

Permanent Democratic Majority?

The Legitimacy of Political Realignment Following the 2008 and 2012 Presidential Elections

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Abstract:

Following Barack Obama's victories in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, some political pundits claimed a new political realignment had been initiated favoring the Democratic Party (Davis 2008, Douthat 2012, Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008). More precisely, some asserted this realignment was influenced by demographic trends (Douthat 2012, Judis 2008, and Meyerson 2008). Reviewing scholarly literature from the past three presidential elections, it is contested Obama's victories were the result of more than changes in demographics. It is argued Obama's success was the result of short-term factors, not necessarily transferable to future elections. Using a series of cases studies, demographic trends are analyzed to see how the behavior of minorities and voters ages 18 – 29 may have shaped outcome of the 2012 presidential election in key battleground states. The results show a realignment is not sustainable unless future Democratic presidential candidates replicate the success Obama had with minority and young voters.

Permanent Democratic Majority?

The 2004 election was a stellar one for the Republican Party. In the Executive Branch, Republican candidate and incumbent George W. Bush was reelected to the White House, winning the popular vote by 2.4% (Peters and Woolley 2015). Likewise, in the Electoral College, Bush won in a sea of red stretching from Virginia to Nevada (Peters and Woolley 2015). Republicans also did well in the House and Senate, taking control of both legislative bodies (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). In the House, Republicans emerged from the election with their highest total of Representatives in over 75 years (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). With regards to the Senate, Republicans now had 55 seats in their grasp, a total that had been equaled only three times by the GOP in the same 75 year time period (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009).

Republicans had been in a similar position of power four years earlier, as they also won control of the House, Senate, and Oval Office. However, it was not the same sense of control achieved in 2004. The 2000 election saw the Republicans achieve a tie in the Senate, and win the presidency by failing to win the popular vote (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). Things would be different four years later, as the 2004 election would mark the first time in over 50 years the Republicans had outright power in both the Legislative and Executive Branches (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). The Republican Party had reached a high point of political power. Ceaser and DiSalvo perfectly surmise their performance in 2004 by stating “Many Republicans, and not just Republicans, looked at 2004 as a plateau on which the GOP would consolidate and begin a climb to a more commanding majority status” (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009, 6).

However, the political landscape looked completely different in the next election cycle. In 2008, Democratic Senator Barack Obama of Illinois beat out Senator John McCain of Arizona to become President. Like his predecessor four years earlier, Obama won the popular vote, but did so by a wider margin of 52.9% to 45.7% (Peters and Woolley 2015). Obama’s impressive victory in the popular vote also came with a dominating win in the Electoral College, with Obama claiming several states Bush had won four years prior (Peters and Woolley 2015). The sudden change in Electoral geography resulted in Obama winning the Electoral College by a

count of 365 – 173 (Peters and Woolley 2015). Obama would once again be elected President in 2012, and did so by a comfortable 332 – 206 vote margin in the Electoral College, and a 3.9% spread in the popular vote (Peters and Woolley 2015).

So how exactly did the political landscape in America change so fast? How was it an Electoral College map so Republican Red in 2004 managed to become so Democratic Blue by the time Obama was reelected in 2012? Following the 2008 election political pundits Lanny Davis, John Judis, and Harold Meyerson asserted that these massive changes were the result of a new political realignment in American politics, one in favor of the Democrats (Davis 2008, Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008). Obama’s subsequent victory in the next election cycle would likewise lead fellow media member Ross Douthat to believe this as well (Douthat 2012). Based upon their writings, it appeared three of these pundits saw underlying changes in American society creating such a political shift. These changes were ones were occurring in the demographic makeup of the country. Douthat, Judis, and Meyerson, all noted the influence demographics had in shaping Obama’s victories, and it’s role in initiating a possible realignment in the Democrats favor (Douthat 2012, Judis 2008, and Meyerson 2008).

