

## **The Emerging Democratic Majority: Prospects and Problems**

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After the 2004 election, many on the center-left in the US were strikingly pessimistic about the Democratic party's future prospects. Retaking control of the Congress seemed out of reach given the advantages of incumbency and a Republican mobilization machine that was widely viewed as both more effective and more ruthless than that of the Democrats. Perhaps if the Democrats built up their strength and fought hard in the next round of reapportionment, retaking Congress might be possible next decade. But it was foolish to expect success much sooner than that.

As for the Presidency, that seemed more possible, but Democrats worried that Republicans had a lock not just on the south but on a wide swathe of culturally conservative states in the plains, southwest, mountain west and midwest. The GOP's demonstrated ability to mobilize voters in these states with a conservatism that melded national security and cultural concerns was thought to offer the Democrats little chance of expanding the electoral map in their favor. The most Democrats could hope for was to re-fight the battle of Ohio again in 2008 and hope that this time they won.

But even at the time there were strong arguments to be made that this take on the Democrats' prospects was unduly pessimistic. An alternative line of analysis suggested that the Republicans' strength was vastly exaggerated, tied to an event (September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001) whose political salience would decline over time. This decline would eventually expose their weakness as a political party whose philosophy and program were remarkably out of step with demographic and geographic shifts that have been transforming the American electorate.

As it turned out, Democrats did not have to wait long to see which line of analysis was more plausible. The 2006 election results, where the Democrats retook Congress and made significant gains in a wide range of swing and GOP-leaning states, showed quite clearly that the GOP is a party on the ropes and that the Democrats are a party in ascendance. Since then, the political situation has only worsened for the GOP and improved for the Democrats. I describe below the various trends that underlie the Democrats' ascendance, as well as the factors that could pose obstacles to Democratic success, both electorally and in terms of governance (which in the long run are not unrelated).

### ***Building Blocks of the Democratic Majority: Strengths***

#### *Minority Communities*

Racial and ethnic minorities are probably the single strongest element of the emerging Democratic coalition. In 2000, Gore carried the minority vote by 75-23 and even in John Kerry's losing 2004 effort, he still carried the minority vote by 71 percent to 27 percent. In that election, minorities were, according to the exit polls, 23 percent of the overall vote. However, the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voter Supplement data tell a somewhat different story,

putting the minority vote at around 21 percent of the electorate. The CPS are, in my view, more reliable, which would still indicate that the minority vote will grow to around a quarter of presidential voters by the middle of the decade. That compares to around 15 percent of voters in the early 1990's when Bill Clinton was first elected.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, maintaining these high levels of support among minority communities is crucial to Democrats' future prospects. And in the most recent election, 2006, they did just that, carrying the minority Congressional vote by 77-22<sup>2</sup>. Prospects for 2008 and beyond can be assessed by breaking down the minority vote into its three major components: blacks; Hispanics and Asians.

**African American voters.** Black voters are the most reliable Democratic constituency. In the 2004 election, Kerry had an 88 percent to 11 percent margin among blacks, down only slightly from the 90 percent to 9 percent margin for Gore in 2000. In fact, except for 2000 and Mondale's 1984 campaign, Kerry's margin among blacks is the highest obtained by a Democratic candidate since the exit polls started in 1976<sup>3</sup>.

And in 2006, Democrats carried the black Congressional vote by 89-10, identical to their performance in 2004. In 2002, the margin was 90-9 and in 2000, it was 88-11. So black support of blacks for the Democrats this decade has not only been overwhelming but rock steady.

In the last several elections, blacks have been about 10-11 percent of the overall electorate. Population growth trends indicate that the black percentage of the overall population will change little in the next ten years, so we should not expect the black percentage of voters to change much either.<sup>4</sup>

**Hispanic voters.** Hispanic voters, while strong for Democrats, are not nearly as strong as blacks, and have famously been more volatile in their support. In the 2004 election, it was initially reported that they gave Bush 44 percent of their vote. However, that initial exit poll figure is now widely acknowledged to have been flawed and the generally accepted estimate is that Kerry carried Hispanics by a 58-40 margin.<sup>5</sup> Still, that represented a significant improvement of 5 points in Bush's support among Hispanics over 2000 and a substantial compression of the Democratic margin among this group.

There has been much debate about the causes of this shift. Probably the best treatment of the issue was done by political scientists Marisa Abrajano, Michael Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler<sup>6</sup>, whose thorough analysis of 2004 exit poll data indicates that the national security and moral values pull toward the GOP outweighed the economy, health care and education pull toward the Democrats for an unusually large proportion of Hispanic voters. This can be illustrated by the

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<sup>1</sup> Author's analysis of CPS and exit poll data.

<sup>2</sup> Author's analysis of 2006 NEP exit poll.

<sup>3</sup> All data in this and subsequent paragraph from author's analysis of 1976-2006 NEP exit polls.

<sup>4</sup> This and other population projections figures data by race/ethnic group from authors' analysis of Census projections data

<sup>5</sup> See Ruy Teixeira, <http://www.emergingdemocraticmajorityweblog.com/donkeyrising/archives/001234.php>, for references and discussion.

<sup>6</sup> "The Hispanic Vote in the 2004 Presidential Election: Insecurity and Moral Concerns", December, 2005

fact that Bush had a 13 point advantage among Hispanics on being trusted to handle terrorism, while Kerry's advantage among Hispanics on being trusted to handle the economy was a more modest 5 points.<sup>7</sup> These figures underscore the extent to which Democratic appeals to Hispanics fell short in that election.

There has been even more debate about the long-term significance of Bush's 40 percent showing among Hispanics. Abrajano, Alvarez and Nagler find no evidence that a specific cultural issue like abortion is realigning Hispanics nor do they find evidence for the "economic advancement" hypothesis—that as Hispanics, particularly second and third generation Hispanics, are becoming richer as a group, this is moving them toward the GOP.

It is also worth noting that, if you compare the two Bush elections of 2000 and 2004 to the two Reagan elections of 1980 and 1984, the average level of Hispanic support for the Democrats in the Bush elections has actually been slightly higher than in the Reagan elections<sup>8</sup>. And in the next election following Reagan's relatively good performances among Hispanics—1988—the Hispanic presidential vote moved sharply Democratic, to 69–30.

Interestingly, the latter figures exactly match the Democrats' support among Hispanics in the 2006 Congressional election. Looking forward to 2008, indications are that Hispanic support for Democrats should be in that range, rather than the 2004 range. In a November, 2007 poll nationwide poll of Hispanics conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, Democrats had a party identification advantage of 34 points, up from 21 points in June of 2006. In addition, the Democrats had a 36 point advantage on which party has more concern for Latinos and a 27 point advantage on which party is doing a better job dealing with illegal immigration.

A January, 2008 Democracy Corps poll of Hispanic voters in four interior west states (Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico) and California had even stronger findings. In this survey, Democrats had a 52 point leaned party ID advantage, with a 54 point lead in a generic Presidential matchup (47 points in the interior west and 57 points in California). Democrats are also favored for Congress by 43 points. And Democrats were strongly preferred by Hispanics on a very wide range of issues: 60 points on understanding the concerns of Hispanics; 47 points on immigration; 43 points on the economy; 42 points on Iraq; 37 points on taxes; 26 points on abortion; 25 points on national security and 23 points on gay marriage.

If Democrats can hold this group's support, demographic trends assure them of greater electoral benefits in years to come. The Hispanic population is growing rapidly, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a share of the US population. Before 1980, the Census did not even record Hispanic origin when it surveyed the country's residents. Today, Hispanics have surpassed

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<sup>7</sup> Author's analysis of 2004 NEP national exit poll data.

<sup>8</sup> If you do an apples-to-apples comparison of data; see Ruy Teixeira, <http://www.emergingdemocraticmajorityweblog.com/donkeyrising/archives/001227.php>, for analysis and discussion.

blacks as the nation's largest minority group and the latest Census estimates indicate that there are about 45 million Hispanics in the US, 15 percent of the nation's population<sup>9</sup>.

This rapid increase in demographic importance will continue for decades. The Hispanic population has grown by 32 percent since 2000 and has accounted for about half of US population growth this decade<sup>10</sup>. Census projections indicate, in fact, that by about mid-century Hispanics will be one-quarter of the US population (at which point or shortly thereafter, the US will become a majority-minority nation).

