



The Path to 270 in 2016

Can the Obama Coalition Survive?

By Ruy Teixeira, John Halpin, and Rob Griffin December 2015

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

One year out, the presidential election of 2016 appears wide open. Over the past four election cycles, American voters have yet to render a decisive verdict on partisan control of the federal government. President Barack Obama won solid margins in both 2008 and 2012, expanding the Democratic hold on the Electoral College map and building a strong and diverse coalition of voters. In turn, Republicans won impressive victories in both the 2010 and 2014 midterm elections, solidly retaking the House of Representatives, obtaining majority control in the Senate, and extending their hold on the majority of state legislatures and gubernatorial offices. Currently, Republicans hold 31 of 50 state governorships and have unified control of 31 state legislatures—compared to just 11 for the Democrats.

Democrats—relying on a growing coalition of young people, people of color, unmarried women, professionals, and secular voters—hold clear advantages in national elections, as well as in the most important battleground states that determine the presidency. As America has changed demographically, the Democratic Party has increasingly changed with it, enabling the party to grow markedly at the national level in terms of both vote share and partisan identification. In five of the last six presidential elections, the Democrats have won the popular vote and regularly lead the GOP by around 8 points in terms of party identification.¹ The main challenges for Democrats in 2016 are: first, low turnout and a lack of passion among core voters and, second, wider voter fatigue and historical patterns working against the party winning a third consecutive term in the White House.

The Democratic Party has won three consecutive elections only twice since 1828: when Martin van Buren followed Andrew Jackson into office in 1837 and when Franklin Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term in 1940 before the passage of the 22nd Amendment, which limits presidents to two terms.² More recently, as the National Constitution Center has noted, Democrats have failed to win a third consecutive term four out of the five times they have had the opportunity since 1920. James Cox, Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, and Al Gore all failed to

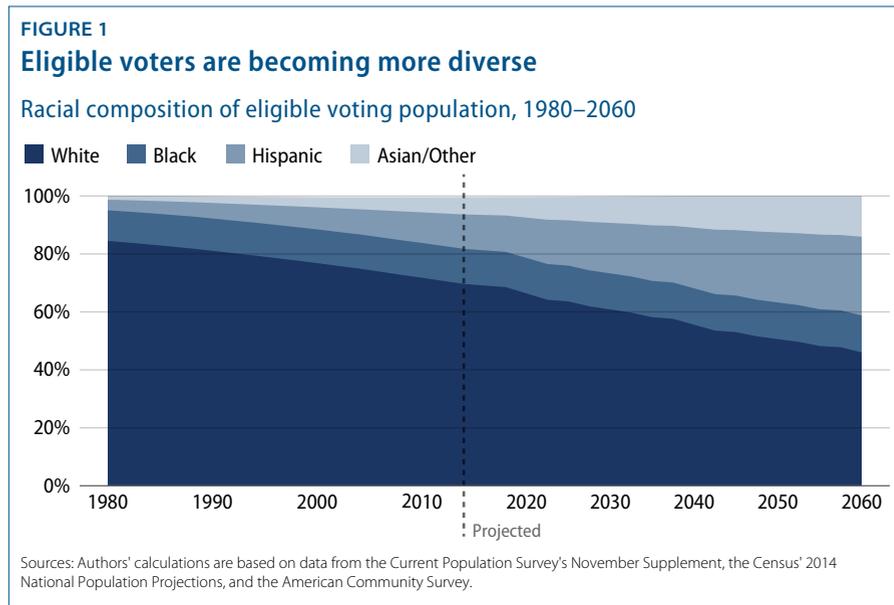
capitalize on the victories of their Democratic predecessors.³ Republicans have historically been more successful than Democrats at extending their hold on the presidency for a third consecutive term,⁴ most recently with the election of George H.W. Bush in 1988.

If Democrats are to retain the presidency in 2016, they will need to successfully transfer the enthusiasm and support of the Obama coalition to a new candidate and overcome the wider belief that the party had its shot for eight years and that it is now time for a change. Finding a candidate and agenda that can successfully motivate core progressive voters—while simultaneously convincing a wider cross-section of less ideological voters that they have new ideas to address lingering economic and social problems—will be paramount. The party must also take seriously the need to knit together its more diverse coalition with a larger share of working class whites if it wants to be competitive in congressional and state-level elections.

The Republican Party—relying on a core base of support from older, whiter, more male, more geographically dispersed, and more religious voters—benefits from a constitutional system with multiple levels of elections and shared power. Although the party’s coalition may be less diverse than Democrats’, Republican voters are typically more active and more reliable in terms of voting in midterm and sub-national elections that determine the balance of power in government. The main challenges for Republicans in 2016 are twofold: first, an overreliance on white votes at the expense of building a broader demographic coalition in battleground states and, second, an agenda and political tone that is too conservative and exclusionary for a national electorate.

Recent social trends present significant headwinds for Republicans, particularly as they relate to demographic shifts in the country. For years, Republicans could rely on white voters—and, in particular, working-class whites—to constitute a decisive proportion of the electorate and deliver victory. This is no longer the case. As documented in the 2014 “States of Change” report⁵—published jointly by the Center for American Progress, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Brookings Institution—the percentage of white voters in the actual electorate dropped 15 percentage points, from 89 percent in 1976 to 74 percent in 2012. The percentage of white working-class voters dropped even more, decreasing by 26 points over the same period. Future projections in the “States of Change” report suggest that the percentage of eligible white voters in the American electorate will

drop to 46 percent by 2060. (see Figure 1) Compounding the problem nationally for Republicans, the decline in the white percentage of the electorate has coincided with stronger Democratic identification and voting patterns among nonwhite voters, as well as increasingly more liberal social views among higher-educated white professionals.⁶



For Republicans to win the presidency in 2016, they must either expand their support beyond their conservative base or hope for a low-turnout election on the Democratic side, magnifying their advantages among white voters. This is a tricky strategic proposition for the party that involves significant tradeoffs in terms of the type of candidate nominated and agenda pursued. Republicans can cross their fingers that the 2016 election is similar to 2004, when turnout was higher among white voters and conservatives and lower among people of color. Alternatively, they can try to carry out the recommendations of the Republican National Committee after their 2012 loss and widen the party's appeal as a means to reach more minority voters, women, and young people.⁷ Given the recent voting and partisan identification trends among people of color, Republicans would clearly need to take the latter approach in order to deal with the longer-term demographic issues facing the party.

Compounding the specific challenges for Democrats and Republicans, both parties must contend with an increasingly unpredictable and unsettled electorate. American voters are angry, distrustful of establishment politics, and open to seemingly out-of-the-mainstream candidates and movements that channel these concerns and anxieties. Despite improvements in the overall economy over the past seven years, many Americans remain economically stressed and have a rising sense that the government is run for the benefit of a few wealthy and well-connected interests rather than the middle class.⁸

Rising populist sentiment has upended electoral politics across advanced democracies. This sentiment has given rise to both untraditional candidates and parties gaining votes and support—often fleeting but in ways that are now influencing the decisions of mainstream parties. Examples include the rising vote totals for, on the right, parties such as the National Front in France; the True Finns in Finland; and the Danish People’s Party in Denmark. On the left, such populist parties include Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

In the United States, left-wing populism is driving Democrats to offer more far-reaching solutions to problems such as inequality and structural racism, while right-wing populism is driving Republicans to more forcefully confront immigration and government spending across the board. Populist forces in both parties are increasingly hostile to global trade, militarism, money in politics, and political compromise with opponents. It remains to be seen whether these populist forces will determine the nominations of either party, but it is clear that the animating issues and the candidates representing these movements will have an effect on the eventual platforms and messages of the two general election campaigns.

However, examining national demographic and voting trends—especially in 12 important battleground states—it is clear that Republicans have a much higher hill to climb than Democrats in terms of amassing a coalition capable of delivering 270 electoral votes, or EVs. The Democrats have successfully achieved this goal in the past two presidential elections, demonstrating resilience in the face of a bad economy and strong Republican opposition.

Even if Republican presidential candidate and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney had won Florida, Ohio, and Virginia in 2012, he still would have lost the presidency to President Obama. Given the predicted increases in the minor-

ity share of the vote across all of the battleground states, a Republican winning these states—plus another vital state such as Colorado or New Hampshire to put them over the top—will require one of two scenarios: a significant decline in Democratic turnout and a surge in Republican turnout that produces an electoral landscape more like 2000 and 2004 than 2008 or 2012; or a widespread outreach effort by Republicans to attract significant numbers of Democratic-leaning voters such as Latinos, women, and younger people. The sobering reality for Republicans is that the Democratic candidate will be able to absorb mild levels of defections or lower levels of turnout from its core voters in the general election and still capture an Electoral College majority. If Democrats manage to hold President Obama's base and expand their reach into the Republican-leaning white working class, they could win by substantial margins.

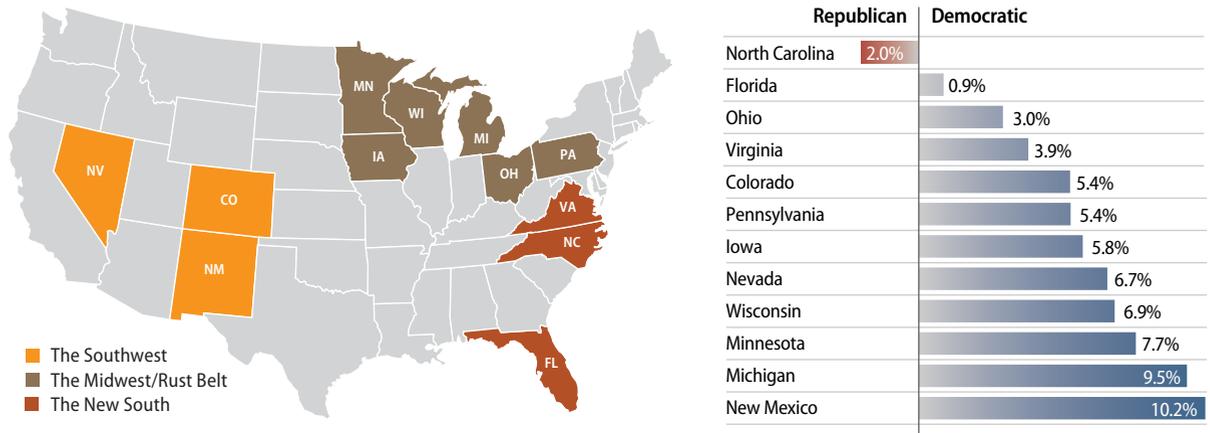
Based on our projections, minority eligible voters—African Americans, Latinos, Asians, those of other race and mixed-race individuals, combined—are expected to rise 2 points nationally during the 2012 to 2016 period, with a similar 2-point projected increase in the minority share of actual voters. (see Methodological Appendix) This includes a roughly 1-point increase in the Latino share of actual voters, as well as another 1-point increase distributed among African Americans, Asians, those of other races, and multiracial voters. Democrats may or may not match the 81 percent support the party received from communities of color in the past two elections. A more conservative estimate is that voters of color will support Democrats at around the 78 percent level—the average level of minority support for Democrats from 2000 to 2012.⁹ Putting our estimates on electoral share and support together, we anticipate that voters of color will rise 2 points to make up 29 percent of the national presidential electorate in 2016, with around 78 percent of those voters supporting the Democratic nominee.

Republicans, meanwhile, are expected to continue to hold strong advantages among white voters—particularly white non-college-educated voters—although the share of these voters in the overall electorate is likely to continue to decline. Based on our conservative estimates,¹⁰ non-college-educated whites are projected to fall 2.3 points as a percentage of the national electorate, while white college-educated voters are projected to increase by .4 percent as a share of actual voters. This shift in the white vote continues a trend slightly favoring Democrats given the voting patterns of both white groups.

FIGURE 2

Key battleground states for 2016

2012 presidential election margin of victory



Source: Author's calculations are based on elections results from Federal Elections Commission, Elections 2012 available at <http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2012/federaelections2012.pdf>

	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	81%	17%	2
White college graduates	44%	55%	0
White working class	38%	60%	-2

Note: Due to rounding error, the numbers in the projected change in share column may not sum to zero.
 Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey 2012: November Supplement* (2012), available at <https://cps.ipums.org/cps/>; data taken from the Bureau of the Census, *American Communities Survey, (2008–2013)*, available at Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2010), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>; CCES Dataverse "CCES Common Content, 2012," available at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7927/H4T1447> (last accessed November 2015); Roper Center, "National Election Pool Exit Polls" (2012), available at <http://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/exit-polls/>; projections from Ruy Teixeira, William H. Frey, and Robert Griffin, "States of Change: The Demographic Evolution for the American Electorate 1974–2060" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2015), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/progressive-movement/report/2015/02/24/107261/states-of-change/>.

If the Democrats receive their 2012 levels of support among these three groups in 2016—an 11-point deficit among white college graduates; a 22-point deficit among white working-class voters; and a 64-point advantage among minority voters—the party will easily win the popular vote by a 6-point margin. If support for the Democrats among minorities declines to our more conservative estimate of 78 percent, they would still win the popular vote by 4 points. If, on top of that diminished minority support, white working-class support replicates the stunning 30-point deficit congressional Democrats suffered in 2014, while support among white college-graduates remains steady, the Democratic candidate would still win the popular vote—albeit by a slender margin. If, however, white college-graduate support also replicates its relatively weak 2014 performance for the Democrats—a 16-point deficit—Republicans would win the popular vote by a single point.

In 2012, President Obama carried 26 states, as well as the District of Columbia, for a total of 332 EVs. Democrats have carried 18 of these states, plus D.C., for a total of 242 EVs in every election since 1992—a group that journalist Ronald Brownstein has termed the “Blue Wall.”¹¹ Of these 18, the Democratic candidate in 2016 is almost certain to carry 14 of them¹²—California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington—plus D.C.—for a total of 186 EVs.

These are the Democrats’ core states, won easily by the Democratic candidate for six straight elections and unlikely to be seriously contested in 2016. But these core states are far short of an Electoral College majority—the Democratic candidate will still need 84 more EVs from some combination of other states to actually win the presidency.

In 2012, Republicans carried 24 states—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming—for a total of 206 EVs. They are almost certain to carry all of these states in 2016, with the exception of North Carolina, for a total of 191 EVs. This is far short of a majority: Republicans will need 79 additional EVs to capture the presidency.

Outside of New Hampshire, both Democrats and Republicans will need to focus on a collection of Midwest, Southwest, and so-called New South states in order to prevail in 2016. These states—Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia—were all carried by President Obama in 2012, except for North Carolina, which he won in 2008 but narrowly lost in 2012.

Both the structural demographic changes and geographic patterns of support in the electorate suggest slight advantages for Democrats in 2016. In no way, however, do these factors preclude Republicans from taking the right steps to amass a national majority and Electoral College victory.

One year out, the dynamics of the 2016 election can be distilled to a few core questions. Will the Democrats’ demographic advantage in recent elections hold? Can a new Democratic candidate gain the support of President Obama’s voters without the president on the ballot? Can Democrats build a cross-class coalition that unites its diverse core with a larger segment of white working-class voters?

