

Don't Panic over the Hispanics!

National data debunk consensus that GOP should embrace another amnesty

BY EDWIN S. RUBENSTEIN

Ever since the 2012 election the Republican leadership has been obsessed with the party's poor showing among Hispanics. Any missteps on immigration, they fear, will condemn the party to perpetual minority status — at least as far as general elections are concerned.

The reasons for their concern are obvious. Mitt Romney got just 27 percent of the Hispanic vote. That is less than John McCain's already low 31 percent in 2008, and well short of George Bush's 40 percent in 2004. Meanwhile, the Hispanic share of the U.S. population — 9 percent as recently as 1990 — was 17 percent in 2012, and is projected to reach 30 percent in 2050. http://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/hispanic/2012.06.22_cspan_hispanics.pdf

Hispanics passed blacks as the largest U.S. minority in 2006. Bad enough for the GOP, even without immigration reform.

But what really scares the beejammers out of Republican elites is the prospect of 11 million illegal aliens gaining (and exercising) the right to vote. This mass enfranchisement could come as early as 2026 under current versions of the reform bill.

An even larger group, consisting of the young married children sponsored by U.S. citizens, spouses, and children of permanent legal residents, plus high-skilled workers admitted under the H-1B visa program, could attain citizenship — and the vote — in as little as five years.

No less a personage than Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) predicted in June that *"the national Republican leadership will tell John Boehner if you can't pass a bill,*

then we are going to be a minority party for a generation." The rest of the Gang agrees.

Pass the Senate bill, sayeth the Gang of Eight, or remain a party dependent on older whites, mainly Southern males, whose time has clearly come and gone.

Reality check, please!

Start with those 11 million prospective new citizens. About 2 million of them are not Hispanic. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/133.pdf> More than one-tenth (11 percent) are Asian, most of them living in California and Washington. They are hardly a game changer so far as the electoral college is concerned. In the last election Asians voted for Barack Obama by a larger margin than Hispanics. Historically, however, their voting patterns are less stable than those of Hispanics. In 1992 they went for George H. W. Bush. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/23/immigration-reform-latino-voter-bonanza-democrats>

Similarly, the notion that 9 million amnestied Hispanics will materially impact the outcome of future elections defies experience. Only 40 percent of the illegals made eligible for citizenship by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 actually went through the process. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/apr/23/immigration-reform-latino-voter-bonanza-democrats> (Only 36 percent of Mexicans did so.) If today's undocumented Latinos become citizens at this rate, then we are looking at about 3.5 million new citizens by 2026.

How many will actually vote? Per the standard census Current Population Survey (CPS) <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-568.pdf> 48.0 percent of Hispanic citizens of voting age cast a ballot in 2012. This is down from 49.9 percent in 2008.

So it is likely that about 1.7 million amnestied Hispanics would actually take the path to citizenship and vote.

Even if 80 percent of these new Hispanic citizens were to vote Democratic (this larger than average share is likely, given the below average income of amnestied illegals), the net Democrat popular vote margin would grow by only about 1 million.

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More importantly, the electoral vote would not change. Sean Trende, Senior Elections Analyst for RealClearPolitics, writes:

Using these numbers, not a single state would have cast its votes for the electors of a different candidate in 2012. In fact, in 28 states, the president’s margin would have increased by just a half-point or less. Many of the important swing states are in this category....

The margin would have increased by a point or more in seven states, only one of which is a swing state: 1 percent in New Jersey, 1.1 percent in California, 1.2 percent in Georgia, 1.6 percent in Nevada, 1.8 percent in Utah, 1.9 percent in Arizona, and 2.4 percent in Texas. As for the last two turning blue in the next few years, they’re still pretty red states; Mitt Romney would have won both comfortably, even with the revised numbers. http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/04/24/an_immigration_bonanza_for_democrats.html

The idea is that otherwise moderate, middle class Hispanics, for whom economic issues are more important than immigration reform, left the party when candidate Romney started talking about “self-deportation.” (After all, he might be talking about their grandmothers.)

The goal is not to win the Hispanic vote outright — though that would be nice — but merely to narrow the gap between Hispanics and whites of similar income and socio-economic levels. Because Hispanics vote Democratic in such overwhelming numbers, even small GOP inroads would be meaningful:

Sean Trende:

This is about moving voters at the margins. If Republicans can increase their share among Hispanics by just three points over Romney’s showing — well within the limits of what can probably be achieved through these shifts — it would completely wipe out the expected vote gain for Democrats among these new voters. If Republicans got to where they routinely won between a third and two-fifths of the Hispanic vote — about how they performed in the late ’90s through the mid-2000s — they’d gain about three times as many votes as the Democrats from the shift.

