Center for American Progress

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Introduction and summary

Since Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1968 and George McGovern's run in 1972, progressives have sought to create a multiracial, multiethnic, cross-class coalition—made up of African Americans, Latinos, women, young people, professionals, and economically populist blue-collar whites—supporting an activist government agenda to expand economic opportunities and personal freedoms for all people. With the re-election of President Barack Obama in 2012, this progressive coalition has clearly emerged, albeit in an early and tenuous stage.

In 2012 President Obama won re-election with 50.9 percent of the popular vote[1] and 332 Electoral College votes. He is the first Democratic president since Franklin Delano Roosevelt to win two terms with more than 50 percent of the total popular vote. Unlike Democratic victories of the past, however, President Obama was also able to achieve victory with a historically low percentage of the white vote. According to the national exit poll, President Obama achieved victory by carrying 93 percent of African American voters, 71 percent of Latino voters, 73 percent of Asian American voters, and only 39 percent of white voters—slightly less than former Democratic presidential nominee Michael Dukakis' share of the white vote in 1988.[2]

Why was this possible? First, the shifting demographic composition of the electorate—rising percentages of people of color, unmarried and working women, the Millennial generation and more secular voters, and educated whites living in more urbanized states—has clearly favored Democrats and increased the relative strength of the party in national elections. Similarly, white working-class support for Democrats has been higher in key battleground states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin than in other states, while white college-educated support for Democrats has been strong in emerging battlegrounds such as Colorado and Virginia.[3] In contrast, the Republican Party's coalition of older, whiter, more rural, and evangelical voters is shrinking and becoming more geographically concentrated and less important to the overall political landscape of the country.

Second, this transition toward a new progressive coalition was possible because of the ideological shift of the American electorate. Voters are moving away from the Reagan-Bush era of trickle-down economics and social conservatism and toward the more pragmatic approach of the Clinton-Obama vision that includes strong governmental support for the middle class, public investments in education and infrastructure, a fairer tax system that requires the wealthy to pay their fair share, and more inclusive social policies.

The Obama coalition of the 2012 election provided a clear mandate for governing that focuses on improving the economy, protecting key social programs, expanding opportunity, and addressing rising inequality and unfairness in American life. Post-election polling by Democracy Corps shows that President Obama enjoyed a 51 percent to 42 percent margin over Republican presidential nominee and former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney on the question of who would be best at "restoring the middle class."[4] Similarly, voters express far more interest in a post-election deficit plan that invests in jobs and growth, raises taxes on the wealthy, and protects the middle class and social programs than one that shelters the wealthy, cuts economic and social programs, and increases defense spending.[5]

The 40-year transition of progressive politics—from Robert Kennedy to President Obama—has not been without difficulties, setbacks, and outright failures. Progressives witnessed the rise of a resurgent conservative movement that successfully shifted political discourse and public policy away from New Deal and Great Society liberalism to supply-side principles, social conservatism, and aggressive militarism. At the national level, the Democratic Party lost many traditionally Democratic states, particularly in the South, and a large percentage of the country's white working class drifted toward the reactionary conservatism of the Republican Party under former President Ronald Reagan and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.[6] The harsh reaction to the centrist Democratic presidencies of both Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton—and President Obama's first term—signaled the challenges progressives continue to face from their conservative opponents.

Despite these challenges, President Obama and his progressive allies have successfully stitched together a new coalition in American politics, not by gravitating toward the right or downplaying the party's diversity in favor of white voters. Rather, they did it by uniting disparate constituencies—including an important segment of the white working class—behind a populist, progressive vision of middle-class economics and social advancement for all people regard-

President Obama and his progressive allies have successfully stitched together a new coalition in American politics, not by gravitating toward the right or downplaying the party's diversity in favor of white voters.

less of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Should President Obama and progressives deliver on their agenda for the nation and improve the economic standing of middle- and working-class families, the potential for solidifying and expanding this progressive coalition well beyond the Obama years will only increase.

The primary strategic question for supporters of progressive values and policies is whether this coalition can be sustained going forward and, if so, how it can be harnessed to achieve progressive policy victories. This paper examines the demographic and geographic changes undergirding the rise of the new progressive coalition and explores some potential ideas for keeping this coalition together in support of progressive policies that will benefit all.

The demography of Obama's 2012 coalition

In our November 2011 report, "The Path to 270," our national analysis broke down the electorate into three key groups—minorities, college-educated whites, and noncollege or working-class whites.[7] Using these three groups, we discussed various scenarios that might result in an Obama or Romney victory. We found, in brief, that President Obama was likely to have a significantly advantage in 2012 due to demographic change, especially from a projected increase in minority voters and a decrease in white working-class voters. We further found that if the president's minority support held up in 2012—with the level of Hispanic support being the biggest question mark—he could absorb quite a lot of falloff in his support among white voters in general, and white working-class voters in particular, and still win the election.