Of course, it is true that the population strength of Hispanics is not currently matched by its voting strength, due to the large proportion of Hispanics who aren't citizens and therefore can't vote or are simply too young to vote. For example, of the 5.7 million Hispanics added to the US population between 2000 and 2004, 1.7 million were under 18 and 1.9 million were non-citizens. As a result of these factors, only 39 percent of Hispanics overall are eligible to vote, compared to 77 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 66 percent of blacks.<sup>11</sup>

Still, the proportion of Hispanics among the voting electorate has grown steadily and will continue to grow. Only 2 percent of voters in early 1990's, they are now somewhere in the 6-8 percent range and within ten years may be approaching blacks as a proportion of actual voters.<sup>12</sup>

**Asian voters.** Asians over the last 15 years or so have become a fairly solid Democratic constituency. In the 2004 election, they supported Kerry over Bush by a 56-44 percent margin, similar to the margin they gave Gore over Bush (55-41 percent) in 2000. And in the 2002 Congressional election, when much of the electorate was going in the opposite direction, Asians actually increased their support dramatically for House Democrats going from 56-44 percent Democratic in 1998 to 66-34 2002. In the 2006 Congressional election, Asians remained strong for the Democrats at 62-37<sup>13</sup>.

If you look at rate of growth, Asians were America's fastest-growing minority group—faster even than Hispanics—in the 1990's (59.4 percent to 57.9 percent in the 1990s). And in this decade, they have not been far behind (30 percent vs. 32 percent for Hispanics). Right now they are 5 percent of the population and about 2 percent of voters.<sup>14</sup> Both figures will increase in the next ten years, due to this group's fast rate of growth, but because they start from a much smaller base than Hispanics, their impact on the population and voting pool will be far more limited.

### *Single, Working and Highly-Educated Women*

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<sup>9</sup> William H. Frey, "Race, Immigration and America's Changing Electorate", paper presented at Brookings-American Enterprise Institute conference on The Future of Red, Blue and Purple America, Washington, DC, February 28, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Frey, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Roberto Suro, Richard Fry and Jeffrey Passel, "Hispanics and the 2004 Election: Population, Electorate and Voters," Pew Hispanic Center, June, 2005 and Frey, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Author's analysis of CPS and exit poll data.

<sup>13</sup> Author's analysis of 2000-2006 exit poll data.

<sup>14</sup> Author's analysis of CPS and exit poll data and Frey, op. cit.

As is well-known, Democrats typically do better among women than men. But women voters are a vast group and the true areas of strength for Democrats are among three subgroups: single, working and highly-educated women. In the 2004 election, Kerry carried single women by 62-37, college-educated women by 54-45 (including 60-38 among those with a postgraduate education) and working women by 51-48.<sup>15</sup>

All of these margins, however, were smaller than they were in 2000, particularly in the case of working women, where Kerry's margin among working women was no better than his margin among women as a whole. This was primarily attributable to his poor performance among *married* working women, part of the Democrats' general problem with married women voters in that election. Single working women, however, remained a very strong progressive constituency, with Democrats dominating by a 65-35 margin<sup>16</sup>.

In 2006, Democrats generally did better among these constituencies, carrying single women by 66-33 and college-educated women by 57-42<sup>17</sup>. It is likely they also did better among working women, but, since the exit polls did not ask a work status question, this possibility could not be tested directly..

While the balance of women relative to men is changing little, of course, trends within the female population are quite favorable to Democrats. Single women are now almost half—46 percent—of adult women, up from 38 percent in 1970.<sup>18</sup> (GET LATEST DATA). Their current size in the voter pool—more than a quarter of eligible voters—closely approximates the size of white evangelicals, the GOP's largest base group. And since the current growth rate of single women is so fast—double that of married women—the proportion of single women in the voting pool will continue to increase<sup>19</sup>

And there is every expectation that this burgeoning population of single women will continue to resolutely Democratic in its politics. Survey data consistently show this group to be unusually populist on economic issues and generally opposed to the conservative agenda on foreign policy and social issues.<sup>20</sup>

Single, working women tend to be a particularly progressive group among single women, as indicated by data cited earlier. They are also a rapidly growing group, growing from 19 percent of the adult, female population in 1970 to 29 percent today.<sup>21</sup> GET LATEST FIGURES That is even faster than the growth among single women as a whole.

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<sup>15</sup> Figures in this and next paragraph, authors' analysis of 2004 NEP exit poll data.

<sup>16</sup> Author's analysis of 2004 NEP exit poll.

<sup>17</sup> Author's analysis of 2006 NEP exit poll.

<sup>18</sup> Authors' analysis of Census marital status data.

<sup>19</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, "A New America: Unmarrieds Drive Political and Social Change", October 31, 2007..

<sup>20</sup> See Women's Voices. Women Vote, "Women in Unmarried America", 2007 GET FULL CITE.

<sup>21</sup> Authors' analysis of Census marital status data.

Finally, college-educated women are also a rapidly growing population group. They have grown from just 8 percent of the 25-and-older, female population in 1970 to 24 percent today.<sup>22</sup> GET LATEST FIGURES

Clearly, these groups of women will be a critical part of a progressive majority coalition; equally clearly, the weakest link here is married working women who performed so poorly for the Democrats in 2004. The reasons are probably similar to those that held down Democratic margins among Hispanics: national security and moral concerns that moved many of these women toward the GOP more than economic, health care and education concerns moved them toward the Democrats. In fact, among many of these women it apparently wasn't much of a contest: among married working women, 54 percent said they trusted Bush to handle the economy, compared to 40 percent who said they trusted Kerry. And on handling terrorism, 63 percent said they trusted Bush, compared to 37 percent who said they trusted Kerry.<sup>23</sup>

### *Professionals*

In the last 15-20 years, professionals have become a very strong Democratic constituency, something they decidedly were not in earlier eras. In the 1960 presidential election, for example, professionals supported Nixon over Kennedy 61 percent to 38 percent. But in the 1988-2000 presidential elections, professionals supported the Democratic candidate by an average of 52 percent to 40 percent. And in 2004, they just moved farther in this direction, supporting Kerry over Bush by a 63-37 margin.<sup>24</sup> In 2006, exit poll data—using postgraduates as a proxy for professionals—suggest that professionals' support for Democrats was once again at record high levels<sup>25</sup>.

This is especially good for progressives because professionals are a rising group in American politics and society. In the 1950s they made up about 7 percent of the workforce. But as the United States has moved away from a blue-collar, industrial economy toward a postindustrial one that produces ideas and services, the professional class has expanded. Today it constitutes just under 17 percent of the workforce. In another 10 years, they will be 18-19 percent of the workforce.<sup>26</sup> GET LATEST FIGURES

Moreover, reflecting their very high turnout rates, they are an even larger percent of voters—and not just of employed voters, but of voters as a whole. Nationally, they account for about 21 percent of voters; in many Northeastern and Far Western states, they form probably one-quarter of the electorate.<sup>27</sup>

### *The Millennial Generation*

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<sup>22</sup> Authors' analysis of Census educational attainment data.

<sup>23</sup> Authors' analysis of 2004 NEP exit poll data.

<sup>24</sup> Authors' analysis of 1960-2004 National Election Study data.

<sup>25</sup> Author's analysis of 2006 NEP exit poll data.

<sup>26</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational projections.

<sup>27</sup> John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, Scribner, 2002; authors' analysis of 2004 National Election Study data.

The Millennial generation is even larger than the Baby Boom generation. This is true no matter what definition you use. (A young generation often does not have a common name and clear start/end dates until a consensus emerges among demographers and social commentators over time.) For example, if you start Millennials in birth year 1978, after the “baby bust”(which Generation X is typically linked to) had ended and an era of steadily rising births had begun, and continue to 2000—as is common in market research—the size of this generation is truly staggering: 95 million (though only about half are adults) out of a population of 300 million, compared to 78 million Boomers. By 2018, Millennials, by this definition, will be 100 million strong and they will all be old enough to vote. Even taking citizenship into account, there will still be 90 million citizen-eligible Millennial voters<sup>28</sup>.

But even if you use 1996 as the last birth year for the Millennials, so that the number of birth years covered by this generation is the same as that covered by the Baby Boom (1978-1996 vs. 1946-64), this generation is still larger than the Boomers: 80 million today and 83 million by 2016, when the tail end of the generation votes in their first presidential election.

The great size of the Millennial Generation is partly because many are children of the Boomers (the “echo boom”). The size of the generation is also boosted by the children of the unprecedented numbers of immigrants in the last several decades. The Millennials are the most diverse generation by far. According to March, 2006 Census data, only 61 percent of Millennial adults are nonhispanic white, 18 percent are Hispanic, 14 percent are black and 5 percent are asian.

Similar to the Boomers, the Millennials are poised to impact the country at every life stage and in myriad ways - but particularly in politics. By 2008, the numbers of citizen-eligible Millennial voters will be nearing 50 million. By the presidential election of 2016, Millennials will be a third or more of the citizen-eligible electorate, and roughly 30 percent of actual voters<sup>29</sup>—and this is making no assumptions about possible increased turnout rates among Millennials in the future, which could make their weight among actual voters higher. Moreover, from that point on, the Millennials’ share of actual voters will rise steadily for several decades as more and more of the generation enter middle age.