On the Republican side, will displeasure with President Obama and uncertainty among the electorate give Republicans an opening to reach more voters? Can Republicans defy long-term demographic trends and pull out a victory by maximizing turnout from its base and support from whites in a potentially low-enthusiasm election? Can Republicans reach across the ideological divide to bring in some Obama voters and those disengaged from politics?

The remainder of this report examines the known contours of the 2016 election by providing in-depth overviews of these national demographic trends; specific breakdowns of 12 battleground states in the Midwest/Rust Belt, Southwest, and New South regions; and a concluding analysis of what each party must do to achieve victory in 2016.

Demography of the path to 270 in 2016

Our analysis examines how a Democratic candidate from the incumbent party and a GOP candidate from the challenger party might fare in terms of demographic and geographic support in 2016. It focuses on the electoral potential of the Obama coalition using 2012 as a baseline, comparing that with the potential support for a Republican challenger in relation to the GOP's 2012 performance.

This much is clear: Despite demographic trends that continue to favor them, the challenging political situation for the Democrats—presiding over an uneven economic recovery, time-for-a-change sentiment, anti-government populism, and sub-50 percent approval ratings for President Obama—means that a third consecutive presidential term is hardly a sure thing. Meanwhile, the Republican Party remains unpopular, with very low favorability ratings, low partisan identification, and a widespread sense that it is too extreme. No potential candidate has convincingly shown that they can appeal to voters outside the Republican base, meaning they will struggle to beat the Democratic candidate despite the Democrats' clear political vulnerabilities. The question then becomes how, given the current political environment and structure of voter inclinations, each side can take advantage of their opportunities and reach 270 EVs.

Our analysis begins with the basic contours of the Obama coalition on the national level. If Democrats are able to generate support and turnout among voters in that coalition at close to 2012 levels, the 2016 Democratic candidate will likely be able to put together enough states to reach 270 or more EVs. Conversely, Republicans could certainly capture the presidency if they are able to make significant inroads into the 2012 Obama coalition or mobilize conservative white voters at unprecedented levels.

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

The heart of the Obama coalition is the minority vote. In 2012, President Obama received 81 percent support from communities of color, a group that made up 27 percent of all voters.¹³ The question is, will the Democratic candidate be able to replicate that performance in 2016?

Consider first the probable minority share of the vote in 2016. Census data underscore just how fast this population is growing in the United States. From 2000 to 2014, the minority population—those who identify as Hispanic, non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic Asian, non-Hispanic other, and multiracial—increased by 39 percent.¹⁴ The Hispanic population alone grew by 57 percent, while the white—meaning non-Hispanic white—population grew by a mere 2 percent. Because of this dramatic difference in growth rates, communities of color have accounted for 91 percent of the country's population growth since 2000. The overall minority share of the population has also ticked steadily upward, while the white share has declined: The 2014 minority share of the population was 38 percent, up more than 7 percentage points since 2000. That is a rate of increase of approximately half a point a year since 2000.

Trend data indicate we should expect more of the same in the future. Indeed, projections from the States of Change project—conducted jointly by the Center for American Progress, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Brookings Institution¹⁵—indicate that, in 1980, minority groups comprised 16 percent of eligible voters, defined as citizens age 18 and over, and make up 30 percent of eligible voters today. By the year 2060, minority groups should constitute a majority, or 54 percent, of eligible voters. Those increases represent an average rise of about half a point a year in the share of minority eligible voters or 2 points over the course of a four-year presidential election cycle. That is exactly the projection of the States of Change project for the 2012–2016 period.

Recent trends indicate that a 2-point increase in the share of minority eligible voters typically translates into a 2-point increase in the minority share of actual voters.¹⁶ We expect that pattern to continue in the coming presidential election,¹⁷ with the 2-point increase roughly distributed as 1 point from Latino voters and 1 point from blacks, Asians, those of other races and mixed race combined.

The eventual Democratic nominee is therefore likely to have significantly more voters from communities of color to work with in 2016 than in 2012. But can she or he plausibly hope to replicate the 81 percent support among these minority voters President Obama received in his 2008 and 2012 election victories? While Democrats retain high levels of support among minorities—especially among blacks—81 percent overall support may be difficult to replicate without President Obama on the ticket. It is worth recalling that support for Democratic presidential candidates among minorities was somewhat lower in the first two presidential elections of the 2000s: a four-election low of 74 percent in 2004 and 77 percent in 2000.¹⁸ Rather than assuming a continuation of 2012 levels, a conservative estimate might therefore put the Democratic candidate's minority support in 2016 at the average of presidential elections held from 2000 to 2012—78 percent. Overall, a reasonable expectation for 2016 is that the minority share of voters will rise 2 points from 2012—to around 29 percent—and that, conservatively, 78 percent of these voters will support the Democratic candidate.

White voters are a different story; under any scenario, the Democratic candidate will do far worse among this group. Not all white voters are the same, however. It is useful to break them down between the growing college-educated group,¹⁹ where Democrats' performance has steadily improved, and the rapidly declining—both in terms of overall population and voter share—non-college or working-class group,²⁰ where Democrats have made little progress over the past two decades.²¹

The distribution of voters between these two groups is shifting rapidly: The white working-class share of voters declined by 19 percentage points between the 1988²² and 2012 presidential elections, while the college-educated white share increased by 6 points. If this trend continues, the share of white working-class voters will decrease by 3 points from 2012 to 2016, with a 1-point increase in the share of white college-educated voters. According to our projections for this report—which, for various technical reasons,²³ are quite conservative—white working-class voters will decline by a slightly smaller amount, 2.3 points, and white college-educated voters will rise only fractionally by 0.4 points. But either way, the underlying demographic composition of the white vote is likely to shift in the Democratic candidate's favor in the 2016 election.

With these changes in mind, we can now focus on how 2016 support levels among these three groups of voters might translate into a Democratic or Republican victory given different assumptions about these support levels. First of all, if the Democratic candidate receives similar support among these groups in 2016 as President Obama did in 2012—an 11-point deficit among white college graduates; a 22-point deficit among white working-class voters; and a 64 point advantage, 81 percent to 17 percent, among minority voters²⁴—she or he will win the popular vote easily by a 6-point margin.

This simulated election result, and others presented in this report, are based on simple computations using a national three-category topline. Detailed simulations that take into account all racial groups, racial groups broken down by age, and cover all 50 states under a wide variety of turnout and support assumptions will be released by the States of Change project in late February of 2016.

If minority Democratic support declines to our more conservative estimate of 78 percent, or a 58-point net Democratic advantage, she or he would still win the popular vote by 4 points, 51 percent to 47 percent. If, on top of that diminished minority support, white working-class support replicates the stunning 30-point deficit congressional Democrats suffered in 2014 while white college-graduate support remains steady, the Democratic candidate would still win the popular vote, albeit by a slender percentage point. That is remarkable. However, if white college-graduate support also replicates its relatively poor 2014 performance for the Democrats—a 16-point deficit—Republicans would win the popular vote, also by a single point.

In summary, given continued strong performance among minority voters—even with some slippage—Democrats can secure a third term by holding President Obama’s 2012 white college-graduate support, in which case, even a landslide defeat of 2014 proportions among white working-class voters could be survived. Conversely, if Republicans can cut significantly into the Democrats’ 2012 white college-graduate support, and then replicate the landslide margins they achieved among white working-class voters in 2014, they are likely to emerge victorious, even if the Democrats hold their 2000–2012 average of the minority vote in the 2016 election.

Of course, if Republicans are able to drive the Democrats' share of the minority vote down—not just to its four-election average but significantly below that average—their chances of victory will improve substantially. Similarly, if Democrats are able to stop or even reverse their continuing decline among white working-class voters, they will be hard to beat.

In the concluding section of the paper, we discuss what each party must do, given these parameters, to maximize their chances of winning the presidency in 2016.

Other demographics

Two other key demographics for 2016 are young voters: members of the Millennial generation—defined in this report as those born in the years 1981 through 2000—and unmarried women. The 18-to-29-year-old age group, all of which are Millennials, made up 15 percent of voters and voted 61 percent to 35 percent in President Obama's favor in 2012. Moreover, that 15 percent figure actually understated the level of Millennial influence in the 2012 election because the 18-to-29-year-old group did not include the oldest Millennials—the 30- and 31-year-olds who were born in 1981 and 1982. Once they are figured in, a reasonable estimate is that Millennials made up around 18 percent of the vote in 2012.

That figure should be significantly larger in 2016 as more Millennials enter the voting pool. About 52 million Millennials were citizen-eligible voters in 2012, and that number has been increasing at a rate of about 4 million a year. In 2016, when Millennials make up the entire 18 to 35 age group, there will be 68 million Millennial eligible voters, accounting for 31 percent of all eligible voters—the same size as the Baby Boomer percentage of eligible voters.

Of course, relatively low youth turnout means that the weight of Millennials among actual voters in 2016 will be significantly less than the generation's share of eligible voters. If turnout patterns remain roughly the same in 2016 as they were 2012, a reasonable guess is that Millennials will make up approximately 25 percent of voters in the upcoming presidential election.

It is also possible that the Millennial generation's support for the Democratic candidate in 2016 will be less than it was in 2012. Economic pessimism has taken its political toll among this group, with institutional mistrust high and enthusiasm for political action low²⁵—not surprising given how hard the poor economy has

hit young people and how sluggish economic improvement has been for them in particular. Wages of young college and high school graduates are substantially lower today than in 2000, and their unemployment and underemployment rates remain above prerecession levels.²⁶ Republicans will hope that this economic pessimism and disappointed expectations will lower youth turnout below its 2012 levels and/or drive youth support to the GOP.

On the other hand, Pew Research Center data indicate that President Obama's job approval among the Millennial generation has generally been strong this year—higher, actually, than they were in 2011 prior to the previous presidential election.²⁷ And Gallup data for October and November of this year show that President Obama's approval rating among 18-to-29-year-old Millennials is averaging very close to 60 percent.²⁸ In addition, Pew data on party identification show Millennials holding steady since 2012 at about a 16-point advantage for the Democrats on party identification—substantially higher than any other generation.²⁹ Given these levels of support, it seems quite plausible that the Democratic candidate in 2016 could come very close to President Obama's 61 percent share of the Millennial vote in 2012.

Unmarried women were also strong Democratic supporters in 2012, favoring President Obama by a 67 percent to 31 percent margin.³⁰ Unmarried women today make up almost half, or 49 percent, of eligible women voters—up from 32 percent in 1970.³¹ Their current share of the voter pool—one-quarter of eligible voters—is nearly the size of white evangelical Protestants, the GOP's largest base group.³²

This burgeoning population of unmarried women can be expected to continue to lean heavily Democratic in its politics. Survey data consistently show this group to be unusually populist on economic issues and generally opposed to the GOP agenda on foreign policy and social issues.³³ Just as with Millennials, however, the economic situation has taken a heavy toll on this group, and economic pessimism is rampant. Almost three-fifths of unmarried women view staying in the middle class as harder than ever, with many jobs not paying enough to live on.³⁴ And, just as with the Millennials, that could give Republicans an opening to cut into Democrats' large margins from 2012.

Geography of the path to 270 in 2016

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

Core Obama and GOP states

In 2012, President Obama carried 26 states, as well as the District of Columbia, for a total of 332 EVs. Democrats have carried 18 of these states plus D.C.—the so-called Blue Wall—for a total of 242 EVs in every election since 1992. Of these 18, the Democratic candidate in 2016 is almost certain to carry 14 of them³⁵—California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington—plus D.C.—for a total of 186 EVs.

These are the Democrats' core states, won easily by the party's nominee for six straight presidential elections and unlikely to be seriously contested in this election either. But these core states are far short of an Electoral College majority, and the Democratic candidate will still need 84 more EVs from some combination of states to actually win the presidency.

Republicans carried 24 states—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming—for a total of 206 EVs in 2012. They are almost certain³⁶ to carry all of these in 2016, except North Carolina, for a total of 191 EVs. This is also far short of a majority, meaning that Republicans will need 79 additional EVs to capture the presidency.

With the exception of New Hampshire, the additional states the Democrats and the Republicans need can come from three broad geographic areas: the Midwest/Rust Belt, the Southwest, and the New South. President Obama carried all of these states in 2012 except for North Carolina, which he won in 2008.

The Midwest/Rust Belt

The Midwest/Rust Belt states that could be in play between the Democratic and GOP nominees are:

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

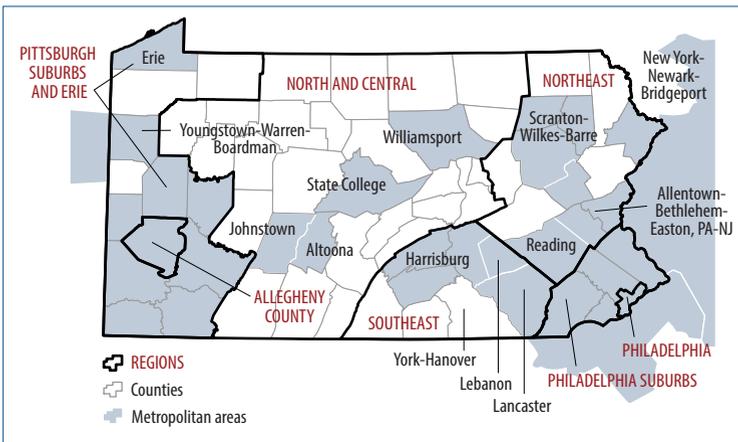
All together, these six Midwest/Rust Belt target states have 80 EVs. When combined with Democratic core states, winning all of these states would get the Democratic candidate very close to the 270 EV threshold. Carrying New Hampshire and its 4 EVs in addition to these six states would put the Democratic candidate at exactly 270, ensuring victory even without any of the Southwest or New South states.

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

The six Midwest/Rust Belt states are all slow growing, with an average population growth rate—5.1 percent between 2000 and 2014—well below the national average of 13 percent. Consistent with this slow overall growth, these states' minority population share has also grown relatively slowly—a 5-point shift over the same time period compared to 7 points for the nation as a whole. These states are whiter than the national average—an average of 83 percent versus 62 percent for the nation—and their race-ethnic composition is shifting more slowly. This is a more favorable dynamic for the GOP than in the two other swing regions.

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

Pennsylvania: 20 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	94%	6%	1
White college graduates	49%	50%	1
White working class	42%	56%	-3

Source: See Figure 2 table.

Democratic presidential candidates have won Pennsylvania for six straight elections going back to 1992. President Obama won the state by 5 points in 2012, a 5-point decline from his margin of victory in 2008.

Communities of color made up 16 percent of Pennsylvania’s vote in 2012, and they gave President Obama 94 percent support.³⁷ We estimate that minorities will make up approximately 17 percent of the 2016 Pennsylvania voting electorate. This increased minority vote share will likely help the Democratic candidate.