Given this general analysis, we argued that the election results would ultimately turn on the answers to these four key questions:

- How much demographic change would there be in the 2012 election?
- Would President Obama's minority support be as high as it was in 2008?
- Would President Obama's support among college-educated whites hold up in 2012?
- Would Gov. Romney overwhelm President Obama among white working-class voters?

We can now provide answers to all these questions. Together, they clarify the demographic contours of President Obama's surprisingly solid re-election victory.

Demographic change and the 2012 election

In "The Path to 270," we projected, based on trends from the national exit poll and Census Bureau data, that compared to 2008, the 2012 voting electorate would see a 2 percentage point increase in the share of minority voters, a 3-point decline in white working-class voters, and a 1 percentage point increase in white college-graduate voters. According to the 2012 exit polls, that is exactly what happened.

TABLE 1
2012 voting by key demographic group

	D-2012	R-2012	Share of voters, 2012	Change in share, 2008-2012
Minorities	80	18	28	2
White college graduates	42	56	36	1
White working class	36	61	36	-3

The 2-point increase in voters of color grew their share of the voting electorate to a total of 28 percent, compared to just 15 percent of voters in 1988. Prior to the election, many prominent national surveys were drawing likely voter samples that projected the nonwhite share of voters to remain static or decline relative to 2008, when these voters totaled 26 percent of the electorate. Most notoriously, Gallup predicted that minority voters would only be around 22 percent of voters,[8] but most other pollsters had the minority share below its actual total of 28 percent, as well.

Thirteen percent of voters in 2012 were African American (same as 2008); 10 percent were Latino (up 1 point); 3 percent were Asian American (also up 1 point); and 2 percent were of another race. The share of black voters remained steady, despite many observers' predictions that black voter enthusiasm would flag and these voters would not turn out for the president. Hispanics increased their share in line with their growing share of the eligible electorate, despite similar skepticism about their level of voter enthusiasm. As for the increase in Asian American voters, this possibility was completely missed by pre-election observers. All in all, it appears that both the polling industry and most political analysts did a poor job anticipating the effects of a demographically changing America on the election outcome.

The shifts among white voters produced an even split between the share of white working-class and white college-graduate voters (36 percent each).[9] This is the first time we have seen this outcome, as white working-class voters have historically been

Thirteen percent of nonwhite voters in 2012 were African American (same as 2008); 10 percent were Latino (up 1 point); 3 percent were Asian American (also up 1 point); and 2 percent were of another race.

a larger group than white college-graduate voters. Indeed, in 1988 voters were 54 percent white working class and just 31 percent white college graduates.

The minority vote and the 2012 election

President Obama received 80 percent support from people of color in 2012, just as he did in 2008. His support among African Americans was almost as overwhelming this year (93 percent to 6 percent) as it was four years ago (95 percent to 4 percent). His support among Hispanics (71 percent to 27 percent) improved substantially from its 2008 level (67 percent to 31 percent). Furthermore, it is possible his support among Latinos was even higher since exit polls tend to undersample Latinos who are Spanish dominant, poorer, and live in less-assimilated environments. A Latino Decisions election-eve poll, which corrects for these sampling problems, found Latino support for President Obama at 75 percent nationally and also found his Latino support substantially higher in various swing states (for example, 87 percent in Colorado versus 75 percent in the corresponding state exit poll).[10]

Obama's support among Hispanics (71 percent to 27 percent) improved substantially from its 2008 level (67 percent to 31 percent).

In addition, President Obama achieved historic levels of support among Asian Americans. This year he got 73 percent of their vote (26 percent voted for Gov. Romney), compared to 62 percent in 2008 (when 35 percent voted for Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)).

The white college-graduate vote and the 2012 election

Pre-election polling generally showed President Obama performing close to his 2008 levels among white college graduates, when he lost this group by 4 percentage points. The exit polls this year, however, showed a more substantial gap for President Obama among these voters: 14 percentage points (42 percent to 56 percent). President Obama lost ground about equally among white college-graduate women and white college-graduate men. Among women in this demographic, his margin declined from 52 percent to 47 percent in 2008, to 46 percent to 52 percent in 2012. Among their male counterparts, the president's margin slipped from 43 percent to 55 percent in 2008, to 38 percent to 59 percent in 2012.

The white working-class vote and the 2012 election

President Obama's huge and stable margin among the growing minority voter population meant Gov. Romney's hopes rode on his performance among white voters, particularly white working-class voters. Both history and pre-election polls suggested this group would be Gov. Romney's strong point. Especially if Gov. Romney could widen the president's modest 2008 deficit among white college graduates, it was conceivable that he could run up a large enough margin among white working-class voters to take the popular vote.