On the level of sheer partisan politics, the increased numbers of Millennials in the voting pool could have substantial effects, since they have voted more heavily Democratic than other generations in their first few elections. For example, in 2006, 18-29 year olds overall voted 60-38 Democratic for Congress, with the 18-24 year old group going 58-37 Democratic (note how similar the strength of Democratic support is between the smaller group of Millennials and the larger group, implying that 25-29 year olds—transition Millennials—did not vote terribly differently from their early Millennial counterparts). In 2004, 18-29 year olds (dominated by the 18-26 year olds who qualify as Millennials) voted 54-45 Democratic for president (55-44 for the House). But note here that 18-24 year olds—Millennials all—voted 56-43 Democratic for president while the older 25-29 year old group—mostly *not* Millennials voted only 51-48

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<sup>28</sup> All data in this and subsequent paragraph from author’s analysis of Census population projections.

<sup>29</sup> Author’s analysis of Census population projections and 2004 Current Population Survey voter supplement data.

Democratic. Even in 2002, a terrible Democratic year, 18-24 year olds (the first time Millennials constituted this group) still voted Democratic 49-47<sup>30</sup>.

In an early 2007 Pew survey, 48 percent of 18-25 year old Millennials identified with or leaned toward the Democratic party, compared to just 35 percent who identified with or leaned toward the Republicans. The latter figure represents a huge crash in support for the Republicans among this age group—Gen Xers of the earlier ‘90s of this age were identifying at a 55 percent rate with Republicans.

Gen Xers continue to be the most Republican generation today, while the Millennials are emerging as the most Democratic generation by a substantial margin. Other polls of Millennials or Millennial-dominated age groups confirm this solid Democratic lead in party ID. Indeed, on election day in 2006, the exit polls showed the Democrats with a 12 point lead on party ID among 18-29 year old voters<sup>31</sup>. And polls taken since then typically give the Democrats even larger leads on party ID among this age group—Pew had the Democratic advantage at an astonishing 25 points in data covering October, 2007-March, 2008—as well as very substantial leads on generic Presidential and Congressional vote intentions for 2008. Numerous political science studies confirm that party identifications and associated voting behavior, once formed in a generation’s twenties, tend to persist over the life course.

#### *The Secular, the Less-Observant and the Non-Christian*

It is a commonplace in American politics today that the highly observant—especially evangelical Christians—are a bedrock conservative constituency. Less well-appreciated is the extent to which the secular, the less-observant and the non-Christian are a bedrock Democratic constituency.

In the 2004 election, Kerry carried those who attend religious services a few times a year by 54-45 and those who never attend by 62-36. And he carried all non-Christian groups by very wide margins: Jews (77-22); Muslims (74-25); those who profess some other religion (72-25); and those who profess no religion (67-31).<sup>32</sup> Democratic support among these groups was even stronger in the 2006 election: those who attend religious services a few times a year (60-38); those who never attend (67-30), Jews (87-12); those who profess some other religion (71-25); and those who profess no religion (74-22)<sup>33</sup>.

According to the 2004 exit polls, non-Christians were 20 percent of voters and the less-observant were 43 percent of voters in 2004 (the latter figure, incidentally, is exactly equal to the percent of voters who were highly observant). Both figures are likely to go up in the future. In the University of Chicago’s General Social Survey (GSS), those who attend church *only once a year*

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<sup>30</sup> Author’s analysis of 2002-2006 exit poll data.

<sup>31</sup> Author’s analysis of 2006 NEP exit poll data.

<sup>32</sup> Authors’ analysis of 2004 NEP exit poll data, except for the figure on Jews, which is taken from Mark Mellman, Aaron Strauss, Anna Greenberg, Patrick McCreesh and Kenneth D. Wald, “The Jewish Vote in 2004: An Analysis”, The Solomon Project, April, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Author’s analysis of 2006 NEP exit poll data.

*or less* is now 38 percent of adults, up from 29 percent in 1972. And in CUNY's American Religious Identification Survey, non-Christians grew by 84 percent (from 20 million to 37 million adults) between 1990 and 2001, including an astonishing increase of 106 percent (from 14 million to 29 million) among the purely secular. GET LATEST FIGURES

### *Union Household Voters*

Union household voters have been a consistently strong constituency for progressives and the 2004 election was no exception. These voters supported Kerry by 59-40. Moreover, they made up an impressive 24 percent of the voting pool.<sup>34</sup> In 2006, union households did even better for the Democrats, supporting them by 64-34, while making up a similarly high share (23 percent) of voters<sup>35</sup>.

A careful look at data from different sources suggests that this latter figure has remained fairly stable for the last couple of decades<sup>36</sup> and simply keeping the proportion of union household voters at around a quarter of the electorate is a significant accomplishment.

However, there is little potential here for growth of the union vote, since it is already so highly mobilized. Of course, if union density starts to rise again, then increases in the union vote might indeed be possible. Democrats would therefore appear to have a strong interest in supporting labor law reform and other efforts to boost union organizing.

### *"Blue" States and Regions*

In the last four elections, the Democrats have carried 18 states (CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, NJ, NY, OR, PA, RI, VT, WA, WI) and DC for a total of 248 electoral voters (EVs). Should all these states be considered part of the Democratic base?

It's certainly non-trivial that each of these states has supported the Democratic candidate for president four times running—Clinton twice, then Gore, then Kerry. That shows considerable loyalty to a basically Democratic vision of where the country should go. But, as is well-known, some of these states have been much, much closer than others and the subjects of a very vigorous competition between the parties.

One way of quantifying this distinction is to average the Democratic margin in the last two presidential elections and assign those where the average margin has been over 5 points to the progressive base and those under 5 points to a more contested or "purple" category. This procedure gives intuitively pleasing results: the northeast corridor (without NH, which is not on the above list, and PA, which is usually thought of as more of a Midwestern state) and the west coast (without OR) plus Illinois are assigned to the progressive base and four of the five Midwestern states listed above (MI, MN, PA, WI) plus Oregon are assigned to the purple category.

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<sup>34</sup> Authors' analysis of 2004 NEP exit poll data.

<sup>35</sup> Author's analysis of 2006 NEP exit poll data.

<sup>36</sup> Richard B. Freeman, "What Do Union Do.....to Voting?" NBER Working Paper 9992, September, 2003.

The leaves us with a narrower, but probably more accurate, definition of the Democratic base as including 13 states (CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, ME, MD, MA NJ, NY, RI, VT, WA) plus DC with 183 EVs and a purple shading blue category of five states (MI, MN, OR, PA, WI) with 65 EVs.

Results from the 2006 election indicate that the purple leaning blue states are becoming bluer. In Michigan, Democrats carried the Congressional vote 53-45 and gained control of the state house; in Minnesota, Democrats carried the Congressional vote 57-42, gained a US House seat and took control of the state house, giving them unified control of the state legislature; in Oregon, Democrats carried the Congressional vote 56-41 and took control of the state house, giving them unified control of the state legislature; in Pennsylvania, Democrats carried the Congressional vote 56-43, gained a US Senate seat, gained a stunning four seats in the US House and took control of the state house; and in Wisconsin, Democrats picked up a US House seat and gained control of the state senate.

### *Cities, Inner Suburbs and “Ideopolises”*

By and large, Democrats are strongest in the cities and inner suburbs and in the more technically advanced metro areas of the country (“ideopolises”).<sup>37</sup> Conversely, the farther away you get from the urban core—into outer (“emerging”) suburbs, true exurbs<sup>38</sup> and rural counties—and the less technically advanced the general area, the weaker progressives tend to be.

For example, we can look at the 50 largest metro areas of the country—where 53 percent of the US population lives—and break down the counties by degree to which they are urban, using a classification scheme developed by Virginia Tech’s Metropolitan Institute (MI).<sup>39</sup> Using this scheme, Kerry carried core counties of these areas 73-26, inner suburbs of these areas by 57-42 and “mature suburbs” (which tend to be somewhat farther out and less dense than the inner suburbs) by 52-47 percent.<sup>40</sup> But Kerry lost the “emerging suburbs” and true exurbs of these areas by 56-43 percent and 62-37 percent, respectively (I shall have more to say about emerging suburbs and true exurbs in the next section of this paper, when I discuss Democratic weaknesses).

Democrats did better across the board in these areas in 2006. They received 76 percent of the vote in core counties, 59 percent in inner suburbs and 55 percent in mature suburbs, the areas that typically lean Democratic. And they received 45 percent of the vote in emerging suburbs and 42 percent in true exurbs, the areas that typically lean Republican.