Conversely, we expect a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, a group who favored Republican candidate and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney by a 54 percent to 44 percent margin in 2012. This figure, however, conceals very different patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. White college graduates split about evenly between President Obama and Gov. Romney, 49 percent to 50 percent, while white working-class voters strongly supported Gov. Romney by 56 percent to 42 percent. The good news for the

eventual Democratic nominee is that the mix of white voters is shifting toward college graduates, with this group actually growing by just more than 1 percentage point, while white working-class voters should decline by 2.5 points in 2016. The Democrats' Pennsylvania coalition is a growing one that links communities of color with the expanding part of the white population, while the Republican coalition is rooted in a rapidly declining demographic group.

Looking just at these likely shifts in the voter pool, the Democratic candidate would be expected to win by a wider margin in 2016. Her or his growing coalition should be larger, and the declining coalition smaller, than in 2012. But two critical factors could undercut Democratic vote totals. The first is that the growing groups that supported President Obama in 2012 might not support the Democratic candidate at the same level in 2016 and perhaps not turn out the same rates. This drop in support and turnout could diminish the Democratic dividend from demographic change.

Take communities of color, for example. As noted, President Obama received 94 percent support from minorities in Pennsylvania in 2012. That unusually high figure reflected President Obama's nearly unanimous support among Pennsylvania's black voters and the fact that blacks made up two-thirds of Pennsylvania's minority voters compared to about half of minority voters nationwide. Some falloff in black support for Democrats is certainly possible with President Obama not on the ballot. Hispanic enthusiasm for Democrats might also flag, perhaps exacerbated by impatience on the immigration issue, which could bring down their 89 percent support rate from 2012—though anti-immigrant statements by some candidates for the GOP nomination probably lessens this possibility. These factors could erode the Democratic candidate's overall minority support level in 2016.

The second is that Democrats' hold on white college graduates in the state could be threatened. The move toward Democrats is a recent trend among this growing group and could be reversed by disappointed expectations, such as a lack of economic mobility due to the relatively slow economic recovery.

The Democrats' biggest problem is also perhaps the GOP's best opportunity: the Democrats' continuing weakness among white working-class voters in the state. If they swing further away from the Democratic candidate in 2016, approaching the 22-point nationwide deficit the Democrats suffered in 2012 or—worse—the 30-point nationwide Democratic congressional deficit in 2014, it could hand the Keystone state to the GOP.³⁸

Breaking down support patterns geographically provides another lens on the Democratic candidate's and the GOP's chances in the state. This angle reveals the same partisan growth and decline pattern as demographic groups. In a nutshell, the Democrats' presidential voting strength has been increasing in growing areas of the state, while Republicans have held their own only in declining parts of the state.

The growing areas of Pennsylvania are mostly located in three regions, all of which are in the eastern part of the state: the northeast, containing the Allentown and Reading metro areas; the southeast, containing the York, Lancaster, and Harrisburg metro areas; and the Philadelphia suburbs.³⁹ These regions are all notable for having added large numbers of minority and white college-graduate voters since 2000.⁴⁰

President Obama carried the Philadelphia suburbs—which grew by 8 percent between 2000 and 2014, with the minority population up 68 percent—by 10 points in 2012, a 6-point decline from his margin in 2008.⁴¹ Over the long term, Democrats have enjoyed an enormous 33-point improvement in their margin of support in the Philadelphia suburbs since 1988.

President Obama carried the northeast region—which also grew by 8 percent between 2000 and 2014, with the minority population up 125 percent—by 3 points in 2012, a 6-point decline from 2008 but a 16-point shift toward the Democrats since 1988. The latter includes Democratic swings of 25 points and 14 points, respectively, in the relatively fast-growing Reading and Allentown metro areas, which, since 2000, have grown by 11 percent and 13 percent, respectively.

The southeast region of the state is the fastest-growing region in Pennsylvania—its population has increased by 13 percent since 2000, with the minority population up 79 percent. Republicans won the region by 19 points in 2012, including margins of victory of 19 points, 8 points, and 21 points, respectively, in the three fast-growing metro areas that dominate the region: Lancaster, up 13 percent in overall population since 2000; Harrisburg, up 10 percent; and York, up 16 percent. But the overall Republican advantage in presidential elections in the region has decreased 10 points since 2004, which has boosted the Democrats' efforts in the state. This formerly rock-ribbed Republican region has become increasingly competitive, shifting toward the Democrats by 14 points since 1988.

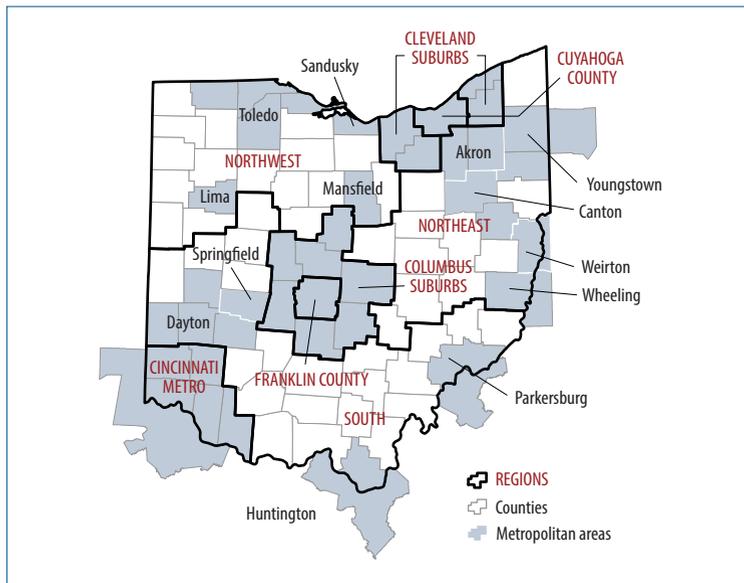
Together, these three growing regions—the northeast, southeast, and Philadelphia suburbs—contributed 53 percent of the Pennsylvania vote. Adding in Philadelphia itself, where Democrats dominate by lopsided margins—71 points in 2012—takes the total to 65 percent of the statewide vote. That leaves only 35 percent of the vote in the rest of Pennsylvania, which, while losing population, has been where the GOP has experienced some favorable trends.

Though Democrats did carry Allegheny County—down 3 percent in population since 2000—by four-tenths of a percentage point, this area has shifted toward the Republicans by 17 points since 1988. The GOP carried the Pittsburgh suburbs/Erie region—down 5 percent in population since 2000—by 11 points, and the conservative north and central region of Pennsylvania—down 1 percent in population since 2000—by 27 points. The GOP margins in these regions are 16 points and 12 points, respectively—better than they were in 1988.

Thus, the Obama “coalition of the ascendant”⁴² in Pennsylvania included not only growing groups but also increasing support in growing regions. Given this, four more years of population growth should strengthen the Democratic nominee’s position in 2016. But, as with growing groups, Democratic vote totals could be undercut by significantly worse performance in declining areas, as well as underperformance in growing areas. Since the declining areas constitute only 35 percent of the statewide vote, it is likely that growing areas will prove decisive in 2016. Of these, the Philadelphia suburbs are the largest and make up 22 percent of the statewide vote, while the southeast is the one most sympathetic to the GOP. If these areas swing significantly toward the Republicans, that could deliver the state to the GOP.

Ultimately, the Democratic candidate in Pennsylvania will benefit from a coalition based on growing groups and improved support in growing regions. However, whether this coalition can survive a situation where the economic recovery has been sluggish—especially as it has affected wage growth—and where there may be considerable time-for-a-change sentiment directed against the incumbent party is an open question. These factors could give the GOP a decent shot at winning Pennsylvania and its 20 EVs in 2016.

Ohio: 18 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	91%	8%	1
White college graduates	44%	55%	1
White working class	41%	57%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Ohio by 3 points in 2012, 2 points less than his margin of victory in 2008. Communities of color made up 17 percent of Ohio's vote in 2012 and voted 91 percent in favor of President Obama. Minorities should account for 18 percent of 2016 Ohio presidential voters—an increase that should help the Democratic nominee.

The flip side of this is a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored former Gov. Romney by a 56 percent to 42 percent margin. This 56-42 figure, however, obscures, as it does in many states, different patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. Ohio's white college graduates split 44 percent to 55 percent between President Obama and Gov. Romney, while white working-class voters were more pro-GOP, supporting Obama at 41 percent and Romney at 57 percent. Given these patterns, the Democratic nominee in 2016

should benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 2-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 1-point increase in white college graduates. So, as with Pennsylvania—though not as strongly—President Obama’s Ohio coalition is a growth coalition that links communities of color with the growing part of the white population, while the GOP coalition is rooted in the declining sector of whites.

Based only on these likely shifts in the voter pool, the Democratic candidate would be expected to win by a wider margin in 2016, as her or his growing coalition expands and the GOP declining coalition contracts. But Democratic support levels within the growth coalition might not hold. As noted, President Obama received 91 percent support from minorities in 2012. That figure was driven by his 96 percent support among Ohio’s black voters, who made up about three-quarters of the minority vote. In light of economic difficulties experienced by the black population in Ohio; President Obama not being on the ticket; and the less historic nature of the upcoming campaign, some falloff from that 96 percent figure is certainly possible. These factors could bring down the Democratic candidate’s overall support level from minorities in 2016.

White college graduates—the other part of the Obama growth coalition—could present a more serious opportunity for a Republican win. President Obama’s 11-point deficit among this group in 2012 represented considerable erosion from his performance in 2008, when he nearly broke even among this group. Significant additional movement toward the GOP among this group could hand them victory given President Obama’s narrow margin in 2012.

Finally, the group most sympathetic to the GOP is the white working class. Gov. Romney won these voters in Ohio by 16 points in 2012. There is ample room for a sharper swing toward the GOP in 2016 and, depending on the depth of that swing, it could certainly tip the state to the Republicans, particularly if the Democrats’ base weakens.

In terms of geographic voting patterns, Ohio is growing particularly slowly—up just 2 percent since 2000. But there is quite a bit of variation within the state, with some areas growing fairly rapidly and others barely growing at all or declining. Mirroring trends in Pennsylvania, Democrats have been making their biggest gains in these growth areas.

The Columbus metro area, which accounts for 16 percent of the statewide vote, is easily the fastest growing area in the state. The population has grown by 20 percent since 2000, and the minority population is up 62 percent. Compared to other parts of Ohio, the Columbus metro area has seen the biggest decline in the share of white working-class eligible voters, as well as the sharpest increases in the shares of white college-graduate and minority voters.⁴³ President Obama carried the area by 7 points in 2012, a 3-point increase in margin compared to 2008, despite support for him declining overall across Ohio.

In the very fast-growing Columbus suburbs, which have grown by 29 percent since 2000—with the minority population up 132 percent—President Obama had a deficit of 19 points in 2012. But in Franklin County—the central county of the metro area that contains the urban core—President Obama won handily by 23 points. There has also been a 34-point pro-Democratic presidential voting swing in the Columbus metro area since 1988. This includes an incredible 44-point swing in Franklin County, and a 20-point swing in the Columbus suburbs.

The second fastest-growing metro area in the state is the Cincinnati metro area, which accounts for 15 percent of the statewide vote—though its growth rate is a far more modest 6 percent—with the minority population up 33 percent since 2000. Gov. Romney won the Cincinnati metro by 12 points in 2012, but Democrats are doing substantially better in the area than they did when then-Sen. John Kerry lost Ohio in 2004. Over the longer term, there has been a 17-point swing in presidential voting toward the Democrats since 1988.

Democrats have also made substantial progress in the northwest region of Ohio,⁴⁴ which includes the Toledo metro area, several smaller metro areas, and many rural counties that are mostly declining in population. Democrats almost broke even in the area in 2012, losing by only 3 points, and there has been a 15-point swing toward Democrats since 1988.

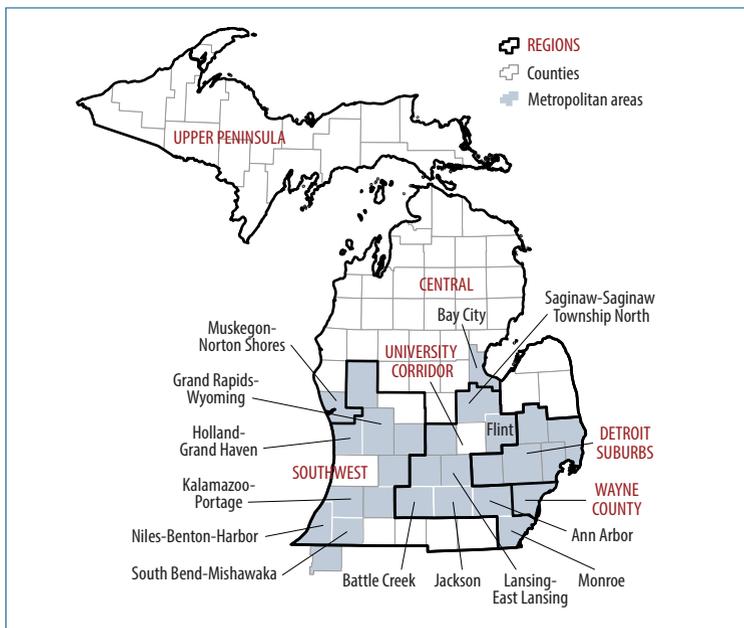
In 2012, Democrats won Cuyahoga County, the central county of the Cleveland metro area, by a wide margin—40 points—and broke even in the Cleveland suburbs, 49 percent to 49 percent. Overall, the Cleveland metro area, which accounts for 19 percent of the statewide vote, went for President Obama by 24 points—a 15-point Democratic swing relative to 1988.

The northeast region, which includes the Akron, Canton, and Youngstown metro areas, went Democratic by 6 points in 2012, while the south region, which

includes the Dayton metro area and a great many rural counties, supported Gov. Romney by 11 points. In the northeast, the shift toward the Democrats since 1988 has been quite modest—only 3 points.

These trends in the growing parts of this very slow-growth state have generally strengthened President Obama’s Ohio coalition. But will these trends hold up in 2016? Some of these growing areas, such as the Columbus suburbs and the Cincinnati metro area, are far more Democrat-friendly than they used to be but remain fairly conservative and are fertile ground for a potential GOP resurgence. And Republican gains in the growing part of Ohio would put a great deal of pressure on Democratic performance in the Cleveland metro area and in the northeast where, as we have seen, Democrats have made only weak gains over time.

Michigan: 16 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	89%	11%	1
White college graduates	49%	51%	1
White working class	45%	53%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Michigan fairly easily by more than 9 points in 2012, and Democrats have won the state in six-straight presidential elections. But in 2004 and 2000, the GOP came within 3 points and 5 points, respectively, demonstrating that the state can be very competitive—and could be so in the coming election.

Communities of color made up 19 percent of Michigan's vote in 2012 and voted 89 percent for President Obama. We estimate that minorities should account for 20 percent of the Michigan vote in 2016. Concomitantly, there should be a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney by 52 percent to 46 percent. But support patterns were significantly different among white working-class and white college-graduate voters in 2012.