As we just saw, Gov. Romney did indeed increase the deficit in President Obama's support among white college graduates, but Gov. Romney still fell far short of the margin he needed among the white working class. While he did improve on Sen. John McCain's 18-point margin among this demographic in 2008, Gov. Romney's margin of 25 points (61 percent to 36 percent for the president) was not enough. Indeed, that improvement among white working-class voters was actually less than he obtained among white college-graduate voters (7 points among the white working class versus 10 points among white college graduates). Gov. Romney would have needed about a 34-point margin among white noncollege voters (a 16-point improvement over the 2008 numbers) to win the popular vote, but he fell short.

Gov. Romney's gains among white working-class voters were primarily driven by gains among white working-class men. Sen. McCain's advantage in 2008 was 59 percent to 39 percent (20 points) with this demographic, which Gov. Romney improved to 64 percent to 33 percent (31 points). In contrast, Gov. Romney's advantage among white working-class women was 20 points (59 percent to 39 percent), up just 3 points from Sen. McCain's 17-point margin in 2008 (58 percent to 41percent). Gov. Romney's inability to make substantial gains among white working-class women was central to his general failure to run up large enough margins among the white working class.

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Other demographics

Two other key demographics in 2012 were young voters—members of the Millennial generation, defined here as those individuals born in the years 1978 to 2000—and women, particularly unmarried women. Turning first to Millennials, young voters (ages 18 to 29) defied skepticism about their likely levels of voter turnout in 2012, comprising 19 percent of voters this election year, up from 18

percent in President Obama's historic 2008 campaign. These young voters supported Democrats by a 23-point margin in the 2012 election (60 percent to 37 percent).[11] This is strong support—by far President Obama's best performance among any age group—just as was the case in 2008, when Obama performed even more strongly among these voters (66 percent to 32 percent). It is also worth noting that Obama did about as well among those ages 18 to 24 (60 percent to 36 percent) as he did among those ages 25 to 29 (60 percent to 38 percent), indicating that younger members of the Millennial generation—those who are just entering the electorate—have the same political leanings as their older counterparts.

As for women, President Obama carried these voters by 55 percent to 44 percent, while losing men by 45 percent to 52 percent. This is a larger gender gap than in 2008, when the president carried women by only a slightly larger margin (56 percent to 43 percent), while doing quite a bit better among men (actually carrying them by 49 percent to 48 percent). President Obama did especially well among unmarried women in 2012, carrying them by 36 points (67 percent to 31 percent), not far off his 70 percent to 29 percent margin in 2008. Unmarried women also made up a larger share of voters in this election—23 percent versus 21 percent in 2008.

The geography of President Obama's 2012 coalition

In 2012 President Obama carried every state that he had won in 2008, save Indiana and North Carolina, for a strong 332 to 206 electoral vote victory. Moreover, he carried every state (plus the District of Columbia) that Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) won in 2004, plus eight states that Sen. Kerry did not (Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, and Virginia) for the second time running.[12]

By region, this pattern of victories has reduced Republican strength in presidential elections to just the Upper Mountain West, the Plains States, and the South. In the South, the Republican Party has lost its political monopoly, as the two fast-growing "New South" states of Virginia and Florida have voted for President Obama in both of his election victories, along with North Carolina in 2008. At the presidential level, the Democrats now solidly control the Northeast, the Midwest (with the exceptions of Missouri and Indiana), the Southwest (with the exception of Arizona) and the West.

To make matters worse, the states that Gov. Romney did win tended to be rural and lightly populated. Fourteen of the 26 states carried by President Obama this year had 10 or more electoral votes, while just six of 24 states carried by Gov. Romney had 10 or more electoral votes. President Obama also carried seven of the eight most-populous states: California, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Only one—Texas—of the eight most-populous states went for Gov. Romney.

Population density and the Obama coalition

This population density pattern can be seen even more clearly by looking at the types of areas in which President Obama and Gov. Romney did well. President Obama ran strongest in large metropolitan areas—those with populations larger

than 1 million—winning these areas by 56 percent to 42 percent.[13] More than half (54 percent) of the U.S. population lives in these 51 large metropolitan areas.[14]

President Obama and Gov. Romney tied—49 percent to 49 percent—in medium metropolitan areas (those with populations of 250,000 to 1 million). Medium metropolitan areas contain another 20 percent of the U.S. population.

