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## The Election

### *How the Campaign Mattered*

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The media need new stories every day. As a result, they often overstate the effects that political campaigns have on election outcomes. Because each new advertisement or appearance is news that they must cover, the people who give us political information frame their stories to suggest all the twists and turns of the race are critical. In their post-election retrospectives, pundits often argue that this advertisement or that gaffe proved decisive in determining the election's outcome. Such daily episodes are rarely important, as much as pundits would like us to believe otherwise. That, however, is not to say the campaigns do not matter. They do. But how do they matter?

The election of 2012 provides an excellent illustration that it is the long-run strategies of the campaigns, rather than their day-to-day tactics, that have a profound influence on who wins and who loses and by how much. To understand why, we must consider the range of things campaigns do. Their decisions rarely change the dynamics of the race with a stunning advertisement or appeal. Rather political observers can better see a campaign's effects by examining who came out to vote, who stayed home, and what issue stands the candidates decided to take. With these criteria in mind, much evidence suggests that Mitt Romney's campaign contributed to his loss, while Barack Obama's snatched victory from what, perhaps, should have been the jaws of defeat.

The seeds of Romney's setback in 2012 were sown in 2008. That is when the formerly moderate Massachusetts governor began to lurch to the political right. Only a few years before his first run for the presidency in 2008 Romney publicly championed gay rights, abortion rights, and universal access to health care for all citizens. These were popular positions in Massachusetts, one of the nation's most liberal states. However, he and his advisers decided that those positions would be liabilities with the much more conservative Republican presidential primary electorate. Moreover, they viewed other relative moderates who were also vying for the nomination, namely John McCain and Rudy Giuliani, as his toughest foes in 2008. Rather than tangle with them for the few moderate voters in Republican primaries, Romney staked out staunchly conservative positions on the entire range of issues in an effort to appeal to the conservative base of the

Republican Party. Although the gambit did not work in 2008, he managed to stagger through a very weak field in 2012 to secure the nomination.

Changing issue positions in this way may sound cynical at first, but strategic positioning to help win votes is nothing new. To some extent, all candidates attempt to balance their more ideological primary election constituency's wishes with those of the more moderate mass of Americans who vote for president in November. But Governor Romney's problem was more acute than for most candidates for two reasons. First, the positions of key groups within his party base, particularly religious conservatives, were particularly extreme, putting him in direct conflict with critical emerging forces within the electorate. Most notably, the Republican base has little sympathy for immigrants, legal or otherwise. To satisfy this group in the primaries, Romney took a very conservative position on immigration throughout the primaries, going as far at one point to suggest that the millions in the country illegally ought to deport themselves. For obvious reasons, his positions alienated Latino voters, the nation's fastest growing ethnic minority. Similarly, religious conservatives' disdain for gay rights caused Romney to believe that he needed to change his positions on gay marriage and gay adoption to satisfy them. This, in turn, alienated socially liberal younger voters who, in 2012, increased their turnout share to its highest point in recent general elections.

Romney's second problem with his primary election constituency probably explains why he did so much to try to accommodate it on the issues. Specifically, a large swath of the Republican base was uncomfortable with the fact that Mitt Romney is a Mormon. Although Mitt's father, George, encountered little resistance to his religious denomination when he ran for president in 1968, the emergence of white evangelical Protestants as a force in American party politics has changed the political dynamics fundamentally. America is a more tolerant country racially and religiously than it was decades ago, but many evangelical religious groups classify Mormonism as a cult rather than a Christian religion. In fact, election analyst Harry Enten found during the Republican primary campaign that the percentage vote for candidates other than Romney in a county very strongly correlated with the percentage of evangelical Christians living in the county.<sup>1</sup> Knowing that they did not consider him "one of them," Romney apparently felt a particularly acute need to satisfy this constituency where he could. As illustrated subsequently, Romney's decision to position himself far to the right contributed to his defeat, as people who consider themselves moderates abandoned his candidacy in droves.

Even as Romney may have cost himself the election in the prenomination process, Obama plotted a strategy that proved a winner. Without any primary challengers, Barack Obama's campaign only needed to prepare for the general election. And prepare it did. The vaunted turnout machine that produced near record voter participation in 2008 got the job done again in 2012. Although absolute levels of turnout were down, Obama succeeded

in turning out people from the demographic groups that the campaign targeted. Generally, campaigns find it hard to get young people and racial and ethnic minorities to the polls on election day, but these groups made up a larger than usual slice of the electorate in 2012. Young people (those aged 18–29) increased their share of the electorate to 19 percent, its highest percentage since exit poll data have been gathered. In addition, nonwhites made up fully 28 percent of the total electorate, an increase of 2 percentage points over 2008.<sup>2</sup> That the Obama campaign boosted minority turnout even with a sluggish economy that was particularly unforgiving to racial and ethnic minorities is a testament to its get-out-the-vote campaign's success.

Also indicative of the Obama campaign's relative strength, it achieved a near sweep of the battleground states, winning nine of the ten states that both campaigns targeted. Going into election day, Ohio was viewed as the lynchpin. Whoever won there would win in the election. Not only did Obama win Ohio by 1.9 percentage points, he also narrowly won toss-up states like Virginia and Florida that many thought Romney would carry and, in fact, needed in order for Ohio to be important. In the end, Obama retained all the states that he won in 2008 except Indiana, which had been a fluke victory the last time around, and North Carolina, which he won in 2008 by a mere 14,000 votes.

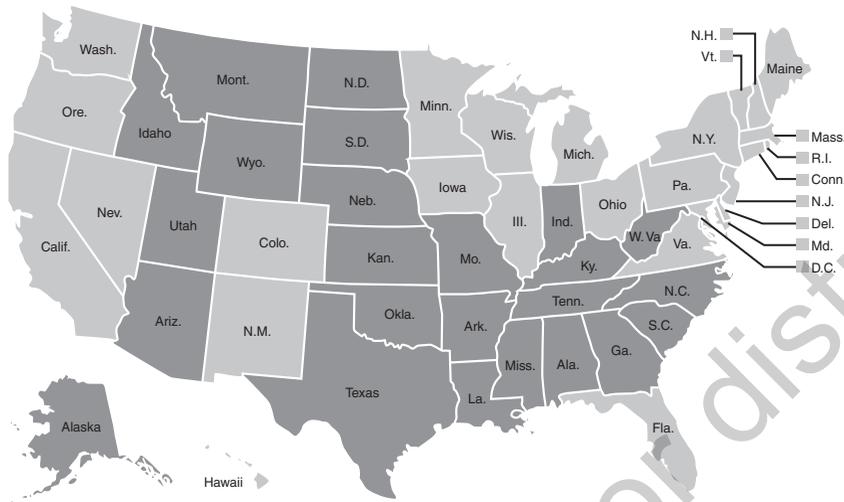
In retrospect, Republicans will likely view 2012 as an opportunity missed. In 2010, Republican House and Senate candidates took advantage of widespread voter discontent to make sweeping gains. With unemployment still hovering around 8 percent, the GOP had every reason to expect a victory. Mitt Romney failed to take advantage of the type of sluggish economy that usually leads to a change in president. This chapter explains why.

