



# New Progressive America

Twenty Years of Demographic, Geographic, and Attitudinal Changes Across the Country Herald a New Progressive Majority

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# Introduction and summary

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama ran on a strongly progressive program that included a promise of universal health care coverage, a dramatic transformation to a low-carbon economy, and a historic investment in education—alongside broad hints that substantial government spending and regulation would be required to deal with the economic and financial crises. He also promised a new, more cooperative approach to international relations. Obama received 53 percent of the popular vote to 46 percent for his conservative opponent John McCain and carried the electoral vote by an even more substantial 365-to-173 margin.

Obama's 53 percent of the popular vote is the largest share of the popular vote received by any presidential candidate in 20 years. The last candidate to register that level of support was conservative George H.W. Bush, who won by an identical 53 percent-to-46 percent margin. So, separated by 20 years, we have two elections that are practically mirror images of one another, but with conservatives on the winning end of the first and progressives on the winning end of the second.

What happened? How did conservatives do so well in one election but progressives so well in the other? The answer: In those intervening 20 years, a new progressive America has emerged with a new demography, a new geography, and a new agenda.

The new demography refers to the array of growing demographic groups that have aligned themselves with progressives and swelled their ranks. The new geography refers to the close relationship between pro-progressive political shifts and dynamic growth areas across the country, particularly within contested states. The new agenda is the current tilt of the public toward progressive ideas and policy priorities—a tilt that is being accentuated by the strong support for this agenda among growing demographic groups.

All this adds up to big change that is reshaping our country in a fundamentally progressive direction. Consider some of the components of the new demography. Between 1988 and 2008, the minority share of voters in presidential elections has risen by 11 percentage points, while the share of increasingly progressive white college graduate voters has risen by four points. But the share of white-working class voters, who have remained conservative in their orientation, has plummeted by 15 points.

That's a repeated pattern—state after state—helping send them in a progressive direction. In Pennsylvania, for example, the white working class declined by 25 points between 1988 and 2008, while white college graduates rose by 16 points and minorities by eight points. And in Nevada, the white working class is down 24 points over the time period, while minority voters are up an amazing 19 points and white college graduates by 4 points.

These trends will continue. The United States will be majority-minority by 2042. By 2050, the country will be 54 percent minority as Hispanics double from 15 percent to 30 percent of the population, Asians increase from 5 percent to 9 percent and African Americans move from 14 percent to 15 percent.

Other demographic trends accentuate progressives' advantage. The Millennial Generation—those born between 1978 and 2000—gave Obama a stunning 66 percent-to-32 percent margin in 2008. This generation is adding 4.5 million adults of voting age every year. Or consider professionals, who are now the most progressive occupational group and increase that support with every election. Fast-growth segments among women like singles and the college-educated favor progressives over conservatives by large margins. And even as progressives improve their performance among the traditional faithful, the growth of religious diversity—especially rapid increases among the unaffiliated—favors progressives. By the election of 2016, it is likely that the United States will no longer be a majority white Christian nation.

Geographical trends are equally as stunning. Progressive gains since 1988 have been heavily concentrated in not just the urbanized cores of large metropolitan areas, but also the growing suburbs around them. Even in exurbia, progressives have made big gains. Progressive gains were only minimal in the smallest metropolitan areas and in small town rural America and only in the most isolated, least populated rural counties did progressives actually lose ground.

Within states, there is a persistent pattern of strong pro-progressive shifts in fast-growing dynamic metropolitan areas. In Colorado, Obama in the 2008 presidential election improved over Sen. John Kerry's margin in 2004 by 14 points in the fast-growing Denver metropolitan area and made his greatest gains in the super fast-growing Denver suburbs. Sen. Kerry lost Colorado to President Bush; Obama defeated Sen. John McCain.

And so it went across key swing states. In Nevada, Obama carried the Las Vegas metro by 19 points, which was 14 points better than Kerry in 2004 and 35 points better than Michael Dukakis in 1988. In Florida, Obama carried the Orlando metropolitan area in the I-4 corridor by nine points, a 17-point gain over 2004 and an amazing 48 point shift since 1988. In Virginia, Obama dominated the state's northern suburbs across the Potomac River from the District of Columbia by 19 points—15 points better than Kerry and 38 points better than Dukakis. There are many other examples, but the story is the same from state to state: where America is growing, progressives are gaining strength and gaining it fast.

As the country is growing and changing, so are the American people's views on what government can and should do. This is shaping a new progressive agenda to go with the new demography and the new geography, starting with the likely diminution in the culture wars that have bedeviled American politics for so long. While cultural disagreements remain, their political influence is being undermined by the rise of the Millennial Generation, increasing religious and family diversity and the decline of the culturally conservative white working class. Culture wars issues, which so conspicuously failed to move many voters in the last couple of elections, will lose even more force in years to come.

Instead, we will see more attention paid to issues such as health care, energy and education, where government has a positive role to play. The public holds distinctly progressive views in each of these areas, backing health care for all, a transition to clean energy and building a 21st-century education system, including a major infusion of resources to improve kindergarten-through-12th grade education and college access. In each of these areas, ongoing demographic change is likely to intensify the public's commitment to progressive goals, since rising demographic groups tend to be especially supportive.

In the pages that follow, this report will document the emergence and current state of this new progressive America through intensive analysis of election, demographic and public opinion data. As we will demonstrate, at this point in our history, progressive arguments combined with the continuing demographic and geographic changes are tilting our country in a progressive direction—trends should take America down a very different road than has been traveled in the last eight years. A new progressive America is on the rise.

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We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

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### About the Glaser Progress Foundation

The Progressive Studies Program at CAP is made possible by the generous support and partnership of the Glaser Progress Foundation, created by Rob Glaser, CEO and Chairman of RealNetworks, Inc, and directed by Martin Collier. The foundation is focused on building a more just, sustainable and humane world through its work in four program areas: measuring progress, global HIV/AIDS, independent media and animal advocacy.

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