In small metropolitan areas where the population dips below 250,000—about 9 percent of the country—Gov. Romney was finally able to build an advantage over President Obama. Gov. Romney carried these areas 55 percent to 43 percent. Outside of metropolitan areas, where population density continues to fall, Gov. Romney did even better. In micropolitan areas[15]—think of these areas as the small-town sections of rural America—Gov. Romney beat the president by 18 percentage points, 58 percent to 40 percent. Micropolitans are another 10 percent of the U.S. population.

In the rest of rural America, the part that is most isolated from population centers and the most spread out, Gov. Romney bested President Obama by 23 points, 61 percent to 38 percent. These areas, despite the vast land area they cover, contain only 6 percent of the population (which is why, if you look at county maps of election returns, so much of it is colored red despite President Obama's solid victory).

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The same density-related patterns of support for President Obama and Gov. Romney were seen within large metropolitan areas. Virginia Tech's Metropolitan Institute and the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program developed a typology to break these areas down by density and distance from the urban core.[16] In large metro areas,[17] President Obama did best in densely populated urban cores (9 percent of the country), carrying counties in this classification by a whopping 55 points (77 percent to 22 percent). Moving out from pure urban core counties to the densest, closest-in suburban counties[18]—classified as inner-suburban in the typology—the president carried these counties by a wide 25-point margin (62 percent to 37 percent). Almost one-fifth (19 percent) of the nation's population is contained in these inner-suburban counties.

President Obama also carried mature suburban counties—16 percent of the nation's population lives in these counties that are somewhat less dense than inner-suburbs and typically contain no portion of the central city—by 13 points (56 percent to 43 percent).

Moving out to the emerging suburbs, it is important to distinguish between these areas and true exurbs, which together constitute what people usually think of as "exurbia." Today's true exurbs contain only 3 percent of the nation's population. That is where Gov. Romney did the best, carrying these counties by 24 points (61 percent to 37 percent).

In contrast, emerging suburbs contain 8 percent of the nation's population and tend to be faster-growing and denser than true exurbs. Emerging suburbs include such well-known counties as Loudoun County, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C.; Scott County, Minnesota, outside of Minneapolis; Warren County, Ohio, outside of Cincinnati; and Douglas County, Colorado, outside of Denver. In this category of counties, Gov. Romney also did well (53 percent to 45 percent), though not nearly as well as he did in the true exurbs.

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TABLE 2
2012 voting by type of area

	D-2012	R-2012	Share of US Population, 2010
Large metros	56	42	54
• Urban core	77	55	9
• Inner suburbs	62	37	19
• Mature suburbs	56	43	16
• Emerging suburbs	45	53	8
• True exurbs	37	61	3
Medium metros	49	49	20
Small metros	43	55	9
Nonmetro micropolitan	40	58	10
Nonmetro non-micropolitan	38	61	6

The story in the battleground states

These general density-related voting patterns were replicated in state after state that President Obama carried in 2012, including the battleground states that were truly in play between the two candidates. In "The Path to 270," we presented analyses of 12 battleground states in three broad geographic areas: the Midwest/Rustbelt, the Southwest, and the "New South." These analyses included a state-by-state projection of demographic shifts in the voting electorate relative to 2008 and an assessment of the paths within each state in the 2012 election for President Obama to hold it (these were all states he carried in 2008) or for the state to flip to the Republican

Party. In the end, the president carried all but one of these swing states (North Carolina), as he benefitted from ongoing demographic change, contained his losses among white voters, and performed well in these states' key metropolitan areas.

People of color increased their share of voters by 4 percentage points in Ohio, which was entirely due to an increase in black voters, who gave the president 96 percent of their vote.

Midwest/Rust Belt states

The Midwest/Rust Belt states analyzed included:

- Iowa (six electoral votes)
- Michigan (16 electoral votes)
- Minnesota (10 electoral votes)
- Ohio (18 electoral votes)
- Pennsylvania (20 electoral votes)
- Wisconsin (10 electoral votes)

TABLE 3
Change in minority share of voters by state, 2008-2012

State	Change in minority share of voters, 2008-2012
Iowa	-2
Michigan	5
Minnesota	3
Ohio	4
Pennsylvania	3
Wisconsin	3

President Obama carried all six of these states. Of the six, the most hotly contested and the state with the narrowest margin was Ohio, where President Obama eked out a 3-point victory (51 percent to 48 percent) thanks to two key factors. One was the minority vote: People of color increased their share of voters by 4 percentage points in Ohio, which was entirely due to an increase in black voters, who gave the president 96 percent of their vote.

The other factor was white working-class voters, a weak group for President Obama in the state during the 2008 election. In that election, Sen. McCain carried these voters by 10 points. The Romney campaign anticipated a large expansion of the Republican margin among these voters, but it was not to be. Gov. Romney's 14-point margin (56 percent to 42 percent) was an improvement over Sen. McCain's numbers but proved too modest a gain for his purposes. Indeed, Gov.

