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The **Democratic Strategist** has three editorial goals—(1) to provide an explicitly and unapologetically partisan platform for the discussion of Democratic political strategy, (2) to insist upon greater use of data and greater reliance on empirical evidence in strategic thinking and (3) to act as a neutral forum and center of discussion for all sectors of the Democratic community.

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**A
DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST
STRATEGY MEMO**

**RUY TEIXEIRA
AND
ALAN ABRAMOWITZ
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**WHY THE "GOP CAN WIN
WITH WHITE VOTES ALONE" STRATEGY
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No, Republicans, ‘Missing’ White Voters Won’t Save You

BY RUY TEIXEIRA AND ALAN ABRAMOWITZ

Reprinted From: [Think Progress Ideas](#)¹

As GOP House members continue their Kamikaze mission to scuttle the immigration reform bill, many political observers are wondering why. After all, isn’t it obvious that Republicans need more minority, particularly Hispanic support, and that therefore their self-interest should lead them to support a reasonable bill? [Karl Rove thinks so.](#)²

But lots and lots of Republicans dissent from that analysis, preferring to put their faith in a group they’re much more comfortable with: white voters. The most influential empirical analysis supporting this view was recently published by Sean Trende in [a four part series on RealClearPolitics](#).³ Trende’s analysis is built around the idea of “missing white voters.”

What he means by this is that, given the estimated number of white voters in 2008 (derived from exit polls) and the natural increase in white eligible voters between 2008 and 2012 there should have been far more white voters than there actually were (again, estimated from the exit polls). He labels the difference between his projected and actual numbers of white voters as “missing” white voters. He goes on to say that “[i]f these white voters had decided to vote, the racial breakdown of the electorate would have been 73.6 percent white, 12.5 percent black, 9.5 percent Hispanic and 2.4 percent Asian — almost identical to the 2008 numbers.” Get it? The only real demographic change of importance between 2008 and 2012 was all those white voters who didn’t show up.

What’s wrong with this analysis? Plenty. Start with Trende’s projected natural increase in white voters—around 1.5 million voters, based on an assumed 55 percent turnout rate of additional white eligible voters. This implies that Trende was using an estimate of around 2.7 million additional eligible whites between 2008 and 2012. That’s wrong: [Census data](#)⁴ show an increase of only 1.5 million white eligibles. At Trende’s assumed 55 percent turnout rate, that translates into only 825,000 additional white voters from “natural increase.”

That’s one problem. But the most serious problem comes from how he handles his “missing” white voters relative to minority “missing” voters. That’s because, by the very same logic he uses to designate large numbers of white voters as missing, there are also large numbers of

¹<http://thinkprogress.org/election/2013/07/09/2266841/trende-republicans-white-voters-missing/>

²<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323873904578569480696746650.html>

³http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/06/21/the_case_of_the_missing_white_voters_revisited_118893.html

⁴<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2012/tables.html>

minority voters who are missing. This is both because minority voters experienced natural increase (much more so than whites actually) and because turnout was low in 2012 compared to 2008. This trend affected all voters, minorities as well as whites.

In 2012, turnout declined by 3.4 percentage points according to [Michael McDonald's US Elections Project](#).⁵ Plugging in his figures on votes cast and using Census data on eligible voters plus exit poll data on shares of votes by race, we calculate that turnout went down by about equal amounts among white and minority voters (3.4 and 3.2 percentage points, respectively).

Not surprisingly then, Trende's own data show a substantial number of missing minority voters — 2.3 million compared to 6.1 million whites. There are more missing white voters despite the roughly equal declines in turnout simply because they are a larger group and more voters are knocked out of the voting pool for any given decline in turnout.

So what starts out looking like a mysterious epidemic of “missing” white voters becomes mostly a reflection of the simple fact that 2012 was a low turnout election. This unremarkable outcome is then hyped by Trende as the big demographic development of 2012 by doing something that is really quite misleading. *He adds back in all the missing white voters to the 2012 electorate while leaving out all the missing minority voters.* That is where he gets his claim that “[i]f these white voters had decided to vote, the racial breakdown of the electorate would have been 73.6 percent white, 12.5 percent black, 9.5 percent Hispanic and 2.4 percent Asian — almost identical to the 2008 numbers.”

This really can't be done. If you're going to add one type of missing voter back in you should add them all back in; you can't—or shouldn't—assume a higher turnout election that would somehow only affect whites. And what happens if you play with the net up and add all the “missing” voters back in? You get 72.4 percent white, 12.8 percent black, 9.6 percent Hispanic, 2.4 percent Asian and 2.8 percent other race—in other words, 72 percent white and 28 percent minority, identical to the actual 2012 exit poll results.