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/04/24/an_immigration_bonanza_for_democrats.html

Supporting immigration reform will help the GOP with Hispanics. *But what will it do to the white vote?* After grabbing nearly 60 percent of white voters in 2012, is the GOP turning its back on the low-hanging fruit residing in the remaining 40 percent? Is the GOP’s Hispanic-centric strategy the reason so many white citizens failed to vote?

Is amnesty a winning political strategy for the GOP?

For perspective, consider a few basic statistics on the U.S. electorate from the 2012 presidential election.

Obama’s popular vote margin over Romney, 4.857 million, equals 3.7 percent of total votes cast in 2012. This is somewhat smaller than the usually stated margin (about 4 percent) because we use as our denominator the Census Bureau’s total voter figure, which includes individuals who voted for write-ins and third party candidates, as well as those who eschewed the Presidential race entirely, voting solely for a member of Congress.

A total of 132.9 million citizens voted in the 2012 general election. Romney and Obama received a combined 126.0 million, or 94.8 percent, of those votes. That leaves 6.9 million voters outside the political mainstream — potential game changers for either major political party.

2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION METRICS

	Number (mil.)	% of total vote
Obama’s victory margin	4.857	3.7%
VOTERS BY RACE:		
White, non-Hispanic	98.041	73.7%
Black, alone or in combination	18.558	14.0%
Asian, alone or in combination	4.331	3.3%
Hispanic	11.188	8.4%
Total (all races)	132.948	100.0%

Data sources: Census Bureau election survey (voters) <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2012/tables.html>

Federal Register (victory margin) <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/electoral-college/2012/popular-vote.html>

Note: Voter totals include people who voted for third party Presidential candidates, write-ins, and for congressmen and Senators but not for a Presidential candidate

Of course, the political fallout from amnesty extends beyond 11 million new citizens. A path to citizenship will resonate with all Hispanics, including legal immigrants and those born in this country. Conservative Hispanics — those who came here legally and have played by the rules — may be turned off, although the vast majority of these folks are probably already among the 27 percent who voted for Romney.

GOP leaders who claim that immigration reform is key to the party’s future have their eye on the 70 percent+ of Hispanic voters who voted for Barack Obama. They want to revisit the 35 to 40 percent Hispanic vote share that was theirs between 2004 and 2008. Pro-amnesty GOP strategists are betting that a large reason for the decline in 2012 was the party’s sharp opposition to immigration reform.

This broader definition of the electorate is important. It captures the “pox on both your houses” part of the American electorate — i.e., independent types who are unhappy with both major party Presidential candidates. They are citizens, and they vote. They are ripe for picking should either major party nominate a suitable candidate.

Still another group of disgruntled citizens are those who voted in 2008, but stayed home in 2012. They are obviously not included in the total vote figure. As we shall see, a disproportionate share of these no-shows are white. Political experts are divided as to why they left, but the GOP’s pro-rich economic agenda is prominently mentioned.

You can dis the GOP as the “Party of White People,” but from a popular vote standpoint this is not a bad thing. As seen in the table, white non-Hispanics accounted for about 74 percent of all votes cast in 2012, while Hispanics accounted for 8.4 percent. Obama’s popular vote margin — 4.857 million — equals about 5.0 percent of the white vote, but a whopping 43.4 percent of the Hispanic vote.

So if identity politics is your thing, reaching out to white voters appears nearly nine-times more likely to succeed than the Gang of Eight’s Hispanic-centric strategy.

The missing white voters

The most important demographic shift between 2008 and 2012 is not the growth in the Hispanic vote, which has been going on for decades, but the decline in white voting rates. The Census Bureau’s post-election voter survey found that 2 million fewer whites voted in 2012 than in 2008; every other racial group saw increases.

By Sean Trende’s reckoning many whites lied, reporting that they voted when they didn’t. When he adjusts for this “over-response bias,” and factors in population growth since 2008, he concludes that around 6.5 million fewer whites voted last year than would have been expected given the number of whites eligible to vote.

Two points must be emphasized.