Romney actually improved more among white college graduates, expanding Sen. McCain's 1-point margin to a very strong 18-point advantage (58 percent to 40 percent). If Gov. Romney had improved that much among white working-class voters, he would have easily taken the state and its 18 electoral votes.

In terms of geography, President Obama's support held up well in the state's three major metropolitan areas: Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus. He lost the Cincinnati metropolitan area 56 percent to 43 percent, a 2-point decline from his margin in 2008. He carried the Cleveland area by 61 percent to 38 percent, just a 1-point decline from his 2008 margin. And he actually improved his performance in the relatively fast-growing Columbus metropolitan area, carrying it by 6 percentage points (52 percent to 46 percent) bettering his 2008 margin by 2 points.

The next most closely contested Midwest/Rust Belt state in 2012 was Pennsylvania, which President Obama carried by 5 points (52 percent to 47 percent), a 5-point decline from his 10-point victory in 2008. Voters of color were once again key, increasing by 3 points as a share of Pennsylvania's voters. The main contributor to this shift were Latinos, who elevated their share by 2 points (6 percent of voters) and supported the president by a 80 percent to 18 percent margin (up from 72 percent to 28 percent in 2008). Combined with 93 percent support from African Americans (13 percent of voters), this was sufficient to allow President Obama to survive a decline in white support from 48 percent in 2008 to 42 percent this year.

In terms of geography, President Obama did very well in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, carrying the region 65 percent to 34 percent, a decline of only 3 points from his vote margin in 2008. He also just about broke even in the Pittsburgh metro area (49 percent to 50 percent), a 4-point decline from his 2008 margin. Both of these margin decreases were less than his statewide decline.

The other four Midwest/Rust Belt states were not as close, with President Obama carrying Iowa by 6 points, Wisconsin by 7 points, Minnesota by 8 points, and Michigan by 10 points. The president's strong margin of victory in Michigan was assisted by a 5-point increase in the share of nonwhite voters, driven by a 4-point increase in black voters and a 1-point increase in Asian American voters. In Wisconsin, President Obama benefitted from a 3-point increase in minority voters, with 2 points of that coming from blacks and 1 point from Latinos. Minnesota also had a 3-percentage point increase in voters of color—2 points from black voters and 1 point from Asian Americans. Finally, the share of nonwhite voters in Iowa actually

went down 2 points, but since President Obama won the white vote 51 percent to 47 percent—just as he did in 2008—he was able to carry the state fairly easily.

Southwest states

The Southwest included three states that were considered potentially competitive in the 2012 election:

- Colorado (nine electoral votes)
- Nevada (six electoral votes)
- New Mexico (five electoral votes)

TABLE 4
Change in minority share of voters by state, 2008-2012

State	Change in minority share of voters, 2008-2012
Colorado	3
Nevada	5
New Mexico	-1

President Obama carried all three of these states. Of the three, the tightest contest proved to be Colorado, with the president carrying the state by 5 points. President Obama's victory there leaned heavily on support from voters of color, who increased their share of the state's voting electorate by 3 points, driven by increases in the share of Asian Americans (3 points) and Latinos (1 point). Latinos, who made up 14 percent of voters, voted more heavily for President Obama this year than in the previous presidential election, supporting him 75 percent to 23 percent, up from 61 percent to 38 percent in 2008. What's more, President Obama's Latino support may have been even higher than indicated by the exit polls: The Latino Decisions election eve poll, which corrects for exit poll sampling problems, measured Colorado Latino support for the president at 87 percent to 10 percent.[19]

The president's strong performance among Colorado's burgeoning minority voter population enabled him to survive a 6-point falloff in white support, which ebbed from 50 percent in 2008 to 44 percent this year. Additionally, President Obama was helped by his solid 55 percent to 43 percent margin in the Denver metro area—about half the statewide vote—as well as by a 51 percent to 46 percent

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margin in the Fort Collins metro area, and a 70 percent to 28 percent margin in the Boulder metro, the third and fourth largest metros in the state.

President Obama carried Nevada by 7 points—substantially more than the average of public polls suggested (3 points).[20] This was probably due to chronic problems Nevada pollsters have when it comes to reaching Spanish-speaking Latinos. President Obama's victory in the state received a huge assist from the increase in voters of color, a group that grew by 5 points to 36 percent of the state's voters. The 5-point increase was split evenly between Latinos and Asian Americans. Hispanics—18 percent of the Nevada electorate—supported the president by 70 percent to 25 percent, according to the exit polls, though once again the Latino Decisions election eve poll had his Latino support higher at 80 percent to 17 percent.[21]

President Obama's performance among minority voters was more than enough to offset a 4-point decline in white support from 45 percent in 2008 to 41 percent this year. The president's cause was also bolstered by his 14-point margin (56 percent to 42 percent) in the all-important Las Vegas metro area, representing 68 percent of the statewide vote.