Kerry also carried technically advanced ideopolis areas 55-44 and lost the rest of the country 56-43. And, if you combine the MI classification with the ideopolis classification, you get results

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<sup>37</sup> See Judis and Teixeira, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> For discussion of the distinction between emerging suburbs and true exurbs, see Ruy Teixeira, “The Next Frontier: A New Study of Exurbia”, New Politics Institute, March, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> See Robert E. Lang and Thomas W. Sanchez, “The New Metro Politics: Interpreting Recent Presidential Elections Using a County-Based Regional Typology”, Metropolitan Institute 2006 Election Brief, Virginia Tech, February, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> All data here and in rest of the section from author’s analysis of 2004 and 2006 county election returns.

that accord exactly with the tendencies summarized above. In ideopolis core counties, Kerry led Bush 75-25 percent, compared to a 55-44 percent lead in non-ideopolis core counties. Similarly, Kerry carried ideopolis inner suburbs by 58-41 percent, compared to 54-45 percent in non-ideopolis inner suburbs, and carried ideopolis mature suburbs by 53-46 percent, while actually losing non-ideopolis mature suburbs by 52-47 percent.

The same patterns apply to the groups of states I described above—the Democratic base and purple leaning blue states. In each group of states, Democrats do best in cities, inner suburbs, mature suburbs and technologically advanced areas and less well in emerging suburbs, true exurbs, rural counties and less technically advanced areas. For example, in Democratic base states, Kerry carried core urban counties by 75-24 percent, inner suburbs by 60-39 percent and mature suburbs by 55-44 percent, while losing emerging suburbs 51-48 percent and true exurbs 58-41 percent.

## ***Building Blocks of the Democratic Majority: Weaknesses***

### *The White Working Class*

The key weakness of the emerging Democratic coalition can be summarized easily: very weak support among white working class voters (defined here as whites without a four-year college degree). These voters, who are overwhelmingly of moderate to low income and, by definition, of modest credentials, should see their aspirations linked tightly to the political fate of the Democratic party. But they don't. Instead, the white working class, as it has declined in numbers, has shifted its allegiance from largely Democratic to largely Republican. Here is the story of that decline and political shift.

Let's start with the basic numbers on the size of the white working class in the World War II era and the size of the white working class today. Using the broad education-based definition above, America in 1940 was an overwhelmingly white working class country. In that year, 86 percent of adults 25 and over were whites without a four year college degree. By 2007, with the dramatic rise in educational attainment and the decline in the white population, that percentage was down to 48 percent<sup>41</sup>.

A similar trend can be seen using a narrow education-based definition. In 1940, 82 percent of adults 25 and over were whites with a high school diploma or less. By 2007, that figure was down to 29 percent.

Turning to a broad occupation-based definition, in 1940, 74 percent of employed workers were whites without professional or managerial jobs. By 2006, the steady climb in professional and managerial jobs, combined with the decline in the white population, had brought that percentage down to 43 percent<sup>42</sup>.

A narrow occupation-based definition yields a decline of similar magnitude. In 1940, 58 percent of workers were whites without professional, managerial or clerical-sales jobs (or looked at another way, whites who held manual, service or farm jobs). By 2006, that figure had fallen to 25 percent.

The final class indicator to look at is income. Using a broad income-based definition of the white working class, 86 percent of American families in 1947 were white families with less than \$60,000 in income (2005 dollars). With rising affluence—especially rapid in the period from 1947 to 1973—and the decline in the white population, that percentage had declined to 33 percent by 2005<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Data in this and following paragraph from authors' analysis of 1940 Census data and 2007 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data.

<sup>42</sup> Data in this and following paragraph from authors' analysis of 1940 Census data and 2006 American Community Survey occupation data.

<sup>43</sup> Data in this and following paragraph from authors' analysis of 1947 and 2005 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement income data.

Using a narrow income-based definition, 60 percent of families in 1947 were white families with less than \$30,000 in income. That figure had dropped to 14 percent by 2005.

So each indicator that can be used to define the white working class, whether applied broadly or narrowly, shows huge declines from the World War II era to today—declines roughly in the 30-50 percentage point range. The income-based definitions show the sharpest declines and the occupation-based definitions the least, with the education-based definitions somewhere in between. And in each case, these shifts have moved the white working class from being the solid and sometimes overwhelming majority of US adults (or workers or families) to being a minority.

But the story of the white working class in the post World War II era is not just one of sharp decline but also one of profound transformation. This is true no matter what indicator one uses to define the white working class. That is, whether one looks at white families with less than \$60,000 income, whites who do not hold professional-managerial jobs or whites without a four year college degree, there have been dramatic shifts in the character and composition of the white working class.

Consider the following shifts among whites without a four year college degree. In 1940, 86 percent of these working class whites had never graduated from high school (or even reached high school). But today just 14 percent of the white working class are high school dropouts. About two-fifths have some education beyond high school, with 13 percent having achieved an associate degree<sup>44</sup>. (Note, however, that the economic situation of those with an associate degree is very similar to those with some college, but no degree: the median household income of whites with an associate degree is only a few thousand dollars more than those with some college only<sup>45</sup>).

While data unavailability preclude a precise estimate, the economic situation of the white working class has altered dramatically. A reasonable guess is that median family income among the white working class rose from around \$20,000 to \$50,000 between 1947 and 2005, a 150 percent increase.

And the jobs the white working class holds have also altered dramatically. Today, most white working class jobs are not manual or blue-collar, but are rather in low-level white collar (technical, sales, clerical) and service occupations. And the blue collar jobs that remain are increasingly likely to be skilled positions: only about a sixth of the white working class holds unskilled blue-collar jobs (even among white working class *men*, the figure is less than one-quarter)<sup>46</sup>.

Today, only about a sixth of the white working class holds manufacturing jobs (even among

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<sup>44</sup> Authors' analysis of 1940 Census data and 2007 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement education data.

<sup>45</sup> Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters*. New York: Basic, 2000, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Data in this and following paragraph are conservative extrapolations from Teixeira and Rogers, p. 16-17.

men, the proportion is still less than one-quarter). In fact, the entire goods-producing sector, which includes construction, mining and agriculture, as well as manufacturing, provides less than three in ten white working class jobs. This leaves the overwhelming majority—over seven in ten-- in the service sector, including government. There are about as many members of the white working class working in trade alone (especially retail) as there are in all goods-producing jobs.

Accompanying the decline and transformation of the white working class was a very significant shift in their political orientation, from pro-Democratic in most respects to pro-Republican, especially on the presidential level. The story of this shift away from the Democratic Party starts with the New Deal Democrats and their close relationship with the white working class.

The New Deal Democratic worldview was based on a combination of the Democrats' historic populist commitment to the average working American and their experience in battling the Great Depression (and building their political coalition) through increased government spending and regulation and the promotion of labor unions. It was really a rather simple philosophy, even if the application of it was complex. Government should help the average person through vigorous government spending. Capitalism needs regulation to work properly. Labor unions are good. Putting money in the average person's pocket is more important than rarified worries about the quality of life. Traditional morality is to be respected, not challenged. Racism and the like are bad, but not so bad that the party should depart from its main mission of material uplift for the average American.

That worldview had deep roots in an economy dominated by mass production industries and was politically based among the workers, overwhelmingly white, in those industries. And it helped make the Democrats the undisputed party of the white working class. Their dominance among these voters was, in turn, the key to their political success. To be sure, there were important divisions among these voters—by country of origin (German, Scandinavian, Eastern European, English, Irish, Italian, etc.), by religion (Protestants vs. Catholics), and by region (South vs. non-South)—that greatly complicated the politics of this group, but New Deal Democrats mastered these complications and maintained a deep base among these voters.

Of course, the New Deal Coalition as originally forged did include most blacks and was certainly cross-class, especially among groups like Jews and southerners. But the prototypical member of the coalition was indeed an ethnic white worker—commonly visualized as working in a unionized factory, but also including those who weren't in unions or who toiled in other blue collar settings (construction, transportation, etc.). It was these voters who provided the numbers for four FDR election victories and Harry Truman's narrow victory in 1948 and who provided political support for the emerging U.S. welfare state, with its implicit social contract and greatly expanded role for government.

Even in the 1950's, with Republican Dwight Eisenhower as President, the white working class continued to put Democrats in Congress and to support the expansion of the welfare state, as a roaring U.S. economy delivered the goods and government poured money into roads, science, schools and whatever else seemed necessary to build up the country. This era, stretching back into the late 40's and forward to the mid-60's, was the era that created the first mass middle class

in the world—a middle class that even factory workers could enter, since they could earn relatively comfortable livings even without high levels of education or professional skills. A middle class, in other words, that members of the white working class could reasonably aspire to and frequently attain.

So New Deal Democrats depended on the white working class for political support and the white working class depended on the Democrats to run government and the economy in a way that kept that upward escalator to the middle class moving. Social and cultural issues were not particularly important to this mutually beneficial relationship; indeed they had only a peripheral role in the uncomplicated progressivism that animated the Democratic party of the '30s, '40s and '50s. But that arrangement and that uncomplicated progressivism could not and did not survive the decline of mass production industries and the rise of postindustrial capitalism.

