: analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on today's news regarding the Trump administration.

FREY: This is William Frey. I'm a demographer and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. The contentious political back-and-forth seen daily in the media, cable TV, and polls should come as no surprise in a nation where Donald Trump won the Electoral College but lost the popular vote by 2.9 million votes. Newly released Census population estimates for 2016 provide further evidence of just why the nation's politics are split demographically. These data show that 31 million fewer Americans live in counties that voted for Trump than in those carried by Hillary Clinton. According to the estimates, 177 million people live in Clinton counties compared with 146 million in Trump counties. Of course, county populations include persons of all ages, not just voters. While it is true that Clinton took less than a sixth of the nation's 3,100 counties, she won most of the largest ones. Trump won the Electoral College by successfully navigating urban-rural balances in key swing states, taking small areas by large voting margins. Notably, Trump is the first winning candidate since at least 1992 to carry only a minority of the nation's combined county populations. Even George W. Bush, who lost the popular vote but won the 2000 election, won in counties that contained 16 million more people than those won by his opponent.

Calculated as a share of the U.S. population, only 45% of residents live in Trump counties, yet this share varies by demographic group. When looking at households classed by income, it is the least well-off households that are overrepresented in Trump counties, while the most well-off households are underrepresented. Interestingly, less

than one third of all households earning more than \$200,000 reside in Trump counties. Generally, Trump counties are least likely to be home to those with so-called “urban” attributes. Only about one in five foreign-born residents live in these counties, compared with a much larger share of the U.S. native-born population. Fewer single than married persons are Trump-county residents. Especially sharp divides are seen by race and ethnicity. Less than one fifth of all Asians and less than one third of all Hispanics and blacks live in counties carried by Trump. By contrast, 56% of the nation’s white population lives in Trump counties. Yet this is not the case for all whites. Nearly two thirds of whites with just a high school education are Trump-county residents, but among whites with college degrees, only 42% reside in Trump counties.

The profile of Trump’s America and Clinton’s America might best be compared when looking at the age and racial makeup of counties that voted for each candidate. Trump’s America is clearly whiter and older. Even young people living in Trump counties are predominately white despite the fact that the national child population is nearly majority minority. Populations in counties where Clinton prevailed are younger and decidedly more diverse. In Clinton counties, minorities outnumber whites for all ages under 45, and are not far behind whites in the age 45-54 group. These Census data make it clear just how sharply divided the nation is politically, demographically, and geographically; more so now than at any other time in recent history.

Right now, the Republican Party has control of the presidency, Congress, and a majority of state governments. The demographic projections suggest that groups now in Clinton counties will continue to grow and disperse to the future advantage of Democrats. It is a precarious time for the nation’s political apparatus. Neither party

should assume that it can hold sway for the long run without reaching out to others in the rest of the country.

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