



The Path to 270

Demographics versus Economics in the 2012 Presidential Election

Ruy Teixeira and John Halpin November 2011

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

With a little under one year to go before the 2012 presidential election, next year's battle looks increasingly competitive, with ongoing economic distress and a highly energized Republican base potentially neutralizing the incumbency advantage that President Barack Obama would traditionally hold.

Obviously, much could change between now and then but at the outset of the election campaign it is clear that two large forces will ultimately determine the outcome: the shifting demographic balance of the American electorate, and the objective reality and voter perception of the economy in key battleground states. The central questions of the election are thus fairly straightforward. Will the rising electorate of communities of color, the Millennial generation, professionals, single women, and seculars that pushed Obama to victory in 2008 be sufficient and mobilized enough to ensure his re-election in 2012? Or will the Republican Party and its presidential nominee capitalize on a struggling economy and greater mobilization from a conservative base that holds the president in deep disdain?

Regardless of the outcome, it is likely that American politics will remain highly contested and polarized for years to come. The electoral volatility seen from 2006 to 2010 suggests that the biggest issues in American politics—the role of government, the balance of public and market forces, taxation, and social welfare policies—remain contested in partisan terms. The financial crisis and the Great Recession have severely clouded the electoral picture, making it clear that 2008 marked only the potential for a new progressive alignment in American elections, rather than its consolidation.

Given the job approval ratings of the president and economic indicators in key states (see Table 1 on next page), the 2012 election will likely be tighter than the 2008 election, perhaps more like 2004 or even the highly contested 2000 election.

TABLE 1
Obama job approval and unemployment rate by state

| | Obama job approval (percent) | Unemployment rate (percent) | | Obama job approval (percent) | Unemployment rate (percent) |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| D.C. | 83 | 11.1 | Nevada | 44 | 13.4 |
| Connecticut | 60 | 8.9 | Arizona | 44 | 9.1 |
| Maryland | 59 | 7.4 | Colorado | 44 | 8.3 |
| Delaware | 59 | 8.1 | Oregon | 44 | 9.6 |
| New York | 57 | 8.0 | South Carolina | 43 | 11.0 |
| Massachusetts | 57 | 7.3 | Louisiana | 42 | 6.9 |
| Hawaii | 56 | 6.4 | Indiana | 42 | 8.9 |
| Vermont | 54 | 5.8 | Missouri | 42 | 8.7 |
| Illinois | 54 | 10.0 | South Dakota | 41 | 4.6 |
| New Jersey | 54 | 9.2 | Texas | 40 | 8.5 |
| California | 53 | 11.9 | New Hampshire | 40 | 5.4 |
| Minnesota | 52 | 6.9 | Tennessee | 40 | 9.8 |
| Rhode Island | 50 | 10.5 | Alaska | 39 | 7.6 |
| Washington | 50 | 9.1 | Nebraska | 39 | 4.2 |
| Wisconsin | 50 | 7.8 | Kansas | 38 | 6.7 |
| Maine | 50 | 7.5 | Alabama | 38 | 9.8 |
| Michigan | 50 | 11.1 | North Dakota | 37 | 3.5 |
| Iowa | 49 | 6.0 | Kentucky | 37 | 9.7 |
| Pennsylvania | 48 | 8.3 | Montana | 36 | 7.7 |
| Georgia | 48 | 10.3 | Arkansas | 33 | 8.3 |
| Florida | 47 | 10.6 | West Virginia | 33 | 8.2 |
| North Carolina | 46 | 10.5 | Oklahoma | 32 | 5.9 |
| Virginia | 46 | 6.5 | Utah | 32 | 7.4 |
| New Mexico | 46 | 6.6 | Wyoming | 32 | 5.8 |
| Mississippi | 45 | 10.6 | Idaho | 27 | 9.0 |
| Ohio | 44 | 9.1 | US | 47 | 9.1 |

Source: Gallup (Average Job Approval Jan-June 2011); BLS (Seasonally Adjusted, Unemployment Rate September 2011).

What strengths and weaknesses do President Obama and Democrats hold going into 2012?

As we've previously argued in other CAP reports (see "[New Progressive America](#)," "[State of American Political Ideology, 2009](#)" and "[Demographic Change and the Future of the Parties](#)"), the shifting demographic composition of the electorate—rising percentages of communities of color, single and highly educated women, Millennial generation voters, secular voters, and educated whites living in more urbanized states or more urbanized parts of states—clearly favors Democrats and has increased the relative strength of the party in national elections in recent years. In contrast, the Republican Party's coalition of older, whiter, more rural, and evangelical voters is shrinking and becoming more geographically concentrated and less important to the overall political landscape of the country.¹

These Democratic advantages emerged clearly in the 2008 presidential election. Barack Obama's 53 percent popular vote represented the largest share any presidential candidate received in 20 years. Obama won 365 electoral votes and he carried all 18 states, plus the District of Columbia, that John Kerry won in 2004 (as did Al Gore in 2000 and Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996), plus nine states that Kerry lost: Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia. By region, this pattern of Democratic victories helped to reduce core GOP strength in presidential elections to the Upper Mountain West, Great Plains states, and the South.

Republicans also lost their political monopoly in the South as the three fast-growing "new south" states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida went Democratic in 2008. The Northeast, the Midwest (with the exception of Missouri), the Southwest (with the exception of Arizona), and the West were solidly controlled by the Democrats. Moreover, the states the GOP carried tended to be rural and lightly populated. Sixteen out of 28 states Obama carried had 10 or more electoral votes while just 4 of the 21 that John McCain carried had that many electoral votes. Obama also carried seven of the eight most populous states: California, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Only one of the eight most populous states—Texas—went for McCain.²

Even with these long-term demographic strengths, Democratic weaknesses are manifest. Continuing economic distress among large segments of the American public, coupled with the perceived inability of the Obama administration's policies to spark real recovery, has coalesced into serious doubts about Democratic stewardship of the economy. In August 2011, Gallup reported record low public approval of President Obama's handling of the economy, with barely one-quarter (26 percent) approving of the president's performance on this key indicator.³ No president in the past 50 years

has been re-elected with unemployment as high as it is today. Historically, administrations with unemployment problems have seen them mitigated with significant employment change ahead of an election.

But given that the Congressional Budget Office is currently projecting unemployment to average 8.7 percent in 2012,⁴ that does not appear to be in the offing—unless of course there are new measures to stimulate jobs and growth. Such measures face difficult prospects given the stated position of House Republicans.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of Republicans going into 2012?

As the 2010 election highlights, Republicans continue to hold strong advantages when the voting electorate is older, more conservative, and less diverse than the overall population. Democrats suffered one of the largest electoral defeats on record last year, ceding control of the House of Representatives to the Republican Party after regaining the majority just four years earlier. Republicans gained 63 House seats in the 2010 election, overperforming by about 10 seats what would have been expected on the basis of the popular vote split—approximately 52 percent Republican to 45 percent Democratic.

The Republican vote was efficiently distributed to produce Republican victories, especially in the Rust Belt states and in contested southern states such as Virginia and Florida. The Republican gain of 63 seats was the best post-World War II seat gain by either party in a midterm election, and only the third time a party gained more than 50 seats since then.

Exit-poll data from 2010 showed that independent voters,⁵ white working-class voters, seniors, and men broke heavily against the Democrats due to the economy. Similarly, turnout levels were also unusually low in communities of color and among young voters, and unusually high among seniors, whites, and conservatives, thus contributing to a more skewed midterm electorate.

The desire to unseat President Obama will likely produce a strong surge of Republican base voters in 2012. If this enthusiasm gap translates into a noticeably more conservative, GOP-leaning electorate than is typical in presidential elections, Republicans may be able to capture several of President Obama's states from 2008.

Republicans maintain ongoing weaknesses that will need to be addressed in order to maximize their chances in 2012. The party's increasing alignment with its most

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conservative wing and the rising power of Tea Party values and positions within the GOP camp does not translate well to the larger electorate. Thus, the GOP's ability to capitalize politically on the poor economy will be significantly reduced if their eventual presidential nominee is too closely associated with an extreme anti-statist platform that is hostile to aspects of government that Americans support or a social and cultural agenda outside of the mainstream of public opinion. And even with a possible advantage in voter enthusiasm, the base mobilization strategy employed successfully by President Bush's campaign in 2004 will be difficult to replicate given demographic shifts since that election and concerns about GOP extremism among more moderate, independent, and nonideological Americans.

Heading into 2012, the primary strategic questions will be: Will President Obama withstand continued doubts about the economy and his approach to recovery? Will the president hold sufficient support among communities of color, educated whites, Millennials, single women, and seculars and avoid a catastrophic meltdown among white working-class voters? Conversely, will Republicans capture voter disenchantment on the economy and offer a credible economic alternative to the president? Will they nominate a candidate who can appeal beyond their older, more conservative, white, evangelical base? Will Democratic apathy and Republican energy make the electorate much more conservative leaning than its underlying demographics would suggest?

The remainder of this paper explores these questions in more detail by first examining the demographic and geographic trends that will matter most in 2012 and then exploring what implications these trends might have in terms of Democratic and Republican strategy for next year's campaign. In brief, here are our key findings.

On the national level, given solid, but not exceptional, performance among minority voters, Obama's re-election depends on either holding his 2008 white college-graduate support, in which case he can survive a landslide defeat of 2010 proportions among white working-class voters, or holding his slippage among both groups to around 2004 levels, in which case he can still squeak out a victory. Conversely, if Republicans can cut significantly into Obama's white college-graduate support and then replicate the landslide margins they achieved among white working-class voters in 2010, then they are likely to emerge victorious.

On the state level, Obama and the Republicans start the election campaign with 186 and 191 electoral votes respectively from their core states. With the exception of New Hampshire, the additional states Obama and the Republicans need can

come from three broad geographic areas: the Midwest/Rust Belt, the Southwest, and the New South. They are all states that were carried by Obama in 2008.

The six Midwest/Rust Belt swing states (Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) are all marked by slow growth and by a relatively small and slow-growing percentage of voters from communities of color. These states are projected to average around 15 percent minority voters in 2012, ranging from a low of 10 percent in Iowa to a high of 21 percent in Pennsylvania. But this relatively small base of minority voters is supplemented for Democrats by fairly strong support among these states' growing white college-graduate populations, who gave Obama an average 5-point advantage in 2008. This coalition of the ascendant has produced increased Democratic support in growing areas of these states.

Moreover, the weight of that coalition should be larger in these states in 2012 than in 2008, with an average 3-point increase in the percent of white college graduates and minorities among voters, and a 3-point decline in the percent of white working-class voters. In addition, Obama should also benefit from the fact that Midwestern and Rust Belt white working-class voters tend to be more supportive than in other competitive states, averaging only a 2-point Democratic deficit in 2008.

The poor economic situation, however, weighs heavily on that relative friendliness and it is likely to reduce enthusiasm for Obama among his coalition of the ascendant. That will give Republicans an opening in these states, especially in Ohio. McCain lost the state by only 5 points in 2008, the white working class was notably sympathetic to the GOP even then (McCain carried them by 10 points), and except for Michigan, the economic situation is worse than in the rest of these states. A strong GOP mobilization effort could take the state, especially if there is no significant economic improvement between now and the election.

GOP chances in the other five states are not as good, though Pennsylvania, with the most friendly white working class, and Michigan, with the worst economy, provide serious opportunities. For Obama's part, his ability to keep his coalition of the ascendant together and avoid catastrophic losses among the white working class in all five states will be heavily dependent on whether and how much the economy improves as we near the election.

The three Southwest swing states (Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico) are all marked by fast growth and by relatively high and growing percentages of minority, chiefly

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Hispanic, voters. These states are projected to average around 36 percent minority voters in 2012, ranging from a low of 21 percent in Colorado to a high of 52 percent in New Mexico. And the 3-point advantage the growing white college-graduate population gives Obama supplements this solid base of minority voters for Democrats.

This coalition of the ascendant has produced increased Democratic support in most growing areas of these states. Moreover, the weight of that coalition should be larger in these states in 2012 than in 2008, with an average 4-point increase in the percent of white college graduates and minorities among voters, and a 4-point decline in the percent of white working-class voters. Yet compared to the Midwestern and Rust Belt swing states, white working-class voters in the Southwest are quite a bit more friendly to the GOP, averaging a 17-point Republican advantage in 2008.

The difficult economic situation, especially in Nevada and Colorado, is likely to enhance their receptiveness to the GOP, even as it is likely to reduce enthusiasm for Obama among white college graduates and, most worrisome for his campaign, among minorities, where support and turnout among Hispanics could fall significantly. Therefore, even though Obama has the demographic wind at his back, so to speak, the Republicans will have a serious shot at these states. And at least in Nevada and Colorado, without significant economic improvement, even hard mobilization work by the Obama campaign may not be enough to keep them out of GOP hands.

The three New South swing states (Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia) are all marked by fast growth, driven by their burgeoning minority populations. These states are projected to average around 31 percent minority voters in 2012. These voters, with their relatively high concentrations of black voters, gave Obama an average of 82 percent support in 2008, significantly higher than the Southwest swing states' average of 71 percent.

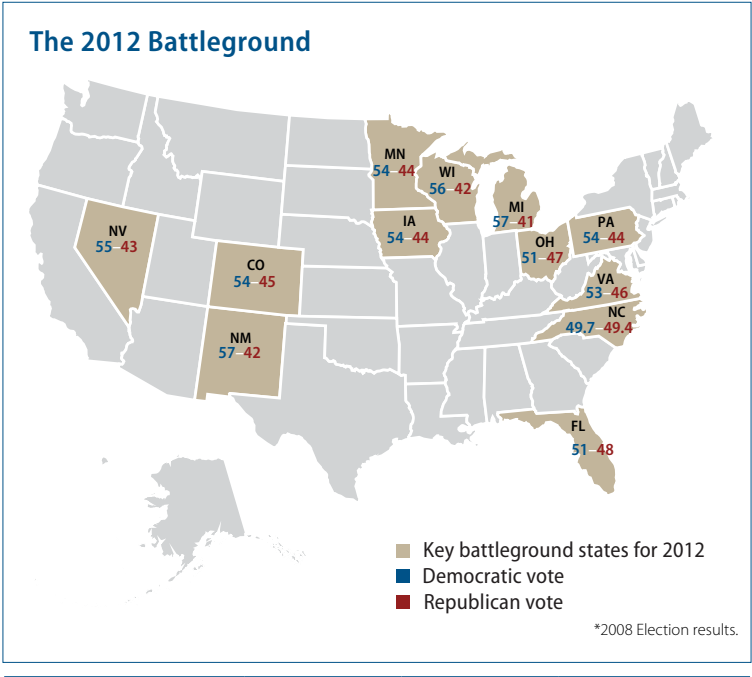
But in contrast to the Southwest states, white college-graduate voters are significantly more supportive of the GOP, giving McCain an average 16-point advantage in 2008. And white working-class voters in the New South swing states, though they are declining rapidly, are even more pro-GOP than in the Southwest, giving McCain an average 28-point advantage. So the level and strength of the minority vote looms especially large to Obama's chances in these states.

The difficult economic situations in North Carolina and above all Florida could, however, undercut the minority vote, even as it alienates white college-graduate voters and moves white working-class voters closer to the GOP. Such a scenario

would be a recipe for Republican success and the GOP nominee will work hard to make it a reality in 2012. Virginia is more promising for the Obama campaign, with a solid minority vote, a relatively friendly white college-graduate population, a tight link between growing areas and increasing sympathy for the Democrats, and a fairly decent economic situation. A strong effort by Obama in 2012 should have a good chance of keeping this state in his column.

Given the findings in this paper, Obama’s recent steps to define the election on more progressive terms through a commitment to a new jobs and growth program and a deficit reduction plan based on “shared sacrifice” will likely aid the president politically. Public polling over the past year suggests that a sustained posture of defending the middle class, supporting popular government programs, and calling for a more equitable tax distribution will be popular among many key demographic groups necessary to win in the 12 battleground states analyzed here.

The findings in the paper also indicate that Republicans can maximize their chances of victory by focusing almost exclusively on the economy. But they will need to downplay their more divisive positions on religion, social issues,



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 80 | 20 | 2 |
| White college graduates | 47 | 51 | 1 |
| White working class | 40 | 58 | -3 |

immigration, and the more extreme Tea Party positions on popular government programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

The stage is set for a showdown of demographics versus economics in the 2012 election. Each side has clear strengths but also very serious weaknesses as they move into this showdown. Victory will likely go to the side most willing to acknowledge their weaknesses and attack them boldly. This will be no election for the faint-hearted.

Demography of the path to 270

Presidential incumbents enjoy numerous structural advantages over challengers, including the power of the office itself, strong name recognition and familiarity among the public, and well-established organizational and fundraising capacities. Examining elections from 1788 to 2004, presidential election scholar David Mayhew has shown that in-office political parties have held the White House in two-thirds of elections when running an incumbent compared to only half of the elections with open-seats. Political scientists have also long established the importance of the economy, in particular the direction of overall growth, income, and employment, in determining presidential outcomes.