First, there was the transformation of the white working class itself, discussed in detail above. The white working class became richer, more educated, more white collar and less unionized (to get a sense of how important the latter factor was, consider the fact that, in the late 1940s, unions claimed around 60 percent or more of the Northern blue-collar workforce<sup>47</sup>).

Second, as this great transformation was changing the character of the white working class, reducing the size and influence of the Democrats' traditional blue-collar constituencies, the evolution of postindustrial capitalism was creating new constituencies and movements with new demands. These new constituencies and movements wanted more out of the welfare state than steady economic growth, copious infrastructure spending and the opportunity to raise a family in the traditional manner.

During the Sixties, these new demands on the welfare state came to a head. Americans' concern about their quality of life overflowed from the two-car garage to clean air and water and safe automobiles; from higher wages to government guaranteed health care in old age; and from access to jobs to equal opportunities for men and women and blacks and whites. Out of these concerns came the environmental, consumer, civil rights and feminist movements of the Sixties. As Americans abandoned the older ideal of self-denial and the taboos that accompanied it, they embraced a libertarian ethic of personal life. Women asserted their sexual independence through the use of birth control pills and through exercising the right to have an abortion. Adolescents experimented with sex and courtship. Homosexuals "came out" and openly congregated in bars and neighborhoods.

Of these changes, the one with most far-reaching political effects was the civil rights movement and its demands for equality and economic progress for black America. Democrats, both because of their traditional, if usually downplayed, anti-racist ideology and their political relationship to the black community, had no choice but to respond to those demands. The result was a great victory for social justice, but one that created huge political difficulties for the Democrats among their white working class supporters. Kevin Phillips captured these developments well in his 1969 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*<sup>48</sup>:

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<sup>47</sup> John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. NY: Scribner, 2002, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority*. New York: Arlington House, 1969.

The principal force which broke up the Democratic (New Deal) coalition is the Negro socioeconomic revolution and liberal Democratic ideological inability to cope with it. Democratic “Great Society” programs aligned that party with many Negro demands, but the party was unable to defuse the racial tension sundering the nation. The South, the West, and the Catholic sidewalks of New York were the focus points of conservative opposition to the welfare liberalism of the federal government; however, the general opposition ... came in large part from prospering Democrats who objected to Washington dissipating their tax dollars on programs which did them no good. The Democratic party fell victim to the ideological impetus of a liberalism which had carried it beyond programs taxing the few for the benefit of the many ... to programs taxing the many on behalf of the few.

But if race was the chief vehicle by which the New Deal coalition was torn apart, it was by no means the only one. White working class voters also reacted poorly to the extremes with which the rest of the new social movements became identified. Feminism became identified with bra-burners, lesbians and hostility to the nuclear family; the antiwar movement with appeasement of the Third World radicals and the Soviet Union; the environmental movement with a Luddite opposition to economic growth; and the move toward more personal freedom with a complete abdication of personal responsibility.

Thus the New Deal Democrat mainstream that dominated the party was confronted with a challenge. The uncomplicated commitments to government spending, economic regulation and labor unions that had defined the Democrats’ progressivism for over thirty years suddenly provided little guidance for dealing with an explosion of potential new constituencies for the party. Their demands for equality, and for a better, as opposed to merely richer, life were starting to redefine what progressivism meant and the Democrats had to struggle to catch up.

Initially, Democratic politicians responded to these changes in the fashion of politicians since time immemorial: they sought to co-opt these new movements by absorbing many of their demands, while holding onto the party’s basic ideology and style of governing. Thus, Democratic politicians didn’t change their fundamental commitment to the New Deal welfare state, but grafted onto it support for all the various new constituencies and their key demands. After Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the party moved over the next eight years to give the women’s, antiwar, consumer’s and environmental movements prominent places within the party. This reflected both the politician’s standard interest in capturing the votes of new constituencies *and* the ongoing expansion in the definition of what it meant to be a Democrat, particularly a progressive one.

But there was no guarantee, of course, that gains among these new constituencies wouldn’t be more than counter-balanced by losses among their old constituency—the white working class—who had precious little interest in this expansion of what it meant to be a progressive and a Democrat. And indeed that turned out to be the case with the nomination and disastrous defeat of George McGovern—who enthusiastically embraced the new direction taken by the party—in 1972. McGovern’s commitment to the traditional Democratic welfare state was unmistakable.

But so was his commitment to all the various social movements and constituencies that were reshaping the party, whose demands were enshrined in McGovern's campaign platform. That made it easy for the Nixon campaign to typecast McGovern as the candidate of "acid, amnesty and abortion". The white working class reacted accordingly and gave Nixon overwhelming support at the polls, casting 70 percent of their votes for the Republican candidate<sup>49</sup>.

Indeed, just how far the Democrat party fell in the white working class' eyes over this time period can be seen by comparing the average white working class (whites without a four year college degree) vote for the Democrats in 1960-64 (55 percent) to their average vote for the Democrats in 1968-72 (35 percent)<sup>50</sup>. That's a drop of 20 points. The Democrats were the party of the white working class no longer.

With the sharp economic recession and Nixon scandals of 1973-74, the Democrats were able to develop enough political momentum to retake the White House in 1976, with Jimmy Carter's narrow defeat of Gerald Ford. But their political revival did not last long.

Not only did the Carter administration fail to do much to defuse white working class hostility to the new social movements, especially the black liberation movement, but economic events--the stagflation of the late 1970s--conspired to make that hostility even sharper. Though stagflation (combined inflation and unemployment with slow economic growth, including, critically, slow wage and income growth) first appeared during the 1973-75 recession, it persisted during the Carter administration and was peaking on the eve of the 1980 election. As the economy slid once more into recession, the inflation rate in that year was 12.5 percent. Combined with an unemployment rate of 7.1 percent, it produced a "misery index" of nearly 20 percent.

By that time, white working class voters had entered an economic world radically different from the one enjoyed by the preceding generation. Slow growth, declining wages, stagnating living standards, and, at the time, high and variable inflation and high home mortgage interest rates were really battering them economically. The great postwar escalator to the middle class had drastically slowed down and for some even stopped.

These economic developments fed resentments about race – about high taxes for welfare (which were assumed to go primarily to minorities) and about affirmative action. But they also sowed doubts about Democrats' ability to manage the economy and made Republican and business explanations of stagflation – blaming it on government regulation, high taxes and spending – more plausible. In 1978, the white backlash and doubts about Democratic economic policies had helped to fuel a nationwide tax revolt. In 1980, these factors reproduced the massive exodus of white working class voters from the Democratic tickets first seen in 1968 and 1972. In the 1980 and 1984 elections, Reagan averaged 61 percent support among the white working class, compared to an average of 35 percent support for his Democratic opponents, Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Judis and Teixeira, p. 63.

<sup>50</sup> Teixeira and Rogers, p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Judis and Teixeira, p. 63 and Teixeira and Rogers, p. 32.

Such a thrashing, coming not that long after the debacle of the McGovern campaign, led many Democrats, spearheaded by a new organization, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), to propose a reconfiguration of the Democratic approach. These “New Democrats argued that in the late ‘60s, the liberalism of the New Deal had degenerated into a “liberal fundamentalism,” which

the public has come to associate with tax and spending policies that contradict the interests of average families; with welfare policies that foster dependence rather than self-reliance; with softness toward the perpetrators of crime and indifference toward its victims; with ambivalence toward the assertion of American values and interests abroad; and with an adversarial stance toward mainstream moral and cultural values<sup>52</sup>.

Galston, Kamarck and the DLC advocated fiscal conservatism, welfare reform, increased spending on crime through the development of a police corps, tougher mandatory sentences, support for capital punishment, and policies that encouraged traditional families. This new approach did not really take off until it was embraced by Democratic Presidential candidate Bill Clinton in 1992, who synthesized these views with a moderate version of New Deal-style economic populism. It proved to be an electorally successful approach both in 1992 and, riding some good economic times, in 1996 as well.

But despite Clinton’s electoral success, it was not the case that he received a great deal of white working class support. He averaged only 41 percent across his two election victories. But he did, at least, prevent these voters from siding with his Republican opponents in large numbers, eking out one point pluralities among the white working class in both elections (the rest went to Perot)<sup>53</sup>.

His designated successor, Al Gore, was not so successful. He lost white working class voters in the 2000 election by 17 points. And the next Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, did even worse, losing these voters by a whopping 23 points in 2004<sup>54</sup>. One could reasonably ascribe the worsening deficit for Democrats in 2004 to the role of national security and terrorism after 9/11 but the very sizeable 2000 deficit cannot be explained on that basis. Apparently, the successes of the Clinton years, which included a strong economy that delivered solid real wage growth for the first time since 1973, did not succeed in restoring the historic bond between the white working class and the Democrats.

It's worth asking what Democratic performance in 2004 looked like when one adds income to education for a more fine-grained consideration of white working class voting, as the exit poll data do permit (occupation cannot be looked at with exit poll data).

