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Two Perspectives on Demographic Change and American Political Campaigns

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Prologue

The States of Change: Demographics and Democracy project is a collaboration of the Center for American Progress, the Bipartisan Policy Center, and the Brookings Institution. The project began in 2014 and has been generously funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Ford Foundation. In year one, States of Change examined the changing demography of the nation and projected the racial and ethnic composition of every state to 2060. The detailed findings, available in the [initial report](#), were discussed at the project's [February 2015 conference](#). In year two, the project's leaders commissioned [six papers](#) on the policy implications of the demographic changes, two each from different political perspectives on the significance of the changes for the family, for the economy and workforce, and for the social contract. A [second report](#), released with the papers in February 2016, projected possible presidential election outcomes from 2016 to 2032 using data from the project's first report. In year three, the project commissioned these two papers from political strategists on demographic change and its impact on political campaigns. A [third report](#), released at the project's [February 2017 conference](#), considered the impact of demographic change on representation in the political system.

The opinions expressed in these papers are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of the Bipartisan Policy Center, the Brookings Institution, or the Center for American Progress.

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Engaging the Emerging Electorate

by Anita Dunn

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This paper does not intend to re-litigate the 2016 campaign and should not be interpreted as criticism of either the Clinton campaign or the Democratic National Committee. Rather, I have tried to take a step back to look at assumptions around the changing demographics of the voting population in the context of how elections are approached and, in particular, assumptions around target groups and engagement moving forward.

The 2016 election is being interpreted (and over-interpreted) in many ways, currently playing out in the debate about the future of the Democratic Party. One school of thought is that the Democratic Party needs to reengage with Midwest white working-class voters and that the losses of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, albeit by narrow margins, signify the need to refocus on those voters. The restoration of the “blue wall” in the Midwest, many argue, lies in more effective messaging to working-class white voters and a party that, culturally, is seen as less driven by coastal “elites.”

The leadership challenge of U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) to House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi was explicitly grounded in both of these arguments. Clare Malone quotes Ryan as saying, “I think people got enamored with this idea that we could slice and dice the electorate up and run the numbers up with African-Americans, run the numbers up with Latinos and rich liberals, and we’re somehow going to be able to piece together a victory.” He goes on to argue that Democrats need new faces to woo the voters that Donald Trump had won away, saying, “We’re seen as hostile to their culture, their religious beliefs, their excitement about hunting and fishing.”¹

Another school of thought argues that the Democratic Party’s future lies with embracing the demographic changes of America and that the arguments about the white voters who abandoned the party over the past couple of election cycles ignore the concerns and potential of the emerging Democratic majority and core Democratic constituencies. This argument suggests that the Democratic Party’s future lies in the rising electorates of African-Americans, Latinos, and younger voters, and that older white voters, who have been over-represented in both the voting population as well as the government, will naturally lose some of their stranglehold on the electoral system as the electorate continues to become more diverse. Particularly given the size of the millennial cohort, the first to outnumber the baby boomers, who have set the nation’s political agenda for decades, there will be larger numbers of nonwhite, younger voters in the electorate regardless of anything else, and those voters have very different attitudes from their baby-boomer counterparts about many issues.

Of course, in the world of practical politics, this should not and cannot be viewed as an “either/or” argument or as mutually exclusive options. Barack Obama won two presidential elections with a message and organizational strategy that spanned both groups, and the Obama coalition is one that many in the Democratic Party believed would be the foundation for several elections to come. The “Emerging Democratic Majority” debate, as currently structured as a choice the Democratic Party needs to make, is simply a false choice.

However, the progressive movement, and the Democratic Party, can't depend on historic, extraordinarily talented, charismatic candidates like Obama for victory any more than the "Reagan Revolution" was able to outlast Ronald Reagan for more than one election. In fact, since Reagan's 1984 reelection, the Republican Party has lost the popular vote in six of the last eight presidential elections (although the elections have been split in the Electoral College at four apiece). The point is simple: A charismatic leader can win elections; longer-term electoral success takes more than simply a charismatic leader.

Let's look at 2016: In the Electoral College loss, the weakness of the Obama coalition minus Obama became readily apparent, although for most Democrats only in retrospect. The state of Wisconsin is an illustrative example of the painful reality of depending on this coalition without Obama himself—Hillary Clinton would have won the state if Milwaukee County had turned out at the levels it did in 2012, with its heavily African-American population. Alternately, Clinton would have won the state if she had been able to perform slightly better with working-class white voters. She was able to do neither. Donald Trump received the same number of white votes in Wisconsin that Mitt Romney received—roughly 1.4 million. Clinton received 230,000 fewer votes than Obama did in 2012 and lost the state.

Michigan is another illustration of the issue. Obama carried the state by 350,000 votes in 2012, and Clinton lost the state by roughly 10,000 votes. She received 75,000 fewer votes than Obama in Detroit and Wayne County alone—a small fraction of those votes would have kept the state blue in 2016. Doing marginally better with either white working-class voters, or motivating more African-American voters in the Detroit area, would have carried the state.

The problems the Democratic Party had in 2016 with voters should not have been a surprise or been seen as a new

problem. During the Obama administration, the difference between a midterm electorate and a presidential-year electorate created the governing gridlock that defined six of the eight years of the Obama presidency.

The Governing Implications for Progressives

The inability of the Democratic Party to mobilize younger voters, African-American voters, Latino voters, and Asian voters in midterm elections led to a disproportionate representation of older, more conservative white voters in Congress and a more conservative Republican Congress determined to halt the progressive Obama agenda for the majority of his presidency. The Obama administration was forced to rely on Executive Orders where they could to move forward policies, leaving the progressive agenda vulnerable to a change in the executive branch, which is exactly what happened.

Unmarried women, younger voters, and people of color are lower-income populations who tend to be more progressive on economic inequality and social issues. Their under-representation in the democratic process—lower registration levels, lower turnout levels generally, and a drop-off in non-presidential years—produces policies that are less reflective of the priorities of these groups and more in tune with the older, white, more affluent voters who participate at a higher level.

The governing problem with the lower participation of the new majority becomes a self-fulfilling loop of negativity. The political process is more responsive to voting blocs with high participation (for instance, senior citizens) so the issues-agenda is influenced more by the larger voting blocs. The political system is that much more unresponsive to the voters who aren't participating, leading them to be even less inclined to participate.

When unmarried women, young people, and diverse populations—often low-income populations with progressive views on economic issues—do not participate equally in the democratic process, the process has no incentive to treat their concerns as seriously as they treat those who are worried about tax cuts. If lower-income voters voted at the same level as more affluent ones, there would almost certainly be less debate around the elimination of the estate tax (an issue that affects a vocal but minuscule percentage of the population) and more around issues that affect a broader class of people, such as college-tuition costs or paid family leave.

For progressives, the risk to their issue agenda has become clear with the 2016 elections. With a Republican Congress and executive branch, the threats to climate-change policy, repealing the Affordable Care Act with no alternative, defunding Planned Parenthood, rolling back consumer protections, immigration restrictions, and tax policy skewed toward older voters and more affluent voters are no longer just bullet points in campaign ads—they are legislative proposals and executive orders moving forward, with the Democratic Party having little power to stop them in the short term.

Swing Voters and Turnout Voters

Even with all of the sophisticated data analysis and information about voters that modern politics and the internet have brought to elections, they are still a pretty simple proposition. There are voters who agree with your candidate and support your candidate—your base. These base voters can be base voters because of party affiliation, individual issue stands (the so-called “single-issue” voter), or issue affinity outside party registration. In the Democratic Party, African-American voters, Latino voters, younger voters, Asian voters, and increasingly, affluent college-educated voters have been considered part of the base (groups that vote in majority numbers for Democratic candidates). Then there are voters who are “soft”—considered persuadables,

and generally the target of a great deal of campaign communication. For Democrats, the persuadables include unmarried women (who had been considered part of the base vote until the general election of 2016), white college-educated voters in general, and suburban married women.

At the beginning of a campaign, research is done and choices need to be made. Is this a “turnout” election, in which maximizing the votes from your base is seen as getting to the magic “50 plus one” needed for victory (blue-state elections)? Is this an election where the “swing” voters are likely to be the decisive factor (purple-state elections), or will they stay home (turning a purple-state election into a blue-state election about maximizing base votes)? Are there even enough swing voters in this increasingly polarized nation to make a difference? Or is this an election where electoral success depends on doing that which is most difficult of all—changing the shape of the expected electorate by bringing new voters into the process?

Post-election analyses tend to over-correct for mistakes made in pre-election analysis. Just as the imminent demise of the Republican Party foretold in October 2016 was inaccurate, so too is the idea that the Republican Party has an electoral “lock” going forward, based on Trump’s victories in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa. Those five states, carried twice by Obama, have not magically realigned, although the Democratic Party may (accurately) view them as battleground states in the future. The current question for the Democratic Party is how to regain an electoral- and popular-vote majority and win elections down-ballot as well.

The *argument* within the Democratic Party right now is about swing voters versus turnout voters, and as noted at the top of this discussion, the party needs to do both in order to win. The *challenge* for the progressive movement really lies in converting the new progressive majority into votes—turning out the turnout voters in numbers great enough to change the shape of the electorate. This requires taking people,

particularly younger ones, with an affinity for Democratic issues and values, and turning them into voters.

Demographic changes alone were never going to be enough to ensure victory without also getting the new voters registered, engaging new voters in the political process around issues, earning the support of new voters and turning new voters out in elections. It is in the first two areas—registration and engagement—that a strong progressive infrastructure can make a difference. And it is in the third and fourth areas—earning the support of new voters and turning them out—that the Democratic Party and its candidates face their greatest challenges but also their greatest responsibilities.

The future of the progressive movement and the Democratic Party lies in changing the existing shape of the electorate by bringing new voters into the process while not ignoring swing voters. The Democratic coalition of younger and more diverse voters is a reality. It is an advantage nationally to the Democratic Party. But it is only a winning coalition when they show up to vote, when they show up to vote in sufficient numbers in the right states to offset the older white voters who make up the base of the Republican Party (and who vote more reliably), and it is a winning coalition in the future only if it is 1) registered; 2) engaged; 3) motivated; and 4) voting.

This is not an inevitability in politics, as Democrats have seen in three of the last five elections. In fact, the difficulties the Democratic Party has experienced in local and national elections when there has been no Obama campaign at the top of the ballot and organizing the grassroots demonstrates just how far from inevitable victories are if the demographics are not matched by engagement and motivation.

Much has been written since the 2016 election about the geographic challenges facing the Democratic Party. (Any Democrat who has looked at Sean Trende’s county maps on *Real Clear Politics* can see the erosion.) However, voters

move—and as millennials age, marry, and consider starting families, the movement to the suburbs has begun. (Homeownership in this age group has been lower than in previous generations, which may be a function of delayed purchases due to the financial challenges faced by the millennial group: high student debt, coming of age in the deepest recession since the depression, rising real-estate costs, a challenging job market.) As the coastal mega-cities grope with affordable-housing crises, infill begins in the middle of the nation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, five of the nation’s fastest-growing cities are in Texas.² Of the 15 fastest-growing cities, only one (Ankeny, Iowa) was outside of the South or the West. This is not to argue that any of these areas will automatically become blue; it is simply to point out that the United States has never stayed static and neither do voting patterns.