Michigan's white college graduates split about evenly between President Obama and Gov. Romney, 49 percent to 51 percent, while white working-class voters favored Romney by 53 percent to 45 percent. That result suggests that Democrats may be modestly helped by ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that should reduce the weight of white working-class voters by 2 points and increase that of white college-graduate voters by 1 point in the 2016 election.

The overall effect of likely shifts in the voter pool in 2016 should therefore favor the Democratic candidate. The real issue for Democrats will be sustaining their support levels among these various groups. President Obama received 89 percent support from minorities in 2012 driven by 98 percent support among Michigan's black voters, who made up 70 percent of the minority vote. Falloff from that 98 percent figure is plausible and could significantly weaken Democrats' overall minority support in 2012. President Obama's 68 percent support among Latinos—whose weight among Michigan voters is much smaller but growing—will also be important for Democrats to maintain.

White college graduates could provide a significant boost for the GOP if they drift away from a more even split and back toward the 17-point Republican advantage the GOP enjoyed among this group in 2004. The Democrats' chief challenge in Michigan may be maintaining their white working-class support, since the 2012 election showed signs of significant erosion among this group; Democrats actually carried white working-class voters in 2008. The key for the Democratic candidate will be damage minimization—avoiding a massive pro-Republican shift among this group.

In terms of geographic voting patterns, Michigan is the slowest growing state in the country. In fact, it was the only state with negative population growth, actually declining by three-tenths of a percentage point between 2000 and 2014. But parts of Michigan did grow. The two fastest-growing regions, the Detroit suburbs and the southwest,⁴⁵ have each grown by 6 percent since 2000, with communities of color providing the overwhelming proportion of the growth in both areas.

The Detroit suburbs are also notable for showing the sharpest trends in the changes affecting all Michigan regions: declining shares of white working-class voters and increasing shares of minority and white college-graduate voters. The latter voters have been trending exceptionally sharply toward Democrats in this region. President Obama carried the Detroit suburbs by 51 percent to 48 percent in 2012, down from 54 percent to 45 percent in 2008. But that 3-point margin was 6 points better than then-Sen. Kerry did in 2004.

Looking back to 1988, Democrats have made an impressive 26-point improvement in their presidential vote margin in the Detroit suburbs. This is equal to their gain over the same time period in Wayne County, the urban core of the Detroit metro area. These improvements have translated into overwhelming dominance of the Detroit metro area as whole—60 percent Democratic to 40 percent Republican— which constitutes 44 percent of the statewide vote.

The southwest region, which is generally considered the most conservative in Michigan, has also seen significant movement toward the Democrats over time. Then-Sen. Kerry lost the southwest by 16 points in 2004, so President Obama's 8-point deficit in the region in 2012 actually represented an 8-point swing toward the Democrats. During the entire 1988 to 2012 period, Democrats improved their position in the region by 18 points. The southwest region contributes just more than one-fifth of the statewide vote.

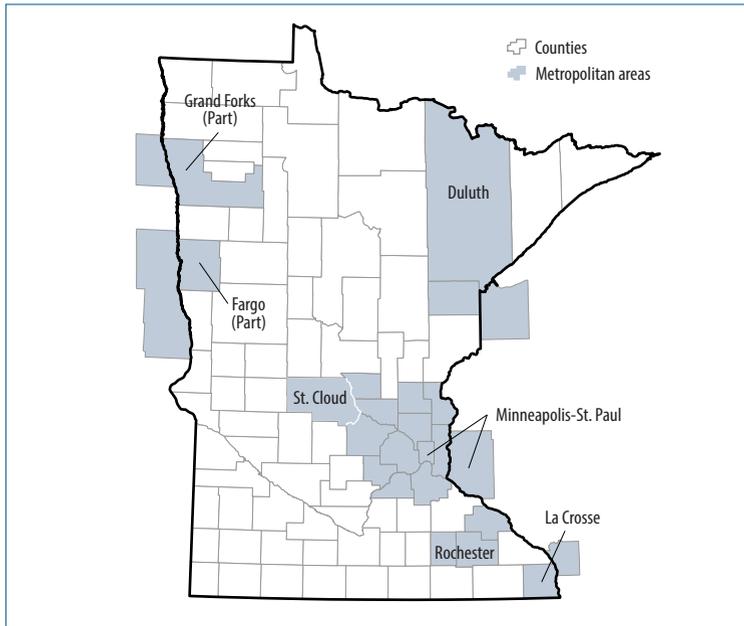
The so-called university corridor contributes another one-fifth of the statewide vote. The corridor is a cluster of counties to the immediate west and south of the Detroit metro area that includes the Lansing and Ann Arbor metro areas, home, respectively, to Michigan State University and the University of Michigan. It is also the other region of the state where some growth is taking place, particularly in the relatively fast-growing Ann Arbor metro area, which has grown 11 percent since

2000—the second-fastest metro-area growth rate in the state. In 2012, President Obama carried the university corridor by a very strong 58 percent to 40 percent margin, an 8-point improvement over then-Sen. Kerry’s 2004 performance. Looking back to 1988, there has been a 17-point pro-Democratic presidential voting swing in this region.

Indeed, only in the lightly populated central region—45 percent to 54 percent in 2012—and even more lightly populated Upper Peninsula region—48 percent to 51 percent in 2012—have Democratic gains since 1988 been modest or even negative. In the central region, the gain has been just 6 points, while the GOP has managed to actually gain 7 points in the Upper Peninsula. But the latter region is only 3 percent of the statewide vote, and its population is down 3 percent since 2000.

Thus, as in Ohio, President Obama’s Michigan coalition has been strengthened by trends in the growing parts of a very slow-growth state—a state where the overall population has actually declined. Some of these Democratic gains may be vulnerable, such as—for example—in the southwest, which is far more sympathetic to the GOP than the Detroit suburbs or university corridor. And the latter areas too could provide opportunities for the Republicans if time-for-a-change sentiment runs deep come election time. It is also possible that the sluggish recovery, with minimal income gains for workers thus far, could provide an opening for the GOP in a state that should otherwise be an easy hold for the Democrats.

Minnesota: 10 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	78%	21%	1
White college graduates	52%	47%	1
White working class	49%	48%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Minnesota with an 8-point margin in 2012, and Democrats have actually won the state in 10 straight presidential elections. The last time the Democrats lost in a presidential election in Minnesota was in 1972, when Richard Nixon wiped out George McGovern. The Democrats' margins, however, were small in 2004 and 2000—3 points and 2 points, respectively—so the state could possibly be in play come 2016 despite the Democrats' current winning streak.

Communities of color made up 9 percent of Minnesota's vote in 2012 and voted 78 percent in favor of President Obama. We estimate that minorities will increase to 11 percent of the 2016 Minnesota voting electorate.

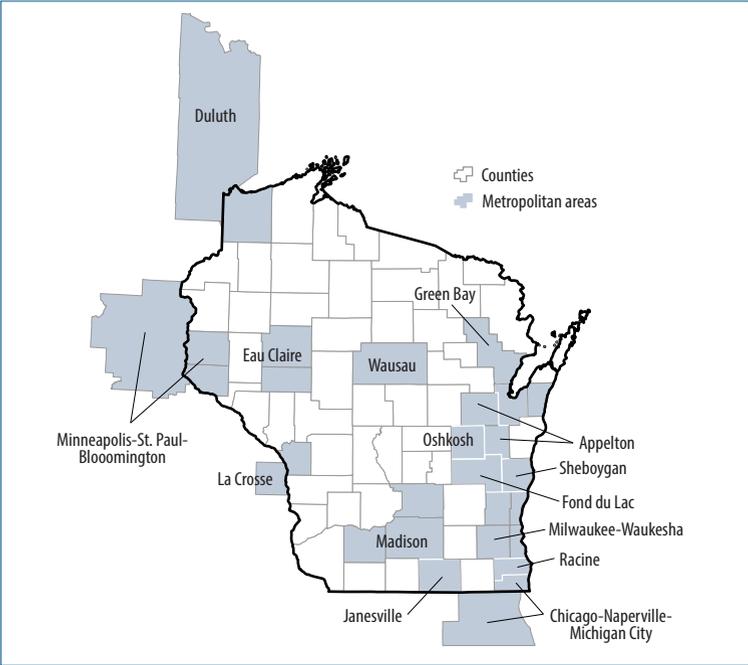
We estimate a 1.4-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored President Obama by 50 percent to 47 percent. Among whites, voting patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters were modestly different. Minnesota's white working-class voters supported President Obama but only very narrowly—49 percent to 48 percent—while the state's white college graduates gave him a more robust 5-point margin at 52 percent to 47 percent. That means the Democratic candidate should derive some benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce more than a 2-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 0.6 percentage point increase in white college-graduate voters in 2016. The Obama Minnesota coalition is the classic Democratic growth coalition that links communities of color with the growing part of the white population—but with unusually high white support among working-class whites.

These likely shifts in the voter pool would, all else equal, produce a larger victory margin for the Democratic nominee in 2016 than in 2012. And Democrats' minority support, in contrast to other swing states, was not so high in 2012 that the party's candidate should have much difficulty replicating or surpassing that level in 2016. But maintaining a solid advantage among white college graduates could be challenging for Democrats, as could keeping their rough parity with the GOP among white working-class voters. The latter could be especially fertile ground for Republicans given rising populist sentiment during the sluggish economic recovery. While the Democratic nominee can afford some slippage among this group, the state could slip away from the Democrats if there is a powerful break toward the GOP, given how large these voters still weigh in Minnesota's electorate.

Turning to geographic voting patterns, Minnesota is a relatively slow-growth state—11 percent growth since 2000 compared to the national average of 13 percent—but is growing faster than very slow-growth states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. This growth is driven almost entirely by expansion in the Minneapolis metro area, which provides 62 percent of the Minnesota vote. The Minneapolis metro area grew by 15 percent between 2000 and 2014, with the minority population up by 73 percent and accounting for 77 percent of population growth. The next largest metro area in Minnesota is the very slow-growing Duluth metro area, which grew by 2 percent and only provides 5 percent of the statewide vote. Aside from Minneapolis and Duluth, the Rochester and St. Cloud metro areas are fairly fast growing—up 17 percent and 15 percent, respectively—but provide only 3 percent each of Minnesota's vote.

The real battle for Minnesota will be fought in the Minneapolis metro area, which gave President Obama a 13-point margin in 2012—5 points larger than the margin the metro gave then-Sen. Kerry in 2004 in his very modest 3-point victory. Demographically, the area is changing in ways that should benefit the Democratic candidate—growth there is primarily fueled by communities of color—but the GOP will vigorously try to reduce their deficit by running up their support in more GOP-friendly outer suburban counties such as Anoka, Scott, and Washington. All in all, however, compared to other competitive Midwest/Rust Belt states, Minnesota should be a fairly easy hold for the eventual Democratic nominee.

Wisconsin: 10 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	87%	12%	1
White college graduates	50%	49%	1
White working class	48%	50%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Wisconsin by a 7-point margin in 2012, down from 14 points in 2008, and Democrats have won the state seven straight times going back to 1988. Democrats' victories in 2000 and 2004 were razor thin, however—0.2 points and 0.4 points respectively—so the state is certainly capable of being competitive.

Communities of color made up 10 percent of Wisconsin's vote in 2012 and voted 87 percent for President Obama. We expect minorities to be 11 percent of 2016 Wisconsin voters. That implies a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney, albeit by a very thin 50 percent to 49 percent margin. White working-class and white college-graduate voters differed in Wisconsin, though not as much as in some other states. Wisconsin's white working-class voters supported Gov. Romney 50 percent to 48 percent, while the state's white college graduates slightly favored President Obama 50 percent to 49 percent. The Democratic candidate should therefore benefit modestly from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool, which are likely to produce a 2.4-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 1.4-point increase in white college graduates in 2016.

These likely shifts in the composition of the voter pool should benefit the Democratic nominee in 2016. But she or he will have to avoid crippling losses in voter support among key groups. Democrats' minority support needs to remain very high, and there is certainly potential for falloff in their 98 percent support among black voters or 74 percent support from Hispanics—the prime driver of Wisconsin's increasing minority population.

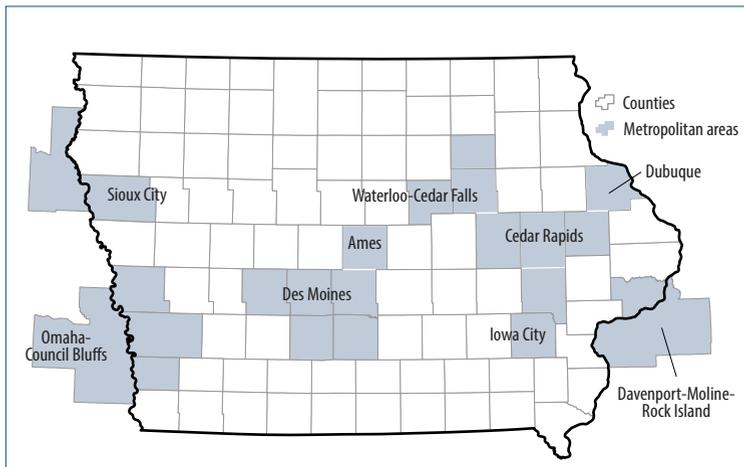
Maintaining Democrats' modest advantage among white college graduates may be more difficult. The 2012 support levels already represent considerable attrition from 2008 support levels. If additional erosion among white college graduates occurs for the Democrats, the Republican nominee will be in a strong position to capitalize on a potential surge in white working-class support. President George W. Bush had an 8-point advantage among this latter group in 2004; if the 2016 Republican nominee is able to increase that margin, the GOP could have a real chance in the state.

In terms of geographic voting patterns, Wisconsin, like other states in the Midwest/Rust Belt, is a slow-growth state—7 percent compared to the national average of 13 percent—but is growing faster than very slow-growth states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. The fastest-growing metro area is the Madison metro area, the second largest in the state, which has grown 19 percent in the period from 2000 to 2014. The minority population in this area has grown by 85 percent, accounting for 51 percent of growth. Madison contributes 11 percent of the statewide vote and has shifted to the Democrats in presidential voting by 23 points since 1988. President Obama carried Madison by a stunning 40 points in 2012.

The Milwaukee metro area, the largest in the state, accounts for 28 percent of the statewide vote. In contrast to Madison, it is relatively slow growing, up only 5 percent since 2000. The minority population in the area grew by 32 percent and accounted for 171 percent of population growth—in other words, without minority growth, the Milwaukee metro area would have experienced significant population decline. The area gave President Obama a 5-point margin in 2012, actually 2 points less than Michael Dukakis' margin in 1988.

Combined, Milwaukee and Madison alone account for 40 percent of the statewide vote. With no other metro area accounting for more than 5 percent of the vote, the contest for Wisconsin will center on these two metro areas. In particular, the GOP will be seeking to move the Milwaukee metro area back toward the break-even point—where President Bush was in 2004—which would put the Democratic hold on the state in real danger. Republicans will also put pressure on Democratic performance in smaller metro areas, such as Green Bay, 5 percent of the statewide vote; Appleton, 4 percent; Racine, 3 percent; Janesville, 3 percent; Eau Claire, 3 percent; and Oshkosh, 3 percent; where President Obama's twin victories in 2008 and in 2012 marked strong gains over then-Sen. Kerry's performance in 2004.

