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RACE IN THE 2012 UNITED STATES ELECTIONS AND BEYOND

Lars Hänsel / Daniel Fuglestad

The result of the 2012 United States presidential election is widely considered to be very tight. Since the official begin of the election with the nomination of Mitt Romney at the Republican convention in Tampa and Barack Obama at the Democratic convention in Charlotte, the polls have shown a very competitive race. Neither the bounce in the polls in favour of Barack Obama after the Democratic convention in September nor of Mitt Romney after his strong showing in the first presidential debate in October has changed the overall picture. Energising the base and getting out the vote, but at the same time attracting swing voters is the key to success for each candidate. In this context of a close race the role of the minority vote is even more crucial. In particular in battleground states like Florida, Nevada and Colorado, Hispanics play an important role. The same holds true for African American voters in particular in North Carolina and Virginia, to a lesser degree also in traditionally "white" northern states like Ohio and Michigan.¹

Both campaigns put an emphasis on the minority vote in this election cycle – visible not only in the strong efforts to put a high number of representatives of minorities on the agenda during both conventions. The Republican Party micro-targets now also minority voters through newly posted state directors in Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina and Virginia, to attract the votes for this election.² But the minority vote also undergoes

- 1 | William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "Why Obama Shouldn't Be Taking the Black Vote for Granted", *The New Republic*, 12 July 2012, <http://tnr.com/blog/plank/104900/why-obama-shouldnt-be-taking-the-black-vote-granted> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 2 | Caitlin Huey-Burns, "GOP Targets Hispanic Voters in Swing States", *Real Clear Politics*, 16 April 2012, http://realclearpolitics.com/articles/2012/04/16/gop_targets_hispanic_voters_in_swing_states.html (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

important long term changes that affect not only the upcoming presidential election. These changes have strong repercussions for the future of both parties.

In fact, the minority share of the vote in the United States presidential election is now larger and more influential than at any other point in history. American minorities, most prominently Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanic Americans, have increased their share of the vote from 12.5 per cent in 1988 to 25 per cent in 2008,³ and the percentage will be even higher in 2012. A growing number of the minority vote, in particular the Hispanic-American one, is also a reality for the swing states that will in the end determine the outcome of the election.⁴

The American population is projected to rise from 310 million today to well over 400 million in 2050, with the vast majority of the next 100 million Americans coming from growth in the Asian and Hispanic ethnic groups.⁵ Though Asian and Hispanic votes comprised at most 5 per cent of the vote in 1988, they may constitute up to 40 per cent of the electorate in 2050, and are critical for understanding the future of the American political world. The United States are projected to be "majority minority" in 2050, with the population being 30 per cent Hispanic, 10 per cent Asian, 15 per cent Black, and 45 per cent white. For the first time in history, in 2011, more non-white babies have been born, non-Hispanic whites became a minority.⁶ As such, it would be helpful for any observer of the American political life to break down the components of the American vote

- 3 | Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor, "Dissecting the U.S. Electorate: The most Diverse in History", 30 Apr 2009, Pew Research Center, <http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/dissecting-2008-electorate.pdf> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 4 | Alexander Bolton, "Hispanic population soars in presidential swing states", *The Hill*, 22 Jun 2012, <http://thehill.com/homenews/news/234231-hispanic-population-soars-in-presidential-swing-states> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 5 | Jeffery Passel and Vera D'Cohn, "U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050", *Pew Social Trends*, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2008/02/11/us-population-projections-2005-2050> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 6 | Frank Bass, "Nonwhite U.S. Births Become the Majority for First Time", *Bloomberg*, 17 May 2012, <http://bloomberg.com/news/2012-05-17/non-white-u-s-births-become-the-majority-for-first-time.html> (accessed 16 Oct 2012). Hawaii, California, New Mexico and Texas, and the District of Columbia already now have majority-minority populations.

along racial lines, and then to examine the past, present, and possible future trends affecting the vote of the various American ethnic groups.