Likewise, assumptions being made about voting behavior in Democratic base groups could be changed dramatically if the Republican Party chooses at some point to try to broaden its base (as recommend by the Republican National Committee’s “Autopsy” report following the 2012 election) and engage in a meaningful way with persons of color. The Republican Party chose a very different direction in 2016 by building on support with non-college-educated white men and rural voters, but demographically that doesn’t feel like a long-term strategy that will work. (Ruy Teixeira refers to this as living on “demographic borrowed time” in his article “Trump’s Coalition Won the Demographic Battle. It’ll Still Lose the War.”)³

Rethinking The “Turnout” Vote

Swing voters in battleground states are the most communicated-to people in the nation in election years. If you live in the Columbus, Ohio, media market, this is not news to you. In 2010, viewers in the 22 counties that make up this media market were exposed to 43,134 political ads, and Obama’s reelection campaign committee had aired its first ad in January 2012.⁴ Voters in Tampa and Orlando,

Denver and Las Vegas—other top battleground markets in battleground states—know this feeling, too.

Between 30 and 40 percent of a campaign committee's budget, in any given election, is dedicated to persuasion—generally, paid communications (television, radio, digital, mail.). This is a significant share of resources dedicated to a relatively small and, in many places, shrinking number of voters.

By contrast, turnout voters are generally considered Get Out the Vote (GOTV) targets, given their existing support for the Democratic Party. They are not the targets of persuasion communication, and in general, fewer campaign resources are dedicated to turnout until late in campaigns. They are not seen as persuadable—they are viewed as persuaded.

Steve Phillips, the founder and editor-in-chief of *Democracy in Color*, took to *The Nation* to criticize independent expenditure organizations and super PACs, who at the time were announcing plans for the general election, for their intention to spend over \$200 million to target moderate white voters and union members, or swing voters. While the organizations he criticized had said they would spend money on digital ads targeting African-Americans as well as some radio, he noted that there were no funds specifically targeted for what he called “the proven and effective grassroots, person-to-person work required to get people out to vote.” This is not a new argument, or one unfamiliar to anyone who has worked in Democratic politics, but the issue of spending money to engage African-Americans, as well as Latinos and immigrant voters, must take on new urgency in the context of the opportunity to grow the electorate. (Phillips also criticized the Democratic Party institutions—Democratic National Committee, Democratic Senate Campaign Committee, and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee—for a lack of diversity among the consultants who work on campaigns.⁵

It is also worth noting that the Obama campaign—in both 2008 and in 2012—spent significant sums of money on field efforts in communities of color, as well as on swing voters and millennial voters, in order to change the shape of the 2004 electorate (which had resulted in a popular-vote and Electoral College loss) as well as to enlarge the new American parts of the electorate for the future. Voters did not show up to the polls just because Obama was on the ballot, it was a labor- and people-intensive effort, and resources were spent across all communities.

The Democratic Party has not undertaken an “autopsy” of its losses in 2016 in the way that the Republican Party did after 2012, and it may be that the next chair of the party takes on this job. How the party deals with its core base constituencies—engages with them between elections, communicates with them during elections, motivates them to vote on Election Day—would be one of the key issues to begin with.

Who Is Best Positioned to Register, Engage, Motivate, And Turn Out the Vote?

The seven candidates currently vying for DNC Chair are united in their support for returning to a grassroots approach to campaigns, to funding 50 state parties, and for placing more emphasis on the type of engagement that proved effective during the two Obama presidential campaigns—with a heavy emphasis on people-to-people contact, both on the ground and through technology. But is the Democratic Party the best entity to perform the critical functions of registration, engagement, and ultimately motivation to vote?

There are two issues to look at when considering this question: (1) financial, and (2) whether the Democratic Party institutionally is the right messenger with many of the new voters who need to be engaged.

Since the passage of the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance legislation, the outsourcing of traditional political-party functions, particularly in the Democratic Party, has accelerated. In the presidential election following McCain-Feingold (the 2004 election), Democratic donors set up a structure outside of the party to concentrate on field efforts, and 527 organizations began to fill advertising functions previously performed by campaigns and political parties.

The outsourcing of what used to be traditional political party functions has continued, with organizations like Emily's List playing an increasing role in candidate recruitment, staffing, fundraising, and strategic advice for pro-choice Democratic women. Priorities USA, a super PAC set up in 2012, has played significant roles in presidential elections. Organizing and field functions are performed by coordinated campaigns and by groups targeting specific voters around specific issues. Following the 2016 election, Priorities USA has begun a major project around economic messaging. Senator Bernie Sanders has converted his campaign supporters into OurRevolution.com, an online political organization outside of the Democratic Party structure to engage voters around progressive issues as well as to encourage support for candidates who Sanders supports. The Center for American Progress has staked out an aggressive position as a leader in the "resistance." Planned Parenthood has launched its "I defy" campaign to organize pro-choice women online. Organizations are being formed to hold the Trump administration accountable in terms of policies and ethics and to protect progressive policies threatened by the new president. Engagement around issues, and engagement around opposition to the new administration, is being organized across the country. These activities are happening outside of the institutional party structure, around issues, financed by individuals and foundations outside of the campaign finance structure, and for activities that are not electoral in nature.

Equally important is the fact that younger voters, particularly in the millennial cohort, are resistant to institutions in general, and political parties in particular. In a Pew Research Center poll, half of millennials described themselves as political independents. In a comment discussing the Pew study, one poster made this succinct point: "We don't trust anyone very much and we don't trust politicians—so why should we trust a big group of politicians called a 'party'?"⁶

In the Democratic Party, the single greatest predictor of voting preference during the 2016 primary contest between former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Senator Bernie Sanders was age—younger voters gave Sanders a huge majority of the vote (and younger African-Americans and Latinos gave him a higher percentage of their vote than older African-American voters and Latino voters), and independents who voted in the Democratic primary went for Sanders by 31 points, while Clinton crushed Sanders with self-identified Democrats by 27 points.

For example, in a statewide poll of 800 California African-American likely voters done during that state's primary by African American Voter Registration, Education and Participation (AAVREP) project, Clinton had a broad lead over Sanders 71 to 16 percent of the vote. However, 50 percent of black Democratic primary voters in the poll under age 40 supported Sanders, while only 34 percent supported Clinton. Among voters over 40, Clinton led 73 to 14 percent.

By the same token a *Los Angeles Times*/University of Southern California survey released shortly before the primary showed Sanders leading with younger Latino voters (58 to 31 percent with Latinos under 50), while Clinton led Sanders 69 to 16 percent with Latino voters above age 50. As political strategist Mike Madrid noted in the *Los Angeles Times*, younger Latino voters are "behaving more like younger whites—who are also siding with Sanders—than their Latino elders, suggesting the Latino voting bloc may one day be indistinguishable from the Democratic electorate at large."⁷

The implications for how the Democratic Party approaches the turnout vote is significant. As the States of Change project forecasts, by 2020 millennials will represent 34 percent of eligible voters and post-millennials another 3 percent, overtaking the baby boomers to become the largest share of eligible voters in the electorate. The millennial generation is far more racially diverse than the baby-boomer generation, with the nonwhite population of millennials estimated by Bill Frey of the Brookings Institution to be 44 percent (compared with 80 percent white for the baby-boomer generation). This generational transition, combined with the institutional reluctance of millennials to embrace the Democratic Party, and the pronounced age split in the primaries between younger voters of color and older ones (mirroring the age split overall in the Democratic Party), argues for rethinking the concepts of “swing” and “turnout” voters in the future.

Millennials and new American voters may agree with a candidate or party on issues, but they still need to be persuaded to vote. For the progressive movement and the Democratic Party, this is the challenge for the progressive-issues agenda of the future.

1. Voter registration

Voter registration is a nonpartisan activity that can be conducted, and is conducted, by a variety of organizations beside the candidate’s committee and political parties. Whether it is facilitated by Starbucks, Rock the Vote, the musical *Hamilton*, or National Voter Registration Day (September 27, 2016), voter-registration drives are generally conducted after Labor Day in even-numbered years as registration deadlines approach in states across the country. Corporations, states, civic, and nonprofit organizations and advocacy organizations participate at different levels throughout the nation.

But voter registration, as the first step toward moving new Americans and millennials into the voting population, can be expensive, time consuming, and labor intensive—and difficult to do in the heat of the general election, when resources are increasingly devoted to motivating turnout. The most successful voter-registration drives are ones that begin early and go to where people are, rather than asking people to go to a certain place to register, particularly for new Americans who often have concerns or cultural barriers to overcome. Helping large service providers, such as community health centers, register their clients (or make sure their clients are registered) addresses some of the harder-to-reach populations as well. Funding nonpartisan voter-registration drives that are grassroots and people-to-people intensive is one of the most effective means of beginning to change the electorate.

Millennials shop online, they bank online, they pay their bills online, they share personal information online, so it should be no surprise that they expect to be able to register online. A survey of 2,000 millennials conducted by social media platform Yik Yak showed that 62 percent registered to vote for the first time this year, and of those, 9 percent registered online following a social-media prompt. In California, a Facebook reminder on May 16 coincided with 143,255 people registering or updating their registrations online that day in the state, compared with an average of 23,166 per day that month.⁸ Social media will continue to be an effective tool, along with texting, for reaching these potential voters, reminding them of deadlines, providing easy links to registration sites, and creating social networks for some gentle peer pressure.

2. Remove barriers to voting: litigation and advocacy

The protection of voting rights and litigation that challenges state laws seeking to curtail voting rights, has until recently been conducted by nonpartisan civil rights groups, such as

the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Brennan Center for Law and Justice, and the Advancement Project. The Democratic Party and individual campaigns have conducted voter-protection activities and litigation as well (for example, the Obama campaign and the DNC in 2012 successfully sued the state of Ohio over the state’s intention to restrict early voting the weekend before the election), but the vast majority of litigation since the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1964 has been in the nonprofit community.

As more states have moved to majority Republican legislatures and governors, the number of laws designed to address “voting fraud” has grown, with the effect of making it more difficult to vote or more intimidating for new Americans (particularly in the area of voter identification laws.). In the 2016 election cycle, in the wake of 14 states passing new laws curtailing voting rights—making a total of 20 states since the 2010 midterm elections that moved to restrict voting in some way—the movement to litigate against states grew. (For the gory details, the Brennan Center for Law has an excellent rundown of the activities along with a map showing the states that have enacted voting restrictions, found at Brennancenter.org.)