Iowa: 6 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	88%	10%	1
White college graduates	47%	52%	1
White working class	51%	47%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Iowa by a 6-point margin in 2012, and Democrats have won the state in six of the last seven presidential elections. The two presidential elections immediately preceding 2008, however, featured a GOP win by 0.7 points in 2004, as well as a very narrow GOP loss by 0.3 points in 2000. The recent past indicates that Iowa may well be in play in 2016.

Communities of color made up 6 percent of Iowa’s vote in 2012 and voted 88 percent for President Obama. We project that minorities should account for 7 percent of the 2016 Iowa voting electorate.

We project a 1-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored President Obama by 50 percent to 49 percent in 2012. Among whites, voting patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters differed but not in the way typical of most states. Iowa’s white working-class voters supported President Obama by 51 percent to 47 percent, while the state’s white college-graduate voters supported Gov. Romney by 52 percent to 47 percent. Based on these

data, the GOP should actually be slightly helped by ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 2-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 1-point increase in white college graduates in 2016.

Likely shifts in the composition of the Iowa voter pool in 2016 therefore do not clearly favor the Democrats as much as in other similar states. That puts extra emphasis on the Democratic nominee's key task: avoiding large losses in voter support among key groups. The Democratic nominee's minority support needs to remain high and avoiding further slippage among white college graduates—as Democrats experienced in 2012—will be crucial.

But the Democratic nominee's most difficult challenge—and the GOP's great opportunity—is the possibility of a sharp drop in the Democrats' solid white working-class support, which was clearly central to their 2012 victory. If the Democrats' white working-class support is far south of the break-even point, and if the Democratic candidate fails to energize the small but significant minority vote, the GOP has a serious chance of taking the state.

In terms of geographic voting patterns, Iowa is a slow-growth state, with 6 percent population growth since 2000 compared to the national average of 13 percent. By far the fastest-growing metro area is Des Moines, up 27 percent over the same time period. The minority population is up 97 percent and accounts for 41 percent of the area's growth. It is also Iowa's largest metro area, contributing 19 percent of the statewide vote. President Obama carried Des Moines by 8 points in 2012, which was 8 points better than then-Sen. Kerry in 2004.

The second largest metro area is Cedar Rapids, which is also growing fairly fast. The population is up 11 percent since 2000, and the minority population has grown by 93 percent. The area accounts for 9 percent of the statewide vote. President Obama carried the Cedar Rapids area by 15 points in 2012, 7 points better than then-Sen. Kerry in 2004.

After that, there are a series of smaller metro areas that each account for 3 percent to 6 percent of the statewide vote. From largest to smallest, these are: Davenport, Iowa City, Waterloo, Council Bluffs, Sioux City, Dubuque, and Ames. Together, they contribute less than one-third, or 29 percent, of Iowa's vote. Most of these metro areas are in the east or central parts of the state and gave President Obama strong margins ranging from 14 points in Davenport, Ames, and Waterloo to 31 points in the fast-growing Iowa City, which has grown by 25 percent since 2000.

The two metro areas at the western end of the state, Sioux City and Council Bluffs, were quite different: Sioux City favored President Obama by just 1 point and Council Bluffs favored Gov. Romney by 8 points.

Iowa's vote lacks the clear geographic fulcrums that characterize the other competitive Midwestern and Rust Belt states. That said, the nine metro areas mentioned above account for 57 percent of the statewide vote, so the 2016 presidential contest will likely be concentrated in these areas. If the GOP can significantly roll back Democratic gains in these areas, particularly in central and eastern Iowa, Republicans will have a serious chance of taking the state in 2016.

Midwest/Rust Belt summary

The six Midwest swing states are all marked by slow growth and a relatively small and slow-growing percentage of voters from communities of color. These states are projected to average around 14 percent minority voters in 2016, ranging from a low of 7 percent in Iowa to a high of 20 percent in Michigan. But the Democrats' relatively small base of minority voters is supplemented by fairly strong support among these states' growing white college-graduate populations, who gave President Obama an average deficit of only 2 points in 2012, whereas the national deficit among white college graduates was 11 points. This coalition of the ascendant has produced increased Democratic support in growing areas of these states.

Moreover, the weight of that coalition should be larger in these states in 2016 than in 2012, with an average 2-point increase in the percent of white college graduates and minorities among voters, as well as a 2-point decline in the percent of white working-class voters. In addition, the Democratic nominee should benefit from the fact that Midwestern and Rust Belt white working-class voters tend to be more supportive of Democrats than in other competitive states, averaging only a 6-point Democratic deficit in 2012.

Time-for-a-change sentiment, rising populist feelings, and the sluggish economic recovery, however, could tax that relative friendliness among the white working class toward the Democrats and could also reduce enthusiasm for the Democratic candidate among the coalition of the ascendant. That could give Republicans an opening in these states, especially in Ohio and Pennsylvania, where pro-GOP leanings are

strongest among the white working class. Of the two, Ohio is the best target for the GOP since the state was closer in 2012, and the state's white college graduates gave Republicans more support in that election than in any of the other competitive Midwestern/Rust Belt states.

If the Democrats do manage to lose only Ohio among the competitive Midwestern/Rust Belt states, that would add 62 EVs to their core support of 186 for a total of 248 EVs, leaving them only 22 short of victory. Twenty of these EVs could be provided by the three Southwestern states President Obama carried in 2008 and 2012.

Carrying Ohio is central to GOP prospects in 2016 because it is their best chance of stopping a Democratic sweep of the swing Midwestern/Rust Belt states. And if the GOP carried Ohio and Pennsylvania in addition to their core support, that would leave them only 41 EVs short of victory. Those 41 EVs could be provided by a combination of Florida and any other New South state or by Florida, Colorado, and any other Southwestern state.

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

The Southwest

The Southwest includes three states that could be in play between the Democratic and the GOP nominees:

- Colorado: 9 EVs
- Nevada: 6 EVs
- New Mexico: 5 EVs

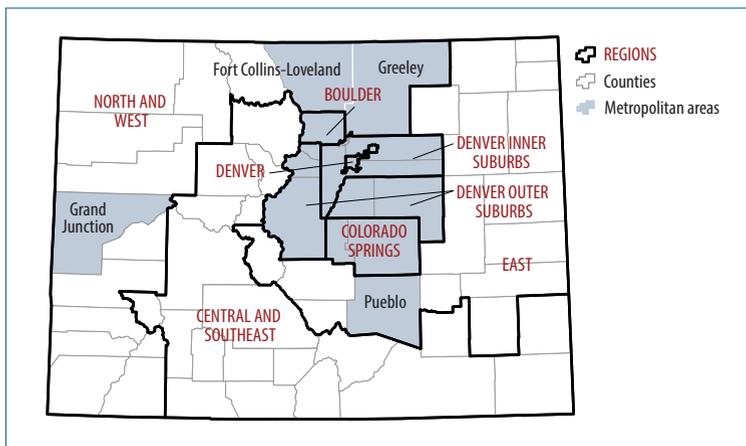
The Democratic campaign does not appear likely to seriously contest Montana and its 3 EVs—even though Sen. John McCain won it by only 2 points in 2008. Nor is Arizona, with its 11 EVs, likely to be a true contest, though the rapid rate of demographic change in the state will likely put it in play by the 2020's. Together, these three Southwestern target states have 20 EVs and could, for example, more than make up for a Democratic loss of Ohio and its 18 EVs. If added to the Democrats' core states and the other five competitive Midwestern/Rust Belt states carried by President Obama in 2008 and 2012, these states would leave the Democratic candidate only two EVs short of victory.

The GOP strategy will focus on adding at least one Southwestern swing state to the states they are able to pick off in the Midwest/Rust Belt, setting the party up to claim victory through success in the New South. For example, if the GOP carries Ohio and any Southwestern state, they can win the presidency by carrying the three swing New South states: Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia. Alternatively, if the GOP carries Ohio and Pennsylvania and then Colorado and Nevada, simply taking Florida would be enough to give them an electoral victory.

These three Southwestern states are all fast growing relative to the national average. New Mexico's 15 percent growth rate and Colorado's 23 percent growth rate since 2000, however, are dwarfed by Nevada's 42 percent over the same period, easily making it the fastest-growing state in the country. Nevada's growth in minority population share—a 14-point shift since 2000—was also far greater than the 6-point increase in Colorado and New Mexico. Nevada's overall minority population share of 49 percent, however, still lags far behind that of New Mexico at 61 percent, though it is considerably higher than Colorado's at 31 percent.

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

Colorado: 9 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	78%	19%	2
White college graduates	46%	51%	0
White working class	45%	52%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won the state by 5 points in 2012, down from a 9-point advantage in 2008.

Communities of color made up 18 percent of Colorado’s vote in 2008 and voted 79 percent for President Obama. Our estimate is that minorities, driven by the burgeoning Hispanic population, will account for about 20 percent of the 2016 Colorado voting electorate. This means a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney by 52 percent to 46 percent in 2012. Unlike other states considered here, the support patterns among white working-class and white

college-graduate voters are very close. Colorado's white college graduates favored Gov. Romney by 51 percent to 46 percent, while white working-class voters supported Romney by slightly more at 53 percent to 45 percent.

Given these patterns, the Democratic candidate should benefit, but only slightly, from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 2.3-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 0.3-point increase in white college graduates in 2016.

Demographic shifts in voter share, particularly the rise of minorities, should therefore put the Democratic nominee in a stronger position in Colorado in 2016, as her or his growing coalition expands and the GOP nominee's declining coalition contracts. But there are challenges for the Democratic nominee. President Obama received 79 percent support from minorities in 2012 driven by 75 percent support among Colorado's Hispanic voters, who made up almost two-thirds of the state's minority vote. Clearly, if Hispanic support for the Democratic nominee falls significantly from its relatively high 2012 level, that would be a boon for the GOP.

White college graduates, the other part of the Democratic growth coalition, could be critical in 2016 as well. The 2012 Democratic deficit among this group is a considerable falloff from President Obama's solid advantage in 2008. The GOP candidate will seek to capitalize on this trend and shift this group further toward the GOP.

Then there is the group most sympathetic to the GOP: the white working class. There is certainly room for a sharper swing towards the Republicans in 2016 given rising populist and time-for-a-change sentiment. If the GOP advantage among these voters increases to, and perhaps surpasses, the levels enjoyed by Sen. McCain in 2008, the Republican nominee would have a serious chance of taking the state.

As previously mentioned, Colorado is a fast-growing state, up 23 percent in population since 2000. And where Colorado has been growing, Democrats have generally been improving their position—one of the keys to President Obama's victories in 2008 and 2012.

Consider first the Denver metro area, far and away the largest metro area in the state and accounting for half the statewide vote. The Denver metro area is experiencing the most rapid demographic change in the state, with the share of white working-class voters declining sharply, while the numbers of white college-graduate and minority voters are surging. To examine trends in the Denver metro area, it is useful to divide it into three parts: Denver county, the urban core; the inner suburbs, which include Arapahoe, Jefferson, and Adams counties; and the outer suburbs, which include the extremely fast-growing emerging suburb of Douglas, as well as several small exurban counties.⁴⁶

President Obama carried the City and County of Denver—which has grown by 20 percent since 2000, with the minority population up 16 percent—by 49 points, a 9-point improvement over then-Sen. Kerry’s performance in 2004. President Obama also improved on then-Sen. Kerry’s margin by 13 points in the inner suburbs, which have grown by 20 percent in population since 2000 and accounted for 31 percent of the statewide vote in 2012. The minority population in the inner suburbs grew by 72 percent and accounted for almost all growth in the area. President Obama improved Democrats’ margin by a more modest 6 points in the amazingly fast-growing outer suburbs, which have grown by 65 percent, with the minority population up 163 percent.⁴⁷

All together, President Obama carried the Denver metro area by 14 points, an 11-point improvement over 2004 and a 16-point improvement over 1988. By themselves, these would be huge advances for the Democrats. But President Obama’s gains were by no means limited to the Denver metro area. Unsurprisingly, he did well in the liberal Boulder metro area, carrying it 70 percent to 28 percent, a 33-point gain over 1988. More surprisingly, President Obama made big gains in the very conservative fast-growing—up 28 percent since 2000—Colorado Springs metro area, bettering then-Sen. Kerry by 14 points and shaving the Republican margin of victory to 21 points. Democrats have improved their presidential voting performance in this metro area by 20 points since 1988.

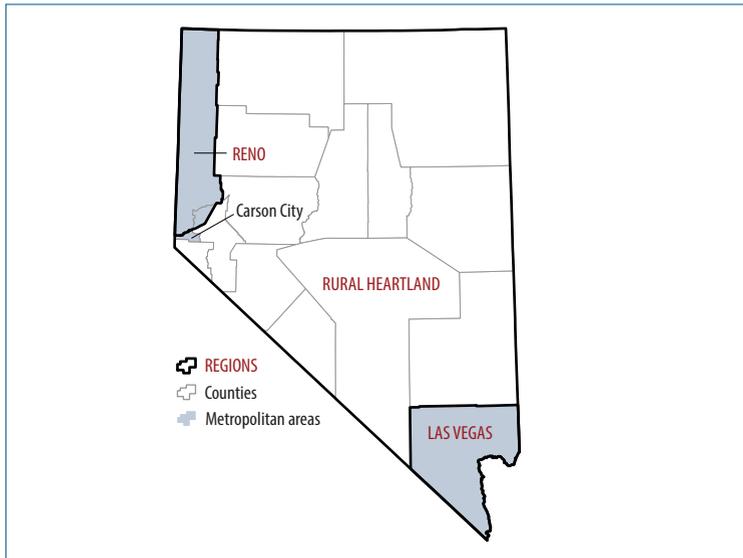
President Obama also made significant progress in the very fast-growing north and west region, which has grown 31 percent in population since 2000 and accounts for one-fifth of the statewide vote. This region includes the relatively liberal Fort Collins metro area and the very conservative Greeley metro area, the fastest-growing metro area—up 54 percent since 2000—in the state. In Fort

Collins, there has been a Democratic swing of 11 points between 2004 and 2012. But in the Greeley metro area, the swing was even larger at 14 points. The latter result is particularly significant since, prior to the 2008 election, Greeley—in contrast to most of Colorado—was trending toward the GOP. Now, over the 1988 to 2012 period, Greeley is essentially unchanged.

The one region in Colorado which has trended clearly toward the Republicans since 1988 is the thinly populated eastern region where the white working-class share of eligible voters is decreasing the slowest and the minority share of voters is increasing the slowest. This is the slowest growing region of Colorado—up just 7 percent since 2000—and contains a fair number of counties that are losing population. The GOP is doing 11 points better in presidential voting in this region today than it was in 1988. But this region only casts 6 percent of the statewide vote.