HISPANIC-AMERICANS – THE MOST PROMINENT FACE OF THE NEW AMERICA

Hispanic-Americans are the most rapidly growing section of the American electorate, both in number and influence. Their number has grown from an inconsequential 2 per cent of the electorate in 1992 to 8-9 per cent today.⁷ They are expected to comprise 25-30 per cent of the electorate in 2050, and given current poll numbers, this

The Hispanic-American minority is not a homogeneous bloc. Only one quarter use terms like “Hispanics” or “Latino” to identify themselves.

is disastrous news for the Republican Party.⁸ It is also important to understand that the Hispanic-American minority is not a homogeneous bloc. In a study of the Pew Hispanic Center, only one quarter use terms like “Hispanics” or “Latino” to identify themselves. More than half (51 per cent) prefer to use their families’ country of origin to identify themselves (“Mexican”, “Cuban”, “Dominican” etc.). Each group has different interests that need to be addressed by the parties to attract their votes.⁹

Though Latinos are a diverse voting group with varied interests, the support of Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney among Hispanics has dropped to below 30 per cent, endangering his ability to win swing states with a high Hispanic population such as Florida, New Mexico, Colorado, and Nevada.¹⁰ Romney himself has acknowledged this reality off the record, having said at one of his fundraising events that Republicans would face electoral “doom” if they

- 7 | Chris Cilliza and Aaron Blake, “Why Republicans Can’t Write off Hispanics”, *Latinos Ready to Vote*, <http://latinosreadytovote.com/?p=3382> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 8 | Sharon Ennis et al., “The Hispanic Population: 2010”, United States Census Bureau, <http://census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 9 | Paul Taylor, Mark Hugo Lopez, Jessica Hamar Martínez and Gabriel Velasco, “When Labels Don’t Fit: Hispanics and Their Views of Identity”, 4 Apr 2012, Pew Research Center, <http://pewhispanic.org/2012/04/04/when-labels-dont-fit-hispanics-and-their-views-of-identity> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).
- 10 | Mark Hugo Lopez, “How Hispanics voted in the 2008 election”, 5 Nov 2008, Pew Research Center, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1024/exit-poll-analysis-hispanics> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

did not increase their numbers among Hispanic voters.¹¹ The GOP has a significant public relations problem with this part of the electorate and is seen by Latinos and the rest of the country as much more welcoming towards whites than towards Hispanics.¹² A recent Latino Decisions poll places Barack Obama's lead in five battleground states with a significant Hispanic population – Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Virginia, and Florida – at 64-27 per cent. These are terrifying numbers for the Romney campaign.¹³ The grimmest outlook for Mitt Romney is in Florida, a must-win state, where President Obama is polling at a comfortable 59-32 per cent among Hispanic-Americans.¹⁴ In an election that promises to be very close and in a future where Hispanics constitute one third of the American electorate, these poll numbers for the Republican Party are unsustainable.

AN OPPORTUNITY GAINED FOR REPUBLICANS ... AND THEN LOST

It was not always this way. Casual observers of American electoral politics may be surprised to learn that George W. Bush managed to pull in impressive numbers of Hispanics as part of his winning coalition of voters in 2000 and especially in 2004. Though Hispanics outside of the Cuban-American community have historically been Democratic voters, the Republican Party had been showing strong growth with this key demographic during Bush's tenure in office. Bush won the support of a large number of Hispanics through his support of compassionate conservatism in the form of temporary work visas for illegal immigrants and a willingness to draft a comprehensive solution to the

11 | Elspeth Reeve, "Only 25 percent of Latino Voters like Romney, GOP", *The National Journal*, 25 May 2012, <http://national-journal.com/thenextamerica/politics/only-25-percent-latino-voters-like-romney-gop-20120525> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

12 | Sylvia Manzano, "Latinos are Less Welcomed by both Democratic and Republican Parties", *Latino Decisions*, 2 Feb 2010, <http://latinodecisions.com/blog/2010/02/22/latinos-are-less-welcomed> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

13 | "Latino Battleground States Poll and Turnout Scenarios", *Latino Decisions*, http://latinodecisions.com/files/4013/4083/4006/LD_AV_Battleground_Webinar.pdf (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

14 | Chasey Clofstad, "Support for Obama appears solid among Latinos in Florida", *Latino Decisions*, 5 Jul 2012, <http://latino-decisions.com/blog/2012/07/05/support-for-obama-appears-solid-among-latinos-in-florida> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

immigration problem.¹⁵ He won a solid 35 per cent of the vote in 2000,¹⁶ 14 per cent more than Bob Dole in 1996, and managed to significantly increase his vote share to 40-44 per cent in the 2004 election. Though the numbers are somewhat disputed in regards to the exact percent-

President Bush managed to win 56 per cent of the Hispanic vote in Florida, a very strong showing compared to Mitt Romney's paltry 32 per cent today.

age that Bush won, most authors agree that his compassionate conservatism was the deciding factor, in combination with a focus by Latino voters on national security and religious moral issues, as opposed to economic, education, and health care issues. Even more importantly, President Bush managed to win 56 per cent of the Hispanic vote in Florida,¹⁷ a very strong showing compared to Mitt Romney's paltry 32 per cent today. However, Hispanic-Americans, alienated by hostile Republican rhetoric surrounding the comprehensive immigration reform in 2006, participated in the national drubbing of the Republican Party in the midterm elections, giving 70 per cent of their vote to Democratic candidates and subsequently 67 per cent of their vote to Barack Obama in the 2008 election.¹⁸

