

President Trump and Reflections from First-time Voters

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The results are in. Donald Trump was just elected the 45th president of the U.S. in a stunning victory that defied the expectations of polls. He becomes the first modern president without military or government experience, besting Hillary Clinton on the strength of rural, white voters who say they are concerned about their jobs disappearing overseas and sick of the political status quo.

So, what does it all mean? Wharton legal studies and business ethics professor Eric Orts and University of Pennsylvania Law School dean Theodore Ruger appeared on the Knowledge@Wharton show, part of Wharton Business Radio on SiriusXM channel 111 this morning, to discuss potential fallout from the election. Visit our parent publication, [Knowledge@Wharton](#), to listen to the full podcast.

Below are a few bullet-point takeaways from the conversation with Orts and Ruger. You will also find alternating comments from first-time teen voters reflecting on their experiences in the voting booth and during this historic 2016 election. They did not share which candidate they voted for, but rather what it felt like to have a role in their first presidential election.

- Why did Donald Trump win so many middle-America states? Globalization fueled the Trump vote in states like Iowa and Ohio as people responded to jobs going overseas. “A lot of manufacturing jobs were lost over the years of 2008-2009, during the recession. People saw Wall Street guys getting bailed out; nobody was really taking responsibility for people losing their houses, losing their jobs,” Orts noted. “Statistically, there has been job growth [since the recession], but a lot of the basic manufacturing jobs people had had were gone.... There was a lot of anger seen about this in the middle parts of the country.”

Reflection from First-time Voter Brandon Wilhelmsen, 18, Utah: *“For me, [voting] was really scary. I knew what has been going on, and I’ve been terrified watching these two candidates fight for every bit of soil. After waiting for an hour and a half to walk through a hallway, I finally got my ballot and was ready to begin. The first thing I saw was the presidential options and immediately skipped it out of fear. After completing everything else, I found it was hard to even lift my pen to sign for my vote knowing that I didn’t want to regret my voice. I seriously felt like I might cry out of fear and nerves. I finally submitted mine after taking an extra five minutes of making sure I wouldn’t regret my voice. I’m telling you, this historic moment isn’t going to be easily forgotten.”*

- What mattered most to voters in this election? Studies show that the single variable most voters cared about was “making a change,” said Dean Theodore Ruger. “It was more important than the economy, more important than national security. Among voters who prioritized making a change, 83% went for Trump. It remains to be seen how this translates into governance, but it was a protest vote.”

Reflection from First-time Voter Natalia Lange, 18, New Jersey: *“I’ve been paying really close attention to everything that is happening in this campaigning process. I didn’t want to just vote the way that my parents voted, I wanted to find my own ideas and my own voice. Going into the municipal building to vote, I was actually a little bit nervous. I had never been inside a voting booth and I wasn’t sure how the whole process was going to go. But as soon as I got into the building, there were many lovely retirees who...helped me out and made sure I knew where to go. Signing in, I had a little lurch in my stomach. It finally started sinking in that I’m an adult now and I’m actually voting to help decide the fate of our nation. It hit me how scary close this election is and how important it is to the future of our country and the lifestyle of our generation and the next... It’s amazing to know that you have an impact in all of this. Every vote counts.”*

- How will a Trump presidency affect big policy issues like protecting our environment and helping displaced refugees? Ort said if Trump follows through on his campaign promises, policies to combat climate change could be in serious jeopardy. “If the U.S. comes out of the Paris agreement, already people are saying Paris doesn’t go far enough [As part of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, reached in December 2015, every nation pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions]; if we lose U.S. leadership and lose possible deals with China on this, we’re almost certain now to face extremely severe [environmental] consequences within a few decades.” The refugee problems currently facing Europe would be dwarfed by future surges in refugees and global conflicts over access to water and food, Orts added. “A wall [which Trump has promised to build to protect our borders from foreigners coming into the country] is not going to solve this problem.”

Reflection from First-time Voter Holden Bleeker, 18, California: *“I voted for the first time yesterday at the Tournament Players Club Golf Course, where they set up a voting facility. I felt a sense of maturity and responsibility as I realized I truly was an adult citizen doing my civic duty. The actual voting for president was not a hard decision, as I followed the election and primaries closely. I felt I was one of the most educated first-time voters, based on how much I love politics. I watched and listened to the national conventions and primaries of both parties, as well as the stances of the candidates. The actual voting was stressful, because I feared after every ballot mark I made that I could have [made the wrong choice]. The hardest part about voting was figuring out who should be in the House of Representatives, the Senate and figuring out every proposition question. After I turned in my ballot, I received my first-ever “I Voted” sticker. It was one of the greatest feelings I have ever had!”*

- Where will a Trump presidency lead? If Trump truly believes the comments he made during the campaign about women and minorities, “then we’re in for a very dangerous world,” Orts said. But Orts saw some room for optimism in Trump’s drive to be successful. “He doesn’t want to fail; if he pursues a lot of his policies, a lot of economists have said he will crater the economy, [create] massive unemployment,” Orts noted. “I think there is hope in that he will want to be successful.... He says he wants to make America great again, and that includes not heading us into another recession in 2017.”

Reflection from First-time Voter Fiorella Riccobono, 19, Florida: *“As a first time voter, I truly did not expect to be participating in such a controversial election. Although every election has had scandal, controversies and fundamental disagreements, I truly think this election’s candidates make this election historic. To be completely honest, at first I did not feel compelled to vote, and I know that has been a common feeling among young voters this election. However, this past weekend I attended the Net Impact conference in Philadelphia, and heard moving stories and experiences from people like Ahamad Ashkar, the founder of the “Hult Prize Foundation”, and Alicia Garza, the founder of “Black Lives Matter,” and throughout their powerful speeches they emphasized the importance of voting. It reminded me that having the right to vote as an American citizen is an honor and a civic duty. As the daughter of two immigrants and as a woman who is going to graduate and join the workforce soon, I have to let my voice be known and vote for the candidate who will do right by my morals and my aspirations for the United States of America.”*