## The Basics

The 2012 election was reasonably close by historical standards. Barack Obama won 50.9 percent of the popular vote, while Mitt Romney garnered 47.4 percent.<sup>3</sup> Only six elections since the dawning of the twentieth century have been closer as far as the popular vote is concerned. Obama's electoral vote margin was somewhat more impressive. He totaled 332 electoral votes compared with Mitt Romney's 206, or about 62 percent of the overall number. This makes it the eighth closest electoral vote election of the post-nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 3.1 displays the 2012 electoral map. States Obama won are shaded. Romney states are white. Table 3.1 shows the percentages of the vote the major party candidates won in each state. Consistent with recent voting patterns, the regional differences cannot be ignored. Every north-eastern state, from Maryland in the south to Maine in the north, voted for Obama. The entire Pacific Coast was also strong Democratic territory. Not only did the Democratic ticket win these states, they often won with large margins. For example, New York in the East and California in the

**Figure 3.1** 2012 Electoral Map



Source: Compiled by the author.

**Table 3.1** State by State Results of the 2012 Election

State	Winner	Percentage	
		Obama	Romney
Alabama	Romney	38.4	60.7
Alaska	Romney	41.3	55.3
Arizona	Romney	44.1	54.2
Arkansas	Romney	36.9	60.5
California	Obama	59.3	38.3
Colorado	Obama	51.2	46.5
Connecticut	Obama	58.4	40.4
Delaware	Obama	58.4	40.0
District of Columbia	Obama	91.4	7.1
Florida	Obama	50.0	49.1
Georgia	Romney	45.4	53.4
Hawaii	Obama	70.6	27.8
Idaho	Romney	32.6	64.5
Illinois	Obama	57.3	41.1
Indiana	Romney	43.8	54.3
Iowa	Obama	52.1	46.5

(Continued)

Table 3.1 Continued

State	Winner	Percentage	
		Obama	Romney
Kansas	Romney	37.8	60.0
Kentucky	Romney	37.8	60.5
Louisiana	Romney	40.6	57.8
Maine	Obama	56.0	40.9
Maryland	Obama	61.7	36.6
Massachusetts	Obama	60.8	37.6
Michigan	Obama	54.3	44.8
Minnesota	Obama	52.8	45.1
Mississippi	Romney	43.5	55.5
Missouri	Romney	44.3	53.9
Montana	Romney	41.8	55.3
Nebraska	Romney	37.8	60.5
Nevada	Obama	52.3	45.7
New Hampshire	Obama	52.2	46.4
New Jersey	Obama	58.0	40.9
New Mexico	Obama	52.9	43.0
New York	Obama	62.6	36.0
North Carolina	Romney	48.4	50.6
North Dakota	Romney	38.9	58.7
Ohio	Obama	50.1	48.2
Oklahoma	Romney	33.2	66.8
Oregon	Obama	54.5	42.7
Pennsylvania	Obama	52.0	46.8
Rhode Island	Obama	62.7	35.5
South Carolina	Romney	44.0	54.6
South Dakota	Romney	39.9	57.9
Tennessee	Romney	39.0	59.5
Texas	Romney	41.4	57.2
Utah	Romney	24.9	72.8
Vermont	Obama	67.0	31.2
Virginia	Obama	50.8	47.8
Washington	Obama	55.8	41.7
West Virginia	Romney	35.5	62.3
Wisconsin	Obama	52.8	46.1
Wyoming	Romney	28.0	69.3

West both went for Obama by more than 20 percentage points. Republican support unmistakably comes from the South, Great Plains, and the upper Rocky Mountain West. Romney's margins in these states were often very large, too. Idaho and Oklahoma, for example, went for Romney by more than 30 percentage points.

The states that featured the closest margins tended to come from the border South (e.g., Virginia and North Carolina), the desert Southwest/lower Rocky Mountains (e.g., Colorado and Nevada), and the upper Midwest (e.g., Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota). Of course, the story of the election's outcome was that Obama won almost all these competitive states, a point we will revisit. Although the margins were not large, that is immaterial. To win all but two states' electoral votes, one need only win by a single vote.

The Electoral College encourages us to examine presidential elections using the state as the unit of analysis. Doing so causes us to lose sight of the fact that it is really population density that divides Republicans and Democrats these days.<sup>5</sup> Republicans win states that are disproportionately rural, while Democrats prevail in disproportionately urban states. If one were to break down a state like Pennsylvania, for example, it would make the population density story clearer. Obama ran up a huge margin in the greater Philadelphia metropolitan area and healthy margins in and around Pittsburgh. The rest of the state is very rural, which was strong Romney country. Given the urban-rural divide there, it produced a relatively close outcome, with Obama winning by just over 5 points. The same is true of similar city-country mix states like Ohio.

Also consequential is the fact that Obama won his states by, on average, smaller margins than Romney won his. This fact had the potential to produce an electoral vote winner that was different from the popular vote winner. Specifically, Obama had fewer "wasted" votes—votes more than the minimum one vote margin needed to win a state's electoral votes—in the states where he did well. Indeed, *New York Times* blogger Nate Silver estimated that, for Romney to win the electoral vote, he probably would have needed to win the popular vote by at least 2 percentage points.<sup>6</sup> This could be an interesting feature of future elections that lean just slightly in a Republican direction.

### Do Campaigns Even Matter?

Political campaigns matter. They are at least part of why this specific electoral map emerged. In their infinite "cleverness," political scientists often argue that campaigns do not matter, suggesting that the outcomes of presidential elections are driven by "the fundamentals." Most often, the fundamentals they have in mind are measures of the economy's strength in the months leading up to the election. Political science has spawned a cottage industry of election forecasting models that often use economic data gathered

well before the campaign starts in earnest to make projections about the outcome.<sup>7</sup> These forecasting models usually pick the correct winner. The political scientists' argument goes that, if we can pick the winner without knowing anything that happened between when these data were gathered and election day, that means the effect of the campaign is minimal. Instead it is merely sound and fury.

This view is wrong headed. The campaigns may not always (or even often) *change* the outcome of a race, but that is not the same as not mattering. Instead, it is probably most often the case that both sides in a campaign field evenly matched teams that, until recently, had exactly the same amount of money to spend on the race. As a result, the campaigns themselves have a tendency to cancel each other out. If one side gains an advantage for a time, the other has the skill to counter that advantage. The reasoning here is analogous to product advertising. Coke and Pepsi spend billions on marketing, with each spending roughly the same as the other. Despite a slew of memorable ads on both sides, Coke maintains a slight sales advantage. Presumably both employ the Don Drapers of the advertising world to make their case, making it difficult for one side to move ahead without the other making a major mistake (remember New Coke?). Is this, then, money wasted by Coke and Pepsi? Surely not. If one side spent more resources or if one side spent them much more effectively than the other, the outcome would be different. In that sense, marketing campaigns matter, even if all they do is reinforce people's existing preferences.