The balance of incumbency versus the economy in determining the outcome reduces the certainty of any electoral predictions, so our analysis will examine how President Obama and his potential GOP challenger might fare in terms of demographic and geographic support in 2012. Since we do not know the actual GOP nominee at this point, the analysis will focus primarily on the potential standing of President Obama in relation to his 2008 baseline support and compare that with the potential support of an unknown Republican challenger in relation to 2008 performance.

The challenging political situation for the Democrats indicates that Obama's re-election is hardly a sure thing. Equally, the Republican party remains unpopular and no potential candidate has shown convincingly that they have wide appeal outside the Republican base, so they will struggle to beat Obama despite his manifest weaknesses. That much is clear. The question then becomes how each side can take advantage of their opportunities and reach 270 electoral votes, given the current political environment and structure of voter inclinations.

Start with the basic contours of the Obama coalition on the national level. If Obama is able to keep his coalition together at close to its 2008 levels, then he will likely be able to put together enough states to reach 270 and beyond. Conversely, Republicans will not be able to capture the presidency unless they are able to make significant inroads into the president's 2008 coalition.

Communities of color, white college graduates, and the white working class

The heart of the Obama coalition is the minority vote. In 2008, Obama received 80 percent support from communities of color, who made up 26 percent of all voters. Will he replicate that performance in 2012?

Consider first the probable minority share of the vote in 2012. Recently released data from the 2010 Census underscore just how fast the this population is growing in the United States. The minority population over the last decade increased by 30 percent (Hispanics alone grew by 43 percent),⁶ while the white population grew by a mere 1 percent.⁷ Because of this dramatic difference in growth rates, communities of color accounted for virtually all (92 percent) of the country's population growth over the decade. And the overall minority share of the population ticked steadily upward while the white share declined. The 2010 minority share of the population was 36 percent, up more than 5 percentage points over 2000. That's a rate of increase of around half a point a year over the decade.

Applying that rate to the four years between 2008 and 2012 indicates that the minority share of voters should be about 28 percent in 2012, up from 26 percent in 2008. Of course, that rate is based on the overall minority population, not voters. Should the rate of increase be lowered to account for this difference? No, if anything it should be increased. Exit poll data show minority vote share increasing at a faster rate last decade than overall population growth, so a 2 point estimated increase in minority vote share may actually be conservative.⁸

So Obama will likely have significantly more voters from communities of color to work with in 2012. But can he plausibly hope to maintain his 80 percent support among minority voters? Certainly his general support from these voters remains high, especially among blacks, but that level of support will be difficult to obtain in 2012. Democratic presidential support among minorities was lower in the two other presidential elections of the last decade: 71 percent in 2004 and 75 percent in 2000. A cautious estimate would put Obama's minority support in 2012 in the mid-range of recent results—75 percent—rather than at the 2008 level.⁹

Overall then a reasonable expectation for 2012 is that the minority share of voters will rise to around 28 percent, and that 75 percent of those voters will support Obama. It should be noted, however, that the poor economy could undercut this estimate. If economic pessimism is high enough, minority enthusiasm for Obama

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may decline to the point where even the 75 percent support figure is difficult to attain. Hispanic support could be a particular problem given recent Obama job approval ratings of 50 percent or less among this group, which may allow Republicans to make inroads among Hispanics.¹⁰

White voters of course are a different story; under any scenario, Obama will do far worse among these voters. Not all white voters are the same, however, and it is useful to break them down between the growing college-educated group,¹¹ where Democrats' performance has steadily improved, and the rapidly declining noncollege or working-class group,¹² where Democrats have made little progress over the last two decades. For reference, Republicans won this latter group by 20 points in 1988 and won them by nearly as much, 18 points, in 2008.

Consider first how the share of voters among these two groups is likely to change. The white working-class share of voters declined by 15 percentage points between the 1988 and 2008 presidential elections, while the college-educated white share increased by 4 points. This projects to a further decline of 3 points in white working-class representation in the 2012 election and a gain of about a point for college-educated whites. So the underlying demographic composition of the white vote is likely to shift in Obama's favor in the 2012 election.

With these changes in mind, we can now focus in on how 2012 support levels among these two different groups of white voters will translate into an Obama or Republican victory. First of all, if Obama receives similar support in 2012 as in 2008 (a 4-point deficit among white college graduates and an 18-point deficit among white working-class voters) he will win the popular vote by about as much as he did in his first election bid, even if his minority support drops from 80 percent to 75 percent as we have conservatively assumed.

Indeed, he will still win the popular vote (50-48) in this scenario if white working-class support replicates the stunning 30-point deficit congressional Democrats suffered in 2010 but white college-graduate support remains steady. That is remarkable. If white college-graduate support also replicates its relatively poor 2010 performance for the Democrats (a 19 point deficit), however, Republicans will win the popular vote by 3 points (50-47).

Another way of illustrating how poorly Obama can do between these two groups of white voters and still win is to use Democratic presidential support rates from the 2004 election. In this scenario, Obama would lose the white working-class

vote by 23 points and the white college-graduate vote by 11 points as Kerry did in 2004. Obama would still win the popular vote by 50-48 if that happened,¹³ indicating just how much the country has changed in the eight years since Kerry's defeat.

In summary, given solid, but not exceptional, performance among minority voters, Obama's re-election depends on either holding his 2008 white college-graduate support, in which case he can survive a landslide defeat of 2010 proportions among white working-class voters, or holding his slippage among both groups to around 2004 levels, in which case he can still squeak out a victory. Conversely, if Republicans can cut significantly into Obama's white college-graduate support and then replicate the landslide margins they achieved among white working-class voters in 2010, they are likely to emerge victorious.

Obama's conditions for victory do not seem like high barriers. But they still may be difficult to meet in the political environment of the 2012 election, as Republicans are likely to work aggressively to win support in these groups. In the concluding section of the paper, we discuss what each party must do to maximize their chances of winning the presidency, given these parameters.

Other demographics

Two other key demographics for 2012 are young voters—members of the Millennial generation (defined here as those born in the years 1978-2000)—and unmarried women. The 18-to-29-year-old age group (all Millennials) voted 66-32 in Obama's favor in 2008 and made up 18 percent of voters. Moreover, that 18 percent figure actually understated the level of Millennial influence in that election because the 18-to-29-year-old group did not include the oldest Millennials—the 30-year-olds who were born in 1978. Once they are figured in, a reasonable estimate is that Millennials made up around 20 percent of the vote in 2008.

And that figure should be significantly larger in 2012 as more Millennials enter the voting pool. About 48 million Millennials were citizen-eligible voters in 2008 and that number has been increasing at a rate of about 4 million a year. When Millennials make up the entire 18-34 age group in 2012, there will be 64 million Millennial eligible voters—29 percent of all eligible voters. Assuming a reasonable turnout performance, that should translate into roughly 35 million Millennials who cast ballots in 2012 and an estimated 26 percent of all voters.

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But will 2012 see solid youth turnout performance? Economic pessimism has also taken its political toll among this group, which is not surprising given how hard the poor economy has hit young people. Obama approval among the 18-to-29-year-old age group was 57 percent against 35 percent disapproval in an August Pew poll.¹⁴ This is considerably below his margin of support among these voters in 2008, and down significantly from the 30-point approval spreads he enjoyed earlier in the year. This suggests a lack of enthusiasm for Obama that could translate into low 2012 turnout among young voters who are typically the most volatile of all age groups. When young voter enthusiasm was tepid in the 2010 election, the 18-29 year old vote share dropped from 18 percent to 12 percent, low even for an off-year election.

For these reasons, it is unlikely that Obama will be able to retain that 66 percent support level from 2008. Young voters still like Obama but they clearly don't like him the way they once did. The Democrats' party identification advantage among 18-29 year olds has declined from its peak of 28 points in 2008 to 13 points today.¹⁵ And congressional Democrats received just 55-42 support from 18-29 year olds in 2010. Obama will seek to do better than that, and minimize the slippage from his 2008 support, while Republicans will hope that economic pessimism and disappointed expectations will lower youth turnout and/or drive youth support to the GOP.

Unmarried women were also strong Obama supporters in 2008, favoring him by a 70-29 margin. Unmarried women now make up almost half, 47 percent, of adult women, up from 38 percent in 1970.¹⁶ Their current share of the voter pool—a quarter of eligible voters¹⁷—is nearly the size of white evangelical protestants, the GOP's largest base group. And since the growth rate of unmarried women is so fast (double that of married women) the proportion of unmarried women in the voting pool will continue to increase.¹⁸

There is every expectation that this burgeoning population of unmarried women will continue to lean heavily Democratic in its politics. Survey data consistently show this group to be unusually populist on economic issues and generally opposed to the GOP agenda on foreign policy and social issues.¹⁹ Just as with the Millennials, however, the economic situation has taken a heavy toll on this group and economic pessimism is rampant. And, just as with the Millennials, that gives Republicans an opening to cut into Obama's large margins from 2008.

Geography of the path to 270

The discussion above focused on the national popular vote. By and large, the national popular vote is a good guide to predicting the actual winner of the presidential election. In fact, the winner of the popular vote not only typically wins the Electoral College vote, but wins it by a wider margin than their popular vote margin. Nevertheless, the presidential winner is, in the end, determined by who can assemble a state-by-state coalition of at least 270 electoral votes, or EVs. It is to that state-by-state coalition that we now turn.

Core Obama and GOP states

Obama carried 27 states plus the District of Columbia and Nebraska's second Congressional district for a total of 365 electoral votes in 2008. Democrats have carried 18 of these states plus D.C., for a total of 242 EVs (based on the new apportionment from the 2010 Census), in every election since 1992. Of these 18, Obama is almost certain to carry 14 of them (California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington) plus D.C. in 2012 for a total of 186 EVs.

These are Obama's core states, won easily by the Democratic candidate for five straight elections and unlikely to be seriously contested in this election either.²⁰ But of course, these core states are far short of a majority and Obama will still need 84 more EVs from some combination of states to actually win the presidency.

Republicans carried 22 states (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming) plus the rest of Nebraska's CDs for a total of 173 EVs in 2008. They are almost certain to carry all of these in 2012 plus Nebraska's first Congressional District and Indiana for a total of 191 EVs. This is also far short of a majority, meaning that Republicans will need 79 additional EVs to capture the presidency.

With the exception of New Hampshire, the additional states Obama and the Republicans need can come from three broad geographic areas: the Midwest/Rust Belt, the Southwest, and the New South. They are all states that were carried by Obama in 2008.

The Midwest/Rust Belt

The Midwest/Rust Belt states that are likely to be seriously in play between Obama and the GOP nominee are:

- Iowa (6 EVs)
- Michigan (16 EVs)
- Minnesota (10 EVs)
- Ohio (18 EVs)
- Pennsylvania (20 EVs)
- Wisconsin (10 EVs)

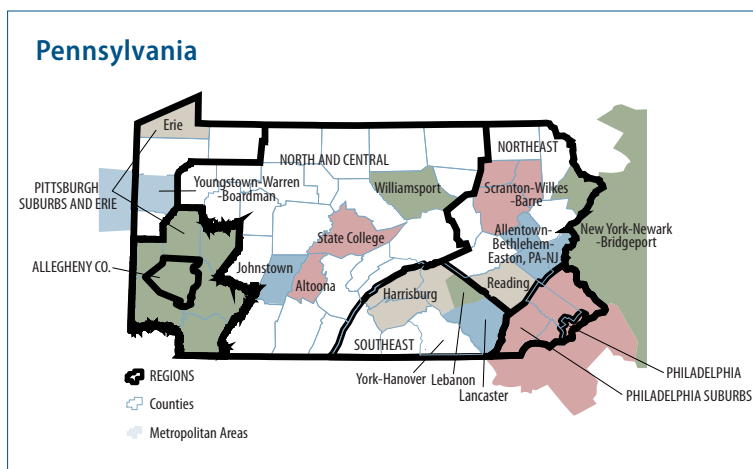
The Republicans appear likely to pick up Indiana (11 EVs), even though Obama carried it in 2008, as well as keep Missouri (10 EVs), where Obama lost in 2008 by only one-eighth of a percentage point. All together, the six target states in play have 80 EVs and would get Obama very close to the 270 threshold when combined with his core states. And if Obama carried New Hampshire (4 EVs) in addition to the six Midwest/Rust Belt states that would put him at exactly 270 without any of the Southwest or New South states in play.

Conversely, if Republicans can pick up several states in this region—they have little chance of taking them all—they will have a lighter lift in the Southwest and New South. For example, if Republicans carried Ohio and Pennsylvania, then that would provide almost half the EVs they need to add to their core states. The rest could be provided by Florida and any other New South state.

The six Midwest/Rust Belt states are all slow growing with an average population growth rate (3.7 percent between 2000 and 2010),²¹ well below the national average of 9.7 percent. Consistent with this slow overall growth, these states' minority population share has also grown relatively slowly—a 3.8 percentage point shift over the time period compared to 5.4 points for the nation as a whole. Thus not only are these states whiter than the national average (an average of 82 percent vs. 64 percent for the nation), their race-ethnic composition is shifting more slowly. This is a more favorable dynamic for the GOP than in the two other swing regions.

We will now discuss these states in detail in descending order of EVs.

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| Minorities | 86 | 13 | 2 |
| White college graduates | 52 | 47 | 3 |
| White working class | 42 | 57 | -5 |

Pennsylvania—20 electoral votes

Democratic presidential candidates have won this state five straight times going back to 1992. Obama won the state by 10 points in 2008, a considerable improvement over Kerry's 3-point and Gore's 4-point victories in their presidential runs. Obama's solid victory came despite an exceptionally strong effort by McCain to flip the state.

Communities of color made up 19 percent of Pennsylvania's vote in 2008 and voted 86 percent for Obama. Extrapolating from exit poll and Census data,²² minorities should compose about 21 percent of the 2012 Pennsylvania electorate. This increased minority vote share should help Obama.

Conversely, we would expect a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who slightly favored McCain by 51-48. This 51-48 figure, however, conceals very different patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. White college graduates supported Obama 52-47, while white working-class voters supported McCain by 57-42. Good news for Obama is that the shrinking white voter pool should produce a 5-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 3-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.²³ So Obama's Pennsylvania coalition may be thought of as a growth coalition that links communities of color with the growing part of the white population, while the Republican coalition is rooted in a rapidly declining group.

Looking just at these likely shifts in the voter pool, Obama would be expected to win by a wider margin in 2012. His growing coalition should be larger and the declining coalition smaller. But two critical factors could undercut his vote totals. The first is that the growing groups that supported him in 2008 might not support him at the same level in 2012, and perhaps not turn out the same rates, which could reduce his dividend from demographic change.

Take communities of color, for example. As noted, Obama received 86 percent support from minorities in 2008. That unusually high figure reflected Obama's 95 percent support among Pennsylvania's black voters and the fact that blacks made up two-thirds of Pennsylvania's minority voters compared to half of minority voters nationwide. Some fall-off from 95 percent support seems very possible, however, if economic pessimism takes a significant toll on black enthusiasm for Obama, as some recent data suggest.²⁴ Hispanic enthusiasm for Obama might flag for the same reason, perhaps exacerbated by impatience on the immigration issue, which could bring down their 2008 72 percent support rate. That would further erode Obama's overall minority support level in 2012.

Even less secure is Obama's hold on white college graduates in the state. The move toward Democrats is a recent trend among this growing group and could easily be reversed by disappointed expectations—such as a lack of economic mobility due to continued economic stagnation.

Obama's second big problem is perhaps the GOP's best opportunity. That is a worsening situation among the group already hostile to him: the white working class. Indeed, in 2008 Obama actually did worse among these voters in Pennsylvania (losing them by 15 points) than Kerry did in 2004. If they swing further away from him in 2012, and approach the 30-point nationwide deficit Democrats suffered in 2010, it could hand the Keystone state to the GOP.

Breaking down support patterns geographically provides another lens on Obama's and the GOP's chances in the state. Here we also see the growth and decline pattern we saw with demographic groups. In a nutshell, Democrats' presidential voting strength has been increasing in growing areas of the state, while Republicans have held their own only in declining parts of the state.

The growing areas of Pennsylvania are mostly located in three regions,²⁵ all in the eastern part of the state: the northeast, containing the Allentown and Reading metro areas; the southeast, containing the York, Lancaster, and Harrisburg metro areas; and the Philadelphia suburbs. These regions are all notable for having added large numbers of minority and white college-graduate voters last decade.²⁶

If white working class voters swing further away from Obama in 2012, it could hand the Keystone state to the GOP.