The presidential contest in New Mexico never wound up being very competitive, with President Obama easily carrying the state by 10 points. Interestingly, this was despite a decline of 1 point in the share of nonwhite voters (down from 50 percent in 2008 to 49 percent this year). New Mexico's Latinos alone were 37 percent of all voters, and they threw their support to President Obama by 64 percent to 29 percent (77 percent to 21 percent, according to Latino Decisions).[22]

Southern states

Shifting to the South, the states in play there in 2012 were:

- Florida (29 electoral votes)
- North Carolina (15 electoral votes)
- Virginia (13 electoral votes)

TABLE 5
Change in minority share of voters by state, 2008-2012

State	Change in minority share of voters, 2008-2012
Florida	3
North Carolina	2
Virginia	0

President Obama won two of the South's three swing states—Florida and Virginia—while Gov. Romney carried North Carolina. The closest of these three contests was in Florida, which President Obama carried by a single percentage point, 50 percent to 49 percent. His victory relied heavily on support from communities of color, whose share of voters increased 3 points to 33 percent, driven by a surge in Latino voters. Latinos, who represent 17 percent of the state's voters, supported the president by 60 percent to 39 percent—6 points higher than their 57 percent to 42 percent vote margin for President Obama in 2008. Even Florida's traditionally conservative Cuban-American Hispanics supported the president in 2012, albeit narrowly, by 49 percent to 47 percent. African Americans, who made up 13 percent of the state's voters, supported President Obama by an overwhelming 95 percent to 4 percent, essentially the same as their support level in 2008.

Minority support in Florida allowed President Obama to survive a 37 percent to 61 percent margin among white voters, a 10-point greater deficit than he had among this group in 2008 (42 percent to 56 percent). In addition, whites declined as a share of voters by 3 points, driven by a decrease in working-class whites. Noncollege whites were Gov. Romney's most dependable group, favoring him by 26 points (62 percent to 36 percent). That was an 8-point larger margin than Sen. McCain enjoyed in the state in 2008, but it still wasn't enough to propel Gov. Romney to victory.

In terms of state geography, President Obama turned in strong performances where needed. He did very well in the Miami metro area, carrying it by 26 points (63 percent to 37 percent), fully 2 points better than his 2008 margin. In the crucial I-4 corridor—a swing region in the center of the state, where 37 percent of Florida's voters live—the president also carried the large metros of Tampa (51 percent to 48 percent) and Orlando (53 percent to 46 percent). The latter margin was only 1 point off his performance in 2008.

Minority support in Florida allowed President Obama to survive a 37 percent to 61 percent margin among white voters, a 10-point greater deficit than he had among this group in 2008 (42 percent to 56 percent).

Virginia gave President Obama a more comfortable 4-point victory (51 percent to 47 percent). The president benefitted from his usual strong support among communities of color—93 percent among African Americans (20 percent of the electorate), 65 percent among Hispanics (5 percent of the electorate), and 66 percent among Asians (3 percent of the electorate). Interestingly there was no increase in the minority share of voters, which held steady at 30 percent. In fact, not only was the overall share of minority voters in Virginia stable, but the shares of black, Latino, and Asian American voters were exactly the same this year as they were in 2008.

Virginia's conservative white working class was Gov. Romney's best hope for taking the state, and he did indeed run up a gaudy 44-point margin (71 percent to 27 percent) among these voters, a full 8 points better than Sen. McCain's showing among this group in 2008. Gov. Romney, however, could not budge enough of Virginia's white college graduates into his camp; their support remained about the same in 2012 as it was in 2008, giving the Republican candidate a comparatively modest 10-point margin (54 percent to 44 percent).

Geographically, President Obama dominated the big metro areas in the state, especially northern Virginia outside of Washington, D.C., which represents a third of the statewide vote, where he carried 57 percent of the vote (to Gov. Romney's 41 percent). He also carried the Virginia Beach metro area by 12 points (55 percent to 43 percent), and the Richmond metro by 4 points (51 percent to 47 percent).

North Carolina was Gov. Romney's lone victory among the battleground states, as he carried the Tar Heel State by 2 points (50 percent to 48 percent). He prevailed despite a 2-point increase in the minority share of the state's voters. Gov. Romney's victory was due in large measure to his expanded margin among whites—68 percent to 31percent, compared to 64 percent to 35 percent for McCain in 2008. That uptick was enough to tilt the state back to the Republican Party following their razor-thin 0.3-percentage-point loss in 2008.