THE REPUBLICAN OUTLOOK WITH HISPANIC VOTERS

Some hope does exist for the Republican Party in regards to Hispanic voters. For example, the Republican Party has done an excellent job in cultivating local Hispanic politicians and maturing them onto the national stage. Governors Susana Martinez and Brian Sandoval, of New Mexico and Nevada respectively, are very popular, and Marco Rubio of Florida has carved out a name for himself in the Senate. In addition, Ted Cruz, who just defeated Texas Lt. Governor David Dewhurst for the Republican Senate nomination, is

15 | Lauren Fox, "Latino Groups want Candidates to Campaign like George Bush", *U.S. News and World Report*, 15 Feb 2012, <http://usnews.com/news/blogs/washington-whispers/2012/02/15/latino-groups-calling-for-engaging--candidates-in-2012-election-> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

16 | Martin Kasindorf, "Latino Voters Paint a new Picture", *USA Today*, 10 Nov 2004, http://usatoday.com/news/politicsselections/2004-11-10-hispanic-voters_x.htm (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

17 | Mark Hugo Lopez, "The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Election", 5 Nov 2008, Pew Hispanic Center, <http://pewhispanic.org/2008/11/05/the-hispanic-vote-in-the-2008-election> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

18 | "The Latino Vote in the 2010 Election", 3 Nov 2010, Pew Research Center, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1790/2010-mid-term-elections-exit-poll-hispanic-vote> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

extremely popular among Republicans and is expected to be the first Latino Senator from Texas.¹⁹ Furthermore, in the 2010 gubernatorial elections, Republican candidates won 38 per cent of the Latino vote nationally, showing that while Latino voters may like Barack Obama and dislike Mitt Romney, they are still willing to vote for Republican candidates no matter how tainted the party has become by anti-immigrant nativist rhetoric.



Ted Cruz, a Republican, is expected to be the first Latino Senator from Texas. | Source: Gage Skidmore / flickr.com (CC BY-SA).

There is potential for Republican gain among Hispanic-Americans in the future, but little is likely to change between now and the election. Despite Governor Mitt Romney's desire for a "Republican Dream Act", he is unlikely to close the gap between him and his opponent. Hispanic-Americans strongly support Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act and are more likely to agree with the idea that government should "do more to solve our country's problems"²⁰ than the white Americans that form the Republican Party's base. Hispanics as a group are also more likely to identify as Democratic than Republican by a 2-1 margin.

19 | Sylvia Manzano, "Latino Stars Make it Interesting in Texas", *Latino Decisions*, 1 Aug 2012, <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2012/08/01/latino-stars-make-it-interesting-in-texas> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

20 | Frank Newport, "Hispanics Favor Government Intervention to Solve Problems", 25 Jun 2012, Gallup, <http://gallup.com/poll/155333/Hispanic-Voters-Favor-Gov-Involvement-Solve-Problems.aspx> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

This, however, is not universal. Hispanics who identify as Protestant, or are of Cuban heritage, or who live in more conservative states such as Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, or Florida are more likely to identify as Republican, but these groups are outnumbered by more liberal leaning Hispanic groups such as Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans, who constitute two thirds of Hispanic America.²¹ While Republicans can conceivably win back many Hispanics in the future that voted Republican under George W. Bush, Hispanic-Americans in 2012 are likely to give the vast majority of their vote to President Barack Obama.

THE DEMOCRATIC OUTLOOK WITH HISPANIC VOTERS

Despite President Obama's perceived advantage in the 2012 election, there is still a danger for the President and the Democratic Party when it comes to Hispanic voters. Though the President is seen as preferable to his opponent, and his desisting from deportations of young illegal immigrants who would be eligible for the DREAM Act is quite popular with Hispanics, he has often been seen as unresponsive to Latino issues.²² In addition, he has deported more illegal immigrants per year than George W. Bush, and this has alienated many in the Hispanic community.²³ Though it is unlikely that President Obama would lose voters to his opponent, there is a danger that in a strongly polarized election, low turnout could compromise his chances in states with a high Hispanic population. Though a majority of Hispanics will vote for the President, Hispanic-Americans are strongly underrepresented in some battleground states, muting their effect on this current election. However, if the Republicans do not change their attitude towards Hispanics, the Democratic Party can

In a strongly polarised election, low turnout could compromise Obama's chances in states with high Hispanic populations.