The Obama Colorado coalition has been considerably bolstered by favorable trends in the growing parts of the state, including its fastest-growing areas. But will these trends hold up in 2016? Some of these growing areas, such as the Denver outer suburbs and Colorado Springs metro area, are more Democrat-friendly than they used to be but remain quite conservative, so the potential for a substantial shift back toward the GOP is very real. And serious Republican gains in these fast-growing parts of Colorado would put a great deal of pressure on Democratic performance in relatively liberal areas such as Denver county, Boulder, and—particularly—the Denver inner suburbs.

Nevada: 6 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	77%	22%	3
White college graduates	44%	55%	0
White working class	38%	59%	-3

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama earned a fairly easy 7-point victory in Nevada in 2012, though this was a 6-point decline in his margin from 2008.

Communities of color made up 34 percent of Nevada’s vote in 2012 and voted 77 percent for President Obama. We estimate that minorities, driven by the rapidly increasing Hispanic population, should account for more than 37 percent of 2016 Nevada voters. This means at least a 3-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney by a 58 percent to 40 percent margin. Following the common pattern, white college graduates in Nevada were more favorable to President Obama than white working-class voters. Nevada’s white college graduates supported Gov. Romney 55 percent to 44 percent, while white working-class voters were stronger in their support, giving Romney a 59 percent to 38 percent margin. Given these patterns, the Democratic nominee should benefit from the fact that essentially all of the projected 3-point drop in white voters should be among white working-class voters—the less Democrat-friendly part of the white electorate.

These demographic shifts should put the Democratic candidate in a stronger position to win Nevada in 2016. But the GOP has serious prospects for improved performance. Chief among them is the group most sympathetic to the GOP: the white working class. The strong performance of the Republicans among this group in 2012 could be a harbinger, given the relatively poor economic situation in the state. If the GOP carries Nevada in 2016, it will likely be because of a surge in support among the white working class.

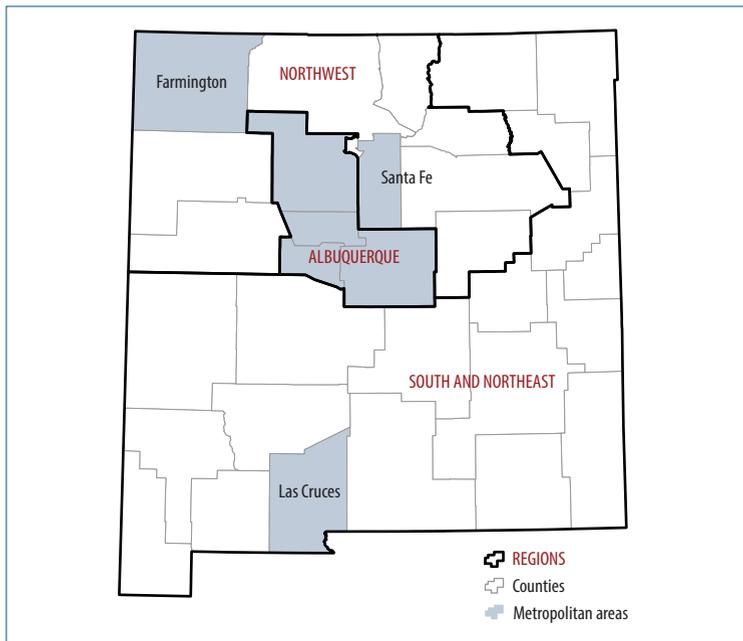
Nevada is easily the fastest-growing state in the United States; its population has expanded 42 percent since 2000. The Las Vegas metro area, including Clark County—which has grown by 50 percent due to huge infusions of minorities and white college graduates—is largely driving this growth. As a result, the demographic profile of this area has changed dramatically: The minority share of voters has gone up by more than 1 percentage point each year, while the white working-class share of voters has been declining by more than 1 point per year.⁴⁸ As a result, Democrats have been making huge strides.

In 2012, President Obama carried the Las Vegas metro area, which accounts for 68 percent of the statewide vote, by 15 points. This margin was 10 points better than then-Sen. Kerry's performance in 2004, when Democrats lost the state. There has been a 30-point swing toward presidential Democrats in the Las Vegas metro area since 1988. The Reno metro area contributes another one-fifth of the statewide vote. This area is also fast growing, with 30 percent growth since 2000, though lagging far behind Las Vegas. President Obama carried the Reno metro area by 3 points, a 9-point slippage from 2008, though a 26-point shift toward the Democrats since 1988.

Republicans do the best, by far, in the vast rural heartland that lies in between the Las Vegas and Reno metro areas. Here Gov. Romney beat President Obama by 63 percent to 34 percent. But this area is the slowest growing in Nevada, with just 16 percent growth since 2000, and contributes just 13 percent of the statewide vote.

President Obama's Nevada coalition is a classic coalition of the ascendant centered in the rapidly growing Las Vegas metro area. Clearly, the battle for Nevada will be fought out in this metro area. Republicans' chances for flipping the state lie in significantly compressing the Democratic nominee's margin in this area in 2016.

New Mexico: 5 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	68%	30%	3
White college graduates	45%	51%	-1
White working class	36%	56%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama earned a 10-point victory in New Mexico in 2012, down from his 15-point margin in 2008. But this is quite a contrast with the 2004 and 2000 elections, which saw razor thin victories for President George W. Bush, who won by 0.79 percentage points in 2004, as well as Al Gore, who won by 0.06 points in 2000.

Communities of color made up 46 percent of New Mexico’s vote in 2012 and voted 68 percent in favor of President Obama. We estimate that minorities, driven by increasing Hispanic population share, should account for around 49 percent of the 2016 New Mexico voting electorate. This indicates a 3-point drop in the white share of voters, a group who favored Gov. Romney by 54 percent to 40 percent. In a similar fashion to Nevada, this overall figure obscures very different patterns

among white working-class and white college-graduate voters. New Mexico's white college graduates favored Gov. Romney by only 51 percent to 45 percent, while white working-class voters strongly supported the GOP candidate by a 56 percent to 36 percent margin.

Given these patterns, the 2016 Democratic nominee should benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 2-point decrease in white working-class voters but only a 0.8-point decrease in white college graduates in 2016. These shifts should put the Democratic nominee in a stronger position in Nevada in 2016. But the GOP will have some electoral openings it can explore. One such opportunity is the minority vote, especially Hispanics. While President Obama received 70 percent support from Hispanic voters in 2012, then-Sen. Kerry did quite a bit worse in 2004. A slide back to Kerry's level in 2016 would greatly aid GOP efforts to carry the state, as would a fade in Hispanic turnout, given the centrality of the Latino vote in this state.

Similarly, the preferences of white college graduates could be critical in 2012. If Republicans can move these voters toward their support level among the white working class, they could conceivably take the state.

New Mexico is a fairly fast-growing state, up 15 percent since 2000. And where New Mexico has been growing, Democrats have generally been improving their position, a pattern that contributed to President Obama's victories in 2008 and 2012. The fastest growing part of New Mexico is the Albuquerque metro area, which has grown by 24 percent since 2000, with minorities up 41 percent and accounting for 90 percent of population growth in the area. President Obama carried the Albuquerque metro area, which accounts for 46 percent of the statewide vote, by 13 points in 2012. This margin was 12 points better than then-Sen. Kerry's performance in 2004. And compared to 1988, there has been a 21-point swing toward presidential Democrats in the Albuquerque metro area.

The northwest region, with a 7 percent growth rate since 2000, constitutes another 22 percent of the statewide vote. President Obama carried the northwest by a surprising 28 points in 2012, 9-points up from 2004 and a 15-points up from 1988. He did especially well in the Santa Fe metro area, the fastest growing metro area in the region—up 15 percent in population since 2000—carrying it by 51 points.

Republicans do by far the best in the south and northeast region, which has grown 9 percent since 2000 and contributes 32 percent of the statewide vote. Here Gov. Romney beat President Obama by 6 points. Note, however, that in the fastest growing part of this region, the Las Cruces metro area, which has grown 22 percent since 2000, President Obama beat Gov. Romney by 15 points, an 11-point improvement over 2004 and a 20-point improvement over 1988.

President Obama's rising New Mexico coalition has been centered in the relatively fast growing and populous Albuquerque metro area. If Republicans can significantly compress Democrats' margin in this area in 2016, while running up their margin in the conservative-leaning south and northeast region, they could have a shot at taking back the state despite the Democrats relatively wide victory margin in 2012.

Southwest summary

These three Southwest swing states—Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico—are all marked by fast growth and by relatively high and growing percentages of minority—chiefly Hispanic—voters. These states are projected to average around 35 percent minority voters in 2016, ranging from a low of 20 percent in Colorado to a high of 49 percent in New Mexico.

Strong support among the growing minority population and relatively solid performance among white college graduates has produced increased Democratic support in the fastest-growing areas of these states. Moreover, the weight of that coalition should be larger in these states in 2016 than in 2012 due to a projected average 3-point increase in the percent of minorities among voters and a matching decline in the percent of white working-class voters. On the other hand, compared to the Midwestern and Rust Belt swing states, white working-class voters in the Southwestern swing states are quite a bit more friendly to the GOP, averaging a 16-point Republican advantage in 2012.

Rising populist and time-for-a-change sentiment and the generally slow pace of the recovery could enhance receptiveness to the GOP among white voters, especially white working-class voters. Most worrisome for the Democratic candidate, these trends could reduce enthusiasm among minorities, resulting in a falloff in either sup-

port or turnout—or both. Therefore, even though the Democrats have the demographic wind at their back, so to speak, the Republicans could have a serious shot at some of these states, particularly Colorado, where the minority share of the vote is smallest and the vote was closest in 2012.

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

Conversely, if the GOP is able to break President Obama's hold on these three states, their path to victory becomes clearer. For example, if they carry any one of them, as well as Ohio—but no other swing state in Midwest/Rust Belt—they would emerge victorious if they sweep the New South swing states. Thus, success in the Southwest can help put the GOP over the top—given strong performance in the New South. It is to these New South swing states we now turn.

The New South

The New South includes three states that are likely to be seriously in play between the Democratic and GOP nominees:

- Florida: 29 EVs
- North Carolina: 15 EVs
- Virginia: 13 EVs

Georgia and its 16 EVs—which President Obama only lost by five points in 2008 and 8 points in 2012—is sometimes raised as a possible competitive state. But this seems like a heavy lift for the Democrats in the current political environment, especially given the state’s very conservative white electorate. However, Georgia’s rapid rate of demographic change—the state is projected to be majority-minority by 2025—indicates that it likely will be a legitimate target state for the Democrats in the 2020s.

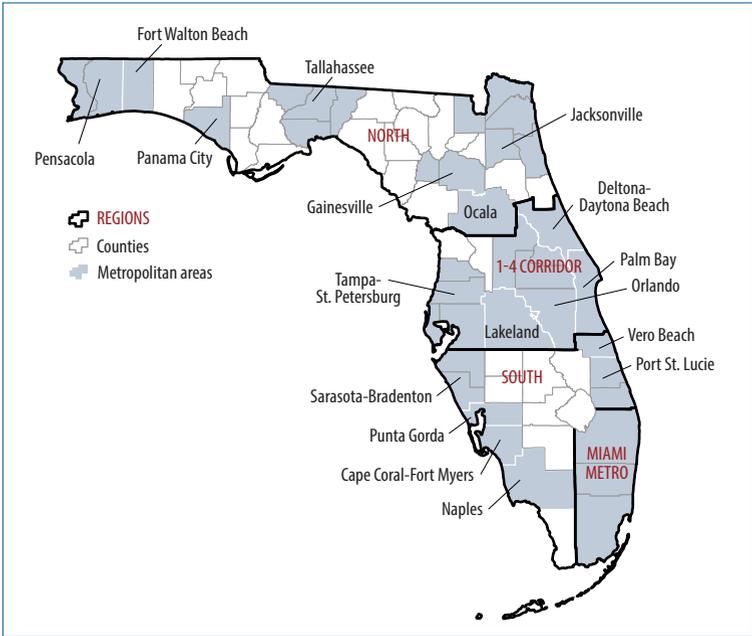
Together, these three New South states have 57 EVs, which—if the Democrats swept them—would allow the party to lose up to four Midwestern/Rust Belt target states along with the entire Southwest and still win the presidency. And if the Democratic nominee does hold the four Midwestern/Rust Belt target states Democrats have carried in every election since 1992—Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—she or he could be elected by carrying only Florida—even if the Democrats lose Ohio, Iowa, and every Southwestern swing state.

On the other hand, if the GOP carries all three of the New South states, which it did in 2004, as well as Ohio and the Republican core states, they would be only 4 EVs short of victory. Those EVs could be provided by New Hampshire or by any of the other contested states. So success in the New South will clearly loom large in Republican calculations for 2016.

These three New South states are all fast growing relative to the national average. Florida is the fastest growing at 25 percent since 2000; followed by North Carolina, with 24 percent growth; and Virginia, with 18 percent growth. Florida also has had the greatest growth in minority population share—10 percentage points since 2000—followed by Virginia, with 7 points, and North Carolina, with 6 points. In terms of overall minority population share, Florida is also the leader at 44 percent, followed by Virginia and North Carolina, which are very close at 37 percent and 36 percent, respectively. As with the Southwestern

target states, these New South states present an overall demographic profile and growth dynamic that are more likely to favor the Democratic nominee than in the Midwest/Rust Belt swing region. We now provide a detailed discussion of these states in descending order of EVs.

Florida: 29 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	73%	26%	2
White college graduates	38%	61%	0
White working class	39%	60%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Florida by a single percentage point in 2012 and by 3 points in 2008. But Republicans won by 5 points in 2004 and by a bitterly disputed 0.01 points in 2000, which swung the election to President George W. Bush. To say Florida is a vigorously contested state is an understatement.

Communities of color made up 33 percent of Florida's vote in 2012 and voted 73 percent for President Obama. We estimate that minorities, driven primarily by Hispanic growth, should increase to 35 percent of Florida voters by 2016. The flip side of this is a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney by a 60 percent to 39 percent margin. In this case, there were only very slight support differences between white working-class and white college-graduate voters. Florida's white college graduates favored Gov. Romney by 62 percent to 38 percent, while white working-class voters supported Gov. Romney by a slightly weaker 60 percent to 39 percent margin. Given these patterns, the Democratic candidate will derive little benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 2.2-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 0.2-point increase in white college graduates by 2016.

The shift toward minority voters should, all else being equal, put the Democratic nominee in a stronger position in the state in 2016. But all else may very well not be equal. Consider President Obama's 73 percent support among minorities in 2008: That number partly reflected 2-to-1 support among Florida Hispanics, who account for 53 percent of the state's minority vote. That margin of course was exceeded in many other states, but for Florida—with its many conservative Cuban-American Hispanics—that was a good performance for a Democrat. The GOP will likely make a strong effort to increase its nominee's support among this group in 2016, and based on historical voting patterns in the state, they certainly have a shot at doing so.

As for the white working class, the GOP will try to expand their 21-point advantage among this group in 2012 to the massive 30-point landslide they achieved nationwide in 2014. That would likely deliver the state to the Republican candidate.