Following the escalation of voting restrictions, a more partisan approach to litigation was developed by Democratic lawyer Marc Elias of Perkins Coie, whose political law group represented Clinton’s 2016 presidential campaign as well as the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, the Democratic Governors Association, and many other parts of the institutional Democratic Party. “Let America Vote,” with Elias in a key role, launched in early February 2017 and is the latest group from outside the Democratic Party formed to combat systemic voter suppression through litigation and advocacy.

Both through litigation and through advocacy in the political system, pushing back against voter suppression is a critical part of growing the New Democratic majority.

3. Open up the party to non-aligned voters

According to Pew, millennials are the group most likely to identify as independents (nearly half of them do). They are also the age cohort that leans most toward the Democratic Party, and they are the most under-represented cohort in terms of voting behavior in politics. As Pew pointed out, millennials “in many respects, have attitudes that are similar to those of partisans—they just prefer not to identify with a party.”⁹ Another way to look at millennials is to see them as a generation that is “detached from institutions, networked with friends.”¹⁰

Any pollster from either major political party will tell you that true “independent” or swing voters—persuadable voters—are becoming increasingly rare with the polarization of modern politics. Instead—particularly in the millennial generation, which consciously rejects institutions—independent voters identify with the political parties on given issues but reject the partisanship associated with joining a political party.

Most Democratic-leaning independents have as much invested in the Democratic Party’s ultimate nominees as those who have registered Democratic—they just prefer, in this highly polarized age, not to join a political party. According to an analysis of voting patterns conducted by Michigan State University political scientist Corbin Smith, “Those who identify as independent today are more stable in their support for one or the other party than were ‘strong partisan’ back in the 1970’s.”¹¹

Those who self-identify as independent voters for registration purposes but identify with the Democratic Party on issues and values are precisely the types of voters the party should want participating in their nominating processes. But in many

states that is not what the Democratic Party communicates during that process. “Closed” primaries—primaries restricted to people who have registered as Democrats—have the effect of denying participation in the choice of candidates to voters who vote consistently for Democratic candidates.

In order to encourage participation and activism, the party should consider whether reforms to the nominating process, such as open primaries or allowing voters to change their registration from independent to Democratic close to primary dates, would encourage younger voters who don’t self-identify as members of the Democratic Party but who vote for Democrats to eventually move into the party. The party should also revisit the issue of caucuses, which disadvantage lower-income voters who often can’t devote the time or get off work to attend them.

4. Increasing voter turnout

The great challenge for the Democratic Party is to move voters who are engaged around issues into voters who turn out to vote for Democratic candidates. Effective voter turnout—including early voting and grassroots field efforts—is as labor-intensive as voter registration, and requires a level of engagement with voters long before Election Day. Particularly for new or disengaged voters—voters who don’t think anything will change, voters who don’t think it makes a difference, or voters who simply don’t see themselves as qualified to make the decision—conversations and personal communication can help get people into the voting booth.

Millennials are “digital natives”—constructing personalized networks of friends, colleagues, and affinity groups online by using the platforms of the digital era. They are a generation that grew up with technology and digital platforms so they don’t need to learn them or adapt to them. They are also the most avid users of the new technologies. They consume news and conduct their political conversations with their networks

online, and they get validation for their decisions from friends. But in addition to the digital validation of social networks, effective grassroots organizing still puts a premium on people. This is where candidates and the party can be most effective and where candidates and surrogates can make a difference in the closing days of the election. Personal appearances near early voting sites, so that people leave a rally and go vote, are effective. Seeing a candidate on local television or in selfies that a friend took at a rally is effective. Press coverage of early voting rallies publicizes early voting and is effective. Parties and candidates have resources and messengers that independent groups don’t have to motivate voters, and making a priority of the correct turnout targets can make a difference. Engagement and getting out the vote are functions the candidates and parties are best positioned to do, and in order to reshape the electorate and take advantage of the demographic opportunities, the Democratic Party needs to view turnout voters as an equal priority with swing voters during engagement and swing voters as an equal priority during get out the vote.

In 2008, the Obama campaign succeeded, first in the primaries and then in the general election, in reshaping the electorate to one more favorable to an Obama victory. As David Plouffe, the 2008 campaign manager for Obama for America, said in a postelection conference hosted by the Annenberg School for Public Policy at the University of Pennsylvania: “We prioritized field operations because we believed we needed to adjust the electorate, we had to have human beings having conversations with human beings in places like Lorain, Ohio. We needed that 65-year-old white retired steelworker to say, ‘You know, maybe I’m surprised, but I’m for Obama and here’s why.’ We had to have those validators out there.”¹² Obama field director Jon Carson noted at the same event, “Traditionally, Democrats have two or three hundred giant labor union parking lots full of canvassers the final weekend. We wanted 1,400 across a state like Ohio. Living rooms, garages, and backyards were going to be our staging areas.”

The expensive and labor-intensive Obama field efforts through three campaigns—the 2008 primaries, the 2008 general election, and the 2012 general election—shared an emphasis on using technology to bring people into the overall Obama orbit and then using people to talk to other people face to face, door to door, barbershop to barbershop, neighbor to neighbor. With new technologies and voters getting their information from different sources, the emphasis on continued engagement and broadening networks by empowering individuals didn't change—only the tactics used to accomplish this did. Identifying people through paid phones doesn't work for millennials, who don't have land lines (and who don't want to get campaign calls on their cell phones!). Identifying people through advertising on social media does work – but constant and continual engagement is required to achieve support and turnout.

Online recruitment followed by grassroots meetings is the model currently working in the progressive movement in the most genuinely organic organizing progressives have seen in generations. The Women's Marches around the country on January 21, 2017, engaged millions of voters after beginning with a Facebook posting in November. *Indivisible* (www.indivisibleguide.com), a political guide that has generated a movement of grassroots engagement at congressional town halls, offices, and even homes. Swingleft.org, a political organization that has designed a website that links progressive activists to the nearest competitive congressional district, posted its first tweet on January 18, had 100,000 people sign up to receive updates by January 22, and has been shared on Facebook nearly 300,000 times. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) raised \$24 million in online contributions in the 48 hours after President Trump issued his Executive Order banning people from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States, and says it has doubled its membership since the election to nearly 1.2 million people. United We Dream, the largest immigrant youth-led organization, has been mobilizing

members around the deportation of Mexican immigrant Guadalupe Garcia de Rayos and the stepped up ICE crackdowns against undocumented immigrants.

As new people come into the process in opposition to Trump and his policies, new resources are available to the progressive movement, particularly around issue engagement. In order to truly take advantage of the energy and the moment, the progressive movement should be planning how to make sure the opposition is registered (or get them registered if they aren't), how to keep a level of engagement going and reach out to additional voters, how to mobilize around protecting new Americans' right to vote, and the party should be preparing for the moment when it's candidates are ready to pick up the mantle, engage an already energized electorate, give them a reason to vote, and get them to the polls.

What's Next?

Postelection analyses tend to over correct for mistakes made in pre-election analyses. Exhibit A: Following the 2016 presidential election, some have floated the idea that the Republican Party has an electoral “lock” given Trump's victories in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa—five states carried by Obama in 2012 and part of the so-called “Blue Wall,” which the Republicans successfully breached in 2016. With the possible exception of Iowa, the other four states all contain the demographic ingredients for swinging back in the other direction; that goes for Democratic statewide elected officials, too. “Swing” voters in those states—voters who moved from Obama to Trump—will obviously be targets for Democrats in 2018 and 2020. Equally important will be better and more effective engagement with “turnout” voters, particularly younger ones.

But it is also possible to see a future Electoral College shift as states like Georgia, Texas, North Carolina, and Arizona continue to grow in population, representation in Congress,

and Electoral College votes while the Midwestern states continue to be a struggle for Democrats, given their demographics (although again, it is worth noting how close they still were). The 2016 margin in Georgia was 5 percent or roughly 200,000 votes, a 100,000 vote improvement over 2012 for the Democrats. In Texas, a 1.2 million vote, 16-point margin for Mitt Romney became an 800,000 vote, 9-point margin for Donald Trump. In Arizona, where the Clinton campaign spent resources and campaigned in October, it was a 3.5 percent margin of less than 100,000 votes compared with a 9-point margin of over 200,000 votes in 2012. North Carolina, carried by Obama in 2008, lost narrowly by Obama in 2012, and lost narrowly by Clinton in 2016, will continue to be a battleground. Changes are coming—they can be accelerated with focused progressive resources and attention.

On February 2, 2017, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee announced their “March into ‘18’ project,” described as “an unprecedented early investment in key Republican-held House districts.”¹³ The move, which involves funding full-time organizing staffers in the 20 targeted districts through local state parties, is a significant break from national party strategy of the past, which concentrated on television advertising toward persuadable voters in the general election. Working with existing and new grassroots organizations and local activists will increase the possibility that the political party staffer can build the credibility and relationships needed to effectively turn anger, frustration, and opposition into activism, and activism into votes.

The ten candidates running to lead the Democratic National Committee are united in pledging a grassroots approach to rebuilding state party apparatuses and in empowering state parties to do this in the ways they believe will be most effective, rather than dictating from Washington, D.C. what will be effective in states far from the nation’s capital.

The candidates have also committed to voter protection and to addressing concerns about uneven playing fields heading into the 2020 nominating process.

The opportunity for an “Emerging Democratic Majority” exists—it is up to the progressive movement and the Democratic Party to make it a reality.

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Targeting the 21st Century Electorate

by Alex Lundry

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President Dwight Eisenhower was fond of an old Army aphorism: “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” He was on to something. The States of Change analysis team has put together a methodologically robust and detailed look at how we expect the nation’s demography to change between now and 2060. This accompanying paper uses that good work to look at how these trends might interact with the U.S. political and electoral system. Surely, it’s a fool’s errand to project out U.S. politics more than 40 years, but merely engaging in the exercise is essential. Will we get it right? Probably not, but this sort of analysis forces a reflection that allows us the agility to adapt whenever new phenomenon conspire to throw well-made plans right in the dumpster and light them on fire. Which, as the 2016 election has shown us, they will—repeatedly and mercilessly.

The States of Change analysis has progressed into its third release this year: the first projected the demography of our 50 states through 2060, the second bumped these projections up against a number of different electoral scenarios to see their potential impact, and this year’s investigated how well various demographic groups are represented on Election Day. To date, each release has been accompanied by analyses focused—appropriately—on the policy implications of these data. Yet, before policy can be made, elections must be held, and so this year, States of Change has turned for analysis to that seedy underbelly of the electoral system: the political consultant and campaign strategist.

Campaigns represent the messy intersection between policymaking and demographic change. They are the first draft of policy and arguably the final draft of demography.

A political consultant brings unique perspective to the States of Change data because our job is to win elections by leveraging favorable demography and minimizing harmful demography. The way we do this is by studying demographic trends and asking ourselves two questions: (1) how do these groups lean politically, and (2) how likely are they to vote?