Obama carried the Philadelphia suburbs (which grew by 6 percent between 2000 and 2010, with the minority population up 51 percent) by 16 points in 2008, a 9-point improvement over Kerry's margin in 2004. The shift is even larger over the long term: Democrats have enjoyed a spectacular 39-point improvement in their margin in the Philadelphia suburbs since 1988.

In the northeast region, which grew by 8 percent between 2000 and 2010, with the minority population up 97 percent, Obama improved even more over Kerry's 2004 performance, carrying the region by 10 points, an 11-point shift toward Democrats in 2008. This shift included Democratic swings of 16 points and 11 points, respectively, in the relatively fast-growing Reading (up 10 percent) and Allentown (up 12 percent) metro areas. The entire northeast region has moved toward Democratic presidential candidates by 22 points since 1988.

Democrats actually got their largest increment of support in the southeast region, the fastest-growing region in the state (which grew by 11 percent, with the minority population up 59 percent). Here they improved over Kerry's performance by 16 points, with pro-Democratic shifts of 20, 16, and 15 points, respectively, in the three fast-growing metro areas that dominate the region: Lancaster (up 10 percent), Harrisburg (up 8 percent) and York (up 14 percent). The overall shift reduced the Democratic deficit in the region to 12 points, down from 28 points in 2004—a huge blow to GOP efforts in the state. This formerly rock-ribbed Republican region has shifted toward the Democrats by 20 points since 1988.

Together, these three growing regions contributed 52 percent of the Pennsylvania vote. Add in Philadelphia itself, where Democrats dominate by lopsided margins (67 points in 2008), and that takes you to 64 percent of the statewide vote. That leaves only 36 percent of the vote in the rest of Pennsylvania, which has been losing population but where the GOP has experienced some favorable trends.

In 2008, however, Republicans could not improve on their 2004 performance in Allegheny County, which contains Pittsburgh and is down 5 percent in population since 2000, and in the Pittsburgh suburbs/Erie region, which shrank by 2 percent. Both regions shifted toward Republicans over the 1988 to 2004 period—a 5-point shift in Allegheny county and an 18-point shift in the Pittsburgh suburbs/Erie—but the GOP managed no further improvement in 2008. And in the conservative North and Central region of Pennsylvania (unchanged in population) McCain actually did 9 points worse than Bush did in 2004.

Thus, Obama's "coalition of the ascendant"²⁷ in Pennsylvania included not just growing groups but increasing support in growing regions. Given this, four more years of population growth should strengthen Obama's position in 2012. But as with growing groups, his vote totals could be undercut by doing significantly worse in declining areas *and* not doing as well in growing areas. Since the declining areas are only 36 percent of the statewide vote, it is likely the latter areas will prove decisive. Of the growing areas, the Philadelphia suburbs are the largest and make up 22 percent of the statewide vote while the southeast is the one most sympathetic to the GOP. If these areas swing significantly toward the Republicans, that could deliver the state to the GOP.

More broadly, the question posed by these data is whether a coalition based on growing groups and improved support in growing regions can survive a situation where very little economic growth is occurring. While unemployment is not particularly high by national standards (8.5 percent,²⁸ with the Philadelphia metro area at 9.1 percent and the Allentown metro area at 9 percent) it is high enough to cause significant pain and provide ample grounds for economic pessimism. This suggests that, despite Obama's decent average approval rating in the first half of 2011 (48 percent) and favorable demographic shifts in the state, the GOP has a serious shot at the state in 2012.

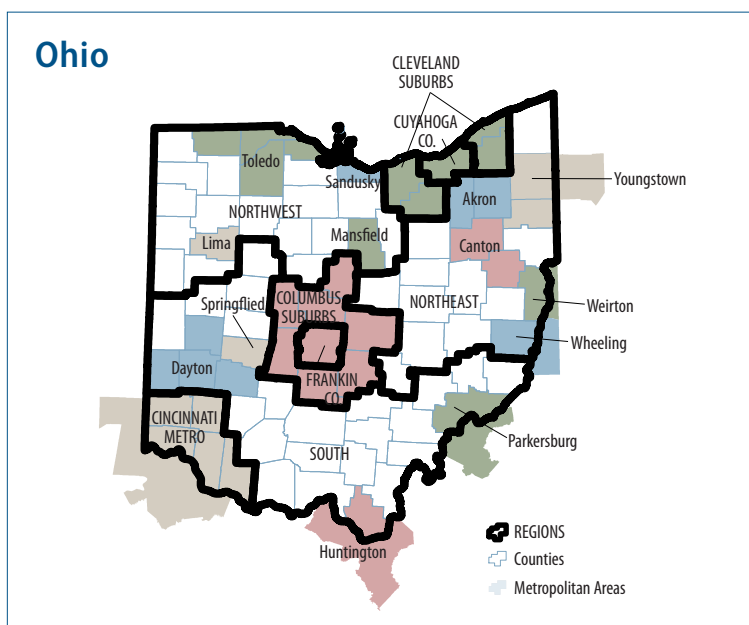
Ohio—18 electoral votes

Obama won Ohio by 5 points in 2008, a Democratic breakthrough after the GOP's 2-point victory in 2004 and 4-point victory in 2000. Communities of color made up 17 percent of Ohio's vote in 2008 and voted 83 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,²⁹ minorities should account for 18 percent of the 2012 Ohio electorate, a slight increase that should help Obama.

This means there should be a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored McCain by 52-46. This 52-46 figure, however, obscures very different patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. Ohio's white college graduates split evenly between McCain and Obama, while white working-class voters supported McCain by 54-44.

Given these patterns, Obama should benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 3-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 2-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.³⁰ So, as with Pennsylvania though not as strongly, Obama's Ohio coalition may be thought of as a growth coalition that links communities of color with the growing part of the white population, while the GOP coalition is rooted in the declining sector of whites.

The question posed by these data is whether a coalition based on growing groups and improved support in growing regions can survive a situation where very little economic growth is occurring.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 83 | 16 | 1 |
| White college graduates | 49 | 50 | 2 |
| White working class | 44 | 54 | -3 |

Based just on these likely shifts in the voter pool, Obama would be expected to win by a wider margin in 2012, as his growing coalition expands and the GOP declining coalition contracts. But his support levels within the growth coalition might not hold. As noted, Obama received 83 percent support from minorities in 2008. That figure was driven by Obama's 97 percent support among Ohio's black voters, who made up about two-thirds of the minority vote. In light of the economic situation and the less historic nature of the upcoming campaign, some falloff from that 97 percent figure seems likely. That would of course bring down Obama's overall support level from minorities in 2012.

White college graduates, the other part of his growth coalition, could present a more serious problem for Obama. When Kerry lost the state back in 2004, he ran a 16-point deficit among this group (42-58). Obama's break-even performance was therefore a significant achievement but also perhaps a tenuous one. Significant movement back toward the GOP among this group is a very real possibility.

Finally, the economic situation seems likely to strengthen GOP support among the group most sympathetic to them: the white working class. McCain won these voters by 10 points in 2008. There is ample room for a sharper swing toward the GOP in 2012, and depending on the depth of that swing, it could certainly tip the state to the Republicans, particularly if Obama's base weakens.

Turning to geographic voting patterns, Ohio is growing particularly slowly—up less than 2 percent since 2000. But there is quite a bit of variation within the state, with some areas growing fairly rapidly and others barely growing at all or declining. It is in the growth areas where Democrats have been making their biggest gains.

The Columbus metro area, which accounts for 15 percent of the statewide vote, is easily the fastest growing area in the state. The population has grown by 14 percent since 2000, and the minority population is up 45 percent. Compared to other parts of Ohio, the Columbus metro area has seen the biggest decline in the share of white working-class eligible voters and the sharpest increases in the shares of white college graduate and minority voters.³¹ Obama carried the area by 4 points in 2008, a 9-point improvement over Kerry in 2004.

Obama did better than Kerry by about the same amount in the very fast-growing Columbus suburbs, which have grown by 24 percent since 2000, with the minority population up 97 percent, as well as in Franklin County, the central county of the metro area that contains the urban core. Indeed, Obama did especially well in the emerging suburb of Delaware County—by far the fastest-growing county in the Columbus suburbs and in Ohio as a whole—which grew by 58 percent since 2000, with the minority population up 187 percent. He improved on Kerry's performance in the county by 13 points.

There has been a 31-point pro-Democratic presidential voting swing in the Columbus metro area since 1988. This includes an incredible 40-point swing in Franklin County and a 20-point swing in the Columbus suburbs.

The second fastest-growing metro area in the state is the Cincinnati metro area, which accounts for 14 percent of the statewide vote, though its growth rate is a far more modest 4 percent (with the minority population up 25 percent) since 2000. Here Obama also registered a 9-point improvement over 2004, including not only an 11-point shift in Hamilton County, the central county that contains Cincinnati, but also substantial shifts in the conservative suburb of Butler (9 points) and even the ultraconservative emerging suburb of Warren (8 points), the second fastest-growing

There has been a 31-point pro-Democratic presidential voting swing in the Columbus metro area since 1988.

county in Ohio (34 percent growth since 2000). The Cincinnati metro area as a whole has swung toward Democrats by 18 points in presidential voting since 1988.

The other part of Ohio where Obama made substantial progress is the northwest region,³² which includes the Toledo metro area, several smaller metro areas, and many rural counties that are mostly declining in population. Here, there was a Democratic swing of 11 points between 2004 and 2008, and Obama split the region evenly with McCain. This region has experienced a 17-point swing toward Democrats since 1988.

Shifts between 2004 and 2008 were more modest in the rest of Ohio. Both Cuyahoga County (the central county of the Cleveland metro area) and the Cleveland suburbs had pro-Democratic margin shifts of just 4 points. Even with this modest shift, however, the Cleveland metro area as a whole, which accounts for 18 percent of the statewide vote, still went for Obama by 25 points—a 15-point Democratic swing relative to 1988.

The northeast region, which includes the Akron, Canton, and Youngstown metro areas, had a Democratic swing of only 3 points, and the south region, which includes the Dayton metro area and a great many rural counties, a mere 2 points. The northeast region, which still leans Democratic (53 percent to 45 percent in 2008) has also experienced the least change since 1988—a comparatively tiny 5-point improvement in Democratic support.

These trends in the growing parts of this very slow-growth state strengthened Obama's Ohio coalition. But will these trends hold up in 2012? Some of these growing areas, such as the Columbus suburbs and the Cincinnati metro area, are more Democrat-friendly than they used to be but remain fairly conservative and are fertile ground for a potential GOP resurgence. And Republican gains in the growing part of Ohio would put a great deal of pressure on Democratic performance in the Cleveland metro area and in the northeast where, as we have seen, Democrats made only weak gains in 2008.

In all these areas, the effect of the economy will loom large. Ohio's unemployment rate stands at 8.8 percent, with worse rates in northeast metro areas such as Canton and Youngstown (both 9.4 percent) as well as the most important metro areas in the northwest (Toledo, 9.6 percent) and the south (Dayton, 9.4 percent). The Cincinnati metro area is about at the statewide average, while, in possible good news for Obama, rates are lower in the Columbus (7.8 percent) and Cleveland (8 percent) metro areas.

More helpful for the GOP, Obama's approval rating averaged an unimpressive 45 percent in first half of 2011 according to Gallup. It is worth noting, however, that Governor John Kasich, who was elected in the GOP wave of 2010 and who has pursued very hard line conservative policies, including a ban on collective bargaining for state employees which was then overturned by referendum, has been sporting an average approval rating of just 36 percent, with 53 percent disapproval.³³ That may help Obama sell his approach by contrast. However, there is no gainsaying the fact that, without significant economic improvement, Republicans have an excellent chance of taking back this state.

Michigan—16 electoral votes

Obama won Michigan quite easily in 2008 (16 point margin) and Democrats have won the state five straight times. But in 2004 and 2000, the GOP came within 3 points and 5 points respectively so the state can be very competitive and is likely to be so in the coming election.

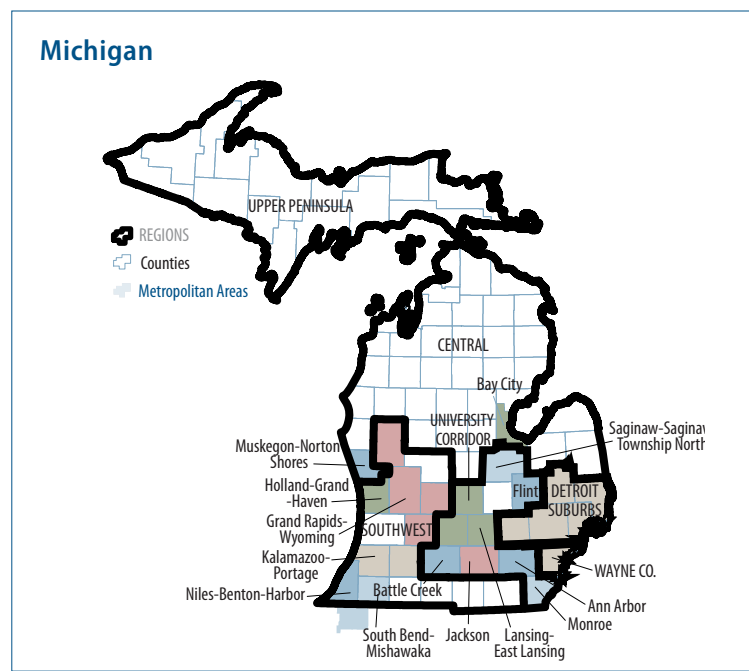
Communities of color made up 18 percent of Michigan's vote in 2008 and voted 85 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,³⁴ the minority vote should account for 19 percent of the 2012 electorate, a slight increase over 2008.

The flip side is a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who also favored Obama, though by far less (51-47). But patterns were significantly different among white working class and white college graduate voters. Michigan's white college graduates split evenly between McCain and Obama, while white working class voters actually supported Obama by 52-46. That suggests that, unusually, the GOP may be slightly helped by ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are reducing the weight of white working class voters.³⁵

The overall effect of likely shifts in the voter pool in 2012 is therefore ambiguous. The real issue for Obama will be sustaining his support levels among these various groups. He received 85 percent support from minorities in 2008, driven by 97 percent support among Michigan's black voters who made up two-thirds of the minority vote. Falloff from that 97 percent figure is plausible and could significantly weaken his overall minority support in 2012. Obama's 64 percent support among Latinos, whose weight is much smaller but growing, will also be important for him to maintain.

White college graduates could provide a significant boost for the GOP if they drift away from their break-even performance and back toward the 17-point Republican advantage Bush had among this group in 2004. But perhaps

Obama received
85 percent
support from
minorities in
2008 in MI, driven
by 97 percent
support among
Michigan's black
voters who made
up two-thirds of
the minority vote.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 85 | 14 | 1 |
| White college graduates | 48 | 49 | 0 |
| White working class | 52 | 46 | -1 |

Obama's chief challenge in Michigan will be maintaining his white working-class support. It seems unlikely he can duplicate his 6-point advantage from 2008 in 2012 given the current economic situation. The trick for him will be damage minimization—avoiding a massive pro-Republican shift among this group.

Turning to geographic voting patterns, Michigan is the slowest growing state in the country. In fact, it was the only state with *negative* growth, actually declining in population by 0.6 percent between 2000 and 2010. But parts of Michigan did grow. The two fastest-growing regions, the Detroit suburbs and the southwest,³⁶ each grew by 4 percent over the decade, with communities of color providing essentially all the growth in both areas.

The Detroit suburbs are notable for showing the sharpest trends in the changes affecting all Michigan regions: declining shares of white working-class voters and increasing shares of minority and white college-graduate voters. The latter voters have been trend-

ing exceptionally sharply toward Democrats in this region. Obama carried the Detroit suburbs by 54 percent to 45 percent in 2008. That 9-point margin was 12 points better than Kerry did in 2004.

Looking back to 1988, Democrats have made an impressive 33-point improvement in their presidential vote margin in the Detroit suburbs. This is even greater than their 28-point gain over the time period in Wayne County, the urban core of the Detroit metro area. These improvements have translated into overwhelming dominance (62 percent to 36 percent) of the Detroit metro area as a whole, 44 percent of the statewide vote.

Interestingly, in the southwest region, which is generally considered the most conservative in Michigan, Obama improved even more over Kerry than in the relatively liberal Detroit suburbs. Kerry lost the southwest by 16 points, so Obama's modest 1-point victory in the region actually represented a 17-point swing toward the Democrats. Even in the conservative anchors of the region, the Grand Rapids and fast-growing Holland (up 11 percent, minorities up 38 percent) metro areas, Obama posted big 18-point and 20-point improvements, respectively, and Democrats improved their position by 27 points over the entire 1988-2008 period. The southwest region contributes about a fifth of the statewide vote.