The same is true of political campaigns, specifically. To illustrate the point, it might be useful to explore examples occurring when the fundamentals were not the whole story. In 1988, the fundamentals suggested a narrow victory for George H. W. Bush. Instead, he won comfortably with 53 percent of the vote and 426 electoral votes. Why? His campaign was better than Michael Dukakis's campaign. Whereas the Dukakis campaign was slow and ineffective in responding to attacks, the Bush campaign produced a remarkable number of memorable advertisements, from Willie Horton to Boston Harbor to one that featured Dukakis himself, looking ridiculous, riding in a tank with a helmet that appeared four sizes too big. Not only were these short-term tactics important, but the Bush campaign was strategically successful in painting Dukakis as an out-of-touch liberal. In this case, the campaigns were not equally skillful, and the difference between the two manifested in an easier than expected Bush victory.

The effect of the campaign was similarly obvious in 2008. In this case, the campaigns were probably more similar in their skill level than they were in 1988, but Barack Obama outspent John McCain by better than a hundred million dollars. Such spending asymmetries had not been possible since the adoption of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974. In return for tens of millions of federal dollars, candidates agreed not to raise and spend cash in the general election beyond what the government gave them. In 2008, however, Obama became the first candidate to eschew federal campaign money

for the general election while McCain accepted it. This allowed Obama to raise and spend an unlimited amount of money while McCain's spending was capped at \$84.1 million.

As a result, Obama's team had resources to commit to a sophisticated ground game designed to mobilize voters who are usually difficult to reach. Making voter mobilization a centerpiece of the campaign has been rare in recent decades. The reason is that, because racial and ethnic minorities and young people are not frequent political participants, campaigns worry that they will not respond to their appeals. Concerned about wasting finite resources on these groups, campaigns often ignore them. Taking advantage of their resource advantage, however, the Obama campaign got these hard-to-reach voters to the polls in record numbers, which padded what the fundamentals predicted would be a reasonably comfortable win. Just how important these efforts were in 2008 is obscured because of the several percentage points of voters that political scientists estimate Obama lost because of the color of his skin.<sup>8</sup>

These examples suggest that the campaign mattered in 2012 even though the preconvention polls taken several months before the election had Obama up narrowly and he won relatively narrowly. In making this case, it is first important to note that Obama won, in the end, by about 3.5 percentage points, which is a couple points more than the roughly 1 point lead he enjoyed according to poll averages generated on the eve of the Republican National Convention in late August. Although 2.5 percentage points might not seem like much, it amounts to about 3 million people moving toward Obama during the general election campaign, given that 129 million people voted. A number that large seems significant. Although the campaign may not have altered the predicted winner, it almost certainly changed the margin.

Even if one does not believe that a 2.5 percentage point shift is much of anything, it is still important to note that there was nothing inevitable about the race ending in roughly the same way as it started. Only the skillful work of the campaign teams and the candidates themselves brought the twists and turns of the race back to where it roughly began.

Let's consider some of the reasons for the movements that we saw during the campaign season. In early September and again in mid-September we saw marked turns toward Obama. The first turn coincides with the end of the convention period, suggesting the Democratic convention was more successful than the Republican convention. Most credit Bill Clinton's nomination speech, which has been described as the best convention speech of the modern era, for the Democratic bounce. Perhaps even more significant was the second turn toward Obama. It coincided with what came to be known as the "47 percent" gaffe. A recording of a private Romney fundraiser was released to the press that showed Romney giving a speech to big donors. In it, he said, "There are 47 percent of the people who will vote

for the president no matter what. All right, there are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe that government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing to you name it... And so my job is not to worry about those people—I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives."<sup>9</sup> The implication was that 47 percent of the electorate, including veterans, senior citizens, active duty service members, and the like, were moochers being supported by a harder working 53 percent.

The 47 percent controversy raged for weeks. Had the election been held during this period, the polls suggest Obama would have won an even more comfortable victory than he did nearly two months later. But the election was not held then, and Obama suffered from the next major campaign event. Specifically, he gave a lackluster performance in the first presidential debate, which was held in Denver on October 3. At times, the president seemed disinterested and sleepy. His delivery was halting and weak, contrasting sharply with Romney's crisp performance. Indeed Romney's performance was probably the best by a Republican presidential candidate since Ronald Reagan in 1980. Although sitting presidents dating back to Jimmy Carter have tended to perform poorly in their first debate, the public provides them little quarter. The electorate in 2012 was no different. Just two days after the first debate, Romney seized his first lead in the poll averages, a lead he would enjoy for nearly three weeks. In fact, some individual polls had him up by more than 5 points at times. Had the election been held after the first debate, then Romney would likely have been the popular vote winner.

Although liberal Democrats appeared ready to hang themselves after the first debate, the race again moved back in their direction. As usual, the vice presidential debate made little difference in the polls, but Obama showed voters that he really did want to be reelected president by performing much better in the second debate than the first. He had more success parrying Romney's attacks on taxes, health care, and the economy. And Romney performed much worse than he had. Two gaffes stood out, both occurring in areas where the former Massachusetts governor was vulnerable. The first had to do with gender pay equality, an issue on which Republicans find themselves on the wrong side of public opinion. Most Americans think government should enact pay equity statutes, which the Obama administration successfully championed with the passage of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009. This law removes previous requirements that any lawsuits challenging pay determinations had to be filed within 180 days of the initial discriminatory pay decision. Under the new law, the 180-day window to file suit begins again with each paycheck that reflects the discriminatory wages, thereby facilitating easier legal challenges to pay discrimination.<sup>10</sup> The GOP tends to see such efforts as unnecessary intrusions on business.

In the debate, Romney attempted to counter charges that he was unsympathetic to women in the workplace by noting how invested he was in ensuring women equal opportunities when he was governor, especially as he assembled his cabinet. In doing so, however, he chose his words inartfully. Specifically he said that he had asked for assistance from women's groups in identifying qualified female candidates for cabinet posts, and the women's groups delivered "whole binders full of women."<sup>11</sup> His unfortunate phrasing became a social media sensation, causing some people, especially women, to focus on an area that was not a strong point for the Republican ticket.

The second gaffe occurred in another area in which Governor Romney had less experience and hence less credibility than his opponent—foreign policy. In the second half of the town hall debate, a member of the audience asked about the situation in Libya whereby the U.S. ambassador and three other Americans had been killed near the consulate in Benghazi. The deaths suggested a serious security lapse. In addition, Republicans were arguing that the Obama administration's evolving story about what had precipitated the attacks suggested a potential cover-up. The administration's original interpretation suggested the attack was part of a spontaneous protest that erupted after an anti-Islamic film showed up on YouTube. Later the administration allowed that it was probably a more coordinated terrorist attack. In pressing this line of argument, Romney ignored the fact that the president had, in his original comments the day after the tragedy, left open the possibility that it was a terrorist attack. When the governor refused to believe the president, the debate moderator, Candy Crowley, corrected him. This turned what seemed to be a positive for Republicans—a colossal security failure that led to the death of an ambassador—into a negative.