So: GOP phone home! Your missing white voters have been found, and it turns out they weren't really missing. They were simply sitting out a relatively low turnout election along with a large number of their minority counterparts. They may be back next time if it's a higher turnout election — but then again so will a lot of minority voters. Bottom line: your demographic dilemma remains the same. The mix of voters is changing fast to your disadvantage and there is no cavalry of white voters waiting in the wings to rescue you.

⁵http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2012G.html

Is Doubling Down on White Voters a Viable Strategy for the Republican Party?

ALAN I. ABRAMOWITZ AND RUY TEIXEIRA, JULY 11TH, 2013

Reprinted from: *Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball*⁶

In the aftermath of Barack Obama's relatively comfortable reelection victory in 2012 — a win fueled by massive margins among African Americans, Hispanics and other nonwhite voters — an intense debate has begun among Republican leaders and strategists over the future direction of the party. The GOP has now lost the national popular vote in five of the last six presidential elections. Yet according to national exit polls, Republican candidates won the white vote by double-digit margins in the last four of these elections, including a 20-point margin in 2012.

Given these results, some prominent Republican strategists, including Karl Rove,⁷ believe that the key to the party's future viability in presidential elections is finding ways to increase its share of the growing nonwhite vote. Since 1992, according to national exit polls, the nonwhite share of the electorate has increased from 13% to 28%, and this trend is almost certain to continue for many years to come. Based on census data, the voters who will be entering the electorate over the next few decades will include a much larger proportion of nonwhites, and especially Latinos, than the voters who will be leaving the electorate.

But not all GOP strategists agree with the approach advocated by Rove and his allies or with the necessity of increasing the party's share of the nonwhite vote in order to achieve success in future presidential elections. In a recent series of posts⁸ at RealClearPolitics.com, analyst Sean Trende has argued that Republicans can effectively compete in future presidential elections without substantially increasing their support among Hispanics and other nonwhite voters by focusing on increasing turnout and support among white voters, who will continue to make up the large majority of the American electorate.

Trende's argument that the GOP can achieve success by, essentially, doubling down on white voters rests largely on an analysis of racial voting patterns in presidential elections over the past several decades. According to Trende, Republicans have significantly increased their performance among white voters over time. If this trend continues, he argues, given a reasonably favorable political and economic environment, Republican candidates should have a good chance of overcoming the Democratic advantage among nonwhite voters in future presidential elections.

The problem with the PVI

Trende's claim that Republicans have increased their performance among white voters is based on his calculation of a statistic known as the PVI, or Partisan Voting Index, for white voters. Essentially, this statistic is used to compare the political preferences of a given group

⁶<http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/is-doubling-down-on-white-voters-a-viable-strategy-for-the-republican-party/>

⁷<http://www.rove.com/articles/480>

⁸http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/06/25/does_the_gop_have_to_pass_immigration_reform_118952.html

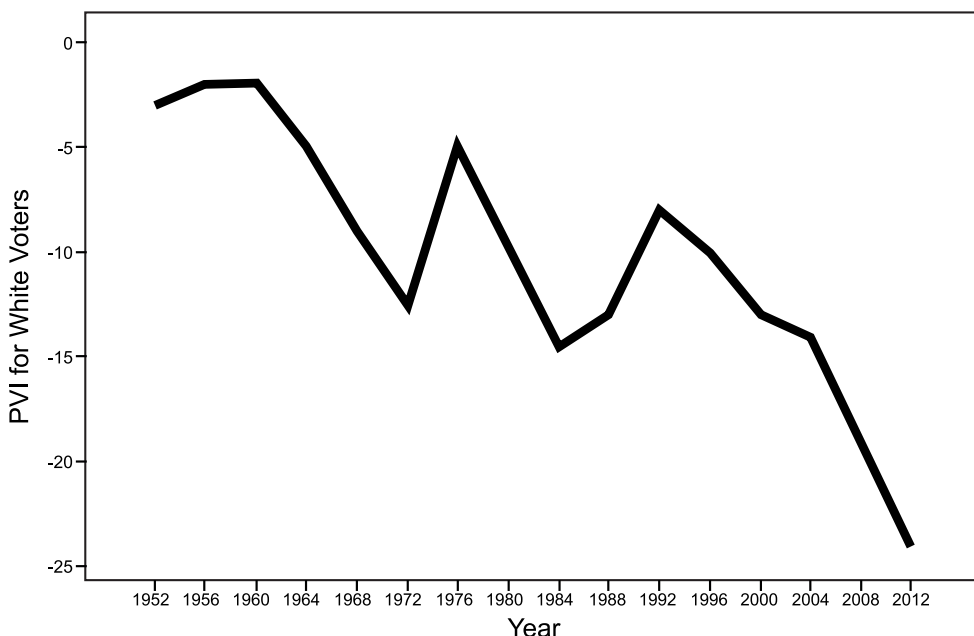
to the electorate as a whole. The PVI for white voters compares the Democratic share of the white vote with the Democratic share of the vote in the overall electorate. For our purposes, however, we have calculated the PVI based on the Democratic vote margin among white voters compared with the Democratic vote margin in the overall electorate in order to reduce the impact of votes for third party and independent candidates.