21 | Jeffery Jones, "Half of U.S. Hispanics Identify as Political Independents", 2 Jul 2012, Gallup, <http://gallup.com/poll/155453/half-hispanics-identify-political-independents.aspx> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

22 | Mark Krikorian, "Romney's Sunday Surrogates on Immigration", *The National Review*, 25 Jun 2012 <http://nationalreview.com/corner/303866/romneys-sunday-surrogates-immigration-mark-krikorian> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

23 | Kathleen Miles, "More Potential Latino Voters in 8 states than margin of Victory in 2008", 12 Jun 2012, *The Huffington Post*, http://huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/12/latino-2012_n_1591622.html (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

expect a significant advantage in the future, as Hispanic America comes of age and geographically diffuses across the country.

On the other hand, long term support for the Democratic Party can not be taken for granted. On the contrary, the long term trend of Hispanic-Americans having increasingly conservative values could also pose a challenge for the Democratic Party and present new opportunities for the GOP. Whereas new immigrants tend to be more liberal, second generation Hispanic-American tend to be more conservative. According to a poll by *USAToday*, for those born in the United States the priorities shift: policies with regard to immigration become less important than economic issues, the role of the government and social issues.²⁴ With further assimilation, immigrants seem to become more open for Republican Party policies. Democrats cannot necessarily count on demographics as regards long term support by the Hispanic-American minority.

With further assimilation, immigrants seem to become more open for Republican Party policies. Democrats cannot necessarily count on demographics.

ASIAN-AMERICANS: THE NEWEST ADDITION TO THE AMERICAN MOSIAC

Asian-Americans are the most recent addition to the American electorate, rising from almost inconsequential numbers 30 years ago to 5 per cent of the total population and 2.5 per cent of the voting population today. Asian Americans are expected to constitute up to 10 per cent of the electorate by 2050, and, what is important, they have recently overtaken Hispanics to be the largest single immigrant group to the United States.²⁵ In contrast to the majority of Hispanic immigrants, 61 per cent of these Asian immigrants have at least a Bachelor's degree. Like Hispanics, Asian-Americans are currently underrepresented in many swing states. However, they represent more than 5 per cent of the population in Nevada, and more importantly, Virginia – a very important state for President Obama's reelection

24 | Susan Page, "USA TODAY/Gallup Poll: Latinos strongly backing Obama", 25 Jun 2012, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/politics/story/2012-06-24/Hispanic-voters-Obama-Romney-election/55796866/1> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

25 | "The Rise of Asian-Americans", 19 Jun 2012, Pew Social Trends, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

prospects. Asian-Americans played a critical role in defeating Republican Senator George Allen in an extremely close Senate race in 2006. During the race, the Senator made an insensitive remark towards an Asian-American which became widely known in the Asian community; this is likely to have played a major role in his defeat.²⁶

Wealthier on average than white Americans, Asian-Americans are much more likely to be urban, non-Christian, and well educated. They are also firm adherents to the American Dream.

Asian-Americans hold an interesting place in American society. Wealthier on average than white Americans, they are much more likely to be urban, non-Christian, and well educated, all traditionally Democratic identifiers. However, they are also firm adherents to the American Dream, they strongly believe in families, and are more likely to be well-off, traditional Republican identifiers. Although they gave a significant percentage of their vote, 62 per cent, to President Obama in 2008, historically such margins in favour of Democratic candidates are not the norm.

In fact, unlike Hispanics, who are traditionally strong Democratic voters that recently have shown some propensity to vote Republican, Asians are historically Republican voters who have recently taken a sharp turn towards the Democrats. In 1992 for instance – the same year that Ross Perot split much of the Republican vote – Asian-Americans voted 62 per cent for George H.W. Bush, when at the same time, he garnered only 38 per cent of the vote nationally. This percentage mirrors the 62 per cent that Barack Obama received from Asian-American voters in 2012. So what happened during those 20 years? Before the recent surge in Asian immigration to the United States, the Asian-American community in the United States was heavily composed of Asians who were refugees from Communism. In addition, among those Asian-Americans there were more Christians than among Asian-Americans today.²⁷ Nearly three-quarters of Asian-Americans in the U.S. today were born abroad, and except for the Philippines and South

26 | Tim Craig and Michael Shear, "Allen Quip Provokes Outrage, Apology", *The Washington Post*, 15 Aug 2006, <http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/14/AR2006081400589.html> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

27 | Thomas Chen, "Why Asian Americans voted for Obama", *Perspective Magazine*, 26 Feb 2009, <http://perspy.com/?p=74> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

Korea, these countries are broadly non-Christian. Since Christianity is a strong predictor for Republican identification, it would make sense to assume that the proportion of Republican-supporting Asians would go down at the same time as Christian-identifying Asians declines. In addition, like Hispanics and Blacks and in contrast to whites, Asians today are more likely to say that in general government should be doing more, not less, which clashes with Republican ideology.²⁸



Asian Americans (here a volunteer in the 2008 Obama Campaign) tend to agree more with Democratic positions than with Republican ones. | Source: keithpr / flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA).