The University Corridor contributes another fifth of the statewide vote. The corridor is a cluster of counties to the immediate west and south of the Detroit metro area that includes the Lansing (Michigan State University) and Ann Arbor (University of Michigan) metro areas. It is also the other region of the state where some growth is taking place, particularly in the relatively fast-growing Ann Arbor metro area, which has grown 7 percent in the last decade, making it the second-fastest metro-area growth rate in the state. Obama carried the University Corridor by a very strong 61-38 margin, a 13-point improvement over Kerry's performance. Looking back to 1988, there has been a 23-point pro-Democratic presidential voting swing in this region.

Indeed, only in the lightly populated central region and even more lightly populated upper peninsula region have Democratic gains since 1988 been under 20 points. In the central region, the gain has been 16 points and in the upper peninsula, the GOP managed to stay almost even, slipping only 2 points in the time period. But the latter region is only 3 percent of the statewide vote and its population is down 2 percent in the last decade.

Thus, as in Ohio, Obama's Michigan coalition was strengthened by favorable trends in the growing parts of a very slow-growth state (actually declining in this

In the southwest region, which is generally considered the most conservative in Michigan, Obama improved even more over Kerry than in the relatively liberal Detroit suburbs.

case). Some of these trends may be vulnerable as, for example, in the southwest, which is far more sympathetic to the GOP than the Detroit suburbs or University Corridor. And the latter areas too could provide opportunities for the Republicans if the economic malaise runs deep at election time.

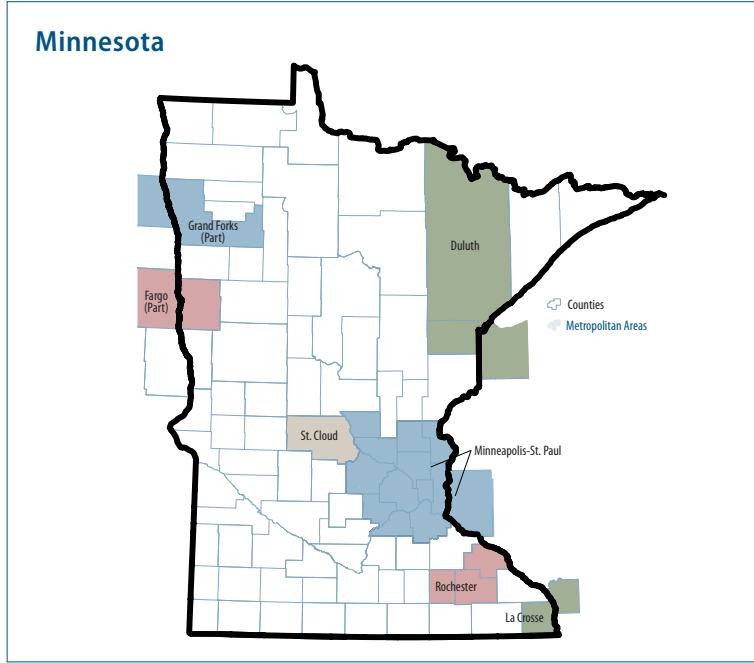
And it certainly might. Michigan's unemployment rate stands at 11 percent, with the worst rate in the Detroit metro area, which stands at 12.9 percent. All metro areas in the southwest and six of seven metro areas in the University Corridor have rates well above 8 percent (Ann Arbor is the sole exception). Despite the sad economic situation, Obama's approval rating averaged a relatively high 50 percent in the first half of 2011, according to Gallup. Obama may benefit in the state from Michigan voters' positive view of the auto bailout in the state, a view that is not generally shared in the rest of the country, and from the declining popularity of Republican Gov. Rick Snyder (who has been around 40 percent approval and net negative).³⁷ But the exceptionally poor economy will still provide an opening for the GOP in a state that should otherwise be an easy hold for Obama.

Minnesota—10 electoral votes

Obama won Minnesota with a 10-point margin in 2008. Democrats have actually won the state *nine* straight times. The last time the Democrats lost in a presidential election here is when Richard Nixon wiped out George McGovern in 1972. The Democrats' margins were so small in 2004 and 2000 (3 points and 2 points, respectively), however, that the state should be considered in play despite the Democrats' current winning streak.

Communities of color made up 10 percent of Minnesota's vote in 2008 and voted 71 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,³⁸ minorities should increase to at least 11 percent of the 2012 Minnesota electorate.

That implies a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Obama by 53–46. Among whites, voting patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters were significantly different. Minnesota's white working-class voters supported Obama but only very narrowly (49–48) while the state's white college graduates gave him a strong 13-point margin (56–43). That means Obama should benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 3-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 2-point increase in white college-graduate voters in 2012.³⁹ Obama's Minnesota coalition is therefore the classic Democratic growth coalition that links communities of color with the growing part of the white population.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 71 | 27 | 1 |
| White college graduates | 56 | 43 | 2 |
| White working class | 49 | 48 | -3 |

These likely shifts in the voter pool would, all else equal, produce a larger victory margin for Obama in 2012. And Obama’s minority support, in contrast to other swing states, was not so high in 2008 that he should have much difficulty replicating or surpassing that level in 2012. But maintaining his strong advantage among white college graduates may be difficult, as may be keeping his rough parity with the GOP among white working-class voters. The latter could be especially fertile ground for Republicans in the current environment. While Obama can afford some slippage among this group, the state could slip away from him if there is a powerful break toward the GOP, given how large these voters still weigh in Minnesota’s electorate.

Turning to geographic voting patterns, Minnesota is a slow-growth state (7.8 percent growth compared to the national average of 9.7 percent) but is growing faster than very slow-growth states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. This growth is driven above all by growth in the Minneapolis metro area, which provides 61 percent of the Minnesota vote. The Minneapolis metro area grew by 10

percent between 2000 and 2010, with the minority population up by 54 percent and providing 85 percent of population growth. The next largest metro area in Minnesota is the very slow growing Duluth metro area, which grew by 1 percent and only provides 5 percent of the statewide vote. Then come the Rochester and St. Cloud metro areas, which are fairly fast growing (up 14 percent and 13 percent, respectively) but provide only 3 percent each of Minnesota's vote.

So it's fair to say that the real battle for Minnesota will be fought in the Minneapolis metro area, which gave Obama a 15-point margin in 2008, 7 points larger than the margin the metro gave Kerry in 2004 in his very modest 3-point victory. Demographically, the area is changing in ways that should benefit Obama, as growth there is primarily fueled by communities of color, but the GOP will vigorously try to compress his margin by running up their support in more GOP-friendly outer suburban counties such as Anoka, Scott, and Washington.

In that regard, Republicans will try to use the bad economy against Obama, which may meet with some success. Minnesota is in generally better shape than a number of other Midwest and Rust Belt states, however, with an unemployment rate of 6.7 percent statewide and in the Minneapolis metro area. That will make Republicans' argument weaker than in these other states. In addition, Obama's approval rating averaged a solid 52 percent in the first half of 2011 according to Gallup. All in all Minnesota, compared to other competitive Midwest/Rust Belt states, should be a fairly easy hold for Obama.

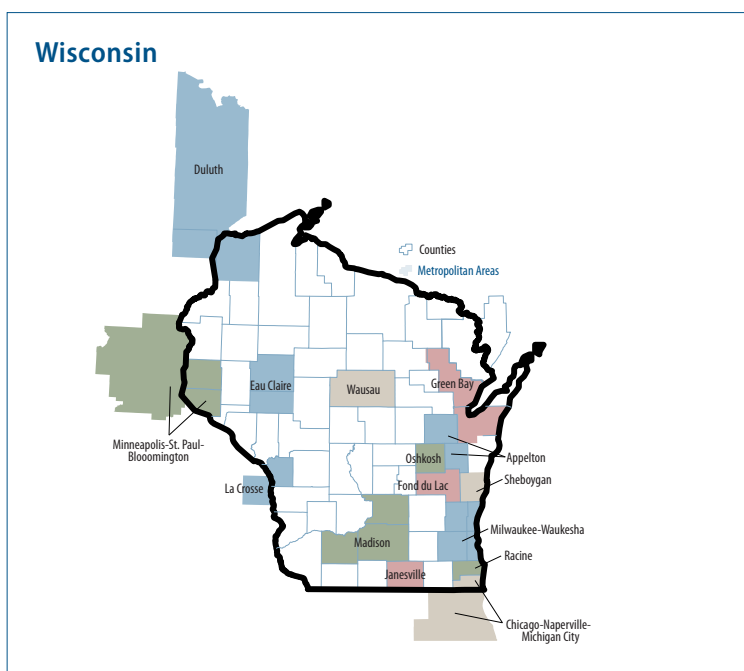
Wisconsin—10 electoral votes

Obama won Wisconsin with a 14-point margin in 2008, and Democrats have won the state six straight times going back to 1988. Democrats' victories in 2000 and 2004 were razor thin (0.2 points and 0.4 points respectively), however, so the state should be considered very competitive.

Communities of color made up 12 percent of Wisconsin's vote in 2008 and voted 80 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,⁴⁰ minorities should account for at least 13 percent in the 2012 Wisconsin electorate.

That implies a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Obama by 54-45. Among whites, voting patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters differed though not as much as in some other states.

The real battle for Minnesota will be fought in the Minneapolis metro area, which gave Obama a 15-point margin in 2008, 7 points larger than the margin the metro gave Kerry in 2004.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 80 | 19 | 1 |
| White college graduates | 56 | 44 | 1 |
| White working class | 52 | 47 | -2 |

Wisconsin's white working-class voters supported Obama by 52-47 while the state's white college graduates gave him a stronger 12-point margin (56-44). Obama should therefore benefit modestly from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool, which are likely to produce a 2-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 1-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.⁴¹

These likely shifts in the composition of the voter pool should benefit Obama in 2012. But he will have to avoid crippling losses in voter support among key groups. Obama's minority support needs to remain very high and there is certainly potential for falloff in his 91 percent support from black voters or 73 percent support from Hispanics, the prime driver of Wisconsin's increasing minority population.

Maintaining his strong advantage among white college graduates will be more difficult. Some pro-GOP attrition toward 2004's more modest 50-49 Democratic margin seems inevitable. If that occurs, Obama will be vulnerable to a collapse in his white working-class support. Kerry ran an 8-point deficit among this group in 2004. If Obama falls farther than that, the GOP could have a real chance in the state.

Turning to geographic voting patterns, Wisconsin, like Minnesota, is a slow-growth state (6 percent compared to the national average of 9.7 percent) but is growing faster than very slow-growth states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. The fastest growing metro area is the Madison metro area, the second largest in the state, which has grown 13 percent in the last decade. The minority population in this area has grown by 65 percent, accounting for 54 percent of growth. Madison contributes 15 percent of the statewide vote and has shifted to the Democrats in presidential voting by 27 points since 1988. Obama carried Madison by a stunning 44 points in 2008.

The Milwaukee metro area, the largest in the state, accounts for 38 percent of the statewide vote. In contrast to Madison, it is relatively slow growing, up only 4 percent. Minority population in the area grew by 26 percent and accounted for 178 percent of population growth—in other words, without minority growth, the Milwaukee metro area would have experienced significant decline. The area gave Obama a 9-point margin in 2008, only a modest 2 points greater than Dukakis's margin in 1988.

Milwaukee and Madison alone account for over half (53 percent) of the statewide vote so the contest for Wisconsin will center on these two metro areas. In particular, the GOP will be seeking to move the Milwaukee metro area back toward the break-even point (where Bush was in 2004), which would put the Democratic hold on the state in real danger. Republicans will also put pressure on Democratic performance in smaller metro areas such as Green Bay (7 percent of the statewide vote), Appleton (5 percent), Racine (5 percent), Janesville (4 percent), Eau Claire (4 percent), and Oshkosh (4 percent) where Obama made strong gains over Kerry in 2008.

In all these areas, the effect of the economy will loom large. Wisconsin's unemployment rate stands at 7.3 percent, with worse rates in metro areas such as Janesville and Racine (both 9.2 percent) and, most significantly, Milwaukee (8 percent). On the other hand, the very Obama-friendly Madison metro area has the lowest rate in the state, just 5.3 percent.

Obama's approval rating averaged a relatively strong 50 percent in the first half of 2011 according to Gallup. The stunning fall in popularity of Republican Gov. Scott Walker, who was elected in the GOP wave of 2010, is likely to also help Obama. Walker's draconian budget and hard-line, union-busting tactics have proven

unpopular with Wisconsin voters and his approval rating is down to 42 percent, with 54 percent disapproval.⁴² These developments are likely to help Obama both by making him appear moderate by contrast and by firing up the Democratic base in the state. But the poor economy will inevitably dog Obama in much of Wisconsin, ensuring that Republicans can put up a strong fight for the state.

Iowa—6 electoral votes

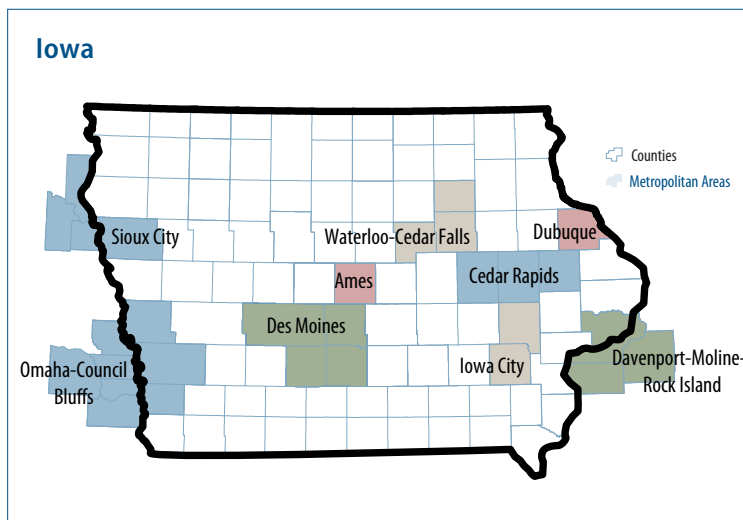
Obama won Iowa by a 10-point margin in 2008 and Democrats have won the state in five of the last six presidential elections. The two presidential elections immediately preceding 2008, however, featured a GOP win (by 0.7 points in 2004) and a very narrow loss (by 0.3 points in 2000) so the state should be considered very much in play.

Communities of color made up 9 percent of Iowa's vote in 2008 and voted 73 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,⁴³ minorities should account for at least 10 percent of the 2012 Iowa electorate.

We should therefore expect a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Obama by 51-47. Among whites, voting patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters differed only modestly and not in the way typical of most states. Iowa's white working-class voters supported Obama by 52-46 while the state's white college graduates gave him a very narrow 1-point margin (50-49). By these data, the GOP should actually be slightly helped by ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 4-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 2-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.⁴⁴

Likely shifts in the composition of the voter pool do not clearly favor either party in 2012. That puts extra emphasis on Obama's critical task: avoiding large losses in voter support among key groups. Obama's minority support needs to remain at least at its 73 percent level from 2008. And maintaining his even split among white college graduates, as Democrats have in the last two elections, will be crucial. But his most difficult challenge—and the GOP's great opportunity—is the possibility of a sharp drop in Obama's white working support, which was crucial to his 2008 victory. If Obama's white working-class support is far south of the break-even point and Obama is not aided by unusually high minority turnout, then the GOP has a good chance of taking the state.

The GOP should actually be slightly helped by ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool in IA that are likely to produce a 4-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 2-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 73 | 25 | 1 |
| White college graduates | 50 | 49 | 2 |
| White working class | 52 | 46 | -3 |

Turning to geographic voting patterns, Iowa is a slow-growth state (4.1 percent growth compared to the national average of 9.7 percent). By far the fastest growing metro area is Des Moines, up 18 percent in the last decade. The minority population is up 68 percent and accounts for 47 percent of the area's growth. It is also Iowa's largest metro area, contributing 19 percent of the statewide vote. Obama carried Des Moines by 10 points in 2008, 9 points better than Kerry in 2004.

The second-largest metro area is Cedar Rapids, also growing fairly fast. The population is up 9 percent since 2000, and the minority population has grown by 68 percent. The area accounts for 9 percent of the statewide vote. Obama carried the Cedar Rapids area by 23 points in 2008, five points better than Kerry in 2004.

After that, there are a series of smaller metro areas that each account for 3 to 6 percent of the statewide vote. From largest to smallest, these are: Davenport, Waterloo, Iowa City, Council Bluffs, Sioux City, Dubuque, and Ames.

Together they contribute just over one-third (34 percent) of Iowa's vote. Most of these metro areas are in the east or central parts of the state and gave Obama strong margins ranging from 15 points in Davenport to 36 points in fast-growing Iowa City, which has grown by 16 percent since 2000. The two metro areas at the western end of the state, Sioux City and Council Bluffs, both favored McCain by slight margins (1 point and 4 points respectively).