Over time, as the data in Figure 1 show, the PVI for white voters has become increasingly negative, with an especially dramatic decline since 1992. There is no question that in comparison with the overall electorate, white voters have become more Republican over time. But the interpretation of this result is not as straightforward as Trende suggests. That is because the PVI for white voters reflects both the Democratic margin among white voters and the size of the nonwhite electorate.

In fact, the main reason that the gap between the Democratic margin in the overall electorate and the Democratic margin among white voters has increased over time is not because whites have become more Republican but because nonwhites, who are overwhelmingly Democratic, now make up a larger share of the overall electorate. As just one example, the PVI of the white vote in 2012 (-24) was far more negative than it was in 1988 (-13). Yet Democratic margins among both whites and nonwhites were essentially the same in each election. The real change: Nonwhites were just 15% of voters in 1988 compared to 28% in 2012. In other words, the rapid growth of the very Democratic nonwhite share of the electorate makes it seem like white voters are becoming more Republican than they actually are.

Correlational analysis⁹ underscores this point. For the 16 presidential elections between 1952 and 2012, the correlation between the PVI for white voters and the Democratic margin among white voters is only .43, while the correlation between the PVI for white voters and the nonwhite share of the overall electorate is a much stronger -.92.

Figure 1: Trend in Partisan Voting Index for white voters, 1952-2012



Source: Gallup Poll for 1952-1972 results, National Exit Polls for 1976-2012

⁹<http://sociology.about.com/od/Statistics/a/Correlation-Analysis.htm>

We can estimate the relative contributions of the Democratic margin among white voters and the size of the nonwhite electorate to the PVI for white voters by performing a regression analysis with the PVI for white voters as the dependent variable and the Democratic margin among white voters and nonwhite share of the electorate as independent variables. The results of this regression analysis are displayed in Table 1. They show very clearly that the major influence on the PVI for white voters over these 16 elections is not the Democratic margin among white voters itself but the size of the nonwhite electorate.

Table 1: Results of regression analysis of Partisan Voting Index for white voters

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.961 ^a	.923	.911	1.815

a. Predictors: (Constant), NWshare, White

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.611	1.056		1.526	.151
	White	.128	.037	.272	3.463	.004
	NWshare	-.738	.066	-.873	-11.121	.000

a. Dependent Variable: pvi

Source: Democratic margin among white voters based on Gallup Poll for 1952-1972 and National Exit Polls for 1976-2012. Nonwhite share of electorate based on data from American National Election Studies surveys for 1952-1972 and National Exit Polls for 1976-2012.

When we directly examine the data on the Democratic margin among white voters over time, there is little evidence of any Republican trend. For all 16 presidential elections between 1952 and 2012, the correlation between years elapsed and Democratic margin among white voters is a slightly negative but statistically insignificant $-.16$. For the 10 presidential elections between 1976 and 2012, the correlation is a slightly positive and statistically insignificant $.02$. Based on these results, it is clear that the trend in the PVI for white voters over this time period is due almost entirely to the growing impact of nonwhite voters on electoral outcomes.

Viewed from this perspective, the growing gap between the Democratic margin among white voters and the Democratic margin in the overall electorate should probably be viewed by Republican strategists not as an encouraging sign but as a source of considerable concern. What this growing gap really means is that the Democratic presidential candidate can win the national popular vote with a smaller share of the white vote with each successive election. By 2016, nonwhites should make up around 30% of the overall electorate, and the Democratic candidate would be able to win the national popular vote while losing the white vote by 24 percentage points.