However, is it valid to believe Obama’s victories marked the beginning of a new political realignment in America? Likewise, are demographic changes the driving force behind this possible transformation? Predictions about realignment can quickly turn out to be proven wrong, as the political landscape is capable of shifting dramatically in a short period of time. The stark contrast between the 2004 and 2008 elections serve as a good example of this. In the wake of the 2004 election, political commentator Fred Barnes also made an argument that claimed realignment in favor of the Republicans (Barnes 2004). Even scholars such as Abramson, Aldrich, Rhode, and Ashbee believed that the 2004 election had the chance to usher in a realignment for the GOP (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005; Ashbee 2005). Yet, as the results of the 2008 election would come to show, these claims were far off the mark.

Key Jr. provides a good working definition of a realignment, stating it must be an election “in which voters are, at least from impressionistic evidence, unusually deeply

concerned, in which the extent of the electoral involvement is relatively quite high, and in which the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate” (Key Jr. 1955, 4). Furthermore, Key Jr. goes on to say the key aspect of such an event is “the realignment made manifest in the voting in such elections seems to persist for several succeeding elections” (Key Jr. 1955, 4). Thus, in order for any realignment to truly be established, it must be shown there has been a fundamental change in the political behavior of the voting public. This change must be one with the capability of lasting over many succeeding elections.

The following research will challenge the notion put forth by the media suggesting Obama’s victories in 2008 and 2012 marked the start of a political realignment in America. Rather, it will be contended such claims are premature and lack sufficient evidence to stand upon. Although it is acknowledged America is changing along racial and generational lines, these changes are not enough by themselves to create a political shift. Doing a review of the scholarly literature from the last three presidential elections, it will be shown Obama’s victories were not the result of any sort of political realignment, and argued Obama’s success was the result of short-term factors. These factors would include increased support and turnout for Obama from minorities and voters ages 18 – 29, poor candidate choice on the part of the Republicans, and other elements not necessarily be transferable to future elections. It will also be presented that any realignment discussed by the pundits will not be sustainable for the Democrats unless they match or increase on the support and turnout Obama received in his election victories from minorities and voters ages 18 – 29. This fact will be demonstrated by a series of case studies. The case studies will analyze how Hispanic voters, Black voters, voters ages 18 – 29, and White voters shaped the election results of key battleground states in 2012.

To make this challenge, a comprehensive review was attempted of the existing scholarly research on not just the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, but also the 2004 contest. Attention is placed upon dominant themes found in the literature for the elections, ones which were cited by more than one piece of scholarly work. Thus, not every know piece of literature regarding the

2004, 2008, and 2012 elections is referenced. Rather, the goal is to find a consensus among the academic community for why the results of the elections turned out the way in which they did. In doing so, this will hopefully provide understanding for the results of the past three elections, and see if any supposed realignment had long-term sustainability.

Research was focused in its scope to only examine candidates, data, and observations regarding the past three presidential elections. Though it may help better understand current voting trends, midterms elections were omitted for two reasons. First, the realignment claims made by the aforementioned pundits were made in the aftermath of presidential elections, and were based primarily upon the results of those contests. Had these claims been stated with more focus on the midterm elections, the research would have been conducted differently. Attention would have also been given to see if voter behavior in those years provided any indication of sustainable long-term voting trends. Second, given the pundits claims were made with presidential elections in mind, the research was focused on analyzing what influenced the electorate to respond the way they did in the years the presidency was at stake. In other words the political climate, the candidates running for president, campaign funding, and other features distinct to those particular races.

2004 Election

While the research will mainly focus on the elections involving Barack Obama, 2004 will be looked at as well. This is due to the fact the 2004 contest was a very successful one for the Republican Party, and thus it will be useful to see what changed between this election and the two following ones. According to the literature, four dominant topics stick out which appear to explain the 2004 outcome. First, the 2004 election was very comparable to the 2000 election in terms of the results and how most demographic groups voted, with the notable difference being an increase in Hispanic support for Bush. Second, there was a rise in voter turnout due to the success both parties had in getting supporters to the poll, although Republicans were more successful in doing so. Lastly, in terms of the candidates, Bush benefited from being perceived

by the voters as strong on terrorism. On the other hand, Kerry struggled to generate a sense of energy within his campaign, hurting his chances to take the presidency from Bush.