So Iowa's vote lacks the clear geographic fulcrums that characterize the other competitive Midwestern and Rust Belt states. That said, the nine metro areas mentioned above account for 62 percent of the statewide vote, so the contest in 2012 will likely be concentrated in these areas. If the GOP can significantly roll back Democratic gains in these areas, particularly in central and eastern Iowa, Republicans will have a serious chance of taking the state in 2012.

Iowa's relatively good economy will be helpful to Obama's chances of winning the state in 2012. The statewide unemployment rate is only 6 percent and ranges from a high of 6.1 percent in Cedar Rapids to a low of just 5 percent in Iowa City. In addition, Obama's approval rating averaged a fairly decent 49 percent in 2011, according to Gallup. The unpopularity of newly elected Republican governor Terry Branstad, whose approval rating has been languishing at around 41 percent with 45 percent disapproval, may also help Obama.⁴⁵ Together these trends will give him a pretty good chance of replicating his 2008 success, though, as outlined above, the GOP also has plausible paths to victory.

Midwest/Rust Belt summary

These six swing states are all marked by slow growth and by a relatively small and slow growing percentage of voters from communities of color. These states are projected to average around 15 percent minority voters in 2012, ranging from a low of 10 percent in Iowa to a high of 21 percent in Pennsylvania. But this relatively small base of minority voters is supplemented for Democrats by fairly strong support among these states' growing white college-graduate populations, who gave Obama an average 5-point advantage in 2008. This coalition of the ascendant has produced increased Democratic support in growing areas of these states.

Moreover, the weight of that coalition should be larger in these states in 2012 than in 2008, with an average 3-point increase in the percent of white college graduates and minorities among voters and a 3-point decline in the percent of white working-class voters. In addition, Obama should benefit from the fact that Midwestern and Rust Belt white working-class voters tend to be more supportive than in other competitive states, averaging only a 2-point Democratic deficit in 2008.

The poor economic situation will, however, heavily tax that relative friendliness and it is likely to reduce enthusiasm for Obama among his coalition of the ascendant. That will give Republicans an opening in these states, especially in Ohio. McCain lost the state by only 5 points in 2008, the white working class was notably sympathetic to the GOP even then (McCain carried them by 10 points), and except for Michigan, the economic situation is worse than in the rest of these states. A strong GOP mobiliza-

tion effort could take the state, especially if there is no significant economic improvement between now and the election.

GOP chances in the other five states are not as good, though Pennsylvania with the most friendly white working class, and Michigan with the worst economy, provide serious opportunities. For Obama's part, his ability to keep his coalition of the ascendant together and avoid catastrophic losses among the white working class in all five states will be heavily dependent on whether and how much the economy improves as we near the election.

If Obama does manage to lose only Ohio among the Midwestern/Rustbelt states, that would add 62 EVs to his core support of 186 for a total of 248 EVs, leaving him only 22 short of victory. Most of this could be provided by the three southwestern states he carried in 2008.

Carrying Ohio is certainly central to GOP prospects in 2012, because it is their best chance of stopping a Democratic sweep of the swing Midwestern/Rust Belt states. And if the GOP carried Ohio and Pennsylvania in addition to their core support, that would leave them only 41 EVs short of victory. Those 41 EVs could be provided by Florida and any other New South state, or by Florida, Colorado, and any other southwestern state.

The swing southwestern states thus loom large in both parties' calculations. We now turn to an analysis of these states.

The Southwest

The Southwest includes three states that are likely to be seriously in play between Obama and the GOP nominee:

- Colorado (9 EVs)
- Nevada (6 EVs)
- New Mexico (5 EVs)

The Obama campaign does not appear likely to seriously contest Montana (3 EVs), even though Obama lost it by only 2 points in 2008. Nor is Arizona (11 EVs) likely to be a true

contest though the rapid rate of demographic change in the state will likely put it in play in the near future, perhaps by 2016. Together, these three southwestern target states have 20 EVs and could, for example, more than make up for an Obama loss of Ohio and its 18 EVs. Added to Obama's core states and the other five competitive Midwestern/Rust Belt states carried by Obama last time, these states would leave Obama only two EVs short of victory.

The GOP strategy will focus on adding several southwestern states to the states they're able to pick off in the Midwest/Rust Belt, thus setting themselves up to claim victory by success in the New South. For example, if the GOP carries Ohio and any southwestern state, they can win the presidency by carrying the three swing New South states (Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia). Or if the GOP carries Ohio and Pennsylvania and then Colorado and Nevada, just taking Florida would be enough to give them victory.

These three southwestern states are all fast-growing relative to the national average though New Mexico's 13.2 percent growth rate and Colorado's 16.9 percent growth rate are dwarfed by that of Nevada at 35.1 percent, easily making it the fastest-growing state in the country.⁴⁶ Nevada's growth in minority population share—an 11.1 percentage point shift over the last decade—was also far greater than that of Colorado at 4.5 points or New Mexico, 4.2 points. Nevada's overall minority population share of 45.9 percent, however, still lags far behind that of New Mexico at 59.5 percent, though it is considerably higher than Colorado's at 30 percent.

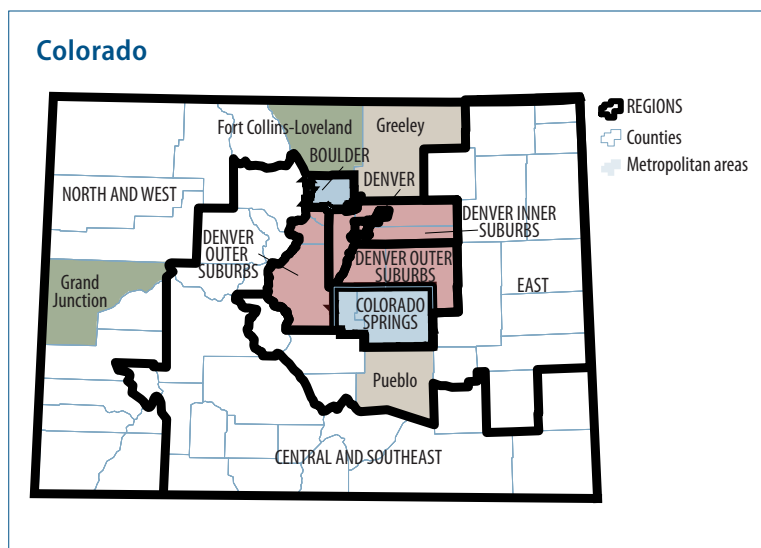
Despite these differences, these southwestern states overall present a demographic profile and growth dynamic more favorable for Obama than in the Midwest and Rust Belt swing region, where the heavily white populations and slow pace of demographic change are relatively advantageous for the GOP. We now provide a detailed discussion of these states in descending order of EVs.

Colorado—9 electoral votes

Obama won the state by 9 points in 2008, a Democratic breakthrough after 5-point and 8-point losses in 2004 and 2000, respectively.

Communities of color made up 19 percent of Colorado's vote in 2008 and voted 64 percent for Obama. Based on Census data,⁴⁷ minorities, driven by the burgeoning Hispanic population, should account for at least 21 percent of the 2012 Colorado electorate.

If the GOP carries Ohio and any southwestern state, they can win the presidency by carrying the three swing New South states.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 64 | 34 | 2 |
| White college graduates | 56 | 42 | 2 |
| White working class | 42 | 57 | -4 |

This means at least a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who slightly favored Obama by 50-48. Even more so than in other states, this overall figure hides *very* different patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. Colorado's white college graduates strongly favored Obama by 56-42, while white working-class voters strongly supported McCain by 57-42—essentially mirror opposites of one another.

Given these patterns, Obama should greatly benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 4-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 2-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.⁴⁸ Obama's growth coalition, that links communities of color with the growing part of the white population, is alive, well, and growing rapidly in Colorado while the GOP coalition is rooted in the declining sector of whites.

These shifts should put Obama in a stronger position in the state in 2012, as his growing coalition expands and the GOP declining coalition contracts. But there are challenges. Obama received only 64 percent support from minorities in 2012. That relatively low figure was driven by Obama's 61 percent support among Colorado's Hispanic voters who made up about two-thirds of the state's minority vote. Clearly, if Hispanic support for Obama falls any lower in 2012 than it did in

the 2008 election, then that would be a great boon for the GOP. But there is certainly room for Obama to increase his support among these voters, which would strengthen his overall position.

White college graduates, the other part of his growth coalition, will be critical in 2012. When Kerry lost the state back in 2004, he ran a 2-point deficit among this group, so Obama's 14-point advantage in 2008 was a huge shift. The GOP candidate will seek to shift this group back toward their earlier GOP sympathies or at least to whittle down significantly Obama's 2008 advantage among this group.

Then there is the group most sympathetic to the GOP: the white working class. McCain carried these voters by 15 points in 2008, and there is certainly room for a sharper swing towards the Republicans in 2012 given the economic situation. If the GOP advantage among these voters approaches the 30 points they attained nationwide in 2010 election, they would have an excellent chance of taking the state.

As mentioned, Colorado is a fast-growing state, up 17 percent over the last decade. And where Colorado has been growing, Democrats have generally been improving their position, one of the keys to Obama's 9-point victory in 2008.

Consider first the Denver metro area, far and away the largest metro area in the state and accounting for half the statewide vote. The Denver metro area is experiencing the most rapid demographic change in the state, with the share of white working-class voters declining sharply while the numbers of white college-graduate and minority voters are surging. To examine trends in the Denver metro area, it is useful to divide it into three parts:⁴⁹ Denver county, the urban core; the inner suburbs, which include Arapahoe, Jefferson, and Adams counties; and the outer suburbs, which include the extremely fast-growing emerging suburb of Douglas plus several small exurban counties.

Obama carried slow-growing Denver county—which has grown by 8 percent, with the minority population up 8 percent—by 52 points, a 12-point improvement over Kerry in 2004. But Obama improved Kerry's margin by 16 points in the relatively fast-growing inner suburbs, which have grown 12 percent over the last decade and account for 30 percent of the statewide vote. The minority population in the inner suburbs grew by 54 percent and accounted for all growth in the area. Obama also improved Democrats' margin by 15 points in the amazingly fast-growing outer suburbs, which grew by 76 percent, with the minority population up 172 percent.⁵⁰

Where Colorado
has been
growing,
Democrats have
generally been
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victory in 2008.

All together, Obama carried the Denver metro area by 17 points, a 14-point improvement over 2004 and a 20-point improvement over 1988. By themselves, these would be a huge advances for the Democrats. But Obama's gains were by no means limited to the Denver metro area.

Unsurprisingly, Obama did well in the liberal Boulder metro area, carrying it 72-26, a 12-point margin gain over 2004. More surprisingly, he made bigger gains in the very conservative, fast-growing (up 20 percent) Colorado Springs metro area, bettering Kerry by 16 points and shaving the Republican margin of victory to 19 points. Democrats have improved their presidential voting performance in this location by 22 points since 1988.

Obama also made good progress in the very fast-growing north and west region (up 20 percent in population since 2000), which accounts for a fifth of the statewide vote and includes the relatively liberal Fort Collins metro area and the very conservative Greeley metro area, the fastest-growing metro area (up 40 percent) in the state. In Fort Collins, there was a Democratic swing of 16 points between 2004 and 2008. But in the Greeley metro area, the swing was even larger: 18 points. The latter result is particularly significant since, prior to the 2008 election, Greeley (in contrast to most of Colorado) was trending toward the GOP. Now, over the 1988-2008 period, Greeley too is trending Democratic, albeit by a modest 4 points.

The one region in the state which has trended toward the Republicans since 1988 is the thinly populated east region where the white working-class share of eligible voters is decreasing the slowest and the minority share of voters is increasing the slowest. This is the slowest growing part of Colorado (up just 7 percent) and contains a fair number of counties that are losing population. The GOP is doing 10 points better in presidential voting in this region today than it was in 1988. But this region only casts 6 percent of the statewide vote.

Thus, Obama's Colorado coalition was considerably bolstered by favorable trends in the growing parts of the state, including its fastest growing areas. But will these trends hold up in 2012? Some of these growing areas such as the Denver outer suburbs and Colorado Springs metro area are more Democrat-friendly than they used to be but remain fairly conservative so the potential for a shift back toward the GOP is very real. And serious Republican gains in these fast-growing parts of Colorado would put a great deal of pressure on Democratic performance in relatively liberal areas such as Denver county, Boulder, and particularly the Denver inner suburbs.

The economic situation is poor in Colorado, which should aid the GOP's prospects in 2012. Colorado's unemployment rate stands at 8.3 percent and is slightly higher in the all-important Denver metro area (8.5 percent). Unemployment is higher still in the Greeley (9.4 percent) and Colorado Springs (9.3 percent) metro areas but lower in the more Democrat-friendly Boulder (6.5 percent) and Fort Collins (6.6 percent) metro areas, which should help Obama in those places.

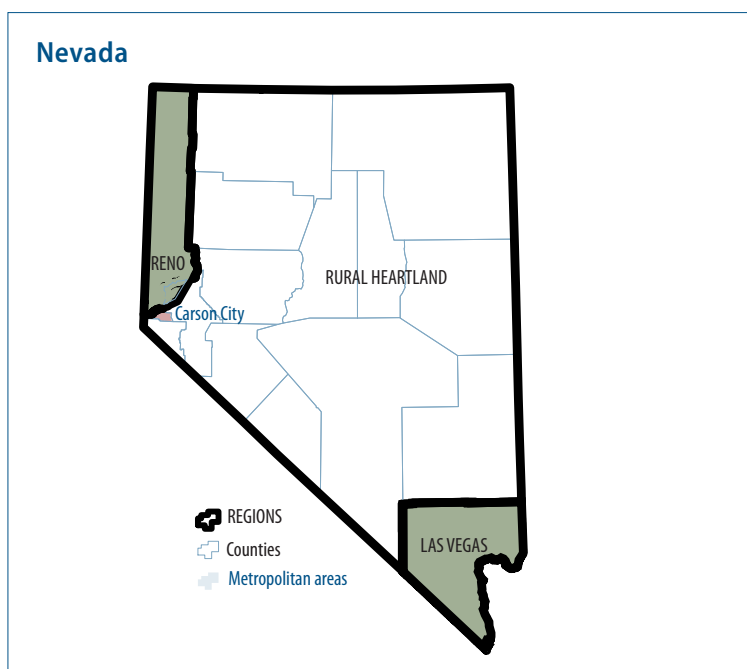
Obama's approval rating averaged an unimpressive 44 percent in the first half of 2011, according to Gallup. Without significant economic improvement, this state, despite the strong demographic tide running in the Democrats' favor, gives the GOP a real opportunity for a pickup—though the Obama campaign no doubt takes heart from the victories of Democrats Michael Bennet for Senate and John Hickenlooper for governor in the GOP wave election of 2010.

Nevada—6 electoral votes

Obama earned a surprising 12-point victory in Nevada in 2012, turning around Democratic fortunes after the GOP won the state by 3 and 4 points in 2004 and 2000. Communities of color made up 31 percent of Nevada's vote in 2008 and voted 79 percent for Obama. Based on Census and exit poll data,⁵¹ minorities, driven by the rapidly increasing Hispanic population, should account for at least 35 percent of the 2012 Nevada electorate.

This means at least a 4-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored McCain 53-45. Once again, white college graduates were more favorable to Obama than white working-class voters, though here the difference was relatively modest. Nevada's white college graduates narrowly supported McCain 51-47, while white working-class voters were stronger in their support, giving McCain a 54-43 margin. Given these patterns, Obama should benefit from a projected sharp decrease of 5 points in white working-class voters and a 1-point increase in the share of white college graduates in 2012.⁵²

These demographic shifts should put Obama in a stronger position in the state in 2012. But the GOP has serious prospects for improved performance. Chief among them is the group most sympathetic to the GOP: the white working class. McCain carried these voters by 11 points in 2008. A sharper swing toward Republicans in 2012 seems a distinct possibility given the economic situation. If the GOP carries the state it will likely be because of a surge in support among this group.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 79 | 20 | 4 |
| White college graduates | 47 | 51 | 1 |
| White working class | 43 | 54 | -5 |

Nevada is easily the fastest-growing state in the United States, adding 35 percent to its population in the last decade. The Las Vegas metro area (Clark County), which has grown by 42 percent since 2000 due to huge infusions of minorities and white college graduates, is largely driving this growth. As a result of those trends, the demographic profile of the Las Vegas area has been changing dramatically, especially the minority share of voters (going up by more than a percentage point year) and white working-class share of voters (declining by more than a point a year).⁵³ Here Democrats have been making huge strides.

In 2008, Obama carried the Las Vegas metro area, which accounts for 67 percent of the statewide vote, by 19 points: 58 percent to 39 percent. This margin was 14 points better than Kerry's performance in 2004. There has been a 35-point swing toward presidential Democrats in the Las Vegas metro area since 1988.