Geographically, President Obama dominated the big metro areas in the state, especially northern Virginia outside of Washington, D.C., which represents a third of the statewide vote, where he carried 57 percent of the vote (to Gov. Romney's 41 percent).

Strategies for harnessing the Obama coalition to achieve progressive policy change

Looking at the long-term trends, a majority broadly supportive of progressive public policy is emerging. The progressive coalition is growing in numbers and coalescing around shared values and a vision of a more egalitarian America with economic and social opportunity for all, a strong middle class, shared tax burdens, and public investments in the foundations of national prosperity. In contrast, the conservative coalition is shrinking. Its ideology is becoming more rigid and exclusionary in its economic and social vision, and it is failing to offer policies that appeal to a large segment of the population. Progressives are building a big tent coalition with inclusive and hopeful policies to help the middle class, while conservatives are relying upon a diminishing group of voters and advancing economic policies designed to benefit the wealthy and well-connected.

But politics is never predetermined, and demographics alone will not deliver more progressive gains and achievements. Although President Obama's electoral victories in 2008 and 2012 were historic, these victories will not ensure large scale shifts toward more progressive public policy.

The fragmented American constitutional system—coupled with the ideological unity of congressional Republicans—gives conservative forces multiple veto points over progressive legislation and the ability to thwart a more expansive set of policies on the economy, jobs and growth, and fairer taxation. Conservatives control many state houses and governor's mansions, increasing their ability to block federal action on matters such as health care and encouraging further attacks on public employees and benefits for the poor, and punitive social policies aimed at communities of color and gays and lesbians. Likewise, Americans remain deeply skeptical of the federal government and the capacity of politics to deliver necessary change.

These trends makes it harder for progressives to govern in a way that improves people's lives in a concrete manner. President Obama got a reprieve from the poor economy in 2012, as voters chose to give him more time to overcome the failed

policies of the Bush era and to help move the economy onto surer footing. But now the president and progressives must deliver on their promises on jobs and the economy, or the public could quickly sour on the progressive policy vision.

What should supporters of progressive values and policies do going forward? Here are a few brief suggestions based on what we know about the electorate and the ideological orientation of the country.

First, a coherent and compelling way must be found to harness the rising electorate of communities of color, young people, women, and professionals, along with economically populist white working class voters, to give strong and consistent support to a progressive policy vision to benefit all Americans. This was the original vision of Sen. Robert Kennedy in 1968. There are many solid tactical ideas on the organizational, messaging, and outreach fronts that should be considered. But above all, this will require a relentless focus on social opportunity for all people and an economic agenda that puts the interests of working- and middle-class families first.

The progressive coalition should be the place that Americans of all stripes can join together to promote their own economic opportunities and personal freedoms, while fighting for the success and advancement of others who are less fortunate and more marginalized. On the economic front, the burgeoning research and policy agenda around "equity and growth" provides a good model for policies that can continue to unite a multiracial, multiethnic, cross-class coalition and convincingly challenge the dominance of laissez-faire policies in American government.

Second, it must be made clear to all Americans that in the progressive coalition, all voices are valued, all opinions are respected, and all ideas are taken seriously. Unlike the conservative coalition, progressives should seek to invite people in rather than push them out. In order to keep a fractious and diverse coalition together, progressives must continue to respect differences on both economic and social policies, and create institutional mechanisms for people to learn from one another and to gain from the experiences of those in different communities. Similarly, the progressive coalition must continue to represent the changing face of America by promoting more people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and working-class Americans into positions of authority in our organizations, party structures, and electoral campaigns.

Progressives must find a coherent and compelling way to unite the rising electorate of communities of color, young people, women, and professionals with the needs and aspirations of many white working-class voters.

Third, progressives must find ways to become a more permanent social movement that consistently organizes and engages a diverse group of Americans to advocate for government reforms and progressive social and economic policies. Gearing up for highly expensive elections every four years is wholly insufficient for achieving real progressive change. Given the range of problems facing the country—from inequality and a stagnant economy to climate change and corporate money in politics—supporters of progressive principles and policies need to be active on all fronts at all times. This will require political parties and leaders learning more from the groups on the ground that are organizing working-class whites and people of color and from groups such as Occupy Wall Street that have successfully engaged young people and activists across the ideological spectrum to fight economic inequality. The money and energy spent winning elections will be for naught if it is not followed by the resources and strategies necessary to keep the Obama coalition in permanent motion to overcome the obstacles to progressive change.

President Obama and progressives have proven they can build a powerful and growing coalition to win elections. Now they must find ways to permanently engage a diverse cross-section of Americans in support of government policies and investments that will produce a stronger middle class with rising opportunities and personal freedoms for everyone.

