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The **Democratic Strategist** is a web-based publication edited by three leading American political strategists and thinkers—political theorist William Galston, polling expert Stan Greenberg and political demographer Ruy Teixeira. It seeks to provide a forum and meeting ground for the serious, data-based discussion of Democratic political strategy.

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.

As **The Democratic Strategists'** editorial philosophy states, the publication will be "proudly partisan, firmly and insistently based on facts and data and emphatically open to all sectors and currents of opinion within the Democratic community".

## AN URGENT DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST STRATEGY MEMO

### DEMOCRATIC UNITY AFTER THE ELECTIONS

BY

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## **AN URGENT TDS STRATEGY MEMO: Democratic Unity After the Elections**

*By Ed Kilgore, James Vega and J. P. Green*

In the next several weeks two things are certain to occur:

- Dems will engage in a robust and often bitter debate about the strategic lessons of the elections.
- The mainstream media will build this into a “Dems in disarray” narrative that will have major negative consequences for Democratic morale, mobilization and public image.

The problem is particularly acute this year because Democrats are now facing a Republican Party even more extreme and radicalized than the one that emerged after the mid-term elections of 1994. The conservative advances in this election will encourage conservatives and Republicans to immediately launch a broad and intense attack, not only on the administration, but also on the network of individuals, groups and institutions that support Democratic office-holders, candidates and causes. Unions, environmental groups, think-tanks, social cause organizations and foundations will all find themselves directly in the cross-hairs.

During this critical period, the “Dems in disarray” narrative and perception will significantly weaken Democrats’ ability to resist this assault. As a result, it is urgent that Democrats seriously try to agree upon certain basic understandings about how to maintain the maximum degree of unity and cohesion as a political coalition and community while still engaging in a robust internal debate about the meaning and lessons of the election.

On the one hand, long Democratic tradition and culture insures that advocates for the major strategic perspectives within the Democratic Party will all energetically argue for their interpretation of the election results. In the coming weeks several hundred articles and several thousand web commentaries, comments, posts and discussion threads will debate these assertions in intense detail.

On the central issue of Obama’s performance, the vast majority of these analyses will fall into one of the following six categories:

1. Obama is basically doing as well as is realistically possible in the circumstances – his unpopularity is an inevitable side-effect of his trying to pass controversial legislation in an adverse economic environment.
2. Obama has made substantial mistakes on various issues, but overall he still deserves support.
3. Obama adopted too radical an agenda. He should have embraced more moderate, centrist positions than those he chose.
4. Obama allowed himself to be caricatured as more radical than he and his programs actually are. He needs to substantially revise his rhetoric and behavior.

5. Obama was too cautious and timid in embracing a coherent progressive program. He needed to take a significantly more forceful and indeed radical stance in a number of different areas, the economy in particular.
6. Obama allowed himself to be dragged down into Washington's permanent culture of corruption, a culture that embraces not only the White House but all of Congress and the political system. Democrats cannot achieve meaningful change without fundamentally reforming the entire system.

Whatever their choice among the six views above, analysts will also argue that five other specific issues also profoundly affected the election outcome (1) "structural" factors like the normal, more conservative demographic slant of off-year election voters and the unusual number of Democrats who were running for re-election from basically Republican districts (2) the bad economy (3) the exceptional "inside" view voters had of the "sausage making" for the health Care bill (4) the huge and unprecedented partisan role of Fox and the right-wing media and (5) the massive surge of secret campaign contributions .

Yet, despite the inevitable outpouring of articles and commentaries on all these subjects, few Democrats will really expect any serious shifts in thinking to occur. Realistically, there are always enough ambiguities in election results to provide some support for any of the major points of view within the Democratic coalition and, as a result, the major intra-Democratic strategic perspectives have all been stable and enduring features of the Democratic Party's ideological landscape for the last half-century. The truth is that all Democrats know perfectly well that in the next three or four months none of the six major viewpoints noted above is going to suddenly and magically disappear as a result of any new data or analysis that emerges from the intra-Democratic debate about this election.

As a result, there are two basic points of agreement on which Dems from all the major intra-party factions ought to be able to agree:

1. All of the major perspectives within the Democratic Party have a legitimate place and role in today's Democratic coalition. While various elements of both the centrist and progressive wings of the party may sincerely believe that in the long run a smaller but more ideologically united party would ultimately be preferable, the present moment categorically demands a basic level of Democratic unity from every element of the coalition.
2. To successfully defend the Democratic Party and its allied institutions against the very powerful conservative offensive that will come after the election, advocates of all major perspectives must proudly and explicitly assert that there are basic values and core areas of agreement unite them with all other Democrats and that they are prepared to present a solid and united front against the external threat posed by Republican extremism.

This can be asserted – to the mainstream media and the country as a whole – as follows:

*Disagreements among Democrats are arguments within a coalition and a community. We are all powerfully united by our profound opposition and deep sense of outrage at the socially irresponsible and politically extremist agenda that has been adopted*

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*by the Republican Party and we proudly stand together against it. We are united by our deep and profound belief that – As James Carville so eloquently expressed it in 1996 – “We’re right, you’re wrong”.*

*Do not mistake our diversity for disunity. Do not mistake our debates for division. Whatever our internal disagreements, they pale beside our common rejection of the extremist world-view that has permeated the Republican Party. We Democrats have a wide range of views within our coalition, but we stand together as one united political party in our dreams for a better future and our readiness to join together as one to confront and withstand conservative attack.*

This should be a common ground for all Democrats. Dems from all sectors of the party and points of view should consistently express it, particularly when dealing with the mainstream media. Dems cannot stop the mainstream media from pushing the Dems in disarray” narrative but they can all energetically and forcefully push back against it at every opportunity.