The Reno metro area contributes another fifth of the statewide vote. This area is also fast growing, with 24 percent growth since 2000, though lagging far behind Las Vegas. Obama carried the Reno metro area by 12 points, 55-43, a 17-point

improvement over 2004. Reno, just like Las Vegas, has experienced a 35-point shift toward the Democrats since 1988.

Republicans do the best by far in the vast rural heartland that lies in between the Las Vegas and Reno metro areas. Here McCain beat Obama by 58 percent to 39 percent. But this area is the slowest growing in Nevada, with just 16 percent growth since 2000, and contributes just 14 percent of the statewide vote. And even here Democrats have gained 15 points in presidential voting margin since 1988.

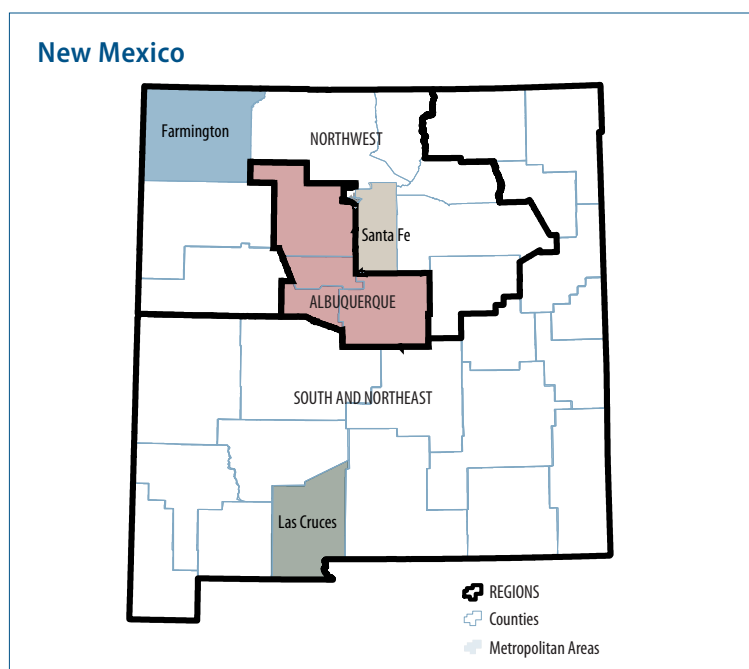
Obama's Nevada coalition is a classic coalition of the ascendant centered in the rapidly growing Las Vegas metro area. Clearly, the battle for Nevada will be fought out in this metro area above all. Republicans may well be able to take the state if they are able to significantly compress Obama's margin in this area in 2012.

The economic situation is very poor in Nevada, which will provide a boost to the GOP in 2012. Nevada's unemployment rate stands at a sky-high 13.8 percent and it is even slightly higher at 14.2 percent in the key Las Vegas metro area, with the Reno metro area not far behind at 13 percent. And the housing market situation is exceptionally abysmal. Obama's approval rating averaged an underwhelming 44 percent in the first half of 2011, according to Gallup. This is a true battle royale between demographics and economics where Republicans have a real opportunity to take the state. But Obama's campaign can take some comfort from Harry Reid's ability to hold his Senate seat fairly easily despite the 2010 nationwide GOP surge, thanks mostly to support from Nevada's Hispanic voters.

New Mexico—5 electoral votes

Obama earned a 15-point victory in New Mexico in 2012, a result whose magnitude contrasts sharply with the two previous elections, which saw razor thin victories for George Bush (0.79 percentage points) and Al Gore (0.06 points). Communities of color made up half of New Mexico's vote in 2008 and voted 71 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,⁵⁴ minorities, driven by increasing Hispanic population share, should account for at least 52 percent of the 2012 New Mexico electorate.

This means at least a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored McCain 56-42. As we have seen with so many other states, this overall figure obscures very different patterns among white working-class and white college-



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 71 | 28 | 2 |
| White college graduates | 49 | 49 | 1 |
| White working class | 36 | 62 | -3 |

graduate voters. New Mexico's white college graduates split their vote evenly between Obama and McCain, while white working-class voters strongly supported McCain by 62-36.

Given these patterns, Obama should benefit significantly from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 3-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 1-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.⁵⁵ So New Mexico features Obama's classic growth coalition, linking communities of color with the growing part of the white population, while the GOP coalition is rooted in a rapidly declining sector of whites.

These shifts should put Obama in a stronger position in the state in 2012, as his growing coalition expands and the GOP declining coalition contracts. But the GOP will have some electoral openings it can explore. One such opportunity is the minority vote, especially Hispanics. While Obama received 69 percent support from Hispanic voters in 2008, Kerry did quite a bit worse in 2004, only carrying 56 percent of New Mexico's Hispanics. A slide back to Kerry's level in 2012 would greatly aid GOP efforts to carry the state, as would a fade in Hispanic turnout.

Similarly, the preferences of white college graduates, the other part of Obama's growth coalition, will be critical in 2012. If Republicans can move these voters away from an even split and then hold the GOP's overwhelming support among the white working class, they will be in a good position to take the state.

New Mexico is a fairly fast-growing state, up 13 percent over the last decade. And where New Mexico has been growing, Democrats have generally been improving their position, a pattern that contributed to Obama's 15-point victory in 2008.

The fastest growing part of New Mexico is the Albuquerque metro area, which has grown by 22 percent since 2000, with minorities up 35 percent and accounting for 85 percent of population growth in the area. Obama carried the Albuquerque metro area, which accounts for 46 percent of the statewide vote, by 18 points in 2008. This margin was 17 points better than Kerry's performance in 2004. And compared to 1988, there has been a 26-point swing toward presidential Democrats in the Albuquerque metro area.

The northwest region, the second fastest-growing area in the state with 9 percent growth in the last decade, contributes another 22 percent of the statewide vote. Obama carried the northwest by an impressive 33 points in 2008, a 15-point improvement over 2004 and a 20-point improvement over 1988. He did especially well in the Santa Fe metro area, the fastest growing metro area (up 12 percent) in the region, carrying it by 55 points.

Republicans do by far the best in the relatively rural and slow-growing south and northeast region, which has grown 7 percent in the last decade and contributes 32 percent of the statewide vote. Here McCain beat Obama by 2 points. Note, however, that in the fastest growing part of this region, the Las Cruces metro area, which has grown 20 percent since 2000, Obama beat McCain by 18 points, a 14-point improvement over 2004 and a 22-point improvement over 1988.

Obama's New Mexico coalition is a classic coalition of the ascendant centered in the relatively fast growing and populous Albuquerque metro area. If Republicans can significantly compress Obama's margin in this area in 2012, while running up their margin in the conservative-leaning south and northeast region, they certainly have a shot at taking back the state despite Obama's wide victory margin in 2008.

The economic situation is relatively good in New Mexico, which should help Obama in 2012. New Mexico's unemployment rate stands at 6.6 percent, with the rate a bit higher in the Albuquerque metro area, where it is 7.2 percent. These rates would not

be good in normal times but in today's stressed economy, they look pretty good relative to many other states. On the other hand, Obama's approval rating averaged a mediocre 46 percent in the first half of 2011 according to Gallup, indicating that Republicans can still mount a serious challenge to the president in the state.

Southwest summary

These three southwest swing states are all marked by fast growth and by relatively high and growing percentages of minority, chiefly Hispanic, voters. These states are projected to average around 36 percent minority voters in 2012, ranging from a low of 21 percent in Colorado to a high of 52 percent in New Mexico. And, the 3-point advantage the growing white college-graduate population gives Obama supplements this solid base of minority voters for Democrats.

This coalition of the ascendant has produced increased Democratic support in most growing areas of these states. Moreover, the weight of that coalition should be larger in these states in 2012 than in 2008, with an average 4-point increase in the percent of white college graduates and minorities among voters and a 4-point decline in the percent of white working-class voters. On the other hand, compared to the Midwestern and Rust Belt swing states, white working-class voters in the Southwest are quite a bit more friendly to the GOP, averaging a 17-point Republican advantage in 2008.

The difficult economic situation, especially in Nevada and Colorado, is likely to enhance their receptiveness to the GOP, even as it is likely to reduce enthusiasm for Obama among white college graduates and, most worrisome for his campaign, among minorities, where support and turnout among Hispanics could well flag significantly.

Therefore, even though Obama has the demographic wind at this back, so to speak, the Republicans will have a serious shot at these states. And, at least in Nevada and Colorado, without significant economic improvement, even hard mobilization work by the Obama campaign may not be enough to keep them out of GOP hands.

However, if Obama does manage to hold these three states, plus the five "easiest" Midwest/Rust Belt states (Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa), he would only be 2 EVs short of victory even without Ohio or any of the New South states. At that point, even tiny New Hampshire would put him over the top. That is a situation the GOP will be working very hard to prevent.

Conversely, if the GOP is able to break Obama's hold on these three states, their path to victory becomes a lot easier. For example, if they carry all three of them, plus Ohio (but no other swing state in Midwest/Rust Belt), they can emerge victorious with just Florida plus either North Carolina and Virginia from the New South. Thus, success in the Southwest can help put the GOP over the top, given good performance in the New South. It is to these New South swing states we now turn.

The New South

The South includes three states that are likely to be seriously in play between Obama and the GOP nominee:

- Florida (29 EVs)
- North Carolina (15 EVs)
- Virginia (13 EVs)

The Obama campaign is making noises about contesting Georgia (16 EVs), which Obama only lost by five points in 2008. But this seems like a heavy lift in the current political environment given the state's conservative proclivities. However Georgia's rapid rate of demographic change—the minority share of the population was up 6.7 percentage points over the last decade, and now accounts for 44.1 percent of the state—indicates it will be a legitimate target state for the Democrats in the near future.

Together, these three New South states have 57 EVs, which, if Obama swept them, would allow him to lose up to four Midwestern/Rust Belt target states and all of the Southwest and still be re-elected. And if Obama does hold the four Midwestern/Rust Belt target states Democrats have carried since 1992 (Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), he could be re-elected by carrying only one of the New South states, Florida, even if he loses Ohio, Iowa, and all the southwestern states.

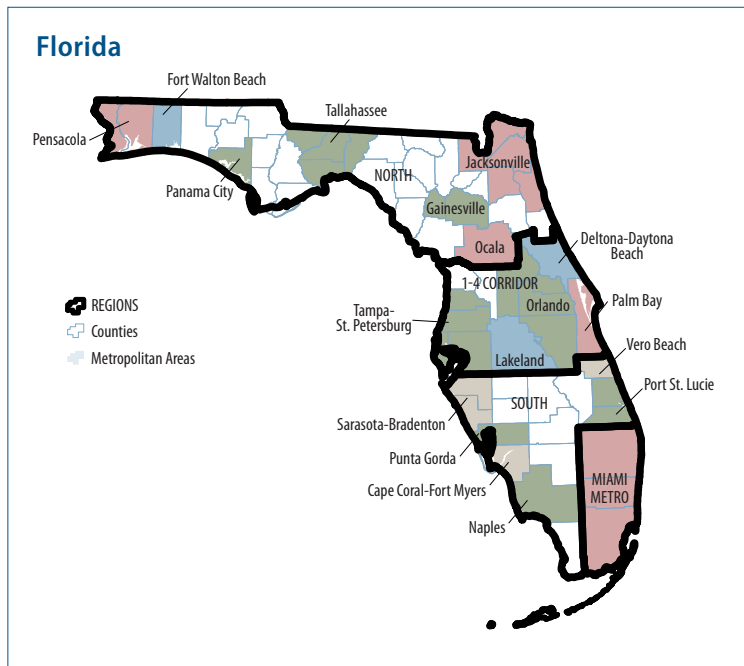
But if the GOP carries all three of these states, which it did in 2004, as well as Ohio and their core states, they would be only 4 EVs short of victory. Those EVs could be provided by tiny New Hampshire or, of course, by any of the other contested states. So success in the New South will clearly loom large in Republican calculations for 2012.

These three New South states are all fast growing relative to the national average. North Carolina is the fastest growing at 18.6 percent over the last decade, followed by Florida with 17.6 percent growth, and Virginia with 13 percent growth.⁵⁶ Florida, however, has the greatest growth in minority population share, 7.5 percentage points over the decade, followed by Virginia, with 5.4 points, and North Carolina, with 4.9 points.

In terms of overall minority population share, Florida is also the leader at 42.1 percent, followed by Virginia and North Carolina, which are very close together at 35.2 percent and 34.7 percent, respectively. As with the Southwestern target states, these New South states present an overall demographic profile and growth dynamic that are more likely to favor Obama over the Republican nominee than in the Midwest/Rust Belt swing region. We now provide a detailed discussion of these states in descending order of EVs.

Florida—29 electoral votes

Obama won Florida by 3 points in 2008, a Democratic breakthrough after the Republicans' 5-point win in 2004 and the Democrats' heartbreaking—and bitterly disputed—0.01 point loss in 2000.



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 74 | 25 | 2 |
| White college graduates | 43 | 56 | 1 |
| White working class | 41 | 58 | -3 |

Communities of color made up 30 percent of Florida's vote in 2008 and voted 74 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,⁵⁷ minorities, driven primarily by Hispanic growth, should increase to account for at least 32 percent of the 2012 Florida electorate.

This means at least a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored McCain 56-42. In this case, there were only slightly different patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. Florida's white college graduates favored McCain 55-43, while white working-class voters supported McCain by a somewhat stronger 58-41 margin. Given these patterns, Obama will derive some modest benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 3-point decrease in white working-class voters⁵⁸ and a 1-point increase in white college graduates in 2012.

These shifts between minorities and whites and within the ranks of white voters would, all else equal, put Obama in a stronger position in the state in 2012.

But all else may very well not be equal. Consider Obama's 74 percent support among minorities in 2008. That number partly reflected Obama's 96 percent support among blacks, who make up 43 percent of the minority vote in Florida. It may be hard for Obama to replicate that 96 percent figure in 2012.

Another possible difficulty for the Obama campaign is the 57-42 margin Obama received from Florida Hispanics, who account for 47 percent of the state's minority vote. That margin may not seem like much when compared to Obama's Hispanic margins in many other states, but for Florida, with its many conservative Cuban-American Hispanics, that is a good performance for a Democrat. The GOP will likely make a strong effort to reduce Obama's margin among this group in 2012, and based on historical voting patterns in the state, they certainly have a shot at doing so.

White college graduates are more friendly to the Republicans than in many other states, so the GOP will seek to move these voters even farther in their direction, ideally up to the level of support they have enjoyed among the state's white working-class voters. And as for the white working class, the GOP will try to expand their 17-point advantage among this group in 2008 to the massive 30-point landslide they achieved nationwide in 2010. That would likely deliver the state to the Republican candidate.

As mentioned Florida is a fast-growing state, with 18 percent growth over the last decade. By and large, where Florida has been growing, Democrats have been improving their position, allowing Obama to squeak out a 3-point victory in 2008 despite the conservative inclinations of substantial sections of the state.

Start with the Orlando metro area, the fastest-growing large (over a million in population) metro area in the state. The area has grown by 30 percent—with minorities up 74 percent, accounting for 86 percent of growth—since 2000. Obama carried the Orlando area by 9 points in 2008, a 17-point gain over Kerry's margin in 2004. There has been an astonishing 48-point swing toward presidential Democrats in this Orlando going back to 1988.

Not surprisingly, Democrats have also done particularly well in urbanized Orange County, the central county of the metro area, gaining 18 points over 2004 and 55 points over 1988. But they have actually made even larger gains (25 points over 2004 and 56 points over 2008) in the very fast-growing emerging suburb of Osceola County, which has grown by 56 percent since 2000.

Democrats have also done well in Tampa-St. Petersburg, another one of Florida's large metro areas, which is growing at a healthy 16 percent clip. The minority population is up 57 percent, accounting for 85 percent of growth in the area. Obama carried Tampa-St. Petersburg by 5 points in 2008, a 10-point margin gain over 2004.

Both the Orlando and Tampa metro areas are located in the I-4 corridor,⁵⁹ where white college graduates and particularly minorities are rapidly increasing their shares of eligible voters, while white working-class voters steadily decline. Obama carried the I-4 corridor as a whole by 3 points, a 10-point improvement over 2004 and 28 points better than 1988. Since the I-4 corridor is growing so fast (21 percent growth since 2000, with 65 percent growth in the minority population) and accounts for 37 percent of the statewide vote, these shifts toward the Democrats are highly significant.

The fastest-growing region in Florida is the south, which includes all of Florida's metro areas below the I-4 corridor except for the Miami metro area. This region, which casts 12 percent of the statewide vote, has grown by 23 percent since 2000, with the minority population up 70 percent. Obama lost this region by 9 points in 2008, but that was an 8-point improvement over Kerry's performance in 2004. Compared to 1988, there has been a 25-point pro-Democratic swing in the region's presidential voting.