Here is what you find: those voters who seem to correspond most closely to one's intuitive sense of the heart of the white working class--that is, white voters who have a moderate income and are non-college-educated--are precisely the voters among whom Democrats did most poorly.

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<sup>52</sup> William Galston and Elaine Kamarck, *The Politics of Evasion*, Progressive Policy Institute, 1989.

<sup>53</sup> Data in this paragraph from authors’ analysis of 1992 and 1996 VNS national exit polls.

<sup>54</sup> Data in this paragraph from authors’ analysis of 2000 VNS and 2004 NEP national exit polls.

For example, among non-college-educated whites with \$30,000-\$50,000 in household income, Bush beat Kerry by 24 points (62-38); among college-educated whites at the same income level, Kerry actually managed at 49-49 tie. And among non-college-educated whites with \$50,000-\$75,000 in household income, Bush beat Kerry by a shocking 41 points (70-29), while leading by only 5 points (52-47) among college-educated whites at the same income level<sup>55</sup>. Thus, the more voters looked like hardcore members of the white working class, the less likely they were to vote for Kerry in the 2004 election.

Clearly Democrats must do better among white working class voters if they hope to capitalize on their burgeoning advantage among the constituencies enumerated earlier. A repeat in 2008 of Kerry's 23 point loss among white working class voters, for example, would make it quite unlikely that the Democrats could prevail.

Indeed, given the structure of the rest of the electorate, the Democrats have to get that deficit down to around 10 points to achieve a solid popular vote victory. How feasible is this?

The results of the 2006 Congressional election indicate this is possible. In that election, the Democrats dramatically improved their performance among white working class voters, running only a 10 point deficit, down from a 20 point deficit in 2004 Congressional voting. Moreover, the Democrats reduced their deficit from 32 to 21 points among non-college whites with \$50,000-\$75,000 in household income and completely eliminated their deficit among non-college whites with \$30,000 to \$50,000 in household income, going from 22 points down in 2004 to dead even<sup>56</sup>.

Looked at in terms of states—and of course the presidential election is fought out on a state by state basis (though popular vote results typically track electoral vote results and in fact are amplified by them)—the challenge for the Democrats will be to hold the line at minimum on the white working class vote in the highly competitive states they won in both 2000 and 2004 (Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin). This means keeping their white working class deficit in these states down to roughly eight points on average. And in the four highly competitive states they lost in both 2000 and 2004 (Florida, Missouri, Nevada and Ohio), they will have to cut their average 13 point deficit at least in half to carry these states.

The issue environment that favored the Democrats in 2006 and led to significant pickups (Senate, governor, state legislature and/or House) in almost all of these states--especially Ohio, where white working class voters backed both the Democrats' senatorial and gubernatorial candidates—remains in place for 2008. Negative views of the economy and the Iraq war, anxiety about health care and disapproval of President Bush continue to run high among white working class voters, making it quite plausible that the Democrats could replicate their 2006 form among these voters. That would all but guarantee a bad outcome for the GOP in 2008.

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<sup>55</sup> Data in this paragraph from authors' analysis of 2004 NEP national exit poll.

<sup>56</sup> All data in this paragraph from authors' analysis of 2006 NEP national exit poll

Moreover, the pattern of election results in 2006 and 2007 suggests that appeals to cultural conservatism and generic toughness on national security, divorced from concrete problems like Iraq, are of diminishing effectiveness in steering white working class voters away from the Democrats. If so, this could make the GOP's task in 2008 even harder.

Another factor that should favor the Democrats, albeit on a more long-term basis, is that the decline of the white working class is likely to continue. First, there is the continuing decline in the white population. By the presidential election of 2020, Census Bureau projections indicate that non-Hispanic whites will be down to around 61 percent of the population. By 2050 that share will have dropped to almost exactly half.

Education upgrading is also likely to continue, though it may slow down. A Census Bureau paper<sup>57</sup> predicts a 4-7 point increase in the high school completion rate, a 7-12 point increase in the college attendance (some college or higher) rate and a 4-5 point increase in the four year college completion rate by 2028.

Occupational upgrading will continue, though here too the rate at which it will increase may slow down. Bureau of Labor Statistics occupational projections to 2016 indicate that, while professional (and service) jobs will grow at the fastest rate among major occupational groups, professional occupations will increase their *share* of jobs by only about a percentage point, a slowdown from the rate of share increase in the 1950-2000 period (changes in occupation coding make the comparison inexact). In addition, managerial occupations will grow at the second fastest rate (though their share will remain flat).

Income upgrading should also continue though the rate is very difficult to assess. Recall that median family income increased about 150 percent from 1947 to 2005. But most of that increase was in the 26 year period between 1947 and 1973 period, when family income more than doubled, with an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent. In the 32 years between 1973 and 2005, income only went up 23 percent, an annual growth rate of .6 percent<sup>58</sup>. So how much income goes up in the future will depend very much on whether income growth follows the pre or post 1973 pattern or something in-between.

Since we don't know the answer to this question and recent history is inconclusive--there was a period of rapid growth in median family income from 1995-2000 (up 11 percent), followed by negative growth from 2000-2005 (down 2 percent)—one approach is to use the growth rate over the entire 1947-2005 period (1.6 percent) which in effect averages the growth rates in the “good” (1947-73) and “bad” (1973-2005) periods. Applying this rate to median family income produces an estimate of \$83,000 for the year 2030 (2005 dollars). Moreover, if one applies this rate to the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile of the family income distribution, the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile would move up to around \$67,000 by 2030, meaning that roughly 65 percent of families in that year would have more than \$60,000 in income. In 2005, the corresponding figure was about 47 percent.

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<sup>57</sup> Jennifer Cheeseman Day and Kurt J. Bauman, “Have We Reached the Top?: Educational Attainment Projections of the US Population”. Census Bureau Population Division: Working Paper Series No. 43, May, 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Data in this and following paragraph from authors' analysis of 1947-2005 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement income data.

The downward trajectory of the white working therefore seems assured if its rate of decline is uncertain. As with the World War II to contemporary era trend data reviewed at the beginning of this paper, it appears likely that the future rate of decline will be fastest under an income-based definition, slowest under an occupation-based definition and intermediate under an education-based definition. More precise statements about the projected population share of the white working class are difficult but some educated guesses can be made.

Looking first at the broad education-based definition (whites without a four year college degree), the rate of decline of the white working class since the World War II era has been .57 percentage points a year. Adjusting this rate downward a bit to allow for the expected slowdown in educational upgrading and projecting it forward to the presidential election of 2020 yields an estimate of 41 percent of adults in the white working class and perhaps a percentage point more of voters. Under the occupation-based definition (whites without a professional or managerial job), the rate of decline since the World War II era has been .47 percentage points a year. Adjusting the rate downward to allow for the projected slowdown in occupational upgrading and projecting forward to 2020 yields an estimate of 37 percent of workers in the white working class. Finally, under the income-based definition (white families under \$60,000), the rate of decline since 1947 has been .91 percentage points a year. Keeping the rate the same and projecting forward to 2020 yields an estimate of 20 percent of families qualifying as white working class<sup>59</sup>.

These changes will allow the Democrats to build majority support with smaller proportions of the white working class. Conversely, Republicans, who are dependent today on supermajorities of the white working class vote to cobble together a majority coalition, will need ever larger majorities of the white working class vote over time to sustain their coalition.

### *White Catholics*

There are several other important characteristics of white voters that intersect the white working class category—either reinforcing or mitigating Democrats’ basic problem with those voters—but are worth considering independently. One such characteristic is Catholicism. White Catholics have historically been a relatively good group for Democrats among white voters but have also been quite volatile. Here are the margins among white Catholic voters in the past five presidential elections:

1988: +14R  
1992: +5D  
1996: +7D  
2000: +7R  
2004: +13R

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<sup>59</sup> Data in this paragraph from authors’ analysis of 1940-2000 Census data and 2007 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement education data; authors’ analysis of 1940 Census data and 2006 American Community Survey occupation data; and authors’ analysis of 1947-2005 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement income data.

As the data show, that volatility has lately sent them away from the Democrats and toward the GOP. That has been a development of real consequence, since they are most certainly a large enough group (21 percent of voters in the 2004 election) to have a serious impact on election outcomes.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, as a March, 2005 Democracy Corps survey report on white Catholics pointed out, white Catholic voters are considerably more Democratic than other white voters and more moderate on a whole range of issues, including tolerance on homosexuality and openness to stem cell research.<sup>61</sup> This and other data suggested that a move back toward the Democrats was likely if the political environment shifted. Results from the 2006 election indicate that this is happening. Democrats carried the white Catholic Congressional vote by a percentage point, their first positive margin among this group in this decade.