The third debate, which was held on October 22, contained no similarly memorable miscues. But Obama provided a commanding performance, which, according to snap polls of debate watchers, was on par with Romney's dominating performance in the first debate.<sup>12</sup> Two days later, the president took a slight lead in the national poll averages, a lead he did not relinquish over the last two weeks of the campaign. Although his margin was small, it was persistent. In short, the polls on election eve suggested a narrow Obama victory, but narrow enough so that even slight changes in the expected composition of the electorate could support a belief that Romney would emerge victorious.

Although the race ended where it started, that didn't mean the events of the campaign were meaningless. Had the election been held right after the 47 percent gaffe, Obama would have won easily. Had it been held after the first debate, Romney would have been elected. There was nothing inevitable about the return of the race to its late August starting line. The candidates and their campaigns needed to perform.

## How the Campaigns Mattered in 2012

In assessing campaign effects, most pundits automatically frame the conversation in terms of one side changing voters' minds, turning Romney voters into Obama voters or vice versa. If changing minds is the main criterion when measuring whether campaigns matter, then they matter little. This is especially true now that the parties have polarized along ideological lines. Over the last forty years, Americans (1) have grown more partisan, (2) care more about who wins elections, (3) vote a straight party ticket more often, and (4) perceive larger differences between the parties.<sup>13</sup> As a result, most see the world as they want to see it and are not particularly open to persuasion.

Democrats and Republicans even tend to interpret objective facts differently. For example, less than a week before the election, the government released its October jobs report. Employers added 170,000 new jobs in October and the unemployment rate was 7.9 percent, a slight increase from September's rate of 7.8 percent. Democrats hailed it as great news—all those new jobs and an unemployment rate below 8 percent meant the economy was on the mend. Republicans noted that most of the decrease in the unemployment rate in recent months could be explained by people abandoning job searches—the economy was still broken. Social scientists call this tendency to see the world as people want *motivated reasoning*,<sup>14</sup> a tendency that has grown stronger as the political world has become more polarized.

Instead of persuasion, effective campaigns are more likely to measure success by their ability to change the shape of the electorate in ways advantageous to their side. Mobilizing voters who might otherwise have decided not to vote is central to this strategy. Recent research in political science, in particular, and behavioral social science more generally has uncovered a range of techniques to encourage people to participate, even as researchers remain largely in the dark about how to change minds. Political campaigns have started to use these tools. For example, we know that Americans respond to social pressure. When you tell people that voting records are public and that friends and neighbors can view them, people are more likely to vote.<sup>15</sup> People are also more likely to vote if they see on Facebook that members of their friend community have voted and believe that their friends can see that they have not.<sup>16</sup> These field experiments also provide campaigns ideas about the best ways to encourage participation. They find that people do not participate more in response to taped phone messages, and also that the effect of direct mail solicitations on voting is relatively weak. But people do respond strongly to canvassers visiting homes.<sup>17</sup> Hence, if you live in a battleground state, chances are you have had at least one person from at least one of the campaigns pay you a visit.

Old style political parties in the “boss era” relied on such tactics for decades, but they fell into disuse as television advertising rose in importance.

Campaign operatives from the 1970s to the 1990s believed they could reach more people more effectively through electronic media. Lately, though, politics has witnessed a resurgence of door-to-door canvassing, sometimes with decisive effects. In 2004, for example, George W. Bush's campaign succeeded in increasing the number of regular churchgoers in the electorate, a group that is overwhelmingly supportive of Republicans. Mobilizing people who belong to organizations like churches can be particularly effective because those in the organization can work to mobilize others in that social network.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, many think the mobilization that occurred around churches in Ohio was decisive in explaining Bush's narrow Electoral College victory. A swing of just 60,000 votes in Ohio would have thrown the election to John Kerry.

In 2012, voter mobilization was central to understanding the efficacy of the campaigns as well. Understanding the importance of mobilization also helps explain the foundation for one of the big controversies that raged through the campaign—whether the news media's preelection polls were accurate. Throughout the campaign, Republicans argued that the polls were skewed in favor of the Democrats. In fact, a website maintained by a conservative activist that was devoted to “unskewing” the media polls received significant attention. The crux of the controversy boiled down to two related questions. What percentage of Republicans and Democrats would make up the electorate on election day? And, what percentage of voters would be white? These two questions are related because of the immense racial polarization in voting that has emerged over the last generation. Since racial and ethnic minorities of almost all types identify and vote disproportionately Democratic, properly estimating how much of the electorate they will make up has a profound effect on the poll forecasts.

According to exit poll data, which appear in Table 3.2, whites supported Mitt Romney over Barack Obama by a 59 to 39 percent margin. Had the demographics of the country remained the same as they were in 1984, Romney, like Ronald Reagan, would have won handily. Back then, 86 percent of the electorate was white.<sup>19</sup> The racial makeup of the electorate has changed significantly since then, however. Although minorities made up only 13 percent of voters in 1992, that percentage had doubled to 26 percent by 2008. In contrast to whites, minority groups all provided overwhelming support to Obama. African American support was nearly unanimous, 93 to 6 percent. Latinos and Asian Americans were among the few groups whose support for Obama increased between 2008 and 2012. For Latinos the increase was from 67 to 71 percent, and for Asian Americans, it was from 62 to 73 percent. These gains are particularly impressive because Obama's overall margin decreased by 4 percentage points. Because Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the United States, this gap became a particular concern to GOP political operatives after the election. Taken together, minority voters supported Obama over Romney by more than a 2-1 vote.

**Table 3.2** Race, Ethnicity, and the Presidential Vote in 2012

Group	Obama	Romney
White (72% of electorate)	39	59
African American (13%)	93	6
Hispanic-Latino (10%)	71	27
Asian American (3%)	73	26
Other (2%)	58	38

Source: National Exit Poll, 2012.

In advance of the election, the question pollsters had to answer was just how large a percentage would nonwhites make up. As always, it would have to be an educated guess. Would the percentage continue to increase after 2008? Or was 2008 an anomaly, driven by the first major party presidential nominee of color? Republican pollsters tended to think the electorate would look more like it did in 2004. That year 24 percent of the electorate was nonwhite. Democratic pollsters thought the percentage would continue to grow, reflecting overall increases in the minority population in the United States, particularly Latinos and Asian Americans. Media polls tended to take the middle position—that the racial composition would be about the same as it was in 2008. The Democratic pollsters turned out to be right. The exit polls suggest that 28 percent of the electorate was nonwhite. That is why the Democratic polls tended to be closer to the mark than the Republican polls. Obama's pollster missed the popular vote total by about 0.1 percentage points. The Romney campaign polls apparently showed Romney winning.