With regards to 2004, the election was very similar to the previous one (Abramowitz 2004). The popular vote was roughly the same as it was four years prior (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005), and only Iowa, New Mexico, and New Hampshire changed party allegiance in the Electoral College (Abramowitz 2004; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005). Voting patterns in terms of demographics fell the same way they had four years earlier (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005). The key exceptions were Hispanics and women supporting Kerry by reduced amounts (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005). With regards to Hispanics, Bush benefited from Kerry's disappointing performance. Possibly the result of Kerry's drop-off in support with Hispanics, Bush improved his performance among this group when compared to the 2000 election (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005).

In terms of public participation, the 2004 election also witnessed a rise in voter turnout (Abramowitz 2004). The increase in voter turnout appears to be caused by the fact that both parties did well in terms of getting supporters to the polls (Abramowitz 2004; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005), and because the political environment surrounding the election was highly polarized due to Bush being a polarizing figure. Voters held strong opinions about Bush, and were eager to either show their support, or vote him out of office on Election Day (Abramowitz and Stone 2006). Contributing to the polarization was the controversial Iraq War, and the lingering feelings Republicans and Democrats had in regards to the 2000 election (Campbell 2005).

Data from the American National Election Survey indicates turnout in the 2004 election for both Democrats and Republicans rose from turnout levels four years prior (Jacobsen 2005). The same data also revealed Republicans were better at getting their supporters to the voting booth. Compared to the previous presidential election, Republicans saw their turnout rise by 4.8 points (Jacobsen 2005). The turnout factor was especially important in the key state of Ohio, where getting Republican voters to come out to the polls was instrumental in Bush winning the

Buckeye State (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005). Democrats improved as well, but turnout improved only 1.9 points (Jacobsen 2005). Turnout woes also hurt Kerry with young voters. His campaign was not successful in getting younger voters to the polls in 2004 (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005).

Terrorism was one of the dominant political matters during the 2004 election. Voters saw terrorism as the most significant issue in the election (Abramson et al. 2007). Overall, Bush was viewed in better light than Kerry was when it came to this subject (Abramson et al. 2007, Campbell 2005). However, Kerry's woes went beyond his inability to convince voters he was adept in terms of handling terrorism. Kerry struggled to generate a sense of genuine enthusiasm for his own campaign (Campbell 2005). Those who were voting in favor of a candidate tended to be Bush voters (Abramson et al. 2007, Campbell 2005). Most of the voters who were voting in opposition to a candidate threw their support behind Kerry (Abramson et al. 2007, Campbell 2005), indicating Kerry voters were voting for the Senator simply because he was the best alternative to the Bush campaign. Overall, Kerry's campaign lacked a sense of positivity, and focused on the wrong issues (Ashbee 2005). As a result, it deflected too much attention away from campaigning on more appealing matters such as economic ones (Ashbee 2005), thus hurting the Senator's chances in the long run.

2008 Election

Whereas 2004 was similar to the election four years prior, 2008 represented a seismic shift in America's political landscape. This seismic change is what led Davis, Judis and Meyerson to believe the Democrats had achieved a political realignment (Davis 2008, Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008). Based upon the writings of Judis and Meyerson, demographic changes played an important role in shaping the 2008 election, and potentially ushering a new political landscape to be dominated by the Democratic Party (Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008). However, in addition to demographic changes along racial and generational lines, the 2008 literature noted high turnout from minority and younger voters, Obama's strength in mobilizing supporters, the

financial strength of the Obama campaign, and the poor economy playing key roles in shaping the results of the 2008 election.