First, the missing white voters alone did not sink Romney. If these voters had shown up and had voted for him like whites overall (60 percent), the President’s margin would have shrunk, but he still would have won by a healthy 2.6 percent of the total vote. Romney would have needed 90 percent of the missing voters to achieve victory.

Second, it seems clear that the same factors that caused them to stay home on Election Day 2012 lured many whites to vote for Obama. The issues are mainly economic, and by addressing them the GOP can plausibly

retake the White House while maintaining a strong anti-immigration reform stance.

Who are the missing white voters?

Sean Trende has analyzed election statistics on a county by county basis, correlating voter declines with the county’s location, demographic profile, average household income, education level, religions, and other variables. The biggest drop in turnout occurs in a rough diagonal from Maine through upstate New York, western Pennsylvania, Michigan, and down into the Mountain West to New Mexico.

Sean Trende:

...Note also that turnout is surprisingly stable in the Deep South; Romney’s problem was not with the Republican base or evangelicals (who constituted a larger share of the electorate than they did in 2004).

For those with long memories, this stands out as the heart of the “Perot coalition.” That coalition was strongest with secular, blue-collar, often rural voters who were turned off by Bill Clinton’s perceived liberalism and George H.W. Bush’s elitism. They were largely concentrated in the North and Mountain West: Perot’s worst 10 national showings occurred in Southern and border states. His best showings? Maine, Alaska, Utah, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, and Minnesota. http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/06/21/the_case_of_the_missing_white_voters_revisited_118893.html

The missing voters were largely downscale, Northern, rural whites. These folks are particularly vulnerable during economic downturns. Even in good times they fear losing their jobs to immigrants or foreign outsourcing.

Free trade scares them. So do free markets at home.

Supply-side arguments for cutting taxes at the top to generate jobs at the bottom do not persuade them — especially when intoned by a candidate whose fourth favorite house has a car elevator.

Budget cutting and entitlement reform take aim at the only hope for survival many of them have.

These fears resonate with Hispanic and black voters also, suggesting that economic populism might help the GOP cope with unfavorable long-term demographic trends.

The path to the White House

For the next few decades the most important question facing the GOP is how the 90 percent of the electorate that is not Hispanic will vote. The discussion might start with African-Americans, whose voting patterns have been altered the most during the Obama years.

From 1980 to 2004 the black share of the electorate moved in a fairly narrow band around 10 percent of the electorate. It then jumped to 13 percent of the electorate in 2008 and 2012.

Similarly, the GOP typically won about 10 percent of the black vote before it dropped to 4 percent in 2008 and edged up to 6 percent in 2012.

Sean Trende:

A 3 percent jump in a group that votes overwhelmingly Democratic is a tremendously important electoral effect. If it continues, Republicans’ chances of winning elections in the near future are bleak with or without immigration reform. What we should be asking — it’s a very, very interesting question — is what happens in 2016, when Barack Obama isn’t on the ballot? http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/06/25/does_the_gop_have_to_pass_immigration_reform_118952.html

One line of thought suggests that black voters are here to stay. While Obama undoubtedly triggered the black voting surge, it will survive his administration. After all, blacks make up 13 percent of the population, so the spike to 13 percent of the total vote simply means that they have reached their “natural” rate.

On the other hand, voter participation has long been linked to socio-economic levels regardless of race. With blacks still disproportionately poor and black unemployment far above that of other groups, the sustainability of the Obama spike seems doubtful. In 2010 blacks comprised 11 percent of the electorate, up only one point from their pre-Obama average. This suggests that, with Obama not on the ticket, black voting rates will decline in 2016.

I have written about the role immigration plays in the black community’s economic decline, a decline that has, if anything, accelerated during the Obama years. <http://www.vdare.com/articles/national-data-obamanomics-bad-for-blacks-but-they-re-voting-for-him-anyway> So we are not surprised when Trende reports that immigration reform “doesn’t play exceptionally well” among black voters. Twenty percent oppose a path to citizenship.

When queried about whether immigration reform would be a drain on government services or take jobs from U.S. citizens, blacks responded much like whites.