The minority vote is more than a story about poll accuracy. It is also a marker of the success of the Obama campaign's mobilization efforts. Realizing that they would change few minds in the weeks leading up to the election, the campaign worked hard to get out as many of their potential voters as possible. The literature on political participation tells us that minorities are less likely to vote than whites. This gap can be explained by differences in socioeconomic status; minorities tend to be less well educated and less well off financially. The need for campaigns to mobilize such irregular voters is very important because, absent get-out-the-vote efforts, they are likely to stay home.<sup>20</sup>

### Groups and Voting Behavior

The racial polarization in voting was not the only storyline in the 2012 election. Many different groups contributed to the result. Table 3.3 presents a systematic breakdown of groups and their voting behavior as reported in the 2012 exit polls.

**Table 3.3** Coalitional Support of the Presidential Candidates, 2012

Group	Obama	Romney
<b>Party Identification</b>		
Democrats (38%)	92	7
Independents (29%)	45	50
Republicans (32%)	6	93
<b>Ideology</b>		
Liberals (25%)	86	11
Moderates (41%)	56	41
Conservatives (35%)	17	82
<b>Gender</b>		
Men (47%)	45	52
Women (53%)	55	44
<b>Religion</b>		
Protestant (29%)	37	62
White Evangelical	21	78
Catholic (25%)	50	48
White Catholic	40	59
Jewish (2%)	69	30
No Religion (12%)	70	26
<b>Income</b>		
Less than \$50,000 (41%)	60	38
\$50,000-\$100,000 (31%)	46	52
Greater than \$100,000 (28%)	44	54

Source: National Exit Poll, 2012.

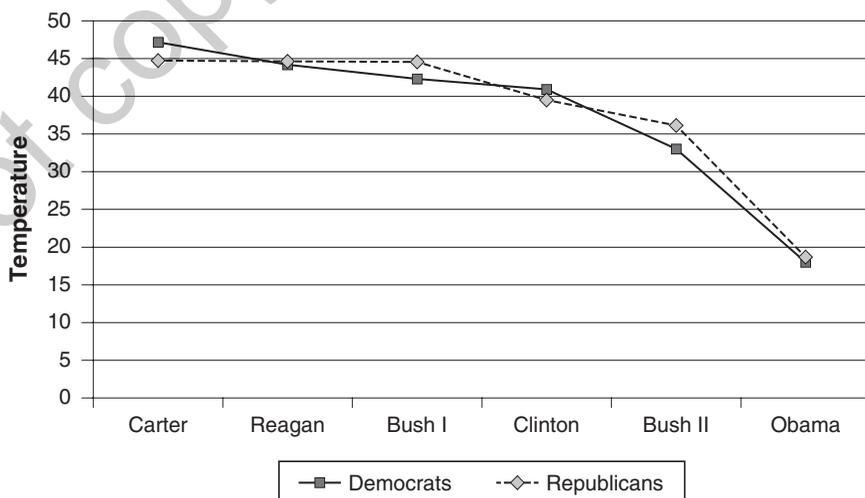
The first thing to note is that party identifiers were more loyal to their party's standard bearer than any time in the history of polling. Twenty or thirty years ago, it was not uncommon for 90 percent of partisans in the winning candidate's party to support him or her but for only about 80 percent of the partisans in the losing candidate's party to vote for him or her. In 2012, 92 percent of Democrats voted for Obama and 93 percent of Republicans voted for Romney. This continues a trend toward more party-orienting voting that political scientist Larry Bartels first identified in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> Increased party voting is a function of the clearer choices that Republicans and Democrats now provide voters. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, the parties were ideological hodgepodes. Although the Democrats were the more liberal party, they had plenty of conservative leaders, especially from the South. Similarly, the Republican Party featured a more liberal wing, mostly from the Northeast, to go along with its

conservative base. That heterogeneity has all but disappeared among office holders today, with Republicans homogenously conservative and Democrats homogenously liberal.

Not only do voters have a clear ideological choice, partisans have developed a real dislike of the other party over time. Consider how partisans say they feel about the other side. Since the 1970s, the American National Election Study (ANES) has been asking voters to rate people and groups on what it calls a feeling thermometer. If someone loves a group, they can rate it as high as 100 degrees. If they really despise a group, they can rate it as low as 0 degrees. And, if their feelings are neutral, they are instructed to rate the group at 50 degrees. They can choose any temperature between 0 and 100 degrees.

As Figure 3.2 shows, Republicans did not exactly love Democrats and vice versa back when Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan served as president, but they did not hate the other side either. The average scores they tended to provide were in the high 40s—chilly but not cold. Partisans have grown far more negative about the party they do not belong to. In 2010, for example, Democrats rated the Republican Party at about 17 degrees, while Republicans rated the Democratic Party around 18 degrees. To put those scores in some perspective, only groups like “student radicals” and “black militants” have ever received scores similarly low since the ANES started to ask these types of questions forty years ago. Polarization has not caused partisans to like their own party more, but has caused them to like the other party much less. It seems reasonable to conclude such negative affect is critical to understanding the big increase in party-based voting in 2012. The other party is simply not a viable option in the eyes of most partisans any longer.

**Figure 3.2** Partisan Feelings About the Other Party



Source: Compiled by the author.

Not surprisingly, ideology affected vote choice as well. More than 80 percent of self-identified conservatives favored Romney while more than 85 percent of self-identified liberals favored Obama. Perhaps more significant, the percentage of self-identified liberals has been creeping upward over time. Although conservatives still outnumber liberals by a 35 to 25 percent margin, not long ago the difference was much larger. In 1988, when a Democratic presidential candidate was castigated for being “a card carrying member of the American Civil Liberties Union,” only 17 percent of Americans said they were liberals.<sup>22</sup> Indeed from the mid-1960s until recently, the word *liberal* was often used as an insult. That appears to be changing.

Even more significant in the exit poll data on ideology is Obama’s success with self-identified moderates. This group, which made up fully 41 percent of the electorate, preferred Obama to Romney, 56 percent 41 percent, a very large 15 percentage point gap. When pundits talk about swing voters, they often mistakenly pitch their analysis in terms of political independents, those who say they do not identify with a political party. Research suggests, however, that most people who say they do not identify with a party actually do.<sup>23</sup> Instead the percentage of pure independents voting in a presidential election is probably under 10 percent, much less than the 40 percent who identify themselves as moderates.

The fact that people who like to think of themselves as moderate provided Obama with such an advantage is surely indicative of the strongly conservative positions Romney felt compelled to saddle himself with in the Republican primaries. Although the exit polls asked few questions about specific policies, most that they did ask suggest the electorate as a whole was not on the far right. For example, when asked about their opinions on abortion, 59 percent said they believed it ought to be legal in all or most cases. Only 36 percent said it ought to be illegal in most or all cases. Similarly, exit polls asked respondents whether most illegal immigrants who are working in the United States should be “offered a chance to apply for legal status” or be “deported to the country they came from.” When given this choice, 65 percent of voters favored a path to legal status while only 28 percent favored deportation. On most issues, Americans prefer something in the broad middle ground. All this suggests that Romney’s efforts to woo the Republican primary constituency may have fatally wounded his candidacy in the general election.