It must be made clear to all Americans that in the progressive coalition, all voices are valued, all opinions are respected, and all ideas are taken seriously.

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Endnotes

1 "2012 National Popular Vote Tracker," available at https://docs.google.com/a/tcf.org/spreadsheet/lv?key=0AjYj9mXElO_QdHpla01oWE1jOFZRbnhJZkZpVFNKeVE&f=true&noheader=false&gid=19, (last accessed November 2012). All subsequent references to the 2012 popular vote, either nationally or in states, are from this data source.

2 Exit poll data for 2012 from "2012 Fox News Exit Polls", available at http://www.foxnews.com/politics/elections/2012-exit-poll (last accessed November 2012). Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to the composition or voting behavior of the electorate in 2012 are from these exit poll data. Exit poll data for 1988 is from the authors' analysis of the exit poll data file from that year. All subsequent references to the composition or voting behavior of the electorate, either at the national or state level, for years prior to 2012 are from the authors' analysis of the data files for those years.

3 Ruy Teixeira and John Halpin, "The Path to 270: Demographics Versus Economics in the 2012 Election" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2011).

4 Letter from Stan Greenberg and James Carville to Friends of Democracy Corps, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, and Campaign for America's Future, November 13, 2012, available at http://www.democracycorps.com/attachments/article/931/dcor.caf.postelec.memo.111312.FINAL.pdf.

5 Letter from Stan Greenberg, James Carville, and Erica Seifert to Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, November 16, 2012, available at http://www.democracycorps.com/attachments/article/932/dcor.econpe.memo.111512.v4.pdf.

6 Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers, America's Forgotten Majority: Why the White Working Class Still Matters (New York: Basic, 2000).

7 Teixeira and Halpin, "The Path to 270."

8 Lydia Saad, "Romney 49%, Obama 48% in Gallup's Final Election Survey," Gallup, October 16, 2012, available at http://www.gallup.com/poll/158048/romney-obama-among-likely-voters.aspx.

9 Note, however, that exit polls have a problem estimating the sizes of groups by education, with a known tendency to undercount the less educated and overcount the more educated relative to Census data sources. It is therefore likely that the Census Bureau Voter Supplement data, when they are released sometime in 2013, will continue to show white working-class voters as a larger group than white college-graduate voters. The two data sources, though, do tend to show similar trends from election cycle to election cycle among these groups, even if they differ on levels of these groups in the voting electorate. For more discussion, see John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira, The Emerging Democratic Majority (New York: Scribner, 2002).

10 "ImpreMedia-Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll 2012", available at http://dl.dropbox.com/u/44794321/Latino_Election_Eve_Poll_By_state.pdf (last accessed November 2012).

11 The exit polls did not break out an age group for those ages 30 to 34 this year, so no information is available about the oldest members of the Millennial generation who would be in this age group.

12 Authors' analysis of data from "2012 National Popular Vote Tracker." For years prior to 2008, authors' analysis of data from "US Presidential Election Returns," available at http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/ (last accessed November 2012). All subsequent comparisons between popular vote results for 2012 and for prior years are from these data sources.

13 Authors' analysis of county-level election returns from the 2012 election. All subsequent analyses of 2012 election returns by type of county or by metropolitan area within states are from the authors' analysis of these data.

14 Authors' analysis of population data from the 2010 U.S. Census. All subsequent analyses of population by type of county from authors' analysis of these data.

15 The technical definition used by the Census Bureau is as follows: Any nonmetropolitan county with an urban cluster of at least 10,000 people 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 from to the central county with the urban cluster. See William H. Frey, Jill H. Wilson, Alan Berube, and Audrey Singer, "Tracking Metropolitan America into the 21st Century:A Field Guide to the New Metropolitan and Micropolitan Definitions", Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, November, 2004.

16 Robert Lang, Thomas Sanchez, and Alan Berube, "The New Suburban Politics: A County-Based Analysis of Metropolitan Voting Trends since 2000." In Ruy Teixeira, ed., Red, Blue and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics (Washington: Brookings, 2008).

17 The MI/Brookings typology only covers 50 of the 51 large metropolitan areas (the Raleigh-Cary metropolitan area in North Carolina was not included). Figures given here are based on those 50 metro areas for which the typology is available.

18 Many of these counties include urban core areas, as well as the suburbs that immediately surround them.

19 "ImpreMedia-Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll 2012."

20 "HuffPost Pollster Election Dashboard," available at http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/2012/romney-vs-obama-electoral-map, (last accessed November 2012).

21 "ImpreMedia-Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll 2012."

22 Ibid.

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