

AN UNSPOKEN DIVIDE

Trump's unexpected win took all the nation and Newton by surprise, revealing a divide within Gen Z and a stigma surrounding political expression at South

By Irene González de las Casas & Ava Ransbotham

On Nov. 5th, Donald J. Trump won the presidential election in an unexpected landslide. Although Newton remained a staunchly blue city, it was not immune to the nationwide rightward shift that carried Trump back to the White House: he saw a two percent increase in support from Newton residents compared to the 2020 presidential election.’

Only six percent of Newton Public School’s (NPS) budget comes from the federal government, but history and Comparative Government teacher Jamie Rinaldi said that new policies in the Trump Administration might lead to hard choices for the Newton community.

“If he were to reject funding to protect the programs that we have in NPS, we could survive, but it would be painful,” he said. “It would force some very difficult, very fractious conversations in the community.”

Those conversations, he said, would focus on social issues, many of which fall along gender divides.

Associated Press exit polling suggested that increased support from young, male voters played a significant role in securing Trump’s victory. According to their data, 56 percent of men aged 19-30 reported voting for Trump; in 2020, he won just 41 percent of that demographic.

Sophomore and self-identifying Republican Jake Paltrowitz said he believes political opinions of South students would also reflect the nationwide gender gap among youth voters.

“In Newton, the guys and the girls are pretty liberal for the most part. But I’d say, in our school, if you were to do a poll of every boy, it would go 80/20 for Trump,” he said.

Hindsight

Paltrowitz’s sentiment, although hypothetical, is indicative of the nation-wide trend, one that contradicts the shock many Democrats at South expressed at the election results.

With Massachusetts polls called early in the evening, senior Noa Munn’s eyes were glued to swing states as she tracked their results trickling in late into election night.

“I noticed that the prediction arrow for Pennsylvania was moving from side to side,” she said. “But then it started to lean more to Trump, 0.1 percent, 0.2 percent. [Commentators] had calculated everything, so that if Pennsylvania goes, then everything else is going to go. And it did. Everything went red.”

Going into the election, senior and president of the South chapter of High School Democrats of America Thomas Kinney was

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Jake Paltrowitz
 class of '27

confident that Harris would win, but looking back, he said that he severely underestimated certain factors.

“There was a big disconnect in this election between how people felt and what was actually going on. I was paying too much attention to numbers and data rather than people’s emotions,” he said. “What I didn’t see coming and what I should have is Trump’s unique ability to really connect with certain voters who feel disillusioned with the political system.”

On the other hand, sophomore Jesse Sherman-Kadish said that, despite his support for Harris, he wasn’t surprised by the results.

“The way that they were running the Harris campaign didn’t touch on the issues that American people faced. They were more involved in identity politics and stuff that doesn’t really affect the general American people,” he said.