Our answers frame the campaign’s approach to different demographics. Strategically, we ask ourselves what policies are especially resonant with a particular demographic, what messaging do we use to talk about our candidate’s positions on these issues, and what tone do we use when we communicate the message? Tactically, we think more specifically about matching the action and type of communication to where they stand on their likelihood to vote and support our candidate.

This line of thinking is what motivates a political strategist’s interest in the States of Change project this year. By focusing on the representation gap for key demographic groups, campaign professionals can think more broadly about how turnout patterns may shift over the next half century.

According to the States of Change data this year, the overall representation gap among key demographic groups is shrinking, and in fact they conclude that “we may be at roughly peak levels of over- and under-representation at the current time.” Most relevant to this paper, they find that most of any remaining gaps in representation will primarily be due to participation gaps (the difference between those eligible to vote and those who actually vote), rather than eligibility gaps (the difference between the total population and the eligible population).

As these gaps fall mostly to participatory ones, the role of campaigns increases dramatically. Campaigns are the ones, after all, with the most resources to expend in turning out groups that would otherwise be under-represented. Who they decide to turn out will be a function of each group's collective partisanship and ideological tincture. This only increases the importance of having this data interpreted by a political strategist, who must consider the current contours of the electorate as they piece together a winning coalition.

What follows is a look at the States of Change data through the eyes of a Republican campaign strategist. Someone that looks at these numbers and asks himself how the parties, the candidates, and the institutions of the Right can and should adapt to the electorate of the middle of the 21st century. We begin with a 50,000-foot view of the electorate as campaigns see it, along with the tactics they have at their disposal to shape it. The analysis then looks specifically at those demographic elements that are easiest to project into the future and that we also expect to have outsized influence at the ballot box: first the immigrant population, then race and ethnicity, followed by educational trends, and finally a look at the impact of different age cohorts.

In the spirit of Eisenhower, I expect there's much in here that we'll get wrong, but in being wrong now, we set ourselves up to succeed as the electorate morphs over time. Mike Tyson famously said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face"—it's this author's hope that planning such as this is what allows campaigns and political institutions to quickly recover, adapt, and overcome any unexpected electoral punches to the face.

Analyzing The Electorate

Political operatives think about the electorate in a much different way than everybody else. While the press, pundits, and armchair strategists focus on pithy categories like "Soccer Moms" and "Security Dads," campaigns instead

are organizing themselves around sophisticated individual-level predictions of how likely a person is to vote and who they are most likely to pull the lever for. This 21st-century political tactic is known in the industry as microtargeting, and known elsewhere as data-mining, predictive analytics, big data, or data science.

The easiest way to think about microtargeting is as a sophisticated form of stereotyping. Analysts take the data they have on a voter—information like their gender, age, consumer interests, the car they drive, the place they live, and so on—and use that to come to some reasonably informed conclusion about whether and how they'll vote.

You've microtargeted before. That person at the back of the line at the coffee shop? They're casting off a gaggle of clues as to whether they voted for Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump: the car they drove up in (what was the make and model? did it have bumper stickers?), the clothes they wear (casual or business? trendy or traditional?), the book they carry (nonfiction or fiction? classic or new release?), and even their demeanor (standing tall or slouching? garrulous or grumpy?). You'd be surprised just how accurate you can be using such subtle and fleeting information.

Microtargeting, however, is grounded in the mathematics of statistics. Think of it this way: If an unmarked Toyota Prius drove down the street, and you were asked who they voted for in 2016, you'd probably guess Clinton. After all, you've met Prius drivers before and passively processed their data; you've sensed they tend to be more concerned about the environment, and therefore more liberal, and therefore a likely Clinton voter.

Pushed to be more mathematical about your prediction you might ask yourself how many Priuses you've seen with Clinton bumper stickers and how many with Trump stickers. If the answer were four Clinton bumper stickers and only one for

Trump, you could back that into an 80 percent probability that a driver of an unmarked Prius voted for Clinton. This is the fundamental premise of microtargeting, only it's done with thousands of pieces of data and complex statistical and machine-learning algorithms.

The ultimate output of this process is a collection of scores for each voter that each ranges between zero and one, representing individual-level probabilities: that they will vote, that they vote Republican, that they are persuadable, et cetera. By the end of a campaign, a voter may have dozens of scores along a variety of salient dimensions, but fundamentally, it is their turnout score and their partisanship score upon which campaigns are organized.

The Shape of The Electorate

Analysis of the electorate frequently focuses on collapsed versions of the turnout and partisanship scores into 10 or 20 buckets and then arrayed against each other in a grid: likelihood to vote on the horizontal X axis running from the people most likely to vote on the left to those least likely to vote on the right; then partisanship on the vertical Y axis running from the most Republican at the top to the most Democratic at the bottom (see Figure 1). Each cell in the grid displays the counts of the number of registered voters in that particular political geography that fall into that specific intersection of partisan and turnout buckets.

This grid, more than any individual demographic, messaging strategy, or press-friendly sound bite, is the base organizing unit of the campaign. In the upper left are those registered voters who are definitely voting and most likely to support Republicans—the core of a GOP campaign from which they will recruit volunteers and solicit donations. The upper right is where Republicans will go for get-out-the-vote operations, where they can find those who are uncertain whether they will vote, but if they did, they would be reliably Republican. The middle left of the grid is where persuasion efforts are

focused, as this area holds the people most likely to vote but uncertain who to vote for.

The grid in Figure 1 shows where campaigns directly overlap with this year's States of Change analysis on the over- and under-representation of demographic groups in the electorate. Voters who have higher predicted-turnout scores tend to primarily come from those groups the States of Change analysis finds to be over-represented—they are whiter, better educated, older, and more likely to be women. Conversely, those voters predicted to be less likely to vote tend to come from groups that are over-represented: minorities, less educated, and younger.

Superior campaign organization coupled with a smart data and analytics infrastructure can exploit the representation gaps in this grid through their microtargeting. As an example, it's no fluke that African-Americans were over-represented in the 2012 presidential election. While some of that is of course a macro function of the reelection of the nation's first black president, at a micro level this reflects both of Barack Obama presidential campaigns' success in identifying low-probability African-American voters and getting them to the polls.

Looking at a specific state's grid will help illustrate how campaigns use it. Michigan, the surprise state of the 2016 presidential election, is especially interesting while also retaining an electoral dynamic similar to other swing states. Here the grid (see Figure 1) is likelihood to vote by the net partisanship of each bucket. The cell in the upper-left-most corner has 138,012 voters who are the most likely to be Republican and the most likely to vote.

Counting up the number of voters in segments that have a net partisanship score of more than 40 points, either on the Republican side or the Democratic one, and then limiting it to the three highest-turnout segments, Republicans have an advantage here of about 150,000 voters—there are more

high-turnout Republicans than there are high-turnout Democrats. This can be good news for Republicans—their best voters are already highly likely to vote! And it’s this dynamic that drives their many successes in lower-turnout midterm elections.

But there’s also bad news for Republicans. If we again look at the number of voters in the segments that have a net-partisanship score of more than 40 points but this time among the three *lowest*-turnout groups, the Democratic bloc is orders of magnitude larger than the Republican one. Republicans have only 44,000 low-turnout voters, while Democrats have 505,000. Democrats simply have a much deeper well of unreliable voters that are reliably liberal to whom they can return to over and over again in order to win their elections. This helps explain why their presidential cycles are usually stronger than their midterms.

The shape of the electorate forces decisions upon campaigns. Each section of the grid naturally dictates a certain strategy: Are there enough core supporters to help fund your campaign? How many do you have available to you for turnout? And how many people will you have to persuade? These cold hard numbers force Democrats to run campaigns that rely heavily on turnout, while Republicans must worry more about persuasion. Of course, all campaigns do all things, but the shape of the electorate forces each side to prioritize a certain way, and this has real implications for the over- and under-representation of groups in the electorate.

Navigating The Electorate

Each section of the electorate corresponds with a particular activity reserved for different parts of a party’s campaign apparatus. First, those voters who don’t even appear on the grid—unregistered voters—are the focus of registration drives. These are typically done in off years when there are fewer elections monopolizing financial and human resources. Independent grassroots organizations with close ties to the

community in question tend to be their primary executor. Drives are frequently targeted geographically to communities that are known to be favorable to the party through the analysis of recent election returns. Locations are usually chosen to reflect known partisan leanings or good messaging opportunities. For example, a GOP registration booth will likely pop up at a gun show in a county that votes reliably Republican or near a community college job fair in a town that is trending more conservative.

Registration targeting can also be done at an individual level through mail, phone, or door-to-door contact. In these instances, conservative grassroots organizations may have commissioned a microtargeting project of unregistered voters to identify their top prospects. These people are found by matching the voter file into consumer data files and identifying individuals in the consumer files who are not matched into the voter database. These individuals are then mined for consumer data patterns that match those of likely Republican voters so that an unregistered man in his 40s who drives a truck, has a hunting license, and owns a Bible will be flagged for a registration contact. The end result of this registration targeting will be a variation on our grid in Figure 1; only this time, it will be comprised solely of unregistered voters and rather than likelihood to vote on the X axis, it will instead display the results of a “likelihood to register to vote” model.

Of course, these efforts specifically close the registration gap outlined in the States of Change analysis. As we’ll see later in this paper, the largest registration gaps exist among groups more favorable to Democratic candidates. It’s no surprise then to find that Democrats tend to dedicate more resources to registration efforts than Republicans.

Once registered, two primary challenges remain: turnout and persuasion. Targeted turnout efforts focus on those voters who are registered but unlikely to vote in that particular election. Turnout communications are usually done by the

state or national party, which can communicate with these voters about the entire ticket rather than a specific candidate. These turnout campaigns are extremely important to both parties, but it is Democrats that have to truly master their turnout technique as they have so many low-turnout voters they could potentially activate. Even so, Republicans have run successful turnout-heavy campaigns before—most notably the 2004 reelection of George W. Bush. Turnout efforts typically take the form of direct contact, preferably by a friend, neighbor, or associate who actually knows them. We know from campaign studies that door knocks are the most effective form of communication, but they don't scale very well; and while phone calls scale well, they are probably the least-effective form of campaign communication. Mail and digital advertising lies somewhere in the middle, though it varies greatly depending upon the quality and frequency of contact.

Persuasion communications—targeted at that middle part of the partisanship scale that is definitely voting—is most typically done through concentrated television advertising. Of course, these persuasion targets are just as likely to receive door knocks, phone calls, and mail, but most of a campaign's video advertising (both TV and digital) is targeted specifically at persuading swing voters. Campaign targeting tools have advanced to a point where they can actually identify the television programming that swing voters are watching, and then skew their advertising accordingly in order to be more likely to hit them with a message. So while buying advertising on *The Voice* and *America's Got Talent* may cost the same amount, by matching detailed viewership data anonymously into a list of swing voters, a Republican campaign can know they are more likely to hit their targets on *The Voice* and buy accordingly. These persuasion efforts are where Republicans must necessarily focus their attention because of the cold, hard electoral math they face.