Another group that received significant attention from pundits both before and after the election was women. Women comprised 53 percent of the electorate, significantly more than men did. Moreover, the presence of more women was bad news for Mitt Romney. Women favored Obama over Romney by 11 percentage points (55 to 44 percent), while men favored Romney over Obama by 7 percentage points (52 to 45 percent). Although pundits often ascribe this gender gap in voting to social issues like abortion rights and contraception, such issues have little to do with why men and women vote differently. In fact, men and women have basically the same opinions on them.

Instead, the gender gap is driven by women and men's differing opinions on the role of government and their differing preferences about foreign policy.<sup>24</sup> Specifically, women favor more government services and spending on social safety net programs than men do. Women also tend to favor a less hawkish foreign policy than men. It is also worth noting that the constant focus on women in understanding gender and voting is probably misguided. In fact, women have cast the majority of their ballots for Democrats in every election since 1988. It is men who tend to shift back and forth from election to election.<sup>25</sup> Although men have voted more Republican than women for decades, they have cast a majority of their ballots for Democratic candidates several times during that period, including 2008.

It is also a mistake to consider the genders as particularly descriptive. Let's face it; we all know people of the same gender who are very different from one another. Categorizing any 50 percent of the public into a single group is bound to be a pretty coarse treatment. Different types of women and men vote differently. For example, Romney actually won 53 percent of married women's votes, compared with 46 percent for Obama. Similarly, unmarried men favored Obama over Romney by 16 percentage points (56 to 40 percent). The largest voting gap between the candidates involved unmarried women, which is the fastest growing of the four groups. Unmarried women favored Obama by 67 to 31 percent, a remarkable 36 percentage point difference.

Religion has received significant attention from political observers in recent decades and it continues to have a significant effect on voting behavior. As usual, Protestants favored the Republican candidate, this time by a 15-point margin (57 to 42 percent). But Protestantism is a problematically lumpy category, insofar as it includes a wide array of different types of people—mainliners, evangelicals, whites, blacks. Breaking the data down further reveals clearer divisions. White evangelicals favored Romney over Obama by a whopping 51 points.

Interesting differences emerged among other religious groups as well. Catholics overall split their vote evenly between the candidates, but, as with Protestants, there is more to it than meets the eye. White and Latino Catholics behaved quite differently. Anglos actually favored Romney by 19 points (59 to 40 percent), while Latinos favored Obama by even more. In decades past, even white Catholics were a strongly Democratic constituency. This was because many were working class and hence beneficiaries of government programs. In addition, the Catholic Church's emphasis on social justice meshed well with the Democrats' use of government to lessen economic inequalities. As the group became more affluent and as the Church embraced conservative positions against abortion and gay rights, white Catholics have become a solidly Republican constituency. The evolution of white Catholics from ardent Democrats to Republicans provides conservatives hope in attracting Latino Catholics in the future. As the thinking goes, although Latinos are, on average, not well-off financially now, they

will be in the future, allowing them to make political decisions on moral rather than material grounds. This thinking hinges on the belief that Latinos eventually will identify more strongly with their religious group than their ethnic group.

Finally, income returned to its customary role in structuring vote choice, unlike in 2008, when its effect was not particularly strong. In 2012, those making under \$50,000 a year voted for Obama by a 60 to 38 percent margin, almost identical to the numbers in 2008. But those making more than \$50,000 moved toward the GOP. Although Obama managed to tie John McCain among those making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and those making more than \$100,000 in 2008, Romney enjoyed an advantage among those with higher income in 2012. Those making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 favored Romney by 52 to 46 percent, while those making over \$100,000 favored Romney by a 54 to 44 percent margin.

### **The Economy: An 800 Pound Gorilla?**

The issue environment seemed advantageous to any Republican candidate in 2012. Although some issues wax and wane in importance from election to election, the state of the economy is almost always influential. Voters can act, in V. O. Key's famous words, as gods of vengeance or reward.<sup>26</sup> When the economy is bad, voters can send the incumbent president home. When the economy is good, voters can keep the president around. Usually the effect of the economy is asymmetric. Because people expect the government to succeed, they often give the president less credit for a good economy than they give blame for a bad one. The economic voting literature would seem to have portended a bad end for Barack Obama.

In 2012, the economy was anything but strong. Indeed the economy had been in the doldrums for Obama's entire presidency. Toward the end of George W. Bush's second term, a near collapse of the world financial sector brought the U.S. economy to the brink of collapse. Even though policymakers avoided the worst possible outcome, the aftermath became known as the "Great Recession," the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Flagging economies usually take time to recover, but the situation was particularly difficult to manage in the late Bush and early Obama years. Many of the usual levers used to stimulate the economy were not available. For example, policymakers often use interest rate cuts to stimulate growth. But interest rates were already at their minimum when the crisis hit. Making matters worse, although banks lending money at low interest rates can provide stimulus, the crux of the economic problems lay in the world credit markets, which led financial institutions to hoard money rather than lend it. Further exacerbating problems, disasters at home like the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and unrest abroad like the euro-zone crisis persistently pushed down any green shoots in the economy.

As a result, the depressed economy that Obama inherited never began to roar. Unemployment, which peaked just below 10 percent in 2009, remained relatively high. At election time, it stood at 7.9 percent, higher than it had been for any successful incumbent presidential candidate. Economic growth was similarly sluggish. Gross domestic product (GDP) grew at a paltry 1.97 percent in the year leading up to the election. Household incomes remained relatively flat and the housing market remained deeply depressed. As far as the economy was concerned, Obama had little good news to report except that inflation remained low and growth, while slow, was at least positive. His main argument was that he had kept the economy from getting much worse, always a politically tough sell.

Mitt Romney appeared on paper to be the ideal candidate to take advantage of the country's economic distress. He grew up around successful businesses; his father, George, was president of American Motors during its boom years. And Mitt Romney built his own professional reputation as a businessman, leading a very successful venture capital firm called Bain Capital. These skills also allowed him to solve problems in more public arenas. When the management of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City fell severely short of expectations, Romney was called in to save the Games. He was successful. Conventional wisdom held that he was better suited than most any other Republican to argue credibly that he could fix the economy.

But the effect of a bad economy did not play out as expected. On the one hand, it is clear that people realized the economy was not particularly strong. When asked about the condition of the nation's economy in the exit poll, 77 percent described it as being either "not so good" or "poor." Such perceptions would seem to predict an electorate ready to be the gods of vengeance. A deeper look at the data, however, suggests something more complicated. When asked whether President Obama or President Bush was more responsible for the negative economic circumstances, 53 percent said Bush while only 38 percent said Obama. If people do not believe the incumbent is responsible for the state of the economy, then in their minds it would not make sense for them to punish him at the ballot box.

In addition, voters were close to evenly split on which candidate would be better at handling the economy: 49 percent said Romney, and 48 percent said Obama. Romney's impressive business credentials clearly did not translate into much of a political advantage. Although people did acknowledge that conditions were poor, they did not necessarily think the challenger was better equipped than the incumbent to solve the problem. Given how poor the economy was for all four years of the Obama presidency, this is a remarkable finding.