Supporting claims for realignment, a case can be made for future Democratic advantages because of the changing racial makeup of the American electorate, a change being driven by factors independent of the political process. Such factors would include increased immigration from outside the country, and increased fertility rates among minorities (Abramowitz 2010). Additionally, these alterations are being aided politically by improved voting behavior among the same groups (Abramowitz 2010). On the other hand, the share of White voters in the overall electorate has decreased by six percent in the time period from 2000 to 2008 (Caswell 2009). Given that Obama did well with Hispanics/Latinos in 2008 (Campbell 2010; Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009), this bodes well for the Democratic Party. If such voting trends continue, Democrats may become the most powerful political party in America going forward (Abramowitz 2010).

Continuing along the lines of racial minorities, Black voters were critical to Obama's success in his 2008 victory. Exit polls found Black voters made up a larger portion of the electorate nationally in 2008 than in 2004, growing from 11% to 13% (McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012). Additionally, they supported Obama with a greater share of support than they had with Kerry four years before. Obama won 95% of the Black vote in 2008, a seven percent improvement from what Kerry received four years prior. If he had not improved on Kerry's performance, Obama would have won the 2008 election by a smaller margin, and been the runner-up in both North Carolina and Florida (Philpot, Shaw and McGowen 2009). The overwhelming support Obama received from Black voters was even strong enough to make Georgia competitive. In 2004, Bush won the state by almost a 17% spread (Peters and Woolley 2015). In 2008, the results were much tighter as the result of high Black voter participation in the Peach State (McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012). McCain ended up winning Georgia by a narrow 5.3 – point margin (McKee, Hood, and Hill 2012).

Just as America appears to be changing racially, the country is also experiencing a demographic change along generational lines. Along with minorities, Obama benefited from the

vast support of people under the age of 30 (Abramowitz 2010, Campbell 2010, Fisher 2010). Like the minority groups mentioned earlier, young people appear to be a subset of the population which could give the Democrats support for many years to come. Similar to Latinos, they are a segment of the population that is increasing in size (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). Since Obama did well with these voters in 2008, this will potentially benefit Democrats in future races.

Why these young voters chose to pull for Obama is somewhat debated in the literature. Fisher claimed that younger voters were attracted to Obama because of the allure that he had as a candidate, and because of dissatisfaction with the Bush presidency (Fisher 2010). Abramowitz stated that data from the 2008 American National Election Survey indicates that young voters chose to vote for Obama because of an attraction to Obama's political beliefs, as opposed to attraction to Obama as a candidate, or the successful mobilization of these voters by the Democratic Party (Abramowitz 2010). Regardless of the reason, these voters are less conservative than previous generations. Unlike their conservative predecessors, Fisher and Abramowitz both stated this is a generation of voters that tended to be more progressive politically (Abramowitz 2010, Fisher 2010). Obama was favored by voters ages 18 – 29 by almost landslide proportions, winning 66 – 32% (Fisher 2010). By contrast, voters over the age of 30 almost tied in their preferences, narrowly preferring Obama 50 – 49% (Fisher 2010). According to Abramowitz and Fisher, voters will tend to stick with the party that they chose when they were young (Abramowitz 2010, Fisher 2010). If this is true, this could potentially give the Democrats a strong base of supporters for many years to come.

Turnout for the 2008 election was high, and it was especially impressive among racial/ethnic minorities, and voters under the age of 30. The high turnout benefited Obama, as much of Obama's size of victory over McCain can be attributed to his successful rallying of minority and young voters (Caswell 2009). Turnout rose for the under – 30 voting group (Abramowitz 2010). Black turnout was the highest in history with 65.2% of Blacks voting, nearly equaling the White voter turnout that year (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009). In fact,

in the 2008 primary elections, Blacks casted ballots at a higher rate than Whites did (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009).

The high turnout which was witnessed may have been the result of Obama's ability to mobilize voters to come to the polls and support him. Obama's campaign did a good job overall of mobilizing voters regardless of age, race, or ethnicity. The Obama campaign was able to make contact with 26% of voters according to exit polls (Caswell 2009). Conversely, Republicans were not as successful when it came to similar efforts. The same exit polls indicated McCain's campaign interacted with only 18% of voters (Caswell 2009). Furthermore, 75% of Black voters who were reached by a candidate or political party in 2008 claimed that Democratic had reached out to them (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009), demonstrating the strength of the Democrats efforts in the election.