How you navigate the electorate and what emphasis you put on each path has profound consequences for campaigns—

look no further than Clinton's 2016 campaign, which arguably relied too heavily on activating that large low-turnout base while neglecting a persuasive message among over-represented voters.

Understanding the contours of today's electorate has to be the fundamental starting point for understanding our looming demographic changes. Though the party by turnout grid is the organizing lens of modern campaigns, within it we can identify important group-level variation by immigration status, race and ethnicity, education, age and a host of other demographics. As such, the next sections look individually at each of these demographic dynamics and their implications for future campaigns.

Immigration

Looking at this year's exit polls, where only 13 percent of voters claimed immigration as the most important issue facing the country, you'd never think that immigration had dominated the cycle as much as it did.¹ And yet, immigration, more than any other issue, served as the catalyst to the successful campaign of our president. Trump's campaign announcement itself leaned heavily on his immigration position, in which he promised to build a wall on the United States' southern border with Mexico—a commitment he reiterated time and time again at his well-attended rallies, during the contentious GOP primary debates, and in the victory speeches he gave week after week on his way to the Republican Party's presidential nomination. Clearly, he tapped a rich vein of immigration-related anxiety within the party and, indeed, nationwide.

Immigration offers a unique challenge to campaign strategists in that it is both a campaign issue in and of itself, and a demographic phenomena we must contend with as we seek to shape the electorate. Immigration's dualism is especially pronounced in the Republican Party, in which the rank-and-file primary-voting electorate is acutely concerned about it as a

political issue, while immigration's demographic power is something politicians and strategists have to wrestle with in the general election.

Of course, immigration as a political phenomena is no new thing. Indeed, presidents of the 19th and early 20th centuries had to navigate treacherous political passages frothed by xenophobia and nationalism. And while the type and nature of immigration these last few decades is different, today's rate and volume nearly matches immigration's zenith in 1890.

To put it in perspective, the immigrant population of the United States stood at 9.7 million in 1960, but grew by more than a factor of four by 2013 to stand at 41.3 million. This, despite the fact that the overall population of the United States grew by a factor of only 1.6 over the same time period. The high water mark for immigrant impact on the United States occurred in 1890, when the immigrant share of the U.S. population stood at 14.8 percent; in 2013, that share was only 13.1 percent, approaching, but not yet overtaking the record.² However, this record does look as though it will be broken soon: Pew Research projects that by 2065, it will hit 17.7 percent; that's approximately 78.2 million foreign-born people who will be living in the United States.³

Yet this time, immigration's footprint is decidedly different. Not only do we have more immigration from non-European countries than we did 25 years ago, but immigrants are increasingly settling outside the urban core of metropolitan areas.⁴ According to a recent Brookings Institution review of recent American Community Survey data about the top 100 metro areas, 61 percent of today's immigrants live in suburban areas, while the remaining 39 percent reside in the metro area's primary city. That's 21 million suburban immigrants compared with only nine million in 1990.⁵

So not only do we have some of the highest immigration levels of the last 100 years, but immigrants are increasingly settling

in nontraditional areas. This means that more and more Americans who previously have had little interaction with immigrants are now faced with them more and more each day. It's this daily friction that powers much of the concern among traditional Republican voters.

A 2016 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and Brookings found that 50 percent of all Americans agree that "It bothers me when I come in contact with immigrants who speak little or no English." The percentage agreeing climbs to 66 percent among Republicans and soars to 77 percent among Trump supporters.⁶

Just a year earlier, in 2015, Pew Research asked Americans about their perception of recent immigrants' uptake of the English language. Only 39 percent thought they learned English in a reasonable amount of time, while 59 percent said they did not. Similarly, Pew found that just one-third of Americans thought that immigrants in our country today generally want to adopt American customs and way of life, while 66 percent said immigrants prefer to hold on to customs and the way of life of their home countries.⁷ This is in spite of the fact that, according to an assimilation index compiled by the Manhattan Institute, "immigrants of the past quarter-century have assimilated more rapidly than their counterparts of a century ago."⁸

If immigrants appear to be assimilating faster than ever before, what then can we know about their level of participation in our political system? The States of Change data on the representation levels of Hispanics in the electorate touches directly upon the impact of immigrants at the ballot box. Hispanics, thanks to their high levels of immigration over the last few decades, are generally under-represented in the electorate through a citizenship gap. This particular component of the overall representation gap is a function of the difference between the group's representation in the U.S. voting-age population and their representation in the voting *eligible* population.

Interestingly, this is an instance where at least some members of the demographic in question can voluntarily change their eligibility status by seeking citizenship. *The Washington Post* recently reported a surge in citizenship applications over the first three months of 2016. According to their report, this follows a trend in increased applications in presidential election years as interest in the race generates a corresponding interest in voting. This cycle in particular saw applications jump 6 percent over the same three-month time period in 2012, indicating a higher level of engagement by immigrants this cycle.⁹

Given immigrants' interest in politics, as well as the long-term impact of a person's first vote on their partisanship (discussed in later sections of this paper), it makes sense for campaigns to engage them for targeted outreach—but how to identify them? Traditionally, campaigns have relied on coalition directors—staff whose job it is to identify key influencers and groups for targeted outreach in distinct communities, such as Hispanics, Asians, farmers, or hunters. In an era of data-driven campaigning (discussed earlier), one would think campaigns would have the ability to do mass targeting of immigrants and ethnic communities at scale. Unfortunately, most information around voters' language preferences and places of birth are either extremely limited or aggressively inferred. Were a campaign to pull a list of voters they deem to be Hispanic immigrants, for example, their success rate would likely be better than random, but still woefully short of expectations. As such, we can expect political outreach to immigrants to remain, for the most part, at the coalitions level of a campaign.

Nonetheless, these data around immigration have clear implications for how campaigns function and communicate. First and foremost, immigrants undeniably lean Democratic. Thomas Holbrook, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, found that the correlation between the percentage of the population in a state that is foreign-born and support

for Democratic candidates has massively increased over time. In the electoral period between 1972 and 1980, the correlation was a fairly weak but positive 0.18. (The correlation coefficient runs from -1, a perfect negative relationship, to 1, a perfect positive relationship.) By 2012, the relationship was strongly positive at a correlation of 0.60.¹⁰

Data from a proprietary survey this author was involved in during the fall of the 2016 election more directly captured the relationship between immigration and voting. Among all eligible immigrants, Clinton held a 28-point lead over Trump, but her lead dropped to only 4 points among those that were second-generation Americans and beyond.

Despite all this, Republicans still value immigrant outreach and believe there are a number of resonant issues they can communicate with them on. So GOP candidates continue to do targeted communication to immigrant communities, most notably in the form of \$10 million spent by Republican advertisers on Spanish-language ads in 2016. This interaction with Hispanics is detailed in a later section, but there are a number of other telling examples of conservative cultivation of non-Hispanic immigrant groups.

In the fall of 2016, the Trump campaign released an ad wishing Indian-Americans a happy Diwali; it featured Trump speaking in Hindi and mimicking the slogan of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying "This time a Trump government."¹¹ Similarly, at the local level, there are Republican candidates in places like Virginia, where Barbara Comstock and Ed Gillespie engage in traditional retail politics targeted to the state's emerging Asian community, which grew by 68 percent between 2000 and 2010, and now stands at 5 percent of the voting population.¹²

Campaigns have usually done this simply because it felt like the right thing to do—just showing up in a community, even if it is overtly hostile to you, can go a long way toward at least

softening opposition to the Republican Party and perhaps, ultimately, toward winning their vote. But more recently, we've seen research that quantifies just how much of a difference this effort can make. Testing by Alejandro Flores and Alexander Coppock has found that targeted language appeals can have a profound impact on in-language voters' perceptions of the candidate doing the talking.¹³ Their experiment leveraged a unique opportunity afforded by the Jeb Bush presidential campaign, which released nearly identical ads but for the language they were spoken in. Jeb Bush—fluent in Spanish—talks directly to the camera, with the same message, same set, same b-roll, but two different languages.

Flores and Coppock recruited Spanish-English bilingual voters to randomly view one of the two ads, which were then followed by key questions about their support for Bush in both the primary and the general election. What they found has enormous implications for how campaigns—especially Republican ones—think about their interactions with immigrants. In all, the bilinguals who watched the Spanish version of the ad supported Bush in the primary election at levels 6 points higher than those who saw the English version, and 5 points higher in their general election support. With perfect controls for message, candidate, and imagery, the results can be attributed directly to the mere act of speaking in these respondents' native language. Now, to be fair, we do not know to what extent these findings would travel well to other candidates, other languages, or other immigrant groups. But nonetheless, it offers a tantalizing insight into how Republican candidates can do a better job reaching out to immigrants.

Race / Ethnicity

Of course, much of the immigration story in the last quarter-century is also one of race and ethnicity, as Hispanics and Asians comprise the majority of the foreign-born population in the United States and represent our fastest-growing racial

groups. A full half of our population growth since 2000 is accounted for by Hispanics, while Asian-Americans and African-Americans account for another 27 percent. This wave of immigration has accelerated the country down a path toward a time when the majority of the country is no longer white.

Already, there are a growing number of demographic outposts in which nonwhite majorities are the norm: 364 counties and four states as of the most recent count.¹⁴ Last year, for the first time, white children were a minority group in the preschool population, and overall we are only about 25 years away from being a majority-minority nation.^{15,16}

Hispanics

Population growth, however, does not necessarily mean a growth in representation at the ballot box. Despite the massive growth of the Hispanic population, their representation gap has increased drastically over time. According to the States of Change analysis, the representation gap among Hispanic voters was only -3 in 1980 and -4 in 1982, but by 2012 and 2014, that gap had grown to -8 and -10 respectively. By these numbers, they are the racial group that is the most under-represented electorally and that have also seen the biggest increase in their under-representation. Right now, this is primarily driven by their eligibility gap—much of the growth in the Hispanic population during this time can be attributed to both legal and illegal immigration, which creates citizenship barriers to voting (discussed earlier in this paper). But gaps in participation among eligible Hispanics have lingered. These gaps are projected to improve over time, but even so, the States of Change project has predicted that, by 2060, Hispanics will end up with a -5 representation gap. By that time, eligibility concerns will be minimal but participation (registration and turnout) gaps are expected to remain.

As with the immigrant population, there is little doubt that decreasing the representation gap among Hispanics is more of

an immediate net positive for Democratic candidates than Republican ones. Historically, strong majorities of Hispanics have supported Democratic voters, with 66 percent most recently supporting Clinton for president. There are, however, instances of Republican candidates doing well, most notably President George W. Bush in 2004, when he won 44 percent support among Hispanics, according to a national exit poll.