THE REPUBLICAN OUTLOOK WITH ASIAN VOTERS

Unlike with Hispanics, the Republican Party does not have an issue like immigration that forms a divide between them and the Asian demographic. Out of the three Asian-Americans who have been elected governor on the mainland United States, two, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Nikki Haley of South Carolina, are Republican. The Republican Party has also beaten the Democrats to important symbolic firsts, such as Republican Hiram Fong being elected the first Asian-American Senator. In addition, with the nominations of Norman Mineta and Elaine Chao, the Bush Administration

28 | Alan I. Abramowitz, "Beyond 2010. Demographic Change and the Future of the Republican Party", 11 Mar 2010, Center for Politics, <http://centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/aia2010031101> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

successfully appointed the first Asian-American man and first Asian-American woman to their Cabinet. And there have been some electoral successes for Republicans in more recent times; Republican Governor Bob McDonnell of Virginia won his 2009 race with 60 per cent of the Asian vote.

It would severely complicate Obama's chances in 2012 if the President failed to secure the Virginian Asian vote as he did in 2008.²⁹ But as regards the Asian electorate as a whole, a great deal of the Republican's problem is structural. Asians agree more with Democratic positions than with Republican ones. Republican support is still strong among Vietnamese-Americans, who, like Cuban-Americans, support the Republican Party for its strong anti-Communist history. It is also strong among Filipino-Americans and Korean-Americans, possibly because of their higher than average Christian identification. Also, some have speculated that strong Asian family values and the relative affluence of the Asian community can constitute an opportunity for the Republican Party to win back Asian America, but this remains to be seen.

THE DEMOCRATIC OUTLOOK WITH ASIAN VOTERS

The urban, non-Christian, and relatively well educated characteristics of the Asian-American community work strongly in favour of the Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party, in contrast to the GOP, has many structural factors that help to guarantee its Asian voters. The urban, non-Christian, and relatively well educated characteristics of the Asian-American community work strongly in favour of the Democratic Party. The Asian-American community should turn out strongly for President Obama and will be a critical factor in the race for Nevada and Virginia.³⁰ There are, similarly as with Hispanic-Americans, issues for Democrats in utilising their advantage among Asian voters due to geography and immigration status. As many Asians in the United States are either immigrants or

29 | "Could 2012 be the Year of the Asian Voter?", *National Public Radio*, 5 Aug 2012, <http://npr.org/2012/08/05/158168493/could-2012-be-the-year-of-the-asian-voter> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

30 | Rosa Ramirez, "Does the Presidency rest on Virginia's Asian-American Vote?", *The National Journal*, 19 Jul 2012, <http://nationaljournal.com/thenextamerica/politics/does-presidency-rest-on-virginia-asian-american-vote--20120719> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

below the voting age, Asian-Americans are still underrepresented among the American voting population. In addition, the Asian-American community is heavily concentrated along the West Coast in the states of California, Oregon, and Washington – all Democratic strongholds. Though it may be unlikely, should the 420,000 Asian-Americans in Virginia give Mitt Romney the 60 per cent of their vote that they gave to Bob McDonnell when he was elected as governor in 2010, this could have a greater influence on the election than the millions of votes on the West Coast cast by Asian-Americans for the President. Asian-Americans in Nevada, another swing state, were also more likely to vote Republican in 2008 than the average Asian voter.³¹

In the end, though, the Democratic Party can count on Asian-Americans in 2012 to give the Democrats a majority of their vote. However, given the willingness of Asian-Americans to vote for Republican candidates and the cold realities of the Electoral College, the Democrats can neither count on this to translate into major results in the 2012 election, nor on the guaranteed support of Asian-Americans in the future. But, should Democrats consolidate their gains with Asian voters, the Party can count on gaining a significant advantage as Asian-Americans increase their numbers and spread across the United States.