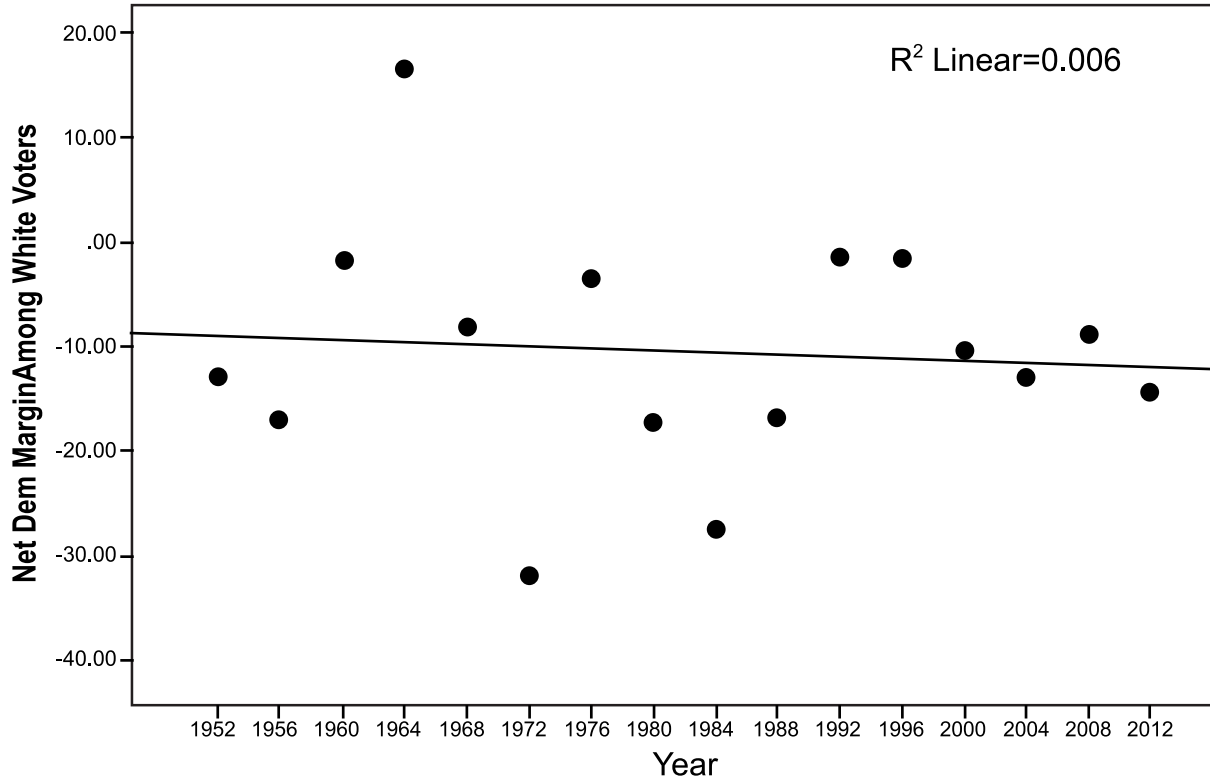
Comparing trends in net Democratic margin among white and nonwhite voters

We can gain a clearer picture of the combined impact of changes in the relative size of the white and nonwhite voting groups along with changes in the Democratic margins among white and nonwhite voters by comparing trends in the net Democratic margins among white and nonwhite voters over the past 60 years. The net Democratic margin is based on the Democratic margin in each racial group multiplied by the size of the group so it represents the group's contribution to the overall outcome of the election. Thus, the net Democratic margin among whites plus the net Democratic margin among nonwhites should add up to the overall Democratic margin in each election.

Data on the Democratic margin among nonwhite voters was taken from the Gallup Poll, which provides estimates for nonwhites as a group for all presidential elections since 1952. These estimates appear to be very accurate: Taken together, the estimated net Democratic margin among white voters and the estimated net Democratic margin among nonwhite voters explain 99% of the variance in actual election margins.

Figure 2 displays the trend in the net Democratic margin among white voters between 1952 and 2012. The results show that there is only a very slight negative trend over this 60-year period. This trend reflects the combined effects of the declining size of the white vote and the changing Democratic margin among white voters.