But Republicans can read Census tables, too, and there is an acute understanding of these looming demographic trends among conservative candidates, operatives, and consultants. Hispanic outreach has become a priority of Republican institutions that can afford to take a longer view of the situation. In 2013, the Republican National Committee hired Hispanic engagement staff in 18 states meant to build out grassroots operations to directly interact with Hispanics in local communities.¹⁷ These staff give Republicans a permanent local presence that can identify issue concerns, messaging opportunities, key influencers, and even potential candidates within the Hispanic community.

Thinking more tactically, political campaigns have a number of encumbrances when it comes to understanding and communicating with Hispanic voters. First and foremost is the measurement challenge of understanding these voters through traditional survey work. The most common problem is the language barrier. In an ideal world, campaigns would translate each of their surveys into Spanish and then engage a call center with bilingual interviewers who can conduct the survey in Spanish. As you can imagine, the drag on time and money this causes is significant. Most campaigns forgo this option completely, while those campaigns to whom the Hispanic vote is critical will usually do separate surveys specifically of Hispanic voters in their districts rather than incorporating Spanish-only Hispanics into all their other surveys.

More importantly, campaigns have to get Hispanics on the phone in the first place, and this is proving to be problematic.

The deterioration of political polling has been well documented elsewhere—between increasing cell-phone penetration, the slow death of the landline, and weak response rates, it is now harder than ever to get a survey completed. Those who do take the time to answer the phone and sit through a 15-minute political survey tend to be the groups who are most over-represented per the States of Change analysis. And of course, those who do not take the survey tend to be those who are most under-represented. According to a recent analysis by Civis Analytics, a firm founded by the head of the Obama 2012 data operation, it takes approximately 300 phone calls to get one survey from a young Hispanic male completed.¹⁸

It is also difficult to measure how targeted groups of Hispanic voters watch television due to the fact that many viewers of Spanish-language television watch via over the air antenna reception. Campaigns are increasingly turning to detailed viewing data for key voter groups in order to build optimized television advertising campaigns targeted at groups of key voters. By matching lists of targeted voters into subscriber data from cable, satellite, or telecom companies, they are able to reorient their advertising more toward those voters they are most interested in. However, campaigns are limited in their ability to do this with Hispanic targets, because so many do not subscribe to pay-TV operators.

Moreover, Spanish-language mail and phone calls only go to those designated as Hispanic on the file, and consumer classifications of Hispanics notoriously fall short of targeters' needs. Most ethnicity and race flags found on commercial data files are inferred based on analysis of an individual's last name and on U.S. Census data about the racial composition of their neighborhood. If your name is Ramirez and you live in a heavily Hispanic neighborhood, then you will almost certainly be classified as a Latino. But according to the 2010 Census, there are about 344 Hispanics in the United States with the last name Wu, and another 1,107 Hispanics with the last name MacDonald.¹⁹ The examples

here are obviously edge cases, but they are frustrating nonetheless, as it is these race classifications that dictate who receives the campaign's messages.

Asians

While so much of the United States' growth has been fueled by Hispanics, it is actually Asians who have recently passed Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants to the United States.²⁰ Their overall share of the electorate remains low—only 4 percent in the recent presidential election—and the States of Change data indicate they are under-represented, with their participation (registration and turnout) gap now accounting for about half of their under-representation. Their participation gap is projected to grow over the next few decades and become the dominant reason for Asian under-representation.

Here again, Republicans are faced with a growing minority demographic that is also growing in their favorability toward Democrats. According to the National Asian American Survey, Democrats improved from a 51 percent market share among Asians in 2012 to 57 percent in 2016, while the Republican Party market share dropped by 4 points to 24 percent. The net result was an 11-point shift in party identification away from Republicans. The only silver lining here for the GOP was that movement wasn't uniform across nationality: Filipino-Americans shifted most aggressively toward the Democrats, while Cambodian-, Japanese-, and Chinese-Americans all shifted more toward Republicans. But more fundamentally, a real hesitancy emerges in the data for Asian-Americans to associate themselves with either party: A strong 41 percent identify as independent—though admittedly, once independent “leaners” are allocated, the Democrat advantage grows.²¹ It's this reluctance that Republicans can tap into in order to pull this emerging electorate to their side.

The Republican playbook here, again, is to look to an expansion of on-the-ground interaction with key members

of the Asian community. The Republican National Committee has hired field directors and communications directors to focus on targeted outreach. These communities have become of particular importance in Nevada and Virginia, two swing states where Asian-Americans make up more than 5 percent of the eligible voter population.²² 2017 will be an interesting year to watch the Asian-American community in Virginia, as Republican gubernatorial candidate Ed Gillespie has made it a priority to talk to Asian voters.

African-Americans

Since 1980, we've seen a steady improvement in black representation in the electorate. Indeed, Obama's election and reelection pushed the black representation to gap to zero and beyond, giving them a slight over-representation in 2012. The African-American representation gap will be particularly interesting for the most recent election, but unfortunately, that won't be available until next spring, when we have the Census's supplemental voter data for 2016. Preliminary data from exit polling and other survey work certainly point to lower enthusiasm and turnout among black voters than Obama enjoyed, potentially making the difference between a Clinton win or loss. Precisely where the black electorate falls on the representation scale will tell us a lot about the contours of Trump's win.

At its core, however, Republicans should be doing more than simply hoping that Democrats can't sufficiently enthrone the African-American community. After all, hope is not a strategy. Instead, just like with many of these other minority groups, many Republicans are actively considering how they can do a better job within the African-American community. The sad truth is that Republicans did not always do so badly with black voters—incredibly, in the 1960 presidential race, Nixon won 32 percent of the black vote, and in 1968, in a contentious three-way, race he pulled 15 percent of the black vote. In the 1968 campaign, the Nixon team undertook a focused African-American strategy with a “black brain trust” and targeted

issue appeals in publications like *Jet* magazine. Nixon showed up at local African-American political clubs and made personalized appeals to key community influentials.²³

All of which is to say that Richard Nixon—the man who in 1972 would pivot into the Southern Strategy that pitted whites against blacks—can actually be held up as a model of Republican outreach to minority groups in the 21st century. At the end of the day, most of the tools campaigns have in their arsenal remain unchanged from the pre-digital era. Sure, campaigns can do targeted Facebook ads or work up sophisticated simulation models, but ultimately, there remains a real amount of shoe leather to wear out, hands to shake, and babies to kiss in order to create real change in a community whose support for Republicans is in the single digits. Mitt Romney's 6 percent support among African-Americans in 2012 and Trump's marginal improvement to 8 percent in 2016 is a long way from Nixon's performance 56 years ago. In order for Republicans to claw our way back, there's a lot of work to be done.

Whites

In the midst of all this rapid demographic change, white voters continue to pull more electoral weight than their numbers would suggest. According to the States of Change data, white voters have actually become more and more over-represented in the electorate even as their overall share of the population fell. In 1980 and 1982, white voters enjoyed a 7-point representation advantage, and that grew to 10- and 14-point advantages in 2012 and 2014. However, based on simulations run by the States of Change team, this year appears to be the apex of their over-representation, as it is projected to fall through 2060. But even then, 44 years from now, it's believed whites will still be over-represented—especially in midterm elections at an estimated 7-point advantage. These advantages aren't thought to derive from age or citizenship—those are projected to fall to near zero.

Rather, nearly all of the advantage will come from whites' higher likelihood to register and then to vote.

One reason whites are—and seemingly will continue to be—over-represented could be the mere fact that they've always been over-represented. Multiple studies have shown that voting itself is habit-forming. Once you have voted in an election, you are very likely to simply continue doing so. A famous field experiment by Gerber, Green and Shachar randomly contacted 25,200 people and encouraged them to vote in the 1998 general election, and compared with a random set of voters who weren't contacted, they were much more likely to vote. But this difference continued into local elections in 1999, and the researchers found that “voting in one election substantially increases the likelihood of voting in the future.” Moreover, they found this effect to be stronger than age and education effects.²⁴ Not only does this help us explain whites' continued over-representation in the electorate, but it also underscores the importance of campaign contact with advantageous groups that may typically be under-represented. If Republicans can activate more white non-college-educated voters and improve their representation numbers, then that could have a lasting electoral impact for the party.

In the meantime, Republicans benefit greatly from white voter over-representation in midterm elections. Recent patterns in off-year voting suggest an electorate that is inherently more conservative in these non-presidential years, leading to Republican advantages in non-presidential-level offices, from the U.S. Senate all the way down to state legislatures. The result is an unprecedented map for the GOP, in which Republicans have a majority in 69 of 99 state legislative chambers, hold both legislative chambers in 32 states, have 33 governorships, and have 31 of 50 secretaries of state.²⁵

Campaign Consequences

There is no better exemplar of the racial component to voter turnout than the presidential campaign we all just

experienced. Coming off of Obama’s reelection in 2012, the Democratic Party in general, and the Clinton campaign in particular, pursued a strategy in which they relied upon the re-creation of Obama’s “coalition of the ascendant.” The idea being that a rising tide of a diverse electorate would lift Clinton into the presidency and usher in a new era of Democratic dominance.

The problem with this, of course, lies in the data discussed above. High tide is still years away; the coalition of the ascendant hasn’t quite ascended yet; use whatever metaphor you like. Relying on racial minorities meant reliance upon demographic groups that remain under-represented in the electorate. Activating those voters was dependent upon maintaining the support levels the party had with Obama (a tall task considering Clinton was the second-least popular presidential nominee of all time), and then meeting or exceeding the already heightened turnout levels of these historically under-represented groups. Essentially, we return to the electoral conundrum this paper opened with: There are more low-turnout Democrats than Republicans, which is good news for the Democrats if they can actually turn them out, but bad news if they cannot be made to be enthusiastic about their candidate.

Meanwhile, the Trump campaign played the other side of this math problem. They banked on the over-representation of a white electorate that already leaned Republican. For them, it become a persuasion-based election among high-likelihood white voters, along with the activation of the small low-turnout base they had. They were also able to take advantage of the geographic patterns of over- and under-representation built into the Electoral College, which give advantages to more rural states. Indeed, Trump’s loss of the national popular vote points to just how efficient his campaign was in leveraging the electorate’s built-in representation gaps.

Some Democrats may be consoled, thinking this is the last time such an electorate could be assembled or looking to

demographic inevitability to save the day. But recent research has demonstrated there is a possibility for demographic backlash. According to one set of researchers, simply informing white voters who are “high in ethnic identification” that we will soon be a majority-minority country increases ballot support for Trump, as well as for anti-immigration policies. Most stunningly, the effects are similar for both Republicans and Democrats.²⁶

Additionally, research by Mara Ostfeld that was shared on Twitter indicates that “democratic outreach to Latino voters turns off white Dems.” The study appears to be the results of a randomized controlled experiment—a method that is very popular in political-analytics circles to isolate and identify the impact of a particular message. It seems that white Democrats were randomly assigned to hear information that Clinton was either (a) specifically courting undecided voters, or (b) that she was courting Latino voters. Her slides indicate that Clinton ballot support among white Democrats who heard about her Latino outreach was 9 points lower than it was among the “undecided” treatment.²⁷ Minority outreach appears to be a double-edged sword.