### *White Married Women*

The “marriage gap”—where married voters lean toward the GOP and single voters toward the Democrats—is famously an important part of today’s political landscape. A particular problem for Democrats lies among a subset of married voters, white married women, a group they lost by 23 points in 2004. Even worse, married white working class women (62 percent of white working class women) gave Bush a 15 margin in 2000 and more than doubled that margin, to 31 points, in 2004. These women were responsible for most of the shift toward Bush among white working class women, which was probably the key electoral shift against the Democrats in the 2004 election.<sup>62</sup>

In 2006, however, the Democrats did much better among white married women. Their deficit dropped sharply to just 12 points.

### *White Evangelicals*

Perhaps no feature of the 2004 election received more attention than the allegedly central role of white evangelical Christians and their high turnout in Bush’s victory.

But the evidence that white evangelicals were so very, very important (as opposed to merely important, which seems reasonable) is shockingly thin. Perhaps the main piece of evidence for this claim is that 23 percent of voters in the NEP exit poll were white “born-again or evangelical” Christians, who supported George Bush, 78 percent to 21 percent.<sup>63</sup>

Unfortunately, we have no idea how that compares to 2000, since the exit polls didn’t ask the same question in 2000. Instead they asked a very different question about being part of the

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<sup>60</sup> Authors’ analysis of 1988-2004 exit polls.

<sup>61</sup> Stan Greenberg and Matt Hogan, “Reclaiming the White Catholic Vote”, based on Democracy Corps survey of white Catholics, February, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Authors’ analysis of 2000 and 2004 exit poll data.

<sup>63</sup> All data in this and next three paragraphs from authors’ analysis of 2000-2004 exit poll data.

“religious right,” which categorized 14 percent of voters as part of the white religious right. Clearly, to conclude from these two different questions that white evangelical turnout increased from 14 percent to 23 percent from 2000 to 2004 is inappropriate.

Better purchase on the question of whether evangelical turnout increased may be obtained from the exit poll question on the frequency of religious service attendance. And this question shows that whites who said they attended services more than weekly were rock steady at 11 percent of voters in 2000 and 2004. Moreover, whites who said they attended weekly actually *declined* across the two elections from 23 percent to 21 percent. This hardly seems consistent with a wave of white evangelical turnout.

Moreover, if one looks at intensity of support, the exit polls do not indicate that more observant white voters dramatically increased their support of Bush in 2004. Indeed, Bush received a greater increase in support (a six point gain in margin) from less observant white voters—those who are moderately observant to completely unobservant—than he did from more observant white voters (a 3 point shift). Moreover, this unimpressive 3 point shift was driven entirely by those who attend weekly, since his support actually *dropped* slightly among the most observant white voters, those who attend more than weekly.

None of this seems consistent with the idea that surging evangelical turnout and support put Bush over the top in 2004. Neither does evidence from other surveys. For example, the leading academic survey of religion and politics, the National Survey of Religion and Politics (NSRP), conducted by the University of Akron’s Bliss Institute, found that white evangelical protestants (measured by a sophisticated series of questions on religious affiliation, beliefs and practices) were 26 percent of voters in 2004, identical to their level in 2000. The NSRP also found only a modest shift in support toward Bush among these voters, less, for example, than the shift *against* Bush among mainline Protestants. (Interesting, the 2004 NSRP survey also identified a group of white evangelicals—“modernist evangelicals”, about 11 percent of the overall group—who are far more liberal than typical white evangelicals and who actually supported Kerry, 52-48.)

However, even though their turnout and support levels for the GOP do not appear to be surging, it cannot be denied that white evangelicals overall are still a very strong group for the GOP and a problem for Democrats (this group still voted 70 percent for Republicans in the 2006 election). If this group was growing over the long term, the task of building a progressive majority would be far more difficult.

But there is little evidence this is happening. The NSRP, for example, has found essentially no change in the level of white evangelicals in the population since its first survey in 1992. Recent Gallup surveys are consistent with the level of white evangelicals measured by the NSRP and also show little sign of an increase in that level. GET LATEST FIGURES

Nor do indicators of religious observance provide indirect evidence that evangelicals’ share of the population is increasing. Gallup data show no change in the share of the population attending church weekly or almost once a week since the early nineties<sup>64</sup>. And in the University

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<sup>64</sup> See data on the Gallup website at <http://poll.gallup.com/content/default.aspx?ci=1690>.

of Chicago's GSS, which has asked a consistent question on frequency of church attendance since the early 1970's, there has actually been an 8 point drop over time in the share of the population who say they attend every week or nearly every week (from 41 percent to 33 percent). Note that the same survey shows a 9 point increase since the early 1970's in the share of the population attending only once a year or less (from 29 percent to 38 percent).

### *"Red" States and Regions*

In the last four elections, the Republicans have carried 16 states (AL, AK, ID, IN, KS, MS, NE, NC, ND, OK, SC, SD, TX, UT, VA, WY) for a total of 135 EVs. This is far less than the 18 states (plus DC) and 248 EVs carried by the Democrats in all four elections.

But this GOP base should be adjusted to reflect their exceptionally strong performance in some states in the last two elections. One way to do this is to add states (besides those included in the above list) which the Republicans have carried by an average of 10 points or more in 2000 and 2004. Using this procedure, I add Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana and Montana, making a total of 20 states with 170 EVs in the GOP base.

I divide the remaining states (that is, outside of the GOP base and outside of the Democratic base and purple leaning blue categories described earlier) into three categories. First, there is a small category of three "pure purple" states that have split their support between the two parties in the last two elections: Iowa, New Hampshire and New Mexico. These states have a total of 16 EVs.

Next, there is a very significant group of states—Florida, Missouri, Nevada and Ohio—where the average GOP margin in the last two elections has been 5 points or less. This purple leaning red category has a total of 63 EVs.

Finally, there is a very interesting group of five states—Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Tennessee and West Virginia—that might be characterized as "red vulnerable". In these states, the average GOP margin in the last two elections has been less than 10 points (though more than 5). And, by definition, they are also states that have been carried by the Democrats as least once in the last four elections. They have a total of 41 EVs.

Results from the 2006 election indicate that the pure purple states are becoming bluer, some purple leaning red states are starting to lean blue and some states that have been redder still are rapidly purpling. In the pure purple category, the Democrats in Iowa picked up 2 US House seats and gained control of both chambers of the state legislature. And in New Hampshire, the Democrats also picked up 2 House seats and control of both state legislative chambers.

In the purple leaning red category, the Democrats made stunning gains in Ohio, capturing the governor's office, gaining a US Senate seat and picking up a US House seat while carrying the Congressional vote 53-47. In Missouri, they gained another US Senate seat and in Florida they picked up two US House seats.

Turning to redder states, impressive shifts are taking place in Colorado (classified above as red vulnerable). But when you consider the state's trajectory over the 2000-2006 period, it now can plausibly be considered a purple state and perhaps one that leans more blue than red. In 2000, Bush carried the state by 9 points and in 2002 Republican incumbent Senator Wayne Allard easily won reelection. But in 2004 Bush carried the state by just 5 points and Democrats took control of both chambers of the state legislature as well as electing Ken Salazar to the Senate. In 2006, the Democrats expanded their control of the state legislature and elected Bill Ritter as governor by a landslide. They also picked up a US House seat and carried the state Congressional vote by 54-41. They now control Colorado's House delegation by 4-3 and are given an excellent chance of picking up the other Senate seat in 2008.

The Democrats also made progress in another red vulnerable state, Arkansas, where they carried 59 percent of the House vote—by far the highest of any southern state—and elected a governor. And in Arizona the Democrats picked up two House states.

There was even some notable progress in a base GOP state that is rapidly purpling: Virginia. In 2005 Democrats elected another Democratic governor, in 2006 they added a US Senator and in 2007 they took control of the state senate and made significant progress in the state house.

#### *Emerging Suburbs, True Exurbs and Rural Areas*

As mentioned earlier, Democrats are strongest in the cities and inner suburbs, while the GOP gets stronger the farther away from the urban core you get—into emerging suburbs, true exurbs and rural areas. To properly analyze where GOP domination of these areas is most important and where progressives might challenge that domination, it is important to distinguish between true exurban and emerging suburban areas (which together constitute what people usually think of as “exurbia”). Today's true exurbs contain only 2 percent of the nation's population. Emerging suburbs on the other hand contain 13 percent of the nation's population and, on average, are growing faster than any other type of county in the US, including true exurbs.<sup>65</sup> Emerging suburbs include such well-known counties as Loudoun county, VA, outside of Washington, DC; Anoka county, MN, outside of Minneapolis; Warren county, OH, outside of Cincinnati; and Douglas county, CO, outside of Denver.

Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute (MI) describes the true exurbs as:

[T]he most far flung [metropolitan] counties with the lowest—essentially rural—population densities. Large-scale suburbanization is just about to take hold in these places, as they offer even better bargains, and more land (but longer commutes) than emerging counties. Exurban counties are included in metropolitan areas by the census because they share a functional relationship with neighboring counties via commuting. But by appearance, these places are barely touched by urbanization.