Florida is a fast-growing state, experiencing a 25 percent increase in its population since 2000. By and large, where Florida has been growing, Democrats have been improving their position, allowing President Obama to squeak out his narrow victory in 2012 despite the conservative inclinations of substantial sections of the state. Start with the Orlando metro area, the fastest-growing large metro area—defined as more than 1 million in population—in the state. The area has grown by 41 percent—with minorities up 101 percent, driven heavily by Puerto Rican Hispanics, accounting for 86 percent of the area's growth since 2000. President Obama carried the Orlando area by 8 points in 2012, a 16-point gain over then-Sen. Kerry's margin in 2004. There has been an astonishing 47-point swing toward presidential Democrats in Orlando going back to 1988.

Not surprisingly, Democrats have also done particularly well in urbanized Orange County—the central county of the metro area—gaining 18 points over 2004 and 55 points over 1988. But they have actually made even larger gains—30 points over 2004 and 61 points over 1988—in the very fast-growing emerging suburb of Osceola County, which has grown by 80 percent since 2000. Democrats have also done well in Tampa-St. Petersburg, another one of Florida’s large metro areas, which is growing at a healthy 22 percent clip. The minority population is up 76 percent, accounting for 84 percent of growth in the area. President Obama carried Tampa-St. Petersburg by 3 points in 2008, an 8-point improvement over the Democrats’ performance in 2004.

Both the Orlando and Tampa metro areas are located in the Interstate 4, or I-4, corridor,⁴⁹ where minorities are rapidly increasing their share of eligible voters, while white working-class voters steadily decline. President Obama carried the I-4 corridor by just less than 1 percentage point in 2012, an 8-point improvement in margin over 2004 and a 26-point improvement over 1988. Because the I-4 corridor is growing so fast—28 percent growth since 2000, with 87 percent growth in the minority population—and accounts for 37 percent of the statewide vote, these shifts toward the Democrats are highly significant.

The fastest-growing region in Florida is the south, which includes all of Florida’s metro areas below the I-4 corridor, with the exception of the Miami metro area. This region, which casts 12 percent of the statewide vote, has grown by 31 percent since 2000, with the minority population up 70 percent. President Obama lost this region by 16 points in 2012, only a modest 2-point improvement in margin over then-Sen. Kerry’s performance in 2004. Compared to 1988, however, there has been a 19-point pro-Democratic swing in the region’s presidential voting.

In the Miami metro area, which accounts for 26 percent of the statewide vote, President Obama beat Gov. Romney by 63 percent to 37 percent—actually a slight increase over his margin in 2008 despite the overall trend in the state. In addition, the overall swing from 1988 to 2012 has been a remarkable 33 points in favor of the Democrats. The Miami metro area has grown at a comparatively modest 18 percent since 2000, but that growth has been entirely from minorities.

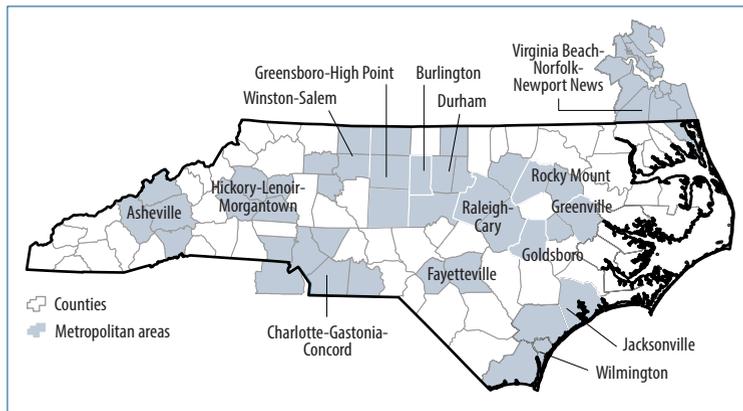
The strongest GOP support in Florida comes from the north region, which accounts for one-quarter of the statewide vote. This region has grown by 24 percent in population since 2000—a strong pace but not as strong as either the

south of the state or the I-4 corridor. Here, Gov. Romney beat President Obama by 17 points, only 3 points less than the Republicans' margin in 2004. But in Jacksonville, the region's large metro area, there was an 11-point Democratic swing from 2004 to 2012. Looking back to 1988, the Democratic shift in the region's presidential voting has been 13 points. This is fairly substantial, but less than the other three regions—the I-4 corridor, the Miami metro, and the south.

The only part of Florida where Republicans are actually increasing their strength is in small nonmetropolitan rural counties.⁵⁰ Gov. Romney beat President Obama by 40 points in these counties, 7 points better than President George W. Bush did in 2004, and 11 points better than President George H.W. Bush did in 1988. In terms of population, however, these counties make up a mere 2 percent of the statewide vote.

Thus, President Obama's Florida coalition has been considerably bolstered by trends in the growing parts of the state, including its fastest growing areas. But will these trends hold up in 2016? The key area for both parties is likely to be the I-4 corridor, particularly the large Orlando and Tampa metro areas. These metro areas are far more Democrat-friendly than they used to be but are still swing areas that could easily move back toward the GOP. And a serious shift back toward the Republicans in the I-4 corridor would put a great deal of pressure on Democratic performance in friendlier areas such as the Miami metro area.

North Carolina: 15 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	90%	10%	2
White college graduates	30%	69%	0
White working class	29%	69%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama lost North Carolina in 2012—but only by a narrow 2-point margin after an even narrower victory by one-third of a percentage point in 2008. Both performances were dramatically better for the Democrats after losing the state by 12 points in 2004 and 13 points in 2000.

Communities of color made up 32 percent of North Carolina’s vote in 2012 and voted 90 percent for President Obama. We project that minorities will be 34 percent of the 2016 North Carolina voting electorate. This indicates a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney 69 percent to 29 percent. Here, support patterns among white working-class and white college-graduate voters were virtually identical. North Carolina’s white college graduates favored Gov. Romney 69 percent to 30 percent, while white working-class voters supported him at a 69 percent to 29 percent margin. Given these patterns, Democrats will derive no benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that are likely to produce a 2.3-point decrease in white working-class voters and a 0.3-point increase in white college-graduate voters in 2016.

The shift toward minority voters should strengthen the Democratic nominee's position in the state in 2016. But she or he will have some very serious challenges in the Democratic effort to take back the state. Chief among them is President Obama's support from minorities—a sky high 90 percent in 2012. That figure reflected the fact that black voters made up four-fifths of the minority vote and supported him at a 96 percent level. Democrats' minority support is therefore highly vulnerable to any decline in black support or turnout in 2016.

Even if the Democratic nominee manages to keep 2012 levels of both minority support and turnout in 2016, she or he will likely be on a knife's edge in the state. If Democrats do not improve their performance among white voters—with white college graduates being the obvious target—Republicans are likely to retain the state in 2016.

North Carolina is a fast-growing state, with 24 percent population growth since 2000. Where North Carolina has been growing, presidential Democrats have been improving their position—without which the state's current competitive status would not have been possible. The two large metro areas in North Carolina are Charlotte and Raleigh, each with more than 1 million in population and each growing rapidly since 2000: 42 percent growth with 91 percent minority population growth in Charlotte and 56 percent growth with 99 percent minority population growth in Raleigh.

In each of these areas, Democrats have made huge strides. In the Charlotte metro area, which accounts for 16 percent of the statewide vote, President Obama beat Gov. Romney by 52 percent to 47 percent—a 16-point swing toward presidential Democrats since 2004. There has been a 29-point pro-Democratic swing in Charlotte since 1988. Mecklenburg County, the fast-growing heart of the Charlotte metro area—which has grown by 46 percent since 2000—has swung even harder toward the Democrats. It went for President Obama by 22 points in 2012—a Democratic swing of 19 points compared to 2004, and an astonishing 42-point improvement since 1988.

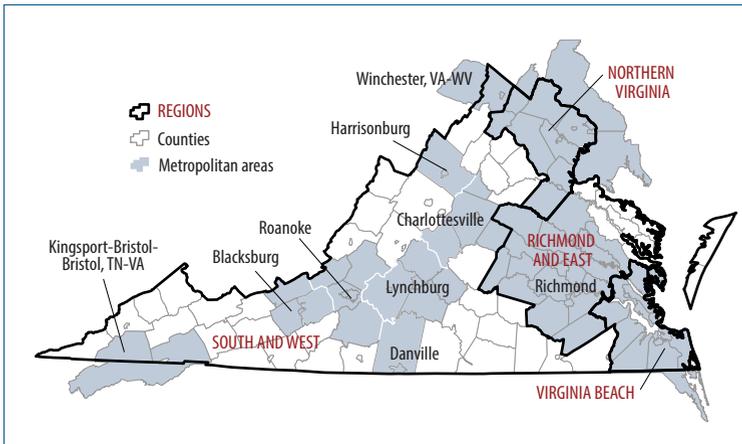
In the Raleigh metro area, which accounts for 13 percent of the statewide vote, President Obama won by 52 percent to 46 percent, a 16-point improvement over then-Sen. Kerry's margin in 2004, and a 21-point improvement over Dukakis' in 1988. The leading county in this area is fast-growing Wake, which has grown by 59 percent since 2000 and supported President Obama by 11 points in 2012, a Democratic gain of 14 points since 2004 and 26 points since 1988.

Adjacent to Raleigh is the Durham metro area—the other part of the North Carolina’s high-tech so-called Research Triangle. The Durham metro area has grown 27 percent since 2000, and its minority population grew by 45 percent. The area, which is the fourth-largest metro area in the state and contributes another 6 percent of the statewide vote, went for President Obama by an overwhelming 39 points in 2012—29-points more than Dukakis’ victory margin in 1988.

Close by the Durham metro area is the Greensboro metro area. Greensboro has grown by 16 percent since 2000, with its minority population up by 52 percent. It is the third-largest metro area in North Carolina and contributes 8 percent of the statewide vote. President Obama carried Greensboro by 1 point in 2012, a 20-point Democratic margin shift compared to 1988.

These metro areas—which together account for 43 percent of the statewide vote and have seen very favorable trends for the Democrats—are the geographic heart of the Obama North Carolina coalition. Will the Democrats move these trends forward in 2016, particularly in the large and dynamic Charlotte and Raleigh metro areas? If the GOP can prevent further Democratic progress in these areas—and ideally move the needle back at least a little bit in their favor—they should be able to hold the state since most of the rest of North Carolina is much friendlier territory for them.

Virginia: 13 electoral votes



	D—2012	R—2012	Projected change in share of actual voters, 2012 to 2016
Minorities	84%	15%	2
White college graduates	41%	59%	0
White working class	35%	62%	-2

Source: See Figure 2 table.

President Obama won Virginia by 4 points in 2012, slightly down from his 6-point margin in 2008. His twin victories were an impressive breakthrough for the Democrats: Prior to this, Republicans had carried the state in every presidential election since 1964.

Communities of color made up 29 percent of Virginia's vote in 2012 and voted 83 percent for President Obama. We estimate that minorities should increase to 31 percent of 2016 Virginia voters. This means a 2-point drop in the white share of voters, who favored Gov. Romney 61 percent to 37 percent. In Virginia, there was more of a difference than in the other two New South target states in voting patterns between white college-graduate and white working-class voters. Virginia's white college graduates favored Gov. Romney by 18 points, while white working-class voters supported him by a stronger 27-point margin. Given these patterns, the Democratic candidate should benefit from ongoing shifts in the declining white voter pool that could reduce the weight of white working-class voters by 2 points in 2016.

These shift in voter mix between minorities and whites, as well as the ongoing decline of the white working class, should strengthen Democrats' position in the state in 2016. But the GOP has significant opportunities in the state. Start with the Democrats' strong 83 percent support from minorities in 2012: That figure was driven by the 91 percent support President Obama received among African Americans, a population that makes up two-thirds of the minority vote in Virginia. President Obama also did well with Virginia's increasingly important Hispanic and Asian voters, receiving 72 percent and 70 percent support, respectively, from these groups. The Democratic nominee will need to replicate these figures or close to them while also keeping turnout levels high in order to ensure she or he is able to hold the state in 2016.

The nominee will also need to keep Democrats' support among Virginia's relatively friendly white college graduates close to 2012 levels. These voters are needed in order to provide a bulwark for the Democratic nominee against Virginia's very pro-GOP white working-class voters, who favored Gov. Romney by 27 points in 2012. It is not hard to imagine that GOP advantage from 2012 increasing in 2016. If that is the case, a significant shift toward the Republicans among white college graduates could tip the state toward the GOP.

Virginia is a fairly fast-growing state, up 18 percent since 2000. Where Virginia has been growing, presidential Democrats have generally been improving their position, a key to President Obama's victories in 2008 and 2012. Virginia's growth is driven first and foremost by the northern Virginia suburbs of the Washington, D.C., metro area—by far the fastest growing area of the state. Northern Virginia has grown by 34 percent since 2000—fueled by rapid increases in minorities and white college graduates—and casts one-third of Virginia's ballots. This is also the area where presidential Democrats have made their greatest gains.

President Obama carried northern Virginia 57 percent to 41 percent in 2012, 13 points better than then-Sen. Kerry did in 2004 and a staggering 36 points better than Dukakis in 1988. These trends included not only a strong performance in the large inner suburb of Fairfax—up 13 points from 2004 and 43 points from 1988—but also huge gains in the two emerging suburbs of Prince William, up 23 points from 2004 and 50 points from 1988, and Loudoun, up 17 points from 2004 and 38 points from 1988. The latter county has grown by 114 percent since 2000—one of the fastest county growth rates in the country.⁵¹

Democrats have also gained strength in the Richmond and east region of the state.⁵² This region has grown by 18 percent since 2000 and accounts for 19 percent of the statewide vote. President Obama won the region by 4 points in 2012—15 points better than the Democratic margin in 2004 and 29 points better than 1988. This result is driven by gains in the Richmond metro area, including the urban core of the city of Richmond itself. But Democrats have also made big gains in the Richmond suburbs—up 20 points from 2004 and 51 points from 1988 in the inner suburb of Henrico and up 18 points from 2004 and 44 points from 1988 in the emerging suburb of Chesterfield.

President Obama also carried the slow-growing Virginia Beach metro area—which has grown by 8 percent since 2000 and contributes one-fifth of the statewide vote—by 12 points, 55 percent to 43 percent. That was an 18-point improvement over then-Sen. Kerry’s performance in 2004 and 30 points better than Dukakis in 1988.

The south and west region of the state, which accounts for 28 percent of the statewide vote, is also slow growing—up 8 percent since 2000—and by far the most rural of Virginia’s regions. Indeed, many of the rural counties in this region are declining. Here Gov. Romney won by 17 points in 2012, with President Obama only gaining a modest 3 points over 2004. From 1988 to 2008, the Democratic gain is the same 3 points.

The northern Virginia, Richmond and east, and Virginia Beach regions—overwhelmingly dominated by their respective metro areas—comprise 72 percent of the statewide vote. If the Democratic nominee in 2016 can hold President Obama’s strength in these areas, especially his healthy margin in northern Virginia, she or he should carry the state. Conversely, if the GOP can significantly increase its support in these areas, their advantage in the conservative south and west region could give Virginia’s 13 EVs to the GOP nominee.