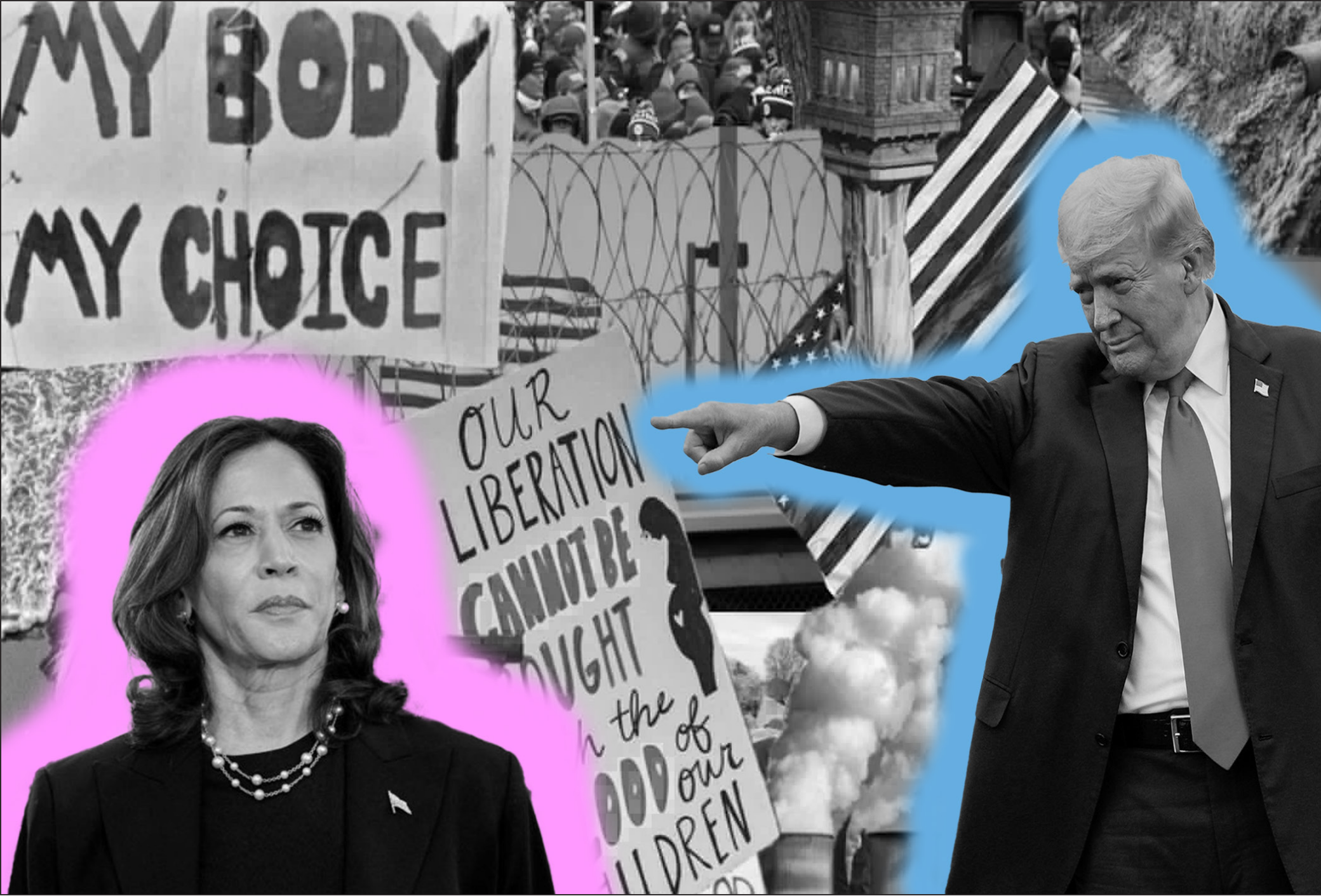
Kinney said his prediction for the election was skewed by his surroundings.

“We’re very much in a bubble in Newton and Massachusetts. A lot of people have been struggling more over the past couple years than people in Massachusetts and in Newton,” he said. “A lot of people view the cost of living as more important than other people around us do.”

Paltrowitz agreed; he said that Newton is not an accurate representation of the voting mindset of average Americans.

“What people in Newton don’t understand is that not all Americans are reading The New York Times every day. With people across the country, they do their jobs and they spend time with their family,” he said.

“They just look at the state of the country now, as opposed to when Trump was president, and they think their lives were better when Trump was president. You can argue it’s not because of Trump, but most people voting thought that it was.”



collage by Irene González de las Casas & Ava Ransbotham

The Right Mindset

Leading up to the election, famed pollster Ann Selzer had predicted that the issue of abortion would rally female voters around Harris. Selzer predicted that the gender gap would be greater than ever, causing the election to shift in Harris’ favor.

Munn represents part of the demographic that influenced Selzer’s poll. She said she is not applying to schools in states that do not have abortion protection enshrined in their constitutions for fear of complications from an

unintended pregnancy.

“Sexual assault and rape are a lot more common in college areas, and so if, God forbid, something happens, and I can’t get immediate medical care there, I could die. I don’t want to be in a state where that could potentially happen,” she said.

Despite her esteemed reputation, Selzer missed the mark on the issue that would motivate voters. According to the AP VoteCast Survey, 40 percent of young voters said the economy and jobs were their top issues, while only 13 percent reported abortion being their

top issue.

Although the gender gap did exist, it was not notably more pronounced than in past elections. The 2024 Edison exit polls showed a 12-point percentage difference between young men and women, 3 points below the 15-point gender divide between 18-29 year olds in the last election cycle.

Paltrowitz represents the majority of the country’s perspective, the one that Selzer underestimated. He said that had he been eligible to vote at the time of the election, he would have cast his ballot for Trump because

of his economic policies and not his stances on social issues.

“At the end of the day, people vote because they care for themselves or their family. If the prices at the gas pump are high, if housing is really high, if the cost of food is really high, that sort of supersedes any social issue,” he said. “His presidency was a lot more economically stable than Biden’s, which is why I would vote for Trump.”

John Doe*, a sophomore and self-identifying Trump supporter, said that the left’s extreme defense of Harris isolated moderates.

“Trump got hyped up for this election. When somebody would say something negative about Kamala, there’d be a lot of backlash, which then caused people to rally with Trump, and his supporters gained a lot of influence,” he said.

Part of this phenomenon can be attributed to what some identified as hastiness from those on the left to equate criticisms of Harris’ policies with sexism, something Munn said that she is guilty of.

“I was saying ‘there’s nothing wrong with Harris, and she’s perfect,’ which is part of the problem,” she said. “But at the same time some of her opponents were acting like because she’s a woman, she’s not a good leader, because she’s a woman, she can’t be a world leader, because she’s a woman, she can’t make decisions. And you would never say that about Trump, even when he had a concept of an idea of something.”

South Divided

While polling data demonstrated that economic issues proved to be, largely, the most prominent factor behind the nation’s shift rightward, social issues, like abortion, remain prominent in conversations about the future of our country.

Both nationwide and at South, Americans have shown they care about the positions their leaders hold on many of these topics.

Munn said she views Trump’s stance on social issues as a dealbreaker.

“It makes me uncomfortable. He’s the definition of the machismo man with his ideals and how he carries himself. He is able to exploit the worst of people,” she said. “There’s this whole new thing about ‘your body, my choice.’ ‘He allows this sexist, racist [and] bigoted environment to grow.’”

When discussing his political views, Paltrowitz said that he is a firm pro-life advocate, a sentiment largely reflecting Trump’s MAGA movement.

“Even if you are in a tough situation, that’s not an excuse to take the life of another human,” he said. “60 million of our fellow countrymen have been killed because of abortion, and that’s a huge issue to me.”

Social issues appear to be underlying, unspoken or even subconscious factors behind Trump’s support: despite Trump’s lack of immediate control over social issues like abortion, Paltrowitz said it is still important to him to have a president that aligns with his conservative views.

“Having a more conservative-minded president as opposed to a more liberal one is

definitely a plus because he’s the leader of the free world. He’s the leader of our country, and he’s propagating conservative ideals as opposed to Kamala Harris saying stuff that’s more liberal than I might not agree with. Even if it’s not through legislation, it’s still better to have it come from the top,” he said.

Because Trump and his supporters have been so closely associated with the pro-life movement, Munn said her firm pro-choice stance influences her perceptions of Trump voters, causing a rift now affecting South.

“If I see a Trump supporter, I’m going to hate them,” she said.

Doe said his support of the pro-life movement comes from his religious identity.

“I’m Christian, and I believe God does everything for a reason. If God gave you a child, he did that for a reason. It’s your job to not go against God,” he said. “And if the woman is going to die from giving birth, I believe that the birth should still go on. I don’t think the birth giver’s life is more important than the baby’s life. God gave you a child for a reason. If you’re going to die to have that child, it’s for a reason.”

However, Paltrowitz said there is more nuance within the pro-life movement than is often acknowledged by the other side.

“I see pro-choice people saying that it’s just a religious thing, which is why I try to divorce myself from that and just say that scientifically and religiously life begins at conception. There’s no other place to draw the line where life actually begins,” he said.

Doe said that conversations between the two sides are often what’s missing.

“I really do understand the positions of pro-choice people,” he said. “That’s not shared the other way around. You’re seen as someone who wants to steal women’s rights, oppress women or take control of their bodies, and that’s a big reason why it’s so heated when it really shouldn’t be. It just should be another issue we talk about.”

Doe said that he would not have requested anonymity if he was merely discussing the economy. What motivated his anonymity in this article is the same reason these intense divides are hidden at South. He said that he conceals his political opinions in the classroom because he doesn’t want others to perceive him differently.

“I didn’t want to look bad in front of my teachers. I don’t want to go against them because obviously they’re the people that are going to be grading me. My impression to them matters a lot,” he said. “So I said, ‘Oh, I was really shocked about Trump,’ when, in reality, I wasn’t.”