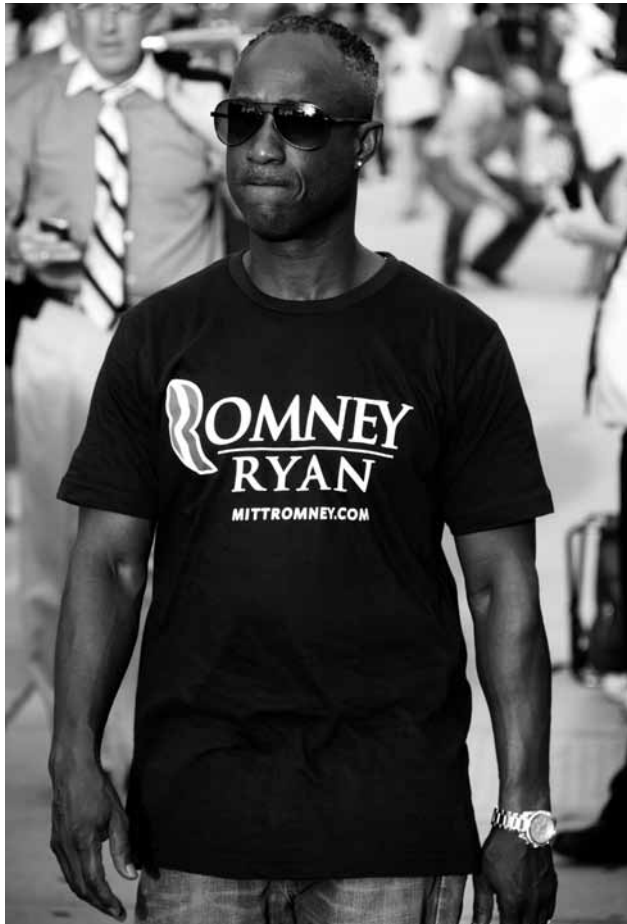
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SUFFERING, BETRAYAL, AND THE NEVER ENDING STRUGGLE: BLACK VOTING IN AMERICA

There is plenty of debate regarding white, Asian, and Hispanic votes in the United States. The role of different issues, sub-demographics, voter turnout, wedge issues, and other problems are discussed ad nauseum in relation to these groups; this is not so for African-Americans, who will vote overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party this November, as they have done for decades. They will form the core of the Democratic vote in the deep blue states, and remain important wherever they vote because of the

31 | Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, *The Asian-American Vote in the 2008 Presidential Election*, <http://aaldef.org/docs/AALDEF-ExitPoll-2008.pdf> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

one-sidedness of their choice. However, for Europeans who may only have a cursory knowledge of the history of American race relations and for U.S. citizens in need of a refresher, it would be useful to recount the history of the African-American vote and why African-Americans vote overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party today.



A rare picture: Unlike this Romney supporter, most African-Americans in November will again vote for Obama. | Source: Andy Herbon / flickr.com (CC BY-NC).

The story begins after the Civil War in 1865. After Abraham Lincoln had freed the slaves and brought the South back into the Union, the Radical Republicans in Congress began what became known as Reconstruction from 1865-1877. Many blacks were elected to state and national office, and

it was a time of great progress for the black community. They were opposed by the national Democratic Party and local groups of white paramilitaries such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Red Shirts. Reconstruction was, for a time, successful, but the weakening of the national Republican Party under President Ulysses B. Grant and the erosion of political will among Northern whites for the programme led to Reconstruction's dramatic end. After a closely contested election in 1876, in which the Republican candidate won the electoral vote but not the popular vote, the national Republican Party agreed to end Reconstruction in the South in return for the recognition of their candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes. Though many blacks continued to vote Republican, they had lost the champion for their rights.

During the decades of Jim Crow following the end of Reconstruction, no party rushed to claim the mantle of Civil Rights. Most blacks continued to vote Republican, even though the Party had abandoned their push for change. Things began to change, however, with the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. Though President Roosevelt was neither a champion of Civil Rights nor particularly concerned with African-Americans, he still nominated 45 African-American community leaders to

his Federal Council on Negro Affairs to advise the administration as to how to best help the African-American community. At this point, the Democratic Party began to split the African-American vote with the Republicans equally. However,

When Harry Truman issued his executive order to desegregate the armed forces, this solidified majority Black support for the Democratic Party.

when Harry Truman issued his executive order to desegregate the armed forces, this solidified majority Black support for the Democratic Party. Despite this, Republicans still managed to win African-Americans at levels similar to how they perform among Hispanic-Americans today: Dwight Eisenhower won 38 per cent of the black vote in 1956 and Richard Nixon earned 32 per cent in his 1960 defeat to John F. Kennedy.³² However, just before the 1964 Presidential Election, Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act: his Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater, opposed this legislation. President Johnson won 94 per cent of the African American vote that year,

32 | Brooks Jackson, "Blacks and the Democratic Party", Annenberg Public Policy Center, 18 Apr 2008, <http://factcheck.org/2008/04/blacks-and-the-democratic-party> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

and Republicans have been lucky to get over 10 per cent of the vote since. Since then, continual Republican opposition to programmes such as affirmative action and the welfare system which disproportionately help African-Americans, and the historic election of President Obama mean that African-Americans will be voting Democratic far into the foreseeable future, and there is little the Republican Party can do to change this.