That the electorate would split evenly on the economy between Romney and Obama is perhaps the biggest surprise from the exit poll data. Obama's economic stewardship during his four years as president had not produced great results as measured by most any economic indicator. Furthermore the Republican candidate's leading credential was his experience

and success with economic matters. Something must have been operating below the surface to produce such an even split in opinion on management of the economy.

Part of the problem for Mitt Romney appears to have been his background. He was the scion of a wealthy family, perceived by many to have been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Although Americans have elected presidents who were very wealthy, these presidents, more often than not, were liberals whose policies often demanded more, not less, of the well-off. Examples include John F. Kennedy and Franklin D. Roosevelt. That Romney argued in favor of lower tax rates for high income earners surely did not help his cause. In addition, his successes in the business world were not of the storied brick and mortar type. He came from a world of leveraged buyouts and high-stakes venture capital, not building factories that employed people for life.

Both of these factors probably contributed to the perception that Romney's policies would not benefit ordinary people. As evidence, the exit polls asked voters what type of people the candidates' policies would generally favor: the rich, the middle class, or the poor. For Obama, only 10 percent said the rich, while the most common response was the middle class (44 percent). Although 34 percent of the electorate thought Romney's policies were designed to help the middle class, too, 53 percent thought they would help the rich the most. Romney's problems with "ordinary" Americans showed up in people's assessments of the two candidates' personal qualities. The exit polls asked respondents which of four qualities mattered most to them in guiding their vote choice: "shares my values," "is a strong leader," "cares about people like me," and "has a vision for the future." About a fifth of Americans said "cares about people like me," which made it only the third most popular response option. But Obama trounced Romney by 81 to 18 percent among people who chose that option. Finally, the exit polls asked which of the two candidates was "more in touch with people like you." Obama enjoyed a 10-point advantage on this question as well. As compelling as Romney's background may have been and regardless of how weak Obama's record on the economy was, Romney's inability to cause voters to believe that his policies would help people like them rather than people like himself robbed him of whatever advantage he might otherwise have enjoyed on the economy.

### The Battleground

Obama's campaign successes manifested in a near sweep of what are called the battleground states. These are states that both sides agree could go either way and are thus critical to winning the election. In 2012, ten states received almost all the candidates' attention: Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nevada, and Colorado. Taken together these states have only 130 electoral votes, or less than a

fourth of all 538. Indeed the number of electoral votes that are truly up for grabs in presidential elections has decreased markedly over the last fifty years.<sup>27</sup>

At least as interesting as the ten battleground states are the states that do not appear on the list. Electoral College gold mines like California (55 votes), New York (29 votes), and Texas (38 votes), which combined have 122 electoral votes, merit no attention at all from the campaigns, except when the candidates parachute in to raise money from wealthy donors in private events. Because one party's candidate is assured of winning each of them, neither campaign has an incentive to spend scarce resources appealing to their voters. It does not matter if, say, the Republicans lose California by 20 points or 10 points; the Democrats still win all 55 electoral votes. Moreover, these three states are not alone. In 2012, thirty-four states were decided by 10 percentage points or more and, of those, eighteen were decided by 20 points or more. Only five states were decided by 5 percentage points or less. An electoral map like this produces a range of perversities. For example, the states that contain the five most populous metropolitan areas in the country (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, and Houston) received no public attention from either campaign. In short, even though presidential elections are nationally competitive, with the last several elections producing some of the closest Electoral College votes in history, they are not at all competitive at the state level, with more blowout states containing far more electoral votes than any time before.

Examining the battleground states offers some clues about how well the Obama and Romney campaigns did their jobs. It is in these ten states that the campaigns spent upwards of 95 percent of their resources. As a first cut, consider the candidates' win-loss record. Obama took nine of the ten states. Only North Carolina broke for Romney on Election Day. Consider that these ten states were viewed as toss-ups at the beginning of the campaign, with about a fifty-fifty chance of going either way. That Obama won 90 percent of them is a remarkable achievement.

Another way of assessing the campaigns is to examine how the actual election result differed from the polls taken just before the election. Because polling in the battleground states was ubiquitous during the lead-up to the election, it is possible to calculate averages based on many polls. Such averages are more reliable than the result of any single poll. If a candidate did better than the polls predicted, it could indicate that the candidate's organization did a superior job turning out supporters. The data presented in Table 3.4 suggest that, by this metric, Obama consistently outperformed his preelection poll average. Only in Ohio did Romney's actual share of the vote exceed his average predicted share of the vote in the polls. In the other nine battleground states, Obama's vote share exceeded his average poll share, sometimes by quite a bit. In New Hampshire, Iowa, Nevada, and Colorado, Obama's vote share exceeded his preelection poll average by more than 3 percentage points. In four of the other battleground states, he ran more than 2 points better than expected. One might argue that the differences here

**Table 3.4** Candidate Vote Advantage Relative to Poll Advantage in Battleground States, 2012

State	Poll Margin	Election Margin	Difference
Florida	Romney 1.5	Obama 0.8	+2.3 Obama
North Carolina	Romney 3.0	Romney 2.2	+0.8 Obama
Virginia	Obama 0.2	Obama 3.0	+2.8 Obama
New Hampshire	Obama 2.0	Obama 5.8	+3.8 Obama
Pennsylvania	Obama 3.0	Obama 5.2	+2.2 Obama
Ohio	Obama 2.3	Obama 1.9	+0.4 Romney
Iowa	Obama 2.0	Obama 5.6	+3.6 Obama
Wisconsin	Obama 3.9	Obama 6.7	+2.8 Obama
Nevada	Obama 2.7	Obama 6.6	+3.9 Obama
Colorado	Obama 1.5	Obama 4.7	+3.2 Obama

*Source:* Compiled by the author.

could be driven by pollsters' inability to gauge minority turnout. Although this explanation might be true in racially and ethnically diverse states like Florida and Nevada, it does not hold for states like New Hampshire and Iowa, which are not at all diverse.

Instead these differences between Obama's support in the polls and in the actual vote might be better read as mobilization effects. When pollsters calculate their results, they usually focus on "likely voters." Different polling organizations have different ways of deciding who a likely voter is, but, regardless of how they do it, it requires a certain amount of guesswork. Pollsters can't read people's minds. And, if pollsters just ask people whether they plan to vote, almost all say they will because it is the socially desirable thing to say. Whatever likely voter screens were employed by pollsters, they had the effect of skewing results toward Romney. Throughout the campaign, samples of registered voters (that is, both likely and unlikely voters combined) were consistently more pro-Obama than samples of likely voters. Obama's campaign apparently turned registered voters whom pollsters judged unlikely to vote into actual voters on Election Day. That is a tangible metric on which campaigns can be judged. The Obama campaign did a demonstrably superior job encouraging potential supporters, who were not particularly enthusiastic, into actual participants when it mattered.