But there may be ways to work against this sort of demographic backlash. After all, given racial projections, it is in the interest of both parties to do targeted outreach to minorities. The difficulty then lies in white voters’ reactions to it. One method for potentially mitigating this risk is by increasing the exposure and interaction rate that white voters have with minorities. This is essentially sociology’s “contact hypothesis”—that as people have direct and meaningful encounters with people they have little experience with, their attitudes are likely to become more favorable toward those groups and issues. Moreover, the change is lasting, with a slow rate of decay. This is what makes contact especially powerful, as most other forms of campaign communication—especially the persuasive kind—have incredibly short half-lives thanks to aggressive decay effects.

Recent research by David Broockman and Joshua Kalla showed that a single ten-minute conversation between a voter and a transgender person can “markedly reduce prejudice for at least 3 months.”²⁸ Though the study focused specifically on transgender issues, it isn’t hard to imagine this being used either by immigrant-advocacy organizations or minority groups to alleviate any sort of cultural anxiety by white voters.

These findings could also be used by campaigns well beyond identity politics and instead used around key issues that have direct and sometimes highly emotional consequences on the personal lives of voters. One can imagine sending women door to door to have a frank conversation around their own experience with abortion, or factory workers who have lost their jobs when a company moves overseas, or a gun owner who protected himself or herself with his or her firearm, or a small-business owner tangled up in bureaucratic red tape, or somebody who just got audited, or a charter-school parent grateful for the choice they have. Conservatives have any number of interesting stories to tell to voters, enabling them to humanize and personalize their issue agenda. The contact hypothesis points to a way to do this and have lasting effects.

Education

In disentangling the demography of a Trump win, no category has gotten more attention than education. The gap between college-educated and non-college-educated whites was stark, and his performance among non-college-educated whites was a marked improvement from Romney’s four years earlier. While Romney’s advantage among the white working-class voters was 26 percentage points, Trump’s advantage grew to 37 points. This shift allowed Trump to gain a sizeable number of voters among this group in spite of the fact that their overall share of the electorate fell by 2 percentage points, from 36 percent to 34 percent, according to the exit polls.

Meanwhile, Clinton saw big gains among white college graduates, losing by only 4 points to Trump, while Obama

had lost the same group by 14 points in 2012. Interestingly, this educational divide didn’t exist among minorities: Clinton got 75 percent of nonwhites without a college degree and 71 percent of nonwhites with a college degree.

It seems education is also the culprit when it comes to the surprise of Trump’s win. Education was strongly related to the sizeable polling errors of the cycle. Across all state-level polling, the error on Trump’s support number was highly correlated with the percentage of white adults with a college degree in the state: the less educated the state, the more likely Trump’s polling number was wildly off from his actual ballot support. Clearly, we have to consider education’s relationship with representation gaps in the electorate.

The States of Change analysis reveals significant differences in representation gaps by educational status. Unsurprisingly, to political professionals who have seen this in turnout models across many cycles, college graduates have positive representation gaps, while non-college graduates have negative gaps, and the underlying data varies significantly by race. This over- and under-representation of college and non-college grads has only grown more pronounced as the former group grows and the latter shrinks.

The increase in college-degree attainment in this country is stunning: In 1940, only 4.6 percent of people over the age of 25 had completed four years of college. By 2015, that number was 32.5 percent, a boost of nearly eight times.²⁹ This has corresponded with an increase in their over-representation—the gap among college graduates stood at 5 and 6 points respectively in 1980 and 1982, and that gap grew to 8 and 11 points in 2012 and 2014. At the same time, the non-college-educated under-representation gap grew from -5 in 1980 to -8 in 2014. These gaps become accentuated in midterm elections, when there is an upturn in over-representation among the college-educated and under-representation swells among non-college-educated voters.

The non-college-education gap is tied up tightly with race. White non-college voters generally hovers close to zero on the representation gap over the last 30 years. Non-college African-Americans have gradually closed their under-representation gap over the years, and in 2012, they were actually over-represented. On the other hand, non-college Hispanics and Asians have seen their representativeness decrease over time.

This relationship—between race, education, and turnout—is what the 2016 election seems to have pivoted on. When updated numbers arrive in the spring, we will be able to see how representation gaps were impacted by Clinton and Trump at the top of ticket. If these numbers mirror much of the initial evidence collected so far, it would only reinforce the difficulty Clinton had in reassembling the Obama coalition. Yes, college-educated whites are one of the most over-represented demographic groups the States of Change project has studied. And yes, college-educated whites increased their support for the Democratic nominee from 2012 to 2016. But consider that non-college whites likely were able to keep their representation gap near zero, while increasing their support for Trump. Couple this with increases in the representation gaps among non-college Hispanic and Asian voters, who we know to be heavily Democratic, and you can see in retrospect how Trump was able to thread this election’s demographic needle.

Layered on this are widespread regional disparities in educational attainment. While the college-educated population has grown massively, those gains have not been evenly distributed. Research by Thurston Domina detailed the disproportionate growth of college degrees across the country between 1940 and 2000 and found that what started as a spread-out phenomenon has increasingly become concentrated in a few “cosmopolitan communities (that have) become magnets for the highly educated.”³⁰ While Domina measures this in detail at the micro level of the county and census tract, the regional divides offer a broad look at the

sort of change the country has seen: in 1970, there was only a 5-point difference between the most highly educated region in the United States (the Mountain and Pacific census divisions at 13 percent) and the least highly educated region (the East South Central division at 8 percent). In 2000, that difference grew to 13 percentage points between New England (31 percent college degree) and East South Central at 18 percent.

We’ve seen similar ideas in works like Richard Florida’s study of the “creative class” or the “big-sort” hypothesis by Bill Bishop. The overall point remains the same: Americans are increasingly finding themselves living with like-minded people. There are serious electoral consequences to this. In proprietary research overseen by this author for an independent advocacy organization in 2016, it was found that white college-educated Clinton voters had an average of 4.1 of their five closest friends who were also college graduates. Among college-educated Trump voters, the average number of their five closest friends with a college degree was only 3.7. In other words, college-educated Trump voters were more likely to have an educationally diverse social network than their counterparts on the Clinton side, who were more likely to live in an educational bubble. Much of this is likely a function of geography.

One of the primary problems with Clinton’s coalition was that her white college-educated supporters were too densely concentrated in areas that weren’t useful to her. Sure, Clinton can run up the score in areas like New York City or San Francisco, but that does her little good in the Electoral College. Political demography is exacerbated by political geography, and Clinton ends up with a moral victory thanks to a popular-vote win but an actual loss thanks to the Electoral College. So while educational trends certainly accrue to her favor, to some extent they are washed away by geo-educational trends.

There’s no better illustration of this than the *New York Times* post-election map detailing the “Two Americas of 2016,”

which imagined separate nations whose geography was built upon the presidential results. Trump's America is a landmass pock-marked by large inland bodies of water such as the Selma Sea, Lake Flagstaff, and Austin Pond. Clinton's America, on the other hand is an archipelago of urban centers giving us Reno Island, the Carolina Islands, and a series of interconnected waterways, such as the Albany Narrows, the High Plains Seas, and Bakersfield Bay.³¹

Democrats should avoid overly relying upon their new coalition of demographic minorities at the expense of maintenance among the white working class. Such an unexpected loss by Clinton must surely smart enough for Democrats to learn this lesson, but then again, there's always the threat they overcorrect too much and neglect a group core to their future as a party. Still, what we seem to see happening here is a reorientation of each party, freshly sorted by education. We've certainly seen a shift in support among white college-educated voters more toward Democratic candidates, and a shift toward Republicans among white non-college-educated voters. This most recent election seems to have accelerated that shift.

We can see this is already manifesting itself in some of the issues and policies emphasized by campaigns. The Democratic primary had Bernie Sanders making college-debt forgiveness a centerpiece of his campaign, while Trump's rhetoric around job loss to Mexico and China spoke directly to the white working-class voters he did so well with. College campuses have always been a safe space for Democratic voter registration drives, election rallies, and volunteer recruitment; we'll likely see an expansion of this in the near term. Meanwhile, Republicans will continue to register, recruit, and gather voters on factory floors and VFW halls as an outgrowth of the success they've had among the white working class.

Education has emerged as one of the most forcefully formative demographics in American politics. It is consistently a top

predictor in the targeting models built by campaigns, was the lynchpin of the 2016 election, and served as the springboard to Trump taking office as the 45th president of the United States. As education becomes more and more powerful as a partisan sorting mechanism, we'll see more of these sorts of distinctions between the parties on this critical variable.

Age

The United States is about to get a whole lot older, and that's going to have serious consequences for our elections. Not only are people living longer lives, but the baby-boom generation has started to retire. We are bound for a big policy and political realignment around our aging population, so it's important that political strategists understand how represented different age groups are at the ballot box.

Since 1950, average life expectancy in the United States has gone from only 68 years to 79 years in 2013 thanks to incredible improvements in medicine that have greatly reduced mortality among seniors.³² This, coupled with the aging of the baby-boom generation, has grown the senior population dramatically. Indeed, every single day from now until 2030, 10,000 baby-boomers will turn 65.³³ To see a preview of what America will look like 20 years from now, take a trip to Florida, whose current population approximates the age profile we eventually expect to see nationwide. In 2014, there were about 46.2 million seniors representing 14.5 percent of the population, but by 2060, that number is expected to grow to 98 million seniors accounting for 21.7 percent of the population.³⁴ By that point, the 65-plus age group will be the second-largest group in the nation, barely behind those aged 45 to 64.

This aging is tangled up tightly with another demographic trend—the growing ethnic and racial diversity of younger generations. As mentioned earlier, we are well down the road toward being a nonwhite-majority country, but those retiring baby-boomers? Still majority-white. By 2048, we'll find ourselves a nation in which every age group except

seniors will be majority-minority, the logical endpoint of a growing diversity gap across age cohorts that's bound to impact our political system.