New South summary

These three New South swing states are all marked by fast growth driven by burgeoning minority populations. Combined, they are projected to average around 33 percent minority voters in 2016—up from 31 percent in 2012. These minority voters—with their relatively high concentrations of African Americans—gave President Obama an average of 82 percent support in 2012, significantly higher than the Southwest swing states average of 75 percent.

In contrast to the Southwest states, however, white college-graduate voters are significantly more supportive of the GOP and gave Republican nominee Mitt Romney a 27-point advantage on average in 2012. And white working-class voters in the New South swing states—though they are declining rapidly—are substantially more pro-GOP than in the Southwest, giving Gov. Romney a 33-point advantage on average. So the level and strength of the minority vote looms especially large for the Democratic nominee's chances in these states.

Virginia is most promising for the Democratic campaign in 2016, with a solid minority vote; a relatively friendly white college-graduate population; a tight link between growing areas and increasing sympathy for the Democrats; and a fairly strong economic situation. A strong effort by the Democratic nominee in 2016 should keep this state in his or her column.

It is important to stress that the Democratic candidate does not need to win any one of these states to be successful in 2012. For example, if the Democrats carry Florida and the 18 Blue Wall states plus D.C.—which they have carried in every election since 1992—their candidate would emerge victorious. If the Democrats carry only Virginia and those 18 states, as well as D.C., their candidate would triumph if she or he also carried the three Southwestern target states. If the Democratic nominee carries only North Carolina and those 18 states plus D.C., she or he would win if just Colorado and New Mexico went Democratic in the Southwest.

On the other hand, if the GOP is able to carry all three New South states—a very real possibility—that would likely put them very close to victory, needing only 22 more EVs from any combination of contested states. That could be from Ohio plus New Hampshire, but there are many other possibilities. That is why success in all three of these states is likely to be a central part of GOP election strategy in 2016—it would give them so many ways to win. Conversely, if they are not able to do this, their path to victory looks cloudy indeed.

What can Democrats and Republicans do in 2016 to ensure victory?

Seven years into President Obama's presidency, voters remain essentially split in their verdicts on his tenure. Roughly one year from the 2016 presidential election, the president's national job approval rating stands at 47 percent—better at this point in his presidency than President George W. Bush was during 2007 but well below where President Clinton stood in 1999.⁵³

The overall approval split on President Obama masks huge partisan differences in ratings of the president. As the Pew Research Center reported earlier this year, the average Democratic approval of President Obama over the course of his presidency has been 81 percent compared to only 14 percent among Republicans.⁵⁴ Republican average approval of President Obama is lower than ratings by out-party supporters of any other president on record. By comparison, the Democratic average approval of President George W. Bush was 23 percent while Republican average approval of President Bill Clinton was 27 percent during their respective presidencies. Neither rating was particularly high, but both are better than where President Obama has sat with Republicans during his tenure.

The potential impact of President Obama's popularity on the 2016 election is not immediately clear. Democrats, as the incumbent party, would certainly prefer to see the president's job approval ratings at or above 50 percent heading into an election. But the president's numbers have been slowly improving, and the continued strong Democratic support for President Obama suggests that enthusiasm for the future nominee is possible. Democrats have also enjoyed an edge in party favorability in presidential years, while Republican numbers have steadily declined—only narrowing during midterms. As Pew recently reported, Americans are far more likely to view Democrats as “more concerned with the needs of people like me”—53 percent for Democrats as opposed to 31 percent for Republicans. Conversely, 52 percent of the electorate sees Republicans as “more extreme in [their] positions,” whereas only 35 percent says the same for Democrats.⁵⁵

At the same time, the overall improvement in the national economy in statistical terms has yet to quell deep anxiety and concern among many Americans. Voter dissatisfaction with the government in Washington has been deteriorating for decades and hit historical lows during the Obama years.⁵⁶ According to a massive recent Pew poll, just 19 percent of Americans currently say they can trust the government always or most of the time—among the lowest levels ever recorded on this measure.⁵⁷ Republicans are at near parity with Democrats on the economy and overall management of the federal government and enjoy slight advantages on budget deficits in public polling.⁵⁸ The heightened anger and anxiety of many voters, coupled with Republicans' severe dissatisfaction with the president, could certainly serve as powerful motivators for voters to support a strong Republican nominee and campaign.

The question for 2016 boils down to which party can best weather the structural headwinds blocking their advancement. Will Democrats overcome potential apathy and a general desire for change to rebuild President Obama's historic coalition of voters? Or will Republicans turn voter animosity and anger into a surge of voters, simultaneously convincing independents and some Democrats in enough states that the party and its candidate are prepared to govern effectively and represent a majority of voters from different class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds?

The Democratic path to victory lies in holding the demographic and geographic wall of support that has fueled victory in the past two presidential elections. As demonstrated earlier, Democrats can withstand slight declines in both turnout and support among voters of color assuming the margins among white non-college and college-educated voters do not collapse entirely. If Democrats keep or expand the minority and youth vote and make slight gains among white voters—particularly white working-class voters—the party could match or exceed past vote margins nationally.

In order to pull this off, we expect Democrats to focus heavily on a campaign of social equality and inclusion for women and racial and ethnic minorities, as well as an economic agenda centered on improving the economic security of working families. The relationship to President Obama will likely be a posture that embraces his achievements and successes while arguing that we need to do more given the long-term problems of the economy and the inability or unwillingness of Congress to do much about it. Given the direction of Democratic messaging and policy development over the Obama years, there appears to be wide consensus among voters and party elites for a strategy along these lines.

The Republican path to victory, by contrast, could go in one of two directions. First, the party could put all its cards on a nominee and policy strategy that seeks to maximize conservative anger at President Obama and disgust with Washington while appealing to similarly agitated and concerned independent voters in key swing states. This approach would focus heavily on maximizing white voter turnout by focusing on issues such as immigration and government spending among white non-college-educated voters, as well as broader concerns about taxes and regulation among white college-educated voters. It also hinges on turnout and overall support rates for Democrats going down among core groups such as African Americans, Latinos, unmarried women, and young people. Our analysis suggests that even though this strategy is highly risky given demographic patterns, it could work by potentially flipping states with large numbers of conservative white voters and core Democratic voters whose partisan leanings have been blunted by the slow recovery.

More promising for Republicans, we believe, is a second path focused on presenting a strong and compelling case to voters that their nominee and party agenda is sufficiently moderate and inclusive to represent a full range of Americans while simultaneously changing the direction of Washington and turning the corner on the Obama years. This approach would be more open to voters who have traditionally shunned the party and less targeted in its effort to maximize conservative white turnout. It would offer reforms that seek to improve necessary social welfare programs rather than waging war on entitlements and the welfare state. It would hold the party's traditional positions on many social issues without making them into the priorities of past campaigns. It would take seriously the problems of wage stagnation and rising costs and offer tax and budget policies designed to help middle- and working-class families. This approach would similarly rely on the support of white non-college-educated base voters but would also strategically seek to cut into Democratic-leaning voting groups such as Latinos and Asians, as well as increase support among white college-educated voters.

It is not at all clear at this point which direction Republican voters and party elites will go in 2016. But after the tumultuous Obama years, Republicans are positioned for victory should the party successfully reorient its approach and capitalize on the overall desire for change. If not, and Democrats can reconfigure the Obama coalition for a new era, the Democratic party is positioned to defy historical trends and cement its hold on the presidency for a third consecutive term.

As the 2016 campaign unfolds, we will revisit this analysis and trends to see how both parties are proceeding in their efforts to build viable electoral coalitions—both demographically and geographically.

About the authors

Ruy Teixeira specializes in the study of demographic change, voting behavior, and public opinion. He is a Senior Fellow at both The Century Foundation and the Center for American Progress and a co-director of the States of Change project. His books include *The Disappearing American Voter*; *America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters*; *The Emerging Democratic Majority*; and *Red, Blue, and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics*.

John Halpin is a Senior Fellow at American Progress focusing on political theory, communications, and public opinion analysis. He is the co-director and creator of the Progressive Studies Program at CAP, an interdisciplinary project researching the intellectual history, foundational principles, and public understanding of progressivism. Halpin is the co-author with John Podesta of *The Power of Progress: How America's Progressives Can (Once Again) Save Our Economy, Our Climate, and Our Country*, a 2008 book about the history and future of the progressive movement.

Robert Griffin is a Senior Research Associate at the Center for American Progress, focusing on demographic change and American political behavior. He also teaches courses on research methodology, statistics, and public opinion at The George Washington University.

Methodological appendix

Rates of support for Democrats and Republicans

The support rates for political parties among the racial and educational groups presented in this report were calculated using a combination of data sources and modeling procedures. Starting with data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study⁵⁹, we derived Democratic and Republican support rates for each racial, age, and educational grouping in all 50 states and the District of Columbia using multilevel modeling techniques. These techniques help provide accurate estimates of support for low-sample populations by partially pooling data across individuals' geographic and demographic characteristics. Data from the 2012 November Supplement of the Current Population Survey⁶⁰, the National Election Pool's 2012 Exit Polls⁶¹, and 2012 state-level elections results⁶² were then incorporated to harmonize these state-level group estimates with other observable features of the 2012 election and electorate.

This process is important because many other popular estimates of support rates either generate election results that deviate from the true election results we observed when combined with plausible turnout rates or propose implausible turnout rates. For example, if we simply combine support rates from the National Election Pool's exit polls with turnout rates derived from the Current Population Survey—widely considered the gold standard for determining turnout rates among demographic groups—we would find that the results varied significantly from observed election outcomes. The end result of the process employed in this paper are support rates that are specific down to the state level and completely compatible with the best estimates we have for group turnout rates and election results in the 2012 election.

Voter composition projections

All of the data presented on voters in 2016 are projections that are based on the eligible voter projections laid out in the “States of Change” report,⁶³ a demographically based educational projection model, and turnout rates derived from the 2012 November Supplement of the Current Population Survey.⁶⁴ The first step in this process was taking data from multiple years of the American Community Survey—2008 to 2013—and dividing up the American population into groups based on state, race, age, and their level of educational attainment—for example, Hispanics ages 30 to 34 in Colorado with a college degree.

We then used multilevel statistical models to estimate the unique education rates—the rate of college education among a given group—and attainment rates—the rate at which these groups gained education over time—for each state, race, and age group. These groups were then tracked forward in time and had those unique attainment rates applied to them as they moved into older age groups. Additionally, our estimates account for the influx of migrants and immigrants into each state, race, and age group, as well as the effect it has on those groups’ overall education level. Note, however, that we assumed that entering cohorts would complete college educations at the same rate as the most recent cohorts have completed them—an assumption that may bias our overall change results downward since that assumption does not correspond to recent trends.

Finally, we apply unique turnout rates that were modeled for each of the state, race, age, and education level groups from the 2012 November Supplement of the Current Population Survey⁶⁵ to simulate the composition of this future electorate. This assumes that turnout for these groups in 2016 will be identical to what we observed in 2012. The end result of the process employed in this paper are voter composition estimates that are sensitive to likely increases in the educational rates of the U.S. population that will occur due to group-specific increases in education over time, immigration rates, and migration rates. In addition, it accounts for changes to the racial and age composition of the eligible voter population that we are likely to observe in each state over the next several years.

Endnotes

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- 9 The support rates and voter shares for minorities and whites throughout this report and in our simulations are based on our analysis of data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey, the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, the National Election Pool exit polls, and state election returns. They tend to differ somewhat from publicly reported figures based on the exit polls. That is because our approach supplements exit poll data with data from other sources and corrects for significant discrepancies between exit poll and census data. Our figures may be thought of as harmonized estimates across these various data sources. For more detail, see the Methodological Appendix of this report.
- 10 See our Methodological Appendix.
- 11 Ronald Brownstein, "How Obama Won: Marrying Old and New Democratic Coalitions," *The Atlantic*, November 7, 2012, available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/11/how-obama-won-marrying-old-and-new-democratic-coalitions/264884/>.
- 12 Obama carried all 14 of these so-called Blue Wall states by more than 10 points; the other four Blue Wall states—Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—were all carried by less than 10 points.
- 13 The voter share and support rates for minorities and whites used here and throughout the rest of this report tend to differ somewhat from publicly reported exit poll figures. See endnote nine and the Methodological Appendix for explanation and details.
- 14 Unless otherwise noted, data on growth in the total population—overall and by race—are from authors' analysis of census population estimates data.
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- 16 Teixeira, Frey, and Griffin, "States of Change."
- 17 Here and elsewhere, we base our expectations of shifts in actual voters on simulations that assume turnout patterns remain as they were in 2012. If turnout patterns are different in 2016, our estimates may be too high or too low—though likely by quite small amounts—assuming our EV projections are basically correct.
- 18 These figures differ from publicly reported exit poll figures. See endnote nine and Methodological Appendix.
- 19 Those with a four-year college degree or higher.
- 20 This group lacks four-year college degrees, so they encompass those with some college, including two-year associate's degrees.
- 21 Teixeira, "Demographic Change and the Future of the Parties."
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- 23 See Methodological Appendix.
- 24 Note that these margins are different from those reported by the 2012 exit polls, including for whites. As previously noted, this is because our approach supplements exit poll data with data from other sources and corrects for significant discrepancies between exit poll and census data, producing harmonized estimates of support by race. Also note that our harmonized estimates—because they actually reduce the gap in support rates between whites and minorities—tend to give more conservative estimates of the electoral effect of demographic change. For more detail, see the Methodological Appendix of this report.
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- 35 Obama carried all 14 of these so-called Blue Wall states by more than 10 points; the other four Blue Wall states—Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin—were all carried by less than 10 points.
- 36 Though questions could be raised about Missouri, Arizona, and—especially—Georgia, all of which Romney carried by less than 10 points.
- 37 In the states as in our national analysis, our figures may differ from publicly reported exit poll figures. See endnote nine and Methodological Appendix.
- 38 For 2014 deficit figure from 2014 national exit poll, see Fox News, "2014 Fox News Exit Polls," available at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2014/exit-polls> (last accessed December 2015).
- 39 The regional breakdown here is drawn from the work of William Frey and Ruy Teixeira, "The Political Geography of Pennsylvania: Not Another Rustbelt State" (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2008), available at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2008/04/political-demographics-frey-teixeira>. XX CORRECT? XX
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Here and throughout this report, all data on voting by geographic area—state, metro, county, and region—are based on authors' analysis of presidential voting data compiled by Dave Leip. See Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, "2012 Presidential General Election Results," available at <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/> (last accessed December 2015).
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- 50 These are the most rural of nonmetropolitan counties, and they lie outside of the small-town micropolitan areas. The technical definition of micropolitan used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census is as follows: Any nonmetro county with an urban cluster of at least 10,000 persons or more, plus any outlying counties where commuting to the central county with the urban cluster is 25 percent or higher, or if 25 percent of the employment in the outlying county is made up of commuters to the central county within the urban cluster.
- 51 Among counties with 10,000 or more in population.
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