These true exurban counties voted for Bush over Kerry by 62 percent to 37 percent, a lop-sided result, to be sure, and a ten-point gain in GOP margin over 2000. But these counties only

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<sup>65</sup> All data in this section from Teixeira, “The Next Frontier: A New Study of Exurbia”.

contributed 9 percent of Bush's net vote gains between 2000 and 2004, mostly due to their relatively modest population sizes.

The emerging suburban counties were more consequential, though the actual numbers of exurban and emerging suburban counties are roughly equal in the MI typology. They are described as:

...the new "it" county of today. They are mostly the fastest growing counties in the region, and are often found in even slow growing regions such as St. Louis (e.g., St Charles County, MO) and Cincinnati (e.g., Boone County, KY). Emerging suburbs are almost wholly products of the past two decades and are booming with both people and the beginnings of commerce (although they remain mostly commuter zones). Emerging suburbs are both upscale and downscale and may feature everything from McMansions to trailer parks. Residents in emerging suburbs typically see these places as bargains compared to mature suburbs. That is true for households that buy a McMansion over an older and smaller tract home in a mature suburb, or a first-time homebuyer that "drives to qualify" by finding a modest attached dwelling at the edge of the region.

The Bush-Kerry split here was less lop-sided (56 percent to 43 percent) and represented only a five-point gain in margin over 2000. But since these emerging suburban counties are much larger than exurban counties, they contributed 26 percent of Bush's net vote gains between 2000 and 2004, dwarfing the true exurban contribution.

It is important to note that the GOP does by far the best in emerging suburban counties in their solid red base states. In those states, they had a crushing 34 point margin (67-33 percent) in the emerging suburbs in 2004. But everywhere else, the Democrats were much closer. In the solid blue, Democratic base states, Kerry lost emerging suburban counties by only 51-48 percent. In purple leaning blue states and purple leaning red states, he did just a bit worse in the emerging suburbs, losing 53-46 percent (and there are states in these categories, of course, where the Democrats did far better than this average, like Florida, where Kerry lost the emerging suburbs by only a single point, 50-49).<sup>66</sup> And even in red vulnerable states, Kerry was still within a 58-41 percent margin in these counties.

Note also that the GOP margin in the emerging suburbs overall in 2000 was only 52 percent to 44 percent and in 1996 a mere 45 percent to 44 percent. Together, these data make clear that emerging suburban counties are not only far more important to Bush's coalition than true exurban counties, but also far more contestable by Democrats.

Election results since 2004 support this assessment. In the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial race, Republican Jerry Kilgore, after running a bruising, culture wars-driven campaign against Democrat Timothy Kaine, lost the emerging suburban county of Loudoun—the second fastest-growing county in the entire nation since 2000—to Kaine by 3,400 votes, 51 percent to 46

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<sup>66</sup> In pure purple states Kerry actually beat Bush by a point in the emerging suburbs, 50-49--but there were only two such counties, so not much should be made of this.

percent.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, John Kerry lost this county in 2004 by 13,000 votes, 56 percent to 44 percent. And even Mark Warner, Kaine's Democratic predecessor, lost Loudoun by 53 percent to 46 percent in his successful 2001 gubernatorial bid.

How did this happen? After all, it was supposed to be the Republicans who really "got" voters in these kinds of areas. But it now appears that Republicans have misinterpreted their past success in these areas as evidence that these voters endorsed and wanted a stridently anti-government, socially conservative agenda. But that was never a warranted assumption, either then or now.

In reality, emerging suburban voters are tax-sensitive and concerned about government waste, but not ideologically anti-government. They tend to be religious and family-oriented, but socially moderate in comparison to rural residents. They are not anti-business, but they do hold populist attitudes toward corporate abuse and people who game the system. And they worry as much or more about public education as they do about moral values.<sup>68</sup>

No wonder Kilgore couldn't connect in Virginia's emerging suburbs. He ran a campaign on cultural wedge issues like the death penalty and illegal immigration when emerging suburban voters were looking for solutions on education, transportation and health care. Kaine, in contrast, spoke clearly to these voters about such solutions and famously did not hide his views on values issues, even when some of them (capital punishment) were not popular. The results speak for themselves.

The contestability of the emerging suburbs was confirmed by results from the 2006 election. Democrats received 45 percent of the House vote in emerging suburbs, up from 39 percent in 2002 and pulled 48 percent of the Senate vote in these areas, also up from 39 percent in 2002.

### ***But Can They Govern?***

The Democrats are therefore in a solid position to build a dominant center-left majority in the US. Fundamental trends in the American electorate are more likely to favor them than the GOP for a considerable time to come.

But the extent and durability of that dominance is very much open to question. More than anything else, it probably depends on the ability of Democrats to attract and retain a solid core of white working class support in upcoming elections. Kerry-style blowouts are obviously not consistent with this.

The challenge the Democrats face here is that the defection of the white working class from the Democrats was rooted, as argued earlier, in both cultural reaction to the movements of the 1960's *and* the post-1973 decline of the American-style Keynesian welfare state, an arrangement that had been of immense benefit to the white working class. The former problem is likely to decline over time as cohort replacement continues to liberalize the electorate. But the

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<sup>67</sup> For much more analysis of Virginia's emerging suburbs in the 2005 gubernatorial race, see Teixeira, "The Next Frontier: A New Study of Exurbia".

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

latter is not susceptible to such a solution. To solve this one, Democrats need to govern and govern well, producing gains that white working class voters can directly attribute to the party.

One way to do this would be for Democrats to enact landmark legislation that solves a problem the white working class has experienced since the decline of the Keynesian welfare state. The passage of an effective national health insurance program, over Republican opposition, might do accomplish this. But there are stiff obstacles to the Democrats getting these kind of major reforms through Congress. First, the Democratic coalition itself is not a leftwing but a center-left coalition, where the views of independents and professionals hold considerable weight. Democrats will have difficulty agreeing among themselves on new large government programs that may require higher taxes. In 1971 and 1979, disagreements among Democrats played an important role as the Republican opposition in blocking new healthcare legislation. That could happen again.

Second, Congress, and particularly the Senate, is structured to prevent the passage of dramatic reform measures, which can be stopped through filibuster or even bottled up in conference. Labor law reform, which is vital to reviving unions, faces a stiff test overcoming a filibuster in the Senate. Third, given these structural obstacles, adopting major reforms is easiest during periods of crisis and popular upsurge, such as the Progressive Era, the 1930s, and the 1960s. But we are not presently in such a period.

Lacking such favorable social conditions, Democrats have found it difficult to pass major legislation even when they controlled the White House and Congress. Jimmy Carter failed in 1977-78 and Bill Clinton failed in 1993-4 to pass any major social legislation though they had such control. A more tractable alternative in the short run is what the Clinton administration tried (not often successfully) during its second term to enact -- incremental reforms that are not cosmetic, but that put in motion a process that can eventually lead to dramatic reforms. For instance, extending eligibility for Medicare to everyone under 21 or adults 55 and over could lead toward national health insurance. But incremental reform, by definition, has a smaller effect on voters' lives and will do less to weld the Democrats' coalition firmly to the party.

More broadly, the need is clear for a successor to the Keynesian welfare state. The increasing pressures of globalization have shredded what was left of those arrangements, leaving the white working class adrift in a changing world. With the exception of a brief period between 1995 and 2000, wage and income growth has lagged woefully behind the 1946-73 period and a wide range of economic insecurities now characterize these voters' lives.

Changing that experience so that the typical member of the white working class enjoyed solid wage and income growth and a diminution of economic security would go a long way toward solidifying white working class attachment to the Democrats. As Benjamin Friedman has argued in a broader context<sup>69</sup>, periods of rapidly rising living standards are typically periods when it is easiest to generate political support for actions that enhance the common good. It is no coincidence that, as living standards stagnated, white working class voters have become more

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<sup>69</sup> *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth*, New York: Vintage, 2005.

and more reluctant to support such measures. Restoring rapid living standards growth would likely repair that relationship.

But, as with passing a piece of landmark legislation, structural obstacles to such a program of economic revitalization would be considerable. In the worst case scenario, the Democrats are caught in a kind of Catch 22. Without the white working class, Democrats can't build the kind of political support necessary for a program of large-scale economic transformation that would improve living standards growth. But the only way to get solid white working class support for such a program is to actually improve the living standards of these voters through the very government actions they are currently reluctant to support.

Democrats' ability to break through this Catch 22 will likely determine the quality and quantity of change we can expect from the current resurgence of the center-left in the US. The next period could merely be a period of temporary electoral dominance or a more profound shift toward a new welfare state spearheaded by the center-left, depending on the Democrats' ability to attract white working class votes. The 2008 election should give us some hints about which of these outcomes is more probable.