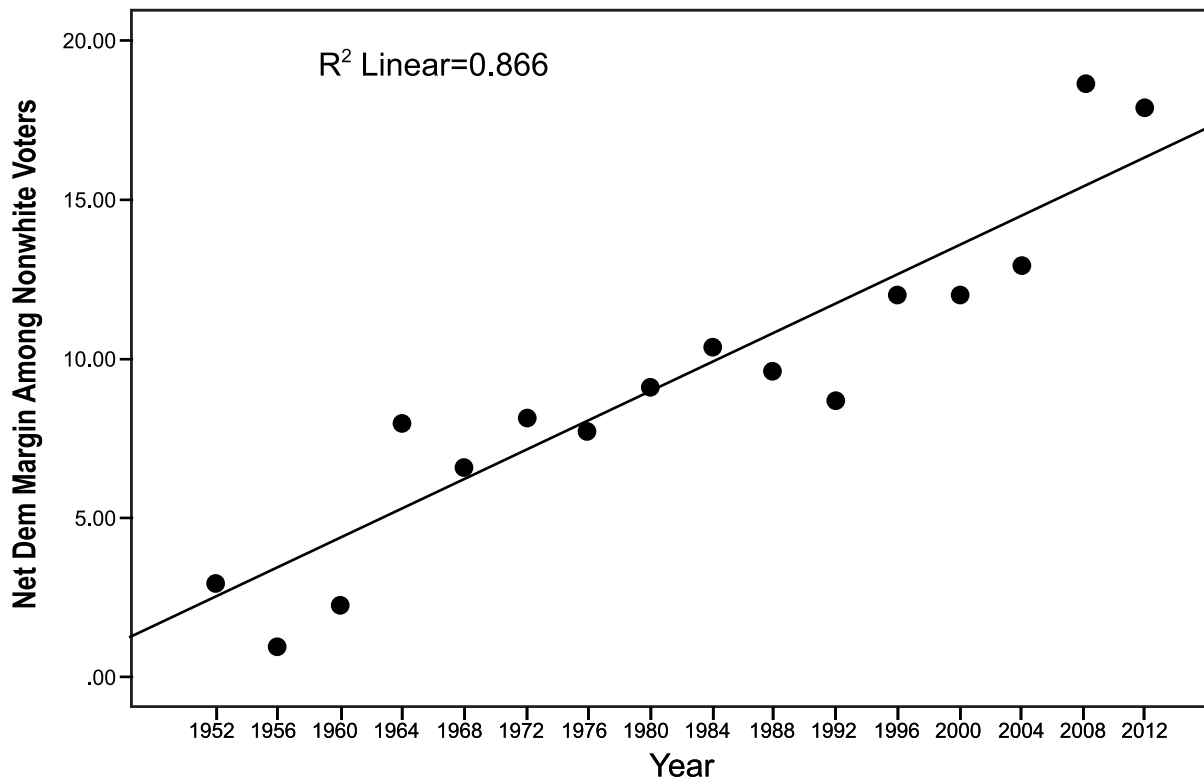
Figure 2: Trend in net Democratic margin among white voters, 1952-2012



Source: Gallup Poll for 1952-1972 results, National Exit Polls for 1976-2012

Figure 3 displays the trend in the net Democratic margin among nonwhite voters between 1952 and 2012. The results here contrast sharply with those in Figure 2, showing a very clear and consistent upward trend based mainly on the growing size of the nonwhite electorate. As a result, Democratic presidential candidates have realized a much larger net advantage from the nonwhite vote in recent years than they did from the 1950s through the 1980s. Moreover, these gains are likely to continue for the foreseeable future given the projected growth of the nonwhite vote unless Republicans are able to reduce the Democratic margin among nonwhite voters.

Figure 3: Trend in net Democratic margin among nonwhite voters, 1952-2012



Source: Gallup Poll for 1952-1972 results, National Exit Polls for 1976-2012

Conclusion

Our findings indicate that the growing size of the nonwhite electorate constitutes a major challenge to the Republican Party in future presidential elections. This does not mean that a Republican candidate cannot win the presidency in 2016 or later. Given a sufficiently favorable political and economic environment, it certainly would be possible for a Republican presidential candidate to win the White House despite a growing nonwhite electorate, but this would require winning a much larger share of the white vote than any Republican presidential candidate since Ronald Reagan in 1984. And Reagan accomplished this feat in an era when the electorate was much less polarized and party loyalties were much weaker than they are today. Moreover, our results demonstrate that unless Republicans improve their performance among Hispanics, African Americans and other nonwhite voters, the task facing Republicans

is almost certainly going to become more and more difficult over time as the nonwhite share of the electorate continues to grow. Doubling down on white voters does not look like a very promising approach to restoring the White House to GOP control