In the Miami metro area, which accounts for 26 percent of the statewide vote, the Democratic swing from 2004 to 2008 was slightly less (6 points) but Obama still beat McCain 62-38. In addition, the overall swing from 1988 to 2008 has been an impressive 32 points. The Miami metro area has grown at a comparatively modest 11 percent since 2000, but that growth has been entirely from minorities. This produced a very rapid increase in the share of minority eligible voters in the last decade—up by a percentage point a year.

The strongest GOP support in Florida comes from the north region, which accounts for a quarter of the statewide vote. This region has grown by 19 percent since 2000, a strong pace but not as strong as either the south or I-4 corridor. Here, McCain beat Obama by 14 points, though that still represented a 7-point improvement for the Democrats over 2004. And in Jacksonville, the region's large metro area, there was an 11-point Democratic swing from 2004 to 2008. Looking back to 1988, the Democratic shift in the region's presidential voting has been 17 points. This is fairly substantial but less than the other three regions in Florida.

The only part of Florida where Republicans are actually increasing their strength is in small nonmicropolitan rural counties.⁶⁰ Here McCain beat Obama by 37 points, 4 points better than G.W. Bush did and 8 points better than Bush Sr. did. These counties, however, make up a mere 2 percent of the statewide vote.

Thus, Obama's Florida coalition was considerably bolstered by trends in the growing parts of the state, including its fastest growing areas. But will these trends hold up in 2012? The key area for both parties is likely to be the I-4 corridor, particularly the large Orlando and Tampa metro areas. These metro areas are far more Democrat-friendly than they used to be but are still swing areas that could easily move back toward the GOP. And a serious shift back toward the Republicans in the I-4 corridor would put a great deal of pressure on Democratic performance in friendlier areas such as the Miami metro area.

The economic situation is exceptionally poor in Florida, which should provide a significant boost to the GOP in 2012. Florida's unemployment rate stands at 10.9 percent and it is even slightly higher (11.2 percent) in the key Miami metro area. In the swing I-4 corridor, unemployment is 11 percent in Tampa and 10.3 percent in Orlando. And the housing market situation, of course, is dismal in the extreme, with Florida ranking near the top in foreclosures and every indicator of housing market distress.

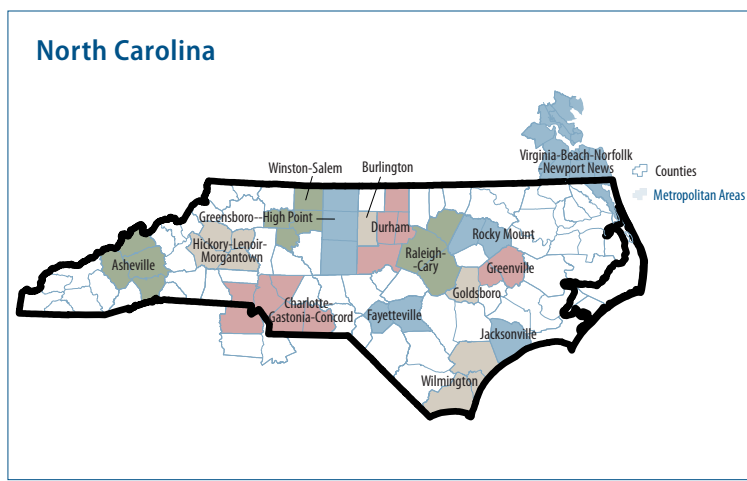
On the bright side for Obama, his approval rating averaged a decent 47 percent in the first half of 2011 according to Gallup, while the newly elected Republican Gov. Rick Scott has been earning a shockingly low 31 percent rating.⁶¹ But there is no gainsaying the fact that the poor economy gives the Republicans an excellent chance of taking back this state, despite the demographic tide running in Obama's favor.

North Carolina—15 electoral votes

Obama won North Carolina, though by a very narrow margin of a third of a percentage point. But this was a huge breakthrough for the Democrats after losing the state by 12 points in 2004 and 13 points in 2000.

Communities of color made up 28 percent of North Carolina's vote in 2008 and voted 88 percent for Obama. Based on exit poll and Census data,⁶² minorities should increase to account for at least 29 percent of the 2012 North Carolina electorate.

This means at least a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored McCain 64-35. Here, as in Florida, there were only slightly different patterns among white



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 88 | 12 | 1 |
| White college graduates | 38 | 61 | 0 |
| White working class | 33 | 67 | -1 |

working-class and white college-graduate voters. North Carolina’s white college graduates favored McCain 61-38, while white working-class voters supported McCain by a somewhat stronger 67-33 margin. Given these patterns, Obama will derive some modest benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 1-point decrease in white working-class voters in 2012.⁶³

These shifts between minorities and whites and within the ranks of white voters would, by themselves, slightly strengthen Obama’s position in the state in 2012. But he will have some very serious challenges. Chief among them is his support from minorities—a sky high 88 percent in 2008. That figure reflected the fact that black voters made up 82 percent of the minority vote and supported Obama at an amazing 96 percent level. His minority support—which just allowed him to squeak by in 2008—is therefore highly vulnerable to any decline in black support levels in 2012. On a somewhat more positive note for Obama, black turnout was not particularly high in 2008, so there is some plausible room for improvement in this area in 2012.

Even if Obama manages to keep his minority support, he will likely be on a knife’s edge in the state. Thus the GOP has an excellent opportunity to take the state by undermining Obama’s already anemic support among North Carolina’s white college graduates and by keeping (and perhaps expanding) their massive 34-point advantage among the state’s white working-class voters.

As mentioned, North Carolina is a fast-growing state, up 19 percent over the last decade. Where North Carolina has been growing, presidential Democrats have been improving their position, without which Obama's razor-thin victory in 2008 would not have been possible.

The two large metro areas in North Carolina are Charlotte and Raleigh, each with over a million in population and each growing rapidly—31 percent growth with 68 percent minority population growth in Charlotte, and 42 percent growth with 75 percent minority population growth in Raleigh—in the last decade. In each of these areas, Democrats have made huge strides. In the Charlotte metro area, which accounts for 16 percent of the statewide vote, Obama beat McCain 53-46 percent, a 17-point swing toward presidential Democrats since 2004. There has been a 31-point pro-Democratic swing in Charlotte since 1988. Mecklenberg County, the fast-growing heart of the Charlotte metro area, which grew by 32 percent since 2000, has swung even harder toward the Democrats. It went for Obama by 24 points in 2008, a Democratic swing of 21 points compared to 2004 and an amazing 44 points since 1988.

In the Raleigh metro area, which accounts for 13 percent of the statewide vote, Obama won 54-45, 16-points better than Kerry's margin in 2004 and 24-points better than Dukakis's in 1988. The leading county in this area is fast-growing Wake, which grew by 44 percent last decade and supported Obama by 14 points, a Democratic margin gain of 17 points since 2004 and 29 points since 1988.

Adjacent to Raleigh is the Durham metro area, the other part of the North Carolina's high-tech Research Triangle. The Durham metro area has grown 18 percent over the last decade, and its minority population grew by 33 percent. The area, which is the fourth largest metro area in the state and contributes another 6 percent of the statewide vote, went for Obama by an overwhelming 40 points, a 30-point improvement over Dukakis's showing in 1988.

And close by the Durham metro area is the Greensboro metro area. Greensboro grew by 12 percent over the last decade, and its minority population grew by 40 percent. It is the third-largest metro area in North Carolina and contributes 8 percent of the statewide vote. Obama carried Greensboro by 4 points, a 23-point Democratic margin shift compared to 1988.

These metro areas, which together account for 43 percent of the statewide vote and have seen very favorable trends for the Democrats, are the geographic heart of

Obama's North Carolina coalition. Will these trends hold up in 2012, particularly in the large and dynamic Charlotte and Raleigh metro areas? If the GOP can cut into Obama's margins in these areas, that puts the state within Republicans' grasp, since most of the rest of North Carolina is far more friendly territory for them.

The economic situation is quite poor in North Carolina, if not as bad as in states such as Florida, Michigan, and Nevada. This will certainly help the GOP's efforts in the state. North Carolina's unemployment rate stands at 10.4 percent and is higher in Charlotte (11.1 percent) and Greensboro (11 percent). More positively for Obama, the unemployment rate is lower in the Research Triangle metro areas of Raleigh (8 percent) and Durham (8.2 percent).

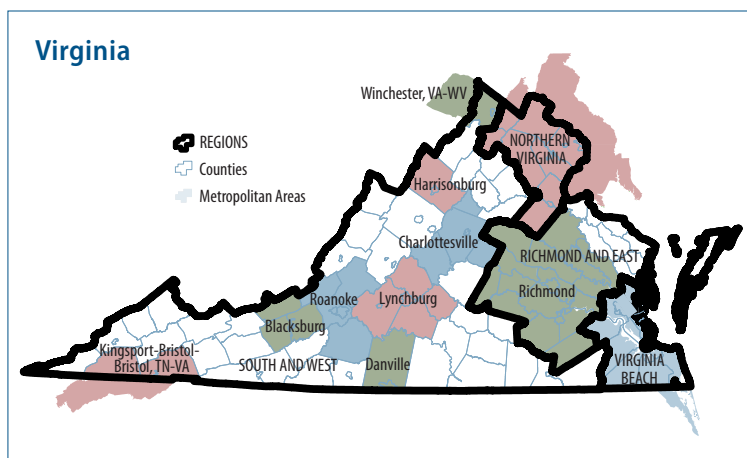
Finally, his approval rating in the state averaged a mediocre 46 percent in the first half of 2011, according to Gallup. Clearly, the Obama campaign will need an exceptionally large and efficient mobilization effort, particularly among black voters, to hold the state in 2012. But with the economy as it is, even that may not be enough to prevent a GOP victory.

Virginia—13 electoral votes

Obama won Virginia by 6 points in 2008, an impressive breakthrough for the Democrats after the GOP won the state by 8 points in 2004 and 2000. This was the first time Democrats carried the state since 1964.

Communities of color made up 30 percent of Virginia's vote in 2008 and voted 83 percent for Obama. Based on Census data,⁶⁴ minorities should increase to account for 32 percent of the 2012 Virginia electorate.

This means a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored McCain 60-39. In Virginia, there was more of a difference than in the other two New South target states in voting patterns between white college graduate and white working-class voters. Virginia's white college graduates favored McCain 56-44. But white working-class voters supported McCain by a much stronger 66-32 margin. Given these patterns, Obama will considerably benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that could reduce the weight of white working-class voters by as much as 5 points⁶⁵ in 2012.⁶⁶



| | D--2008 | R--2008 | Projected Share Change, 2008-12 |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------------------------------|
| Minorities | 83 | 16 | 2 |
| White college graduates | 44 | 55 | 3 |
| White working class | 32 | 66 | -5 |

These shifts between minorities and whites, and changes within the ranks of white voters, should considerably strengthen Obama's position in the state in 2012. But he will face significant challenges that will give the GOP openings in the state. Start with his very high 83 percent support from minorities in 2008. That figure was driven by the 92 percent support he received among blacks, who make up two-thirds of the minority vote in Virginia. He also did well among Virginia's increasingly important Hispanic voters, receiving 65 percent support from this group. He will need to replicate these figures or close to them, while keeping turnout levels up, to hold the state in 2012.

He will also need to keep his support among Virginia's relatively friendly white college graduates close to his 2008 levels. These voters are needed to provide a bulwark for Obama against Virginia's very pro-GOP white working-class voters, who favored McCain by 34 points in 2008. Indeed, that GOP advantage from 2008 seems more likely to increase than diminish in 2012. If that's the case, a significant shift toward the Republicans among white college graduates could tip the state toward the GOP.

Virginia is a fairly fast-growing state, up 13 percent over the last decade. Where Virginia has been growing, presidential Democrats have generally been improving their position, a key to Obama's 2008 victory.

Virginia's growth is driven first and foremost by Northern Virginia—that is, the northern Virginia suburbs of the Washington, D.C. metro area—by far the fastest growing area of the state. Northern Virginia grew by 24 percent in the last decade, fueled by rapid increases in minorities and white college graduates, and casts a third of Virginia's ballots. This is also the area where presidential Democrats have made their greatest gains.

Obama carried Northern Virginia 59-40 in 2008, 15-points better than Kerry did and a staggering 38 points better than Dukakis. These trends included not only a strong performance in the large inner suburb of Fairfax (up 14 points from 2004 and 44 points from 1988) but also huge gains in the two emerging suburbs of Prince William (up 22 points from 2004 and 50 points from 1988) and Loudoun (up 20 points from 2004 and 42 points from 1988). The latter county has grown by 84 percent since 2000, and has the fifth-fastest county growth rate in the country.⁶⁷

Democrats have also gained strength in the Richmond and east region.⁶⁸ This region has grown by 13 percent since 2000 and accounts for 19 percent of the statewide vote. Obama won the region by 5 points in 2008, 17 points better than the Democratic margin in 2004 and 31 points better than 1988. This result is driven by gains in the Richmond metro area, including the urban core of the city of Richmond itself. But Democrats have also made big gains in the Richmond suburbs, up 20 points from 2004 and 51 points from 1988, respectively, in the inner suburb of Henrico, and up 18 points from 2004 and 44 points from 1988 in the emerging suburb of Chesterfield.

Obama also carried the slow-growing Virginia Beach metro area, which grew by 6 percent over the last decade and contributes 21 percent of the statewide vote, by 12 points, 56-44. That was an 18-point improvement over Kerry's performance in 2004 and 30 points better than Dukakis in 1988.

The south and west region, which accounts for 28 percent of the statewide vote, is also slow growing—up 7 percent this decade—and by far the most rural of Virginia's regions. Indeed, many of the rural counties in this region are declining. Here Obama only gained 9 points over 2004 and lost to McCain by 11 points. The 9-point gain, however, while modest, reverses the 1988-to-2004 trend in these regions, which leaned slightly toward the GOP. Now, over the full 1988-to-2008 period, this region too is trending Democratic, albeit by a modest 8 points.

The Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Virginia Beach regions, overwhelmingly dominated by their respective metro areas, comprise 72 percent of the statewide vote. If Obama can hold his strength in these areas, especially his healthy margin

in Northern Virginia, he should carry the state. Conversely, if the GOP can significantly compress Democratic margins in these areas, their advantage in the conservative south and west region could give the state to the GOP.

The economic situation is relatively good in Virginia, which should help Obama. Virginia's unemployment rate stands at 6.5 percent, though it is a bit higher in the Virginia Beach (7.3 percent) and Richmond (7.4 percent) metro areas. His approval rating in the state, however, has averaged only a mediocre 46 percent in the first half of 2011 according to Gallup, underscoring the serious possibility that the GOP can take back the state.

New South summary

These three New South swing states are all marked by fast growth, driven by their burgeoning minority populations. These states are projected to average around 31 percent minority voters in 2012. These voters, with their relatively high concentrations of black voters, gave Obama an average of 82 percent support in 2008, significantly higher than the southwest swing states average of 71 percent.

But, in contrast to the southwest states, white college graduate voters are significantly more supportive of the GOP, giving McCain an average 16-point advantage in 2008. And white working-class voters in the New South swing states, though they are declining rapidly, are even more pro-GOP than in the southwest, giving McCain an average 28-point advantage. So the level and strength of the minority vote looms especially large to Obama's chances in these states.

The difficult economic situations in North Carolina and above all Florida could, however, undercut the minority vote, even as it alienates white college-graduate voters and moves white working-class voters closer to the GOP. Such a scenario would be a recipe for Republican success and the GOP nominee will work hard to make it a reality in 2012. Virginia is more promising for the

Obama campaign, with a solid minority vote, a relatively friendly white college-graduate population, a tight link between growing areas and increasing sympathy for the Democrats, and a fairly decent economic situation. A strong effort by Obama in 2012 should have a good chance of keeping this state in his column.

It is important to stress that Obama does not need to win any particular one of these states to be successful in 2012. If Obama carries just Florida and the 18 states plus the District of Columbia that Democrats have carried in every election since 1992, then he would be re-elected. If he carries only Virginia and those 18 states plus D.C., he would be re-elected if he also carried the southwestern target states. If he carries only North Carolina and those 18 states plus D.C., he would be re-elected if he carried just Colorado and New Mexico in the Southwest.

But if the GOP is able to carry its core states plus all three New South states—a distinct possibility—that would likely put them very close to victory, needing only 22 more EVs from any combination of contested states. That could be from Ohio plus New Hampshire, but there are many other possibilities. That's why success in all three of these states is likely to be a central part of GOP election strategy in 2012—it would give them so many ways to win.

What President Obama and Republicans should focus on to win in 2012

The president faces difficult choices in setting his strategy for the upcoming election.