There wasn't always such a difference among age groups politically. The post-Nixon political era saw little distinction in party-support levels by age—51 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds supported Jimmy Carter in 1976, while seniors were only 4 points lower at 47 percent support. This rough alignment lasted through the 2000 election, when Al Gore held 48 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds and 50 percent of those 65 or older. The age gap emerged in 2004 when we saw a 7-point difference between the under-30 and over-65 age groups, and it grew to 21 points for Obama's first presidential election in 2008. In 2016, the gap remains, though it is not as pronounced: 45 percent of seniors voted for Clinton versus 55 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds.³⁵

A heavily Democratic youth presents a long-term challenge to Republicans, as an individual's vote preference has been shown to be highly related to both who was president when they turned 18 and who they pulled the lever for in their first presidential election. As an example, younger baby-boomers and older generation-X-ers who came of age during the Reagan and Bush presidencies were 5 points more likely to support Romney in the 2012 presidential election. Whereas younger generation-X-ers and older millennials (who turned 18 during the Clinton years) were 10 points more likely to support Obama in 2012.³⁶

The weight of one's coming-of-age era extends beyond the presidency at the time to the larger political and historical milieu as well. Two economists' investigation of the voter registration preferences of Californians who turned 18 just before and just after the September 11th attacks reveals just how profound and lasting an impact context can have on political allegiance. The study, by Ethan Kaplan and Sharun Mukand, found that voters who turned 18 just after the attacks were more likely to register as Republicans than

those who turned 18 just before them and that this difference persisted through at least 2008, even among those who moved and changed registration addresses.³⁷

So where then do things stand in regard to the representation of these age groups at the ballot box? Generally the States of Change data finds that younger age groups are getting smaller and less represented, while older age groups are getting larger and more over-represented. Young voters' under-representation goes back to 1980 and has only gotten worse over time—especially in midterm elections. Their smallest gap recently was in 2008, when their enthusiasm for Obama pushed their representation gap to only -5. It grew slightly in 2012 to -6, and, though it remains to be seen exactly how it moved in 2016, presumably it did not improve or we would be looking at a different outcome.

But it's not just the youngest voters who have become less represented over time—the 30 to 44 age cohort has gone from being over-represented from 1980 through the early 1990s to in notable decline over time. In 1980 and 1982, this group was over-represented by 1 point and 0.3 points; by 1994 and 1996, it dropped into negative territory and has not yet recovered.

On the other hand, the oldest groups have been over-represented and have maintained that over-representation for 36 years—especially in midterm elections. The senior population in particular has become more and more over-represented each year since 2010, hitting representation highs in each of the last two election cycles. Recall that this is happening as every other age group shrinks as a percentage of the population and seniors grow. The richly represented are becoming more richly represented.

Campaigns necessarily craft their actions specifically toward those most likely to vote. (Per the earlier discussion around the shape of the electorate, this is particularly the case for Republican campaigns.) This data tells us that, short of a

massive reversal among young people, campaigns will continue to orient themselves toward older generations. Campaigns are, after all, organizations that inherently inhabit the now, unconcerned about long-term trends. More permanent partisan institutions, on the other hand, should take a more specific interest in young voters given the long-term impact of party identification at a formative age. In other words, organizations like the Koch Brothers' grassroots network or the Republican National Committee should be doing whatever they can to rock the vote among young people.

Most of any concern among Republicans about focusing on millennials revolves around the conventional wisdom that young people aren't the best targets for conservatives. And yes, given the last few cycles, they aren't, but it's not always been the case that younger generations are more liberal: In 1994, there were actually more Republicans than Democrats among 18- to 29-year-olds.³⁸ Of course, there are broader contextual and demographic issues that exacerbate the Republicans' challenge there: Not only is there the generational impact of eight years of newly registered 18-year-olds under an Obama presidency, but they are also more educated and more diverse.

That's three pro-Democratic structural factors for Republicans to contend with. Add in some of the more eye-raising sociological stats of the millennial generation, and the conservative challenge only grows. Millennials are delaying their marriage age—in 2011, the median age of a person's first marriage was 28.7 for men and 26.5 for women, while in 1960, the median ages were 22.8 and 20.3 respectively.³⁹ Millennials are also more reluctant to strike out on their own: 40 percent of millennial men were living in their parents' homes in 2012, the highest share in modern history.⁴⁰ None of these are Republican-leaning trends—the GOP does better among married voters and homeowners. This of course just reinforces the importance of Republican efforts to capture the hearts and minds of younger voters, lest they risk losing a generation of voters.

Conclusion

This year, the foundation of the States of Change project is an implicit assertion that an electorate that looks more like the general population is a more desirable—indeed, a more democratic—outcome. The idea being that a more representative electorate creates favorable conditions toward more representative policy. It is an admirable goal. Unfortunately, it also runs counter to the goals of party politics. The ambitions of partisans are alternately more liberal or more conservative policies, rather than simply more representative ones.

Our elections are where these ideological battles are fought, and partisans seek to leverage every advantage they have to win. It makes sense then to bring political strategists and campaign consultants to this analysis, as we bring a unique perspective. Our job is not to strive for some platonic ideal of democracy. Our job is to win.

Our analysis of the States of Change data on representation should necessarily be clear-eyed about the motivations of electoral actors. Both sides of our two-party system are ideological agents that at best represent the views of only slightly more than half the country, and they compete in winner-take-all contests. Of course, among multiple races, a bicameral legislature, and the direct election of the executive, there are opportunities for our government to be more complex, more diverse, and more representative of our country.

But for any given race? There will be an ideological winner and loser. In order to win, the campaign will do what it must to shape the electorate in a way that is more favorable to their side. Representation gaps will be exploited. In other words, no one should be counting on political institutions and actors to close all representation gaps to zero. This is the reality of electoral politics, and the States of Change team is to be applauded for confronting this reality with a hefty dose of data on representation. Hopefully, then, it has been helpful

to see how Republican and Democratic campaign strategists think about these gaps in order to better understand their repercussions and how non-political institutions—at odds with the campaign strategists of the world—can adapt accordingly.

Of course, there are many more considerations when it comes to gaps of representation, well beyond even those discussed above. Those that were chosen were chosen for their importance along with their report-ability, and their ease of project-ability through the next decades. But there are dozens of other groups and segments of the electorate we could similarly investigate. Future analyses should consider the over-representativeness of rural voters, the impact of inter- and intra-state migration on political attitudes, the growing gender divide in which women are better-represented than men, the under-representation of lower- and middle-income voters, and the electoral staying power of highly religious voters.

Most immediately, however, we have to consider the geography of this new demography. We've seen in the above analysis how the current geography of over- and under-representation favors Republicans, but how might this change as boomers retire and the majority-minority pre-K population ages into the electorate? Over the next 50 years, the battleground map will distort and shift—indeed, it may already be happening.

The 2016 election saw Iowa and Ohio recede into the Republican column, while Nevada and Colorado may now be more decisively Democratic. We also had Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania reemerge as presidential battlegrounds. Though we won't know until the release of data in the spring, many of these shifts are likely thanks to shifts in the representation gaps of white and minority voters, coupled with educational differences. And there are more shifts to come. Given what we've seen in the data above, we can expect states like Georgia and Arizona to at some

point become more competitive, thanks to growing minority populations and closures of their representation gap closures.

Future analyses should also consider all these trends in the context of the rapid technological change we've faced since the turn of the century. Differential access and distinctive media and technology consumption by age, ethnicity, education, and other key segments mean a varied impact on things like ideology and electoral representativeness. For example, how might millennials' politics be impacted by being the first generation to become politically aware and active within the internet age? What does it mean for electoral-turnout patterns that mobile-web consumption is so much higher among minority communities than it is among whites? How might online and mail voting impact voter participation? Non-demographic factors like this are harder to foresee and therefore complicate any organization or institution's ability to do something about the representation gaps they may wish to close.

Ultimately, this year's States of Change data underscores that political parties are going to have to be adaptable in order to win during this looming period of massive demographic transformation. The data reinforce that there are structural advantages for the Republican Party, built-in through over-representation gaps of right-leaning demographic groups, but Democrats continue to have a massive opportunity among low-turnout groups that are under-represented. Moreover, these groups are not only under-represented, they are also growing, so there is quite a bit of opportunity there for Democrats if they can manage it effectively. So if Republicans want to prepare for a future where representation gaps are merely participatory, then they have to prepare for a more diverse electorate. Fortunately, Republicans are indeed planning for this future, despite the fact those plans will likely be useless—after all, the electorate does tend to punch us in the face from time to time. Hopefully, the next time it does, we'll be ready.

Figure 1. Electoral Grid for the State of Michigan in 2016

		Highest TO										Lowest TO
			0.97	0.95	0.92	0.86	0.73	0.59	0.49	0.38	0.32	0.28
Most GOP	Avg. Net Party	Bin	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
		0.55	1	138,012	109,353	63,350	24,441	22,869	5,295	2,808	3,204	365
	0.47	2	110,389	94,156	64,648	34,967	31,247	11,762	6,724	12,152	3,320	396
	0.42	3	86,440	79,277	66,274	44,089	38,206	19,491	11,841	15,552	7,360	1,231
	0.34	4	60,310	68,193	68,836	52,045	49,954	25,445	14,873	19,885	8,604	1,617
	0.24	5	32,541	37,505	40,185	40,962	48,536	36,897	27,445	39,645	33,646	32,399
	0.16	6	13,521	19,697	26,840	36,098	47,614	44,551	33,104	52,016	50,860	45,460
	0.10	7	9,361	14,711	22,695	33,996	42,719	44,281	33,547	54,024	57,132	57,296
	0.06	8	6,692	12,789	20,258	32,057	39,432	42,270	34,764	60,404	63,209	57,886
	0.03	9	6,244	11,796	20,081	32,121	39,376	41,957	38,923	58,112	60,531	60,620
	-0.01	10	6,105	11,678	19,955	32,023	38,319	41,541	56,445	55,673	56,043	51,979
	-0.04	11	6,105	11,197	16,201	25,087	34,094	37,054	104,204	50,114	43,245	42,461
	-0.09	12	6,136	10,596	14,342	22,776	32,080	67,896	99,113	47,037	38,488	31,297
	-0.16	13	8,269	11,570	14,406	23,357	33,069	80,539	75,392	47,951	38,900	36,308
	-0.27	14	12,925	16,267	22,227	33,031	40,087	42,821	40,716	55,349	51,385	54,954
	-0.39	15	17,167	21,189	27,208	35,027	36,493	39,507	38,369	43,687	49,853	61,261
	-0.49	16	21,545	23,154	28,529	37,414	33,688	38,210	34,914	39,889	51,463	60,955
	-0.56	17	28,042	30,331	39,353	44,639	33,678	36,486	30,341	32,961	48,046	45,885
	-0.63	18	37,683	41,734	50,704	47,933	32,884	30,336	22,670	22,257	36,435	47,125
	-0.67	19	66,814	53,412	49,785	43,190	31,303	24,907	16,775	18,776	26,967	37,832
Most DEM	-0.75	20	66,222	60,918	63,645	64,270	33,874	28,277	16,555	10,834	13,671	12,495

Source: Deep Root Analytics.

Voters are each assigned a score between 0 and 1 on three predictive models built by analytics professionals on the campaign: likelihood to vote, likelihood to support the Republican Party, and the likelihood to support the Democratic Party. Voters are then binned into equal-sized groups based on those scores—ten for the likelihood to vote and 20 for their Republican partisanship. For each of the 20 Republican groups, their average score on the Democratic model is subtracted from their average score on the Republican model, creating a NET party score. The 20 bins are then re-sorted and re-labeled to run from the most Republican to the least Republican. The left-most cells, colored red to blue, display that net party score for each bin. The cells in green, running from left to right, display the average turnout score for each of the ten turnout bins. Each cell displays the number of registered voters at the intersection of each model's bin.

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Notes

Notes



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