It’s all relative. The 20 percent black support for scuttling immigration reform is huge compared to the 4 percent support blacks gave to Mitt Romney. Nevertheless, it opens the door to a GOP White House in 2016 and beyond:

Let’s assume that immigration reform doesn’t pass, that the Democratic share of African-Americans reverts to 90 percent, that black voter participation drops somewhat, and that white participation picks up a notch. Let’s assume that the GOP share of the white vote continues to improve according to trend, about 1.5 points per year, with a “kicker” of a couple points for our “missing whites” returning in 2016. We’ll cap the Republicans’ share of the white vote at 70 percent.

Let’s also assume that Hispanic and Asian voters gradually react to this by voting increasingly like African-Americans. To accomplish this, we’ll add three points to the Democrats’ share of the Hispanic and Asian votes each cycle. http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2013/06/25/does_the_gop_have_to_pass_immigration_reform_118952.html

Trende dubs this the “racial polarization” scenario, and models the likely electoral college results using Nate Silver’s election template, which projects the size of each state’s voting age population — White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian.

The results are compiled in the table below.

The chart on the previous page assumes that 70 percent is the maximum white vote share available to Repub-

SEAN TRENDE’S RACIAL POLARIZATION SCENARIO

	ELECTORAL VOTES		% VOTING REPUBLICAN			
	Republican	Democrat	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
2012 Actual	206	332	59.0%	6.0%	27.0%	26.0%
2016	296	242	63.0%	10.0%	25.0%	21.0%
2020	304	234	65.0%	10.0%	22.0%	18.0%
2024	304	234	66.0%	10.0%	19.0%	15.0%
2028	329	209	68.0%	10.0%	16.0%	12.0%
2032	296	242	69.0%	10.0%	13.0%	10.0%
2036	300	238	70.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%
2040	270	268	70.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%
2044	257	281	70.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%
2048	185	353	70.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%

Data Sources: CNN Poll (Republican share, 2012)

<http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/race/president>

Sean Trende, RealClearPolitics, June 25, 2013. (Republican share, 2016 to 2048)

licans. Or, as Trende notes, sooner or later you encounter Madison, Wisconsin, and Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Is a 70 percent white share unattainable for the GOP?

Ninety-percent shares are common in Mississippi and Alabama.

It is true, however, that 70 percent is the GOP's national high water mark for white voters, set by Ronald Reagan in 1984. Two years later his amnesty set millions

of illegals on a path to citizenship. In 1984 immigrants comprised about 8 percent of the labor force. Today they are 17 percent.

Native-born workers have lost billions competing with their immigrant counterparts.

It was the Reagan Democrats, downscale white workers who lost economic ground during the Carter years, that propelled his share to 70 percent. Surely there are more of them today. ■

A GOP Victory Scenario for 2016

Can Republicans regain the White House without embracing immigration reform in 2016? The conventional wisdom among the GOP leadership, from John Boehner on down, says no. Meanwhile, Eric Cantor's shocking primary election loss makes it more unlikely that Republican candidates will support immigration reform.

In fact, a GOP victory is possible — and even “plausible” — if you define the term to include the most GOP-friendly combination of turnout rates and victory shares that has occurred since 1980. The best-case scenario assumes the following:

- Whites revert to their 2004 turnout peak.
- Turnout rates for blacks, Asians, and Hispanics decline to 1996 levels. With Obama (certainly) not on the ticket, and immigration reform (hopefully) squelched by GOP opposition, this confluence is not inconceivable.
- A popular, populist GOP Presidential candidate achieves the same vote shares for white and minority voters enjoyed by Ronald Reagan in his 1984 landslide.

Under these assumptions GPS in 2016 is a whopping 55.2 percent:

BEST-CASE SCENARIO: GOP POPULAR VOTE SHARE, 2016			
	% of voters in each group(a)	GOP vote share of Ethnic Group(b)	GOP Share of Total Popular Vote (Col. 1 x col. 2)
White	74.4%	66.0%	49.1%
Black	10.5%	9.0%	0.9%
Hispanic	10.0%	34.0%	3.4%
Asian	3.2%	34.0%	1.1%
Other	2.0%	34.0%	0.7%
TOTAL	100.0%		55.2%

a. Calculated by applying 2004 white turnout rate and 1996 minority turnout rates to 2016 voting age population projections. b. 1984 GOP shares; Asian and other shares set at Hispanic share. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/elections/how_groups_voted/voted_12.html

Even if the white share of the GOP vote remains at Romney's 59 percent level, the GOP candidate would achieve a narrow popular vote victory in 2016 under this scenario. ■

—Ed Rubenstein