Obama's successful outreach effort, and ability to drive turnout was due to the financial strength the Obama campaign had in 2008. Campbell stated Obama had a significant financial edge over McCain when it came to campaign financing (Campbell 2010). Obama was able to spend more than McCain in four key states: Indiana, Virginia, Ohio, and North Carolina (Campbell 2010). Consequently, all four of those states would be won by Obama (Campbell 2010). The superiority of Obama's financial resources enabled his campaign to get first-time voters to the polls, as well as voters who did not demonstrate a consistent pattern of voting (Caswell 2009). These resources also allowed Obama to increase the amount of states in which his campaign committed time and effort to (Caswell 2009).

Despite all of the advantages Obama may have had, Campbell noted the election was actually closer than people realized. McCain and Obama were not too far apart in the polls prior to both conventions, and McCain actually appeared to be in the drivers seat following their conclusion (Campbell 2010). Unfortunately, the 2008 election was one that took place in an abysmal economic climate (Abramowitz 2010, Campbell 2010, Caswell 2009). The economic crisis eventually doomed McCain, and consequently sent Obama to the Oval Office (Campbell

2010). Caswell argues Obama's impressive performance with most voters in 2008 was simply the reflection of voters responding to the poor condition of the economy (Caswell 2009).

2012 Election

Unlike the prior election, there was very little discussion on the topic of demographics and turnout in the 2012 literature. Jacobsen mentioned Obama's victory was aided by the votes of minorities and young people, and his campaign was better than Romney's in terms of turning out the vote (Jacobsen 2013). Campbell also references Obama's edge in mobilization efforts, as well as the fact the electorate was composed of a greater share of non-White voters (Campbell 2013).

However, the literature pointed to a different set of causes for why Obama was able to retain his hold on the Oval Office. Drawing from the relevant scholarly material, Obama's victory in 2012 was not an indication of realignment, demographics, or turnout. Instead it was influenced by the poor candidacy of Mitt Romney, Obama's strength in the election as an incumbent president, and the increasing trend of polarization among the American electorate.

Campbell, Jacobsen and Mayer all discussed the role of Mitt Romney within the 2012 campaign and his struggles as the Republican Party nominee (Campbell 2013, Jacobsen 2013, Mayer 2012). Romney would encounter a great deal of difficulty in trying to defeat Obama in 2012. Some of this was out of his control, although much of it was self-inflicted.

Romney's difficulties actually began before he faced Obama, as his campaign ran into hurdles in terms of gaining support from the Republican base. With Romney being seen as too moderate, Republicans chose to support several other candidates before eventually rallying behind his campaign (Campbell 2013). In terms of the nomination, Romney had to endure the completion of three-dozen nominating contests before he earned 40% support from Republicans in the Real Clear Politics average of preference polls (Campbell 2013). Romney would eventually receive the nomination due to his campaign financial strength and mistakes made by his opponents (Campbell 2013). However, his nomination lacked the important factor of genuine enthusiastic support from the GOP base. Republicans preferred a candidate with better

conservative credentials (Jacobsen 2013). Conservatives ended up reluctantly supporting Romney, but did so in a way similar to how liberals supported Kerry in 2004 (Jacobsen 2013).

In the fall campaign season, Romney did well in the first debate (Mayer 2012). This would arguably be one of the few bright spots for his candidacy. Romney's list of mistakes would include failing to properly make use of the poor economy existing that year (Mayer 2012, Campbell 2013), struggling to ever accurately define the policies that he would enact as president (Mayer 2012), and not being able to achieve any sort of post-convention bounce in the polls due to unsuccessful utilization of the Republican Convention (Mayer 2012). Romney's stellar performance in the first debate would prove to be an outlier, because like the convention, Romney did not properly take advantage of the other debates (Mayer 2012).