As stated earlier, President Obama must maintain as much of his community of color, Millennial generation, and unmarried women base as possible in terms of vote share and electoral composition—and then manage to either hold his 2008 margins among white college graduates to offset possible crushing losses among white working-class voters or keep his deficits among both white college and working-class voters to 2004 levels and hope that his base support compensates for these deficits.

This is a tight needle to thread, especially in a bad economy. How might President Obama accomplish this difficult task? Given the low probability that the Republicans in the House of Representatives will advance his legislative agenda in the next year, the president and his campaign team have wisely shifted their political strategy from the first half of 2011, which focused unsuccessfully on winning over independent voters through a postpartisan posture of reasonableness and compromise in the face of extremism from the right.

Although this approach was consistent with many of the president's 2008 campaign promises and his overall personality, it did little to accomplish its original political and policy goals and failed to sharpen contrasts with Republicans in a manner that would likely increase Democratic base commitment to the election. The recent steps to define the election on more progressive terms through a commitment to a new jobs and growth program and a deficit reduction plan based on “shared sacrifice” will likely aid the president politically given the trends outlined throughout this paper. Public polling over the past year suggests that a sustained posture of defending the middle class, supporting popular government programs, and calling for a more equitable tax distribution will be popular among many key demographic groups necessary to win in the 12 battleground states outlined here.

The president's single greatest weakness remains the actual condition of the economy. Despite his attempts to create jobs and growth, and his passionate call

for a better approach to restructuring the American economy, a significant percentage of voters might simply conclude that a well-intentioned president just wasn't up to the job and want to give someone else a chance. The ongoing difficulties with the economy thus present a real opening for Republicans.

What might the GOP do to maximize their chances of unseating President Obama?

Republicans will first need to acknowledge that they likely cannot win with their base alone and that they will need to find a way to cut into the president's support among Latinos, professionals, Millennial generation voters, and moderates. This will require a candidate and a program that has broad appeal and offers something more than tax cuts, deregulation, and small government—an agenda supported strongly by the GOP base but not strongly among a wider swath of Americans. Voters disillusioned with the economy will listen to Republican solutions that appear workable and helpful to their own situations. But these voters will want reassurance that the GOP nominee has a framework for the economy that uses all the levers of private and public power to create jobs and growth while protecting well-supported government programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

Republicans can maximize their chances of appealing to disaffected Obama voters and more moderate Americans by focusing almost exclusively on the economy and downplaying their more divisive positions on religion, social issues, immigration, and the more extreme Tea Party positions on popular government programs such as Social Security and Medicare. The eventual GOP nominee should be well positioned to run a Warren Harding-style campaign that focuses on a “return to normalcy” after the perceived tumult of the Obama years.

Americans will be open to replacing President Obama with an even tempered, nonthreatening GOP leader focused on the economy, but they are not likely to sign up for a conservative revolutionary promising to transform the country along Tea Party lines.

A lot could change over the course of the next year. The outcome of the election is far from certain at this early stage. Given the dynamics outlined here, it is safe to say that President Obama will need to take strong steps to connect with his base and prove to middle-class voters and skeptical moderates that his economic approach is worth supporting and is better than the GOP alternative of lower taxes and smaller government. In contrast, Republicans will need to make this election a referendum on the economic performance of the president, reduce the

extremist face of their nominee and agenda, and present a plausible and emotionally resonant economic vision with broad appeal.

The president came into office having to bail out the financial sector and take strong fiscal steps to stave off economic disaster. His presidency has been dogged by these decisions ever since. Now he will likely finish his term in office needing his progressive base and a sympathetic middle class to bail him out politically in the face of a bad economy. The Republicans began the term going into full-bore opposition to the president and his agenda. They reaped big benefits in 2010 and will now have to harness this opposition once more while simultaneously showing Americans that they can be trusted to run the government with the interests of everyone in mind.

The stage is set for a showdown of demographics versus economics in the 2012 election. Each side has clear strengths but also very serious weaknesses as they move into this showdown. Victory will likely go to the side most willing to acknowledge their weaknesses and attack them boldly. This will be no election for the faint-hearted.

About the authors

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Endnotes

- 1 See Ruy Teixeira, “New Progressive America: Twenty Years of Demographic, Geographic and Attitudinal Changes Across the Country Herald a New Progressive Majority” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009), and John Halpin and Karl Agne, “The State of American Political Ideology, 2009” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009).
- 2 See Matt Browne, John Halpin, and Ruy Teixeira, “Building a Progressive Center: Political Strategy and Demographic Change in America” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2011).
- 3 Lydia Saad, “New Low of 26% Approve of Obama on the Economy,” available at http://www.gallup.com/poll/149042/New-Low-Approve-Obama-Economy.aspx?utm_source=alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=syndication&utm_content=morelink&utm_term=All%20Gallup%20Headlines.
- 4 Congressional Budget Office, *The Budget and Economic Outlook: An Update*, August, 2011, available at <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/123xx/doc12316/08-24-BudgetEconUpdate.pdf>.
- 5 Note however that most independents are not independent. That is, the overwhelming majority of Americans who say they are “independent” lean toward one party or the other. They are better thought of as IINOs, or Independents In Name Only. IINOs who say they lean toward the Republicans think and vote just like regular Republicans. IINOs who say they lean toward the Democrats think and vote just like regular Democrats. For a more detailed analysis of independents and their current political significance, see Ruy Teixeira, “Obama’s Unhealthy Obsession with Independents,” *The New Republic*, August 2, 2011, available at <http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/93041/obama-independent-voters>.
- 6 Hispanic, black, Asian, other, and multiracial.
- 7 Non-Hispanic white.
- 8 Another way to derive an estimate is to use the long-run rate of change in minority vote share from the exit polls. As minority vote share rose from 15 percent of voters in 1988 to 26 percent in 2008, the exit polls show a slower change in the first half of this period and then an acceleration in the second half of this period. This produces an average rate of change of 0.55 percentage points over the whole time period, which translates into 2.2 points over four years—very close to the 2-point estimate used here.
- 9 The 75 percent estimate is also very close to the long-range average of Democratic presidential minority support going back to 1988.
- 10 See Pew Research Center, “Obama Leadership Image Takes a Hit,” August 25, 2011, available at <http://people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/8-25-11%20Political%20Release.pdf>; and Gallup, “Weekly Demographic Job Approval Trends,” available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/Presidential-Job-Approval-Center.aspx>.
- 11 Four-year college degree or higher.
- 12 Lacking a four-year college degree, so this group encompasses those with “some college” including two-year associate’s degrees.
- 13 Assuming he captured 75 percent of the minority vote.
- 14 August 17-21, 2011, available at <http://people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/8-25-11%20Political%20Release.pdf>.
- 15 Pew Research Center, “GOP Makes Big Gains among White Voters,” July 22, 2011, available at <http://people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/7-22-11%20Party%20ID%20commentary.pdf>.
- 16 Authors’ analysis of Census marital status data.
- 17 Women’s Voices, Women Vote, and Lake Partners, “50 Years of Unmarried America: A Report on the Importance and Status of Unmarried America” (2010) available at, http://www.wvvv.org/assets/2010/3/18/50_yrs_of_unmarried_america_-_a_report_on_the_importance_and_status_of_unmarried_america_-_unmarried_women-1.pdf.
- 18 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, “A New America: Unmarrieds Drive Political and Social Change” (2007).
- 19 See the ongoing series of surveys by Women’s Voices, Women Vote.
- 20 They were all, with the exception off Oregon, won by an average of over 5 points in the very tight 2000 and 2004 elections. Despite the closeness of the 2000 (especially) and 2004 elections in Oregon, it is included in the core list because of the size of Obama’s victory in 2008 (16 points) and its location in the strongly Democratic-trending Pacific Northwest.
- 21 All data in this paragraph is from the authors’ analysis of data in Census Bureau, “Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010,” (2011), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-01.pdf> and Census Bureau, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin, 2010” (2011) available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.
- 22 The Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.46 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.4 points per year (1988-2008).

- 23 Based on 1988-2008 exit poll trends. Note however that the 2004-2008 exit poll shifts in white working-class and white college-graduate vote shares in Pennsylvania were unusually large in comparison to other states. If this result is problematic, it is possible that the 1988-2008 trend used here is exaggerated. Note also that it is difficult to project the sizes of these two groups in 2012 using exit poll data. This is because the exit polls have a problem estimating the sizes of groups by education, with a known tendency to undercount the less educated and overcount the more educated. Thus, while the exit poll figures project to 32 percent white working-class voters in 2012, Census voter supplement data, which probably have less of an education sampling problem, project to a much higher 55 percent white working-class voters. This difference is unusually large but significant differences exist across all states.
- 24 For more detailed analysis along these lines, see Ruy Teixeira, "Does Obama Have a Problem with His Base?" *The New Republic*, July 13, 2011, available at <http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/91934/obama-minority-youth-voters-2012-election>.
- 25 The regional breakdown here is drawn from the work of William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "The Political Geography of Pennsylvania: Not Another Rustbelt State" (Washington: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2008).
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Journalist Ronald Brownstein's phrase; see "Coalition of the Ascendant," *The National Journal*, November 8, 2008.
- 28 This is the not seasonally adjusted rate, which we use to allow reasonable comparisons between the state rate and the rates in various metro areas, which the Bureau of Labor Statistics only provides on a non-seasonally adjusted basis (and also a month later than initial report of the national unemployment rate—rates reported here are for August 2011). Generally speaking non-seasonally adjusted rates tend to be a bit higher than seasonally adjusted rates so the state rates we report here tend to run a bit higher than those typically reported in the media.
- 29 The Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.29 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.3 points per year (1988-2008).
- 30 Exit poll figures project to 48 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census voter supplement data project to a higher 56 percent level.
- 31 William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "The Political Geography of Ohio, Michigan and Missouri: Battlegrounds in the Heartland" (The Brookings Institute, 2008).
- 32 The regional breakdown here follows William Frey and Ruy Teixeira in "The Political Geography of Ohio, Michigan and Missouri."
- 33 See Nate Silver, "GOP Governors Swing Right, Leaving Voters Behind," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2011, available at <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/21/g-o-p-governors-swing-right-leaving-voters-behind/>.
- 34 The Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.2 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.1 points per year (1988-2008). In either case, added to the 18.2 percent minority figure in the exit polls, we should get at least a rounded-up figure of 19 percent in 2012.
- 35 Though these changes are taking place only slowly. Exit poll figures project to 51 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census voter supplement data project to a slightly higher 53 percent level.
- 36 The regional breakdown here follows William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "The Political Geography of Ohio, Michigan and Missouri." Trend data on white working-class and white college-graduate voters by region from this report.
- 37 Silver, "GOP Governors Swing Right, Leaving Voters Behind."
- 38 Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.51 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.3 points per year (1988-2008). In this case, the trends are different enough that they give slightly different estimates for share change from 2008-2012: 2 points from the Census and a little over 1 point from the exits. We use the 1 point estimate here which may be conservative since minority share increase in Minnesota appears to be accelerating (recent exit poll shifts are consistent with this).
- 39 Exit poll figures project to 47 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census voter supplement data project to a higher 60 percent level.
- 40 Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.4 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have this same share of voters increasing by 0.25 points per year (1988-2008). These trends are different enough that they give slightly different estimates for share change from 2008-2012: a little under 2 points from the Census (1.6 points) and 1 point from the exits. We use the 1-point estimate here though this may be conservative since the minority share increase in Wisconsin appears to be accelerating (recent exit poll shifts are consistent with this).
- 41 Exit poll figures project to 52 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census voter supplement data project to a higher 58 percent level.
- 42 Silver, "GOP Governors Swing Right, Leaving Voters Behind."
- 43 Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.39 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.3 points per year (1988-2008). These trends give slightly different estimates for share change from 2008-2012: 1.6 points from the Census and 1.2 points from the exits. But in either case, added to the 8.6 percent minority figure in the 2008 exit poll, we should get at least a rounded-up figure of around 10 percent in 2012.

- 44 Exit poll figures project to 50 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census voter supplement data project to a slightly higher 52 percent level.
- 45 Silver, "GOP Governors Swing Right, Leaving Voters Behind."
- 46 All data in this paragraph is from the authors' analysis of data in Census Bureau, "Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010;" (2011), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-01.pdf> and Census Bureau, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin, 2010" (2011) available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.
- 47 The Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.45 percentage points per year (2000-2010). Unlike in all the Midwest states, exit poll data are not available going back to 1988, so a long-term time trend on the minority share of voters cannot be estimated from the exits. However, the 2008 Colorado exit poll shows a 5-point increase in minority share over 2004, so it is possible that the Census-based 2-point projected increase for 2012 is too low.
- 48 We calibrate the white working-class and white college-graduate share projections to be consistent with the overall projection in white/minority share change based on Census data. Again, these Census-pegged projections may be conservative because the minority shift across the 2004-2008 Colorado exit polls is quite large and would imply larger projected shifts among these groups in 2012. On the other hand, the recent exit poll figures project to a ridiculously low level of 23 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census voter supplement data project to a much higher 46 percent level, so caution on the use of the exit figures seems fully justified.
- 49 The tripartite division of the Denver metro area and other region breakdowns for Colorado follow William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "The Political Geography of the Intermountain West: The New Swing Region" (Washington: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2008). Trend data on white working-class and college-graduate eligible voters from this report.
- 50 These growth figures are slightly inflated by inclusion of Broomfield County in this region, which did not exist in 2000.
- 51 The Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 1.11 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while the exit polls indicate a long-term trend of 0.95 points per year. However, the 2008 Nevada exit poll shows an 8-point increase in minority share over 2004, so it is possible that the 4 point projected increase for 2012 based on the long-term trend is too low.
- 52 Exit poll figures project to 33 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census Voter Supplement data project to a higher 42 percent figure.
- 53 See Frey and Teixeira, op. cit.
- 54 The Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.42 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while the exit polls have the share increasing at 0.55 points per year (1988-2008). Since the 2008 New Mexico exit poll shows a 7-point increase in minority share over 2004, it is possible that minority share increase is accelerating and that therefore the projected 2-point increase for 2012 is too low.
- 55 Possibly these projections of decline in the white working-class could be too conservative since 2004-2008 changes in white working-class voter share are considerably larger in both the exit polls and the Census voter supplement. On the other hand, these recent figures project to very--perhaps unrealistically--low figures of 18 percent (Census voter supplement) and 13 percent (exit polls) white working-class voters in 2012, so use of the conservative projection figures seems like a safer bet.
- 56 All data in this paragraph is from the authors' analysis of data in Census Bureau, "Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010;" (2011), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-01.pdf> and Census Bureau, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin, 2010" (2011) available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.
- 57 Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.75 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.6 points per year (1988-2008). These trends give slightly different estimates for share change 2008-2012: 3 points from the Census and a little over 2 points from the exits. We use the relatively conservative 2-point estimate here.
- 58 Exit poll figures project to 35 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census Voter Supplement data project to a higher 42 percent figure.
- 59 The regional breakdown here follows William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "The Political Geography of Virginia and Florida: Bookends of the New South" (Washington: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2008). Trend data on white working-class and college graduate eligible voters from this report.
- 60 These are the most rural of nonmetropolitan counties and lie outside of the small town "micropolitan" areas. The technical definition of micropolitan used by the Census Bureau is as follows: Any nonmetro county with an urban cluster of at least 10,000 persons or more, plus any outlying counties where commuting to the central county with the urban cluster is 25 percent or higher, or if 25 percent of the employment in the outlying county is made up of commuters to the central county within the urban cluster.
- 61 Silver, "GOP Governors Swing Right, Leaving Voters Behind."
- 62 Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.49 percentage points per year (2000-2010), while exit poll data have the minority share of voters increasing by 0.3 points per year (1988-2008). These trends give slightly different estimates for share change from 2008-2012: 2 points from the Census and a little over 1 point from the exits. We use the relatively conservative 1-point estimate here though the Census data certainly suggest this could be an underestimate.

- 63 Exit poll figures project to 40 percent white working-class voters in 2012, while Census Voter Supplement data project to a slightly higher 44 percent figure.
- 64 Census data have the minority share of the overall population increasing at 0.54 percentage points per year (2000-2010). There was no Virginia exit poll in 1988 so a long-term trend in the minority vote share cannot be estimated. However, the 2004-08 exit poll minority share change (2 points) is consistent with the projected increase.
- 65 Census Voter Supplement data project to 37 percent white working-class voters in 2012. Exit poll data (applying the change rate from the Census Voter Supplement) would imply a considerably lower figure of 25 percent.
- 66 This estimate is based solely on CPS voter supplement data since not only was there no Virginia exit poll in 1988, in 2004 the Virginia exit poll did not include a question on education. So no change estimates at all are possible for these groups from the exit polls.
- 67 Among counties with 10,000 or more in population.
- 68 The regional breakdown here follows William Frey and Ruy Teixeira in "The Political Geography of Virginia and Florida." Trend data on white working-class and college-graduate eligible voters from this report.

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