## Conclusion

Much of this chapter has painted a discouraging picture for conservatives and Republicans. They lost an election that was winnable. Just two years before, the GOP enjoyed sweeping victories in the 2010

midterm elections. But the Obama campaign's successful mobilization of key groups changed the playing field enough so that the electorate in 2012 did not look like the one in 2010. It was much younger and more diverse, like the one that elected Obama in 2008. The numbers that have come out of the 2012 election have caused Democrats to become giddy with excitement about the future. The country is getting more racially and ethnically diverse, and these minority voters are voting overwhelmingly Democratic. Women also make up a larger share of the electorate, especially those who are not married—another overwhelmingly Democratic constituency. And young people are starting to develop a habit of voting Democratic, too. Although the support of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds for Obama dropped from two-thirds to three-fifths between 2008 and 2012, they still provided a sizable edge for Democrats. Moreover, strong support among the elderly for Republicans will not last forever. The Grim Reaper eventually gets us all.

It is probably best not to turn demographic trends into inevitable future outcomes, however. Although demography definitely favors the Democrats, these demographics might not play out the same way in subsequent elections. First, a coalition that relies so heavily on difficult-to-mobilize groups like young people and minority groups is bound to suffer from a fair amount of surge and decline. High stimulus presidential elections may bring out irregular voters, provided mobilization efforts continue to be successful. But Democrats will be much more vulnerable in midterm elections when interest is lower and mobilization efforts less complete. The GOP sweep in 2010 is evidence of the limits of purely demographic arguments. Democrats may find similar problems in 2014, particularly if the economy does not improve demonstrably by then.

It is also possible that Republicans will change tactics by attempting to win minority voters as the country grows more diverse. Democrats probably will not continue to win more than three-fourths of the minority vote if Republicans begin pursuing policies that are attractive to nonwhites. In the aftermath of the election, for example, some prominent Republicans, such as senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina and conservative radio and television host Sean Hannity argued that the party needed to moderate its stance on immigration. In 2004, when George W. Bush championed a comprehensive immigration reform plan, about 40 percent of Latinos supported him. Taking what many see as extreme and hostile stances on such issues is not only alienating the GOP from Latinos but is making Asian Americans feel like Republicans regard them as foreigners in their homeland, too. Of course, a more moderate position on immigration may distress some of the party's base, but it is unlikely they will vote Democratic as a result. Moreover, Republicans might be well served by losing some votes in the staunchly conservative South and Great Plains by pursuing policies that help them win votes in increasingly diverse swing states such as Colorado, Virginia, and Nevada.

Making such changes on issues to attract new coalition partners usually does not come easily. The reason party leaders are the leaders of their parties often has to do with their positions on issues that matter to the existing party coalition.<sup>28</sup> Change often requires an electoral shellacking in which party leaders cannot possibly misinterpret the public's message. Such a shellacking has not yet happened to the GOP. Although they have lost the last two presidential elections, they still control the House of Representatives and a majority of state governments. Indeed just two years before Obama's reelection, Republicans made among the most sweeping gains the party has ever achieved in off-year elections, picking up sixty-three House seats in 2010. Moreover, conservatives in the party can still argue that they would have won the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections if the GOP had nominated "real conservatives." Although they did not run as moderates, both McCain and Romney were drawn from the moderate part of the party.

Absent an old-fashioned beat down, old habits die hard. We saw evidence of this in 2012. Since Richard Nixon's southern strategy, Republican candidates have used resentments toward African Americans to win whites' votes. Although saying directly disparaging things about African Americans is no longer socially acceptable, Republicans have found that talking about "states rights," "welfare," "street crime," and "food stamps" act as proxies.<sup>29</sup> Following the usual playbook, Republican campaign operatives described Obama as being somehow less than American and his supporters as not coming from "the real America." They expressed a desire "to take the country back."

The use of such implicitly racial appeals almost became overtly explicit after Obama's poor performance in the first presidential debate. John Sununu, the former Republican governor of New Hampshire and White House chief of staff under George H. W. Bush, invoked a common racial stereotype in calling Obama "lazy." Around the same time, Newt Gingrich, the former Republican Speaker of the House and 2012 presidential candidate took his racialized criticism a step further. He said, "You have to wonder what he's doing. I'm assuming that there's some rhythm to Barack Obama that the rest of us don't understand. Whether he needs large amounts of rest, whether he needs to go play basketball for a while or watch ESPN, I mean, I don't quite know what his rhythm is, but this is a guy that is a brilliant performer as an orator, who may very well get reelected at the present date, and who, frankly, he happens to be a partial, part-time president."<sup>30</sup> The racial stereotypes in remarks like these are not hard to identify.

After their defeat in 2012, Republicans began some serious soul searching. Much of it was directed toward attracting votes from a more diverse group of Americans. Doing so would almost certainly serve the best interests of the party. Although they may lose a few votes in the South and Great Plains, they can afford such losses if it helps them arrest their slide among young people and people of color. To do so, however, will require

grappling with established ways of doing things within the party. Convincing existing Republican leaders to change course will be made harder by the fact that 2012 was a close election. Parties find it hard to change without collapsing first.

## Notes

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2. 2012 Exit Poll Data, [www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-exit-poll](http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-exit-poll).
3. Data taken from David Liep's Election Atlas, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php>.
4. Ibid.
5. John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. (New York: Scribner, 2004).
6. See Nate Silver, "What State Polls Suggest about the National Popular Vote," <http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/oct-30-what-state-polls-suggest-about-the-national-popular-vote/>.
7. Ray Fair, Michael Lewis-Beck, Tom Rice, and Alan Abramowitz are all notable contributors to this genre.
8. Donald R. Kinder and Allison Dale-Riddle, *The End of Race: Obama, 2008, and Racial Politics in America*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012).
9. The transcript is from MotherJones, the original source for the secret video, [www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/full-transcript-mitt-romney-secret-video#47percent](http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/full-transcript-mitt-romney-secret-video#47percent).
10. The summary here is from a legislative summary by the bill's Senate sponsor, [www.mikulski.senate.gov/\\_pdfs/Press/LedbetterSummary.pdf](http://www.mikulski.senate.gov/_pdfs/Press/LedbetterSummary.pdf).
11. For context, see the debate transcript at Politico.com, [www.politico.com/news/stories/1012/82484\\_Page4.html](http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1012/82484_Page4.html).
12. The CBS News postdebate snap polls found approximately the same gaps for the first and third debates, [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2012/10/22/snap-polls-obama-won/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-politics/wp/2012/10/22/snap-polls-obama-won/).
13. Marc J. Hetherington, "Resurgent Mass Partisanship: The Role of Elite Polarization," *American Political Science Review* 95 (2001): 619–631.
14. See for example, Milton Lodge and Charles Taber, "Three Steps toward a Theory of Motivated Reasoning" in *Elements of Reason: Cognition, Choice, and the Bounds of Rationality*, eds. Arthur Lupia, Mathew D. McCubbins, and Samuel L. Popkin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
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22. See the American National Election Studies' Guide to Public Opinion, [www.electionstudies.org/nsguide/toptable/tab3\\_1.htm](http://www.electionstudies.org/nsguide/toptable/tab3_1.htm).
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