With regards to his personality, the former Governor struggled to come across as personable or likable as Obama. Romney had trouble relating to the public, and struggled with a perception of being too elite (Jacobsen 2013, Campbell 2013). Similarly, he unsuccessfully expressed how his solutions for solving the existing economic troubles would go beyond helping only the wealthy (Jacobsen 2013). To only worsen his situation, Romney made several questionable statements about his wealth throughout the campaign (Jacobsen 2013). This enabled his opposition to make it seem as though Romney could not relate with ordinary Americans (Jacobsen 2013).

Adding to Romney's woes was the fact he was being negatively influenced by the last Republican to hold the White House. In addition to being used as a scapegoat for Obama to blame for the poor economy, George W. Bush was still seen by voters as the cause of the existing economic troubles (Campbell 2013, Jacobsen 2013, Mayer 2012). This made it hard for Romney to win over Democrat and Independent voters (Jacobsen 2013). Although Romney could not reverse the legacy of the Bush presidency, Romney still could have handled this factor better. Romney should have tried to pin some of the blame on Obama for the state of the economy, and find some way to separate his candidacy from the tarnished legacy of the Bush

presidency (Mayer 2012). Mayer concluded that Romney lost the campaign because of problems on a personal level, and poor decisions made in terms of campaign staffing (Mayer 2012).

Despite the flaws of Romney, he still had a chance to win the presidency. The election in 2012 looked as though it was winnable for either candidate (Mayer 2012). On one hand, Obama had mediocre approval ratings, and the poor economic conditions would have been working against his chances of being re-elected (Mayer 2012). The economy was sputtering at the time, and the public had a very unfavorable view of the current economic situation (Jacobsen 2013). The economic solutions which came about in Obama's first term were perceived with rather low regards. Obama's stimulus package, along with his bailout of the auto industry, received lukewarm approval by the public (Jacobsen 2013). Voters arguably expressed their displeasure with the state of the economy, and Obama's inability to fix it, via the voting booth in the 2010 midterms. The public voted 64 Democrats out of the House, the worst midterm defeat in over six decades regardless of political affiliation, and a loss that reverted the Democrats back to minority status within the chamber (Campbell 2013). Overall, despite what mistakes Romney made, the poor economy remained on voters' minds and thus kept the election close. Only a week prior to the 2012 election, the RealClearPolitics average of polls showed Obama only with a small 0.7% lead (Lewis and Ceaser 2013).

However, Obama benefited from being an incumbent, specifically an incumbent whose party has had control of the presidency for just four years (Mayer 2012). According to Mayer, going back to 1900, it has become almost impossible for a challenger to defeat a sitting President who has been in office for such a short-time period (Mayer 2012). Romney faced an uphill battle against Obama because of the incumbency advantage (Mayer 2012), especially since Obama was a first-party term incumbent, an incumbent president that followed a president of the other political party (Campbell 2013). These types of incumbents almost always get reelected, and Romney faced a daunting assignment of trying to win the election because of this (Campbell 2013). Contrary to Mayer, who believed Romney had a great deal of control on the fate of the

election (Mayer 2012), Lewis and Ceaser assert that Romney would have lost no matter the circumstances because of the incumbency factor (Lewis and Ceaser 2013).

Finally, the other significant theme that stood out within the literature on the 2012 election was the trend of partisanship and polarization among the electorate (Campbell 2013, Lewis and Ceaser 2013, Jacobsen 2013). Similar trends were seen in the 2004 election as the result of Bush's divisive presidency, and briefly touched on in the 2004 literature. It was also witnessed in 2012 as well. Exit polling reported a mere 6.5% of voters claiming to have crossed party lines to vote for a candidate for any public office in the opposing party, a decrease of about four percent from the prior two elections, and the lowest total ever recorded in the history of exit polls (Jacobsen 2013).

As result of polarization, election results for the presidency at the state level are becoming increasingly predictable. Presidential elections on a state level used to be far more competitive (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). Over time there has been a reduction in the amount of competitive states up for grabs with each passing election, and this was shown in the 2012 election. Landslide wins at the state level were an important feature in that year's contest (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). Jacobsen argued the polarized political structure played a heavy influence in the 2012 election (Jacobsen 2013). This structure happened to lean Democratic, and thus gave Obama the presidency (Jacobsen 2013).

Was it Realignment?

Although it may be too early to come to a comprehensive conclusion about the historical precedence of Obama's election triumph, it's still possible to look at the preliminary evidence garnered from the scholarly literature, and see if there is anything which could ensure the longevity of a realignment "for several succeeding elections" (Key Jr. 1955, 4). Within both the 2008 and 2012 writings, scholars analyzed and debated as to whether there was any existing proof of a political realignment. The type of proof needed is something capable of creating a long-term permanent change in the political climate. The only factor having the capability of being able to make such a change would be the ongoing demographic changes. As will be

explained, these demographic changes provide the Democrats with a great deal of promise given minorities and voters ages 18 – 29 gave Obama strong support in the previous two elections. However, these voting patterns were shaped by mostly temporary factors working in the Democrats favor. This provides hope for the Republicans, as they have the ability to make changes in light of these influences, and thus also have the ability to use demographic trends to their advantage in future elections. Additionally, just as demographic trends are working independent of the influence of the two parties, so too is another factor. This factor would be polarization, something which would work mostly against the potential of a political realignment in America.

In the 2012 literature, despite the fact Obama was elected to a second term, there was very little discussion about realignment. Only Lewis and Ceaser touched on the theme (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). The two scholars acknowledge the elections of 2008 and 2012 have been seen as starting point of a new realignment in America (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). However, they point to two other elections as ones they would consider to mark the start of a realignment in America. Lewis and Ceaser argue, at least in terms of make-up of the Electoral map, that a realignment occurred in the 1990's with Clinton's successive election victories (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). Clinton managed to win several states in 1992 and 1996 that were once Republican, states that have morphed into reliably safe Democratic ones (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). In contrast, Obama essentially piggybacked off of the Electoral geography Clinton established in the 1990's. The only state Obama won in both 2008 and 2012 that was not won by Clinton was Virginia (Lewis and Ceaser 2013).

Lewis and Ceaser also compared Obama's 2012 election results to the historical record (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). When looking at other presidential elections, Lewis and Ceaser found that Obama's margin of victory was rather average in a historical context, ranking 24th when taking into account presidential contests going back to 1896 (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). Furthermore, Lewis and Ceaser stated Obama was the first president to win another term by not

increasing on his Electoral and popular vote totals from his initial victory (Lewis and Ceaser 2013).

Although realignment was little discussed in the 2012 literature, there was much debate among scholars over whether realignment occurred following the 2008 election. Siding with the pundits, Obama's success with younger voters led Abramowitz and Fisher to believe the Democrats could potentially be strong for a long period of time (Abramowitz 2010, Fisher 2010). On the other hand, Ceaser and DiSalvo showed Obama's win was not out of the ordinary when compared to other presidential elections in terms of margin of victory in the popular and Electoral votes (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). Moreover, they believed that a conclusion about realignment could only be made many years down the road (Ceaser and DiSalvo 2009). Despite his claims about potential Democratic dominance, Abramowitz admitted it would take some time determine if this election titled Electoral power in favor of the Democrats (Abramowitz 2010). He goes on to cite the 1964 election as an example of how election fortunes can change in a short amount of time (Abramowitz 2010). Lyndon. B. Johnson came to power on the heels of a landslide election in 1964, one followed by claims of the end of the Republican Party (Abramowitz 2010). Four years later the Republicans regrouped themselves, and Nixon won the presidency (Abramowitz 2010). Furthermore, the poor economy did play a role in the 2008. Thus, Caswell argued if voting behavior was indeed driven by voters responding to economic conditions, such a coalition is not something that will last for a long-time (Caswell 2009).

Overall, most of the factors cited by scholars in the reviewed literature for the previous three elections would be incapable of producing a political realignment. In almost all cases, the dynamics shaping the results of these elections were ones particularly relevant for a brief period of time, or been isolated to particular candidates. These causal influences would not have necessarily been transferable to a different candidate from the same party. The elections of 2004 and 2012 appear to have been won/lost on several of these elements. This would include Bush's strength on terrorism, Bush's turnout advantage over Kerry, Obama's incumbency advantage, as

well as the poor candidacy of Kerry and Romney. 2008 also had temporary dynamics because of the poor economy developing in the late stages of the campaign, and Obama's turnout advantage.

The strongest piece of evidence found in the literature regarding a sustainable political realignment would be the changing demographics going on in America along racial and generational lines. It's clear one of the most undeniable things emerging from the Obama victories is the ongoing shift in demographics within the nation. Racially, America is becoming less and less White, as racial/ethnic minorities grow in size relative to the rest of the population. Generationally, Millennials are becoming of greater political influence as more and more them reach voting age with each passing year. Regardless of how poor the economy is, how great candidate selection is for either party, or what the dominant geopolitical issues are of the time, these are ongoing trends which will continue for many years to come.

This change in demographics is also being reflected in the voting. The literature showed the electorate is becoming more and more diverse racially. It should be no surprise Douthat, Judis, and Meyerson highlighted the factor of minority voters in their respective opinion pieces (Douthat 2012, Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008). Supporting the pundits' claim is the fact demographics seem to be trending in the Democrats favor. Compared to 2004 totals, Obama increased support among these groups and saw them vote in higher numbers.

Along the same lines, Obama received strong support from younger voters. Like minority voters, Douthat noted this group was instrumental to Obama's victories (Douthat 2012). The political strength of younger voters is also something sustaining for realignment. As these voters mature, they will be a force both parties will have to deal with.

Connecting all of these factors together, it would seem to indicate the Democrats have a bright future ahead of them. As stated earlier, there would need to be a long lasting fundamental change in voting behavior to foment a political realignment. Based off the evidence of the reviewed literature, the ingredients are there to create one. If demographic trends continue this way going forward, the population will certainly be altered enough to give the Democrats a demographic edge over the Republicans. This is based off the fact the reviewed literature, and

pundits, discussed how minorities favored the Democrats handedly in 2008 and 2012. With regards to younger voters, this factor will also play to the Democrats advantage. Over time, these voters will grow older and replace aging conservative voters, solidifying the blue shift of the nation which followed the 2004 election.

However, despite the fact demographic trends have been going on independent of the political process, they were shaped by many of the other themes in the literature such as voter turnout efforts and the economy. While these themes don't per se sustain realignment, they played a heavy influence on the main cog in the realignment process, which is the demographic trends. The Democrats have been able to come out ahead on the battle over demographics because many of the influencing factors have swung in their favor, resulting in these demographics shifting in ways unfavorable to the Republicans. While this is obviously not good for the GOP, it does provide hope. Republicans are just as capable of influencing the changing demographics to their advantage. There is nothing to suggest the ongoing demographic transformation will lead to, or has already created a "Permanent Democratic Majority."

For example, in regards to the high turnout, the academic work reviewed seems to suggest the main cause of this was the superior mobilization efforts of the Obama campaign. If it is true Obama won because of his campaign's ability to spur voters to the poll, future Democratic campaigns will need to make similar efforts in future elections. They will have to equal the financial strength Obama's campaign had. If this is the case, it is not necessarily a good sign for the Democrats. Realignment should not be based upon a political party continually having to induce voter behavior, especially when it is entirely possible Republicans are capable of mounting similar mobilization efforts. Jacobsen indicated that Republicans had the upper hand in 2004 in terms of getting out the vote compared to the Democrats in the same election (Jacobsen 2005). Furthermore, Republicans used to have an advantage over Democrats when it came to running and funding campaigns, and thus reaching voters (Caswell 2009). