How did Donald J. Trump win the presidency? [Nearly every forecast](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/upshot/presidential-polls-forecast.html?action=click&pgtype=Homepage&clickSource=story-heading&module=c-column-middle-span-region&region=c-column-middle-span-region&WT.nav=c-column-middle-span-region&_r=0) model predicted that Hillary Clinton would be the next president of the United States. We were in disbelief — sort of.

During elections, most public opinion surveys try to identify likely voters and use them to predict the winner. Working with our students at Cornell University, we took a different approach by focusing on respondents who said they did not intend to vote for Mrs. Clinton or Mr. Trump. In our survey, this was a sizable group — more than 20 percent of the public — and our analysis indicated that [they leaned toward Mr. Trump](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/opinion/are-there-really-hidden-trump-voters.html?_r=0). Whether undecided or unwilling to openly express their support, this group was hidden to pollsters focusing on likely voters.

We had found [hidden Trump supporters](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/opinion/are-there-really-hidden-trump-voters.html?_r=0), but we did not expect them to swing the election. After all, these respondents were unwilling to directly express their support for Mr. Trump and were the most likely to indicate that if both candidates had flaws, it was better not to vote. But vote they did. This seems the most plausible explanation for why the near unanimous predictions of a Clinton victory proved wrong.

Who then were these hidden Trump supporters? To find out, we returned to our data (a nationally representative sample of 1,461 adults surveyed in October) to examine the opinions and policy preferences of four distinct groups: those who indicated a Trump vote, those who indicated a Clinton vote, hidden Trump supporters and hidden Clinton supporters.