A NEW-FOUND RACIAL POLARIZATION – THE WHITE VOTE IN 21ST CENTURY AMERICA

White Americans are not often thought of as an ethnic voting bloc in the same way as African-, Asian-, and Hispanic-Americans. However, given the future of the United States as a majority-minority country and the strong political polarization seen among whites, especially working-class whites, it is appropriate to examine the white vote in the same way that one examines the votes of African-, Asian, and Hispanic-Americans. Constituting 75 per cent of the eligible voter rolls and 63 per cent of the society as a whole, white Americans are still the most political American ethnic group. White working-class Americans are an important sub-set of the white vote, and were the core of the New Deal Coalition that brought the Democratic Party to power almost continuously for the 40 years following the 1932 election. Though the white working class has declined from 86 per cent of the American electorate to 48 per cent today, white Americans and the white working class are critical for the electoral chances of any candidate.³³ In the same way that Republicans are having issues appealing to Hispanic- and Asian-Americans, the Democratic Party is having severe difficulty appealing to many white Americans, including groups in which the Democratic Party did quite strongly in 2006 and 2008. 60 per cent of whites voted Republican in the 2010 midterms, and significantly, only 33 per cent of working-class whites voted for the Democratic Party. How did the political landscape change so profoundly? How did the darling of the New Deal coalition become such a reliable Republican voting bloc?

33 | Ruy Teixeira and Alan Abramowitz, "The Decline of the White Working Class and the Rise of a Mass Upper Middle Class", Apr 2008, Brookings, <http://brookings.edu/research/papers/2008/04/demographics-teixeira> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

It would be easy to ascribe white distaste for the Democratic Party and Obama to mere racism, but this would be an oversimplification. Many argue that the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by President Johnson “flipped” the electoral map, with the racist states of the American South and West supporting the Republican Party due to Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” in the 1968 election.³⁴ The argument maintains that the continual white support for the Republican Party is based on this premise. However, the narrative fails to account for critical causes for white support of the Republican Party. The whites were particularly drawn in by the stringent anti-Communism and religious fundamentalism offered by Ronald Reagan and other like minded Republicans. This resonates more strongly in the predominantly Christian South, Midwest, and mountain West than in other parts of the country. In addition, some have argued that economic factors played a larger role in turning the South red than racial issues. They say that the growth of the South from an economic backwater to a heavily suburban national engine of economic power was the critical factor leading to GOP growth in the South from the 1960s to the 1990s. Working class southern whites, even in areas with large black populations, still voted strongly for the Democrats up until the 1990s. It was wealthier Southerners who were the backbone of the Republicans.³⁵ Though it is a complicated and controversial question, one can say that a combination of a soft appeal to whites through the “Southern Strategy”, economic changes in the South, and culture war issues have caused whites, and especially working class whites, to trend towards the Republican Party.

Working class southern whites, even in areas with large black populations, still voted strongly for the Democrats up until the 1990s.

THE REPUBLICAN OUTLOOK WITH WHITE VOTERS

White Americans, both working class and white-collar, will be critical to the chances of Mitt Romney this November. Minorities will be turning out strongly on behalf of President Obama, so maintaining conservative enthusiasm for

34 | James Boyd, “Nixon’s Southern Strategy ‘It’s all in the Charts’”, *The New York Times*, <http://nytimes.com/packages/html/books/phillips-southern.pdf> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

35 | Clay Risen, “The Myth of the Southern Strategy”, *The New York Times*, 10 Dec 2006, <http://nytimes.com/2006/12/10/magazine/10Section2b.t-4.html> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

Romney will be key for the Governor's campaign. White working class voters have swung wildly during election season for the past 50 years and, for better or worse, despite their reduced size they are very important to both Republicans' and Democrats' election hopes.³⁶ Though Republicans have posted impressive numbers among whites and especially the white working class, Mitt Romney himself is unlikely to enjoy the affection of working class people in the way that Presidents Bush, Clinton, and Reagan did. While some have speculated that he may gain more traction among educated whites based on his elite business and economic experience,³⁷ much of the Governor's chances this fall rest upon a heavy turnout of the white working class.³⁸ Lack of enthusiasm for John McCain in this group helped doom his chances in 2008, and avoiding this problem is paramount if the Republican Party hopes to change the occupant of the White House in November.

THE DEMOCRATIC OUTLOOK WITH WHITE VOTERS

Barack Obama and the Democrats' issues with white voters are more complicated. Many suggest that due to the reduced numbers of the white working class the President can create a new coalition that does not rely on the traditional working class voters that formed the foundation of the Democratic Party in the 20th century.³⁹ This coalition would consist of college educated, young, and female whites in conjunction with solid majorities of minority voters. This also heavily relies on Obama not losing the margins he has enjoyed among educated whites – losses

36 | Thomas Edsall, "Canaries in the Coal Mine", *The New York Times*, 17 Jun 2012, <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/canaries-in-the-coal-mine> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

37 | Ronald Brownstein, "Romney's Economic Reach Threatens Obama", *The National Journal*, 12 Jun 2012, <http://decoded.nationaljournal.com/2012/06/romneys-economic-reach-threate.php> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

38 | Ronald Brownstein, "Romney needs Gipper like White Grip", *The National Journal*, 18 Jun 2012, <http://nationaljournal.com/thenextamerica/politics/romney-needs-gipper-like-white-grip-20120618> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

39 | Thomas Edsall, "The Future of the Obama Coalition", *The New York Times*, 27 Nov 2012, <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/27/the-future-of-the-obama-coalition> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

among them would be catastrophic.⁴⁰ For now Obama's numbers have remained steady among educated whites.⁴¹ However, he faces dangerous numbers among white subgroups which predominantly voted Democrat in 2008. According to a recent Gallup survey, support for Obama among young adults and unmarried female whites has declined.⁴² While the listed groups are still expected to give a majority of their votes to Obama, there is the issue of voter mobilization, as with Hispanics, and of whether or not these groups will come out in sufficient numbers to make up for the Democratic Party's losses in larger white subgroups.

A DIVIDED AMERICA

In conclusion, the ethnic vote will continue to have a significant influence on the electorate, not only in the upcoming election but also in the future. Whites, and especially working class whites, will continue to vote predominantly Republican, while Asians, Blacks, and Hispanics will give the vast majority of their vote to the Democratic Party. Republicans will steal some of the votes of Christian Asians and Protestant Hispanics, as well as specific ethnic groups such as Cubans and Vietnamese from the Democratic Party, while President Obama is going down well with white women, the educated, and the young. Mitt Romney will presumably not backtrack to his strong immigration rhetoric, nor could he if he desired to, given his previous statements on the issue. Barack Obama will probably continue to lose white voters, and many of his political advisers will urge him not to care, asking him to focus on the white subgroups he can win.

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40 | Ruy Teixeira and Jim Halpin, "The Path to 270", Center for American Progress, http://americanprogress.org/issues/2011/11/pdf/path_to_270.pdf (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

41 | Nate Cohn, "Obama's Problem With White, non-College Educated Voters is Getting Worse", 11 Jun 2012, *The New Republic*, <http://tnr.com/blog/plank/103969/obama-s-problem-white-non-college-educated-voters-getting-worse> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

42 | Lydia Saad, "Obama's White Base Shows Cracks Compared to 2008", 12 Jun 2012, Gallup, <http://gallup.com/poll/155156/Obama-White-Base-Shows-Cracks-Compared-2008.aspx> (accessed 16 Oct 2012).

In the long run, these ethnic politics are unsustainable, and profoundly unhealthy for the country. No party will have a structural majority in the future along ethnic lines that it can count on. The parties will thus have to adapt to the changing demographic developments. The Republican Party cannot go on as an alliance of white voters, devout Christians of other races, and historically anti-communist ethnic groups. The biggest challenge for the Republicans is the growing percentage of non-white voters. It must find a way to appeal to Asian and especially Hispanic voters without compromising its principles.

There is no future for the GOP as a primarily "white party". At the same time, a Democratic majority in the future is also not a given prospect. The Democratic Party cannot go on as an alliance of ethnic voters and select white subgroups. While this formula might still seem much more viable for elections than the Republican strategy, given the changing demographics of the country, the Democratic Party must resist the temptation to take the ethnic vote for granted and to abandon the white vote to the Republican Party. Democrats must find a way to recreate the New Deal coalition that brought together Americans of all stripes, working class Southern whites, Jewish intellectuals, immigrants, and African-Americans, etc, for the health of the country. And Republicans need to find another route beyond religion to appeal to the growing masses of Asian and Hispanic Americans in order to build a more unified society. A United States of America divided by ethnic strife will be less safe, less prosperous, and less free; both Democrats and Republicans must work tirelessly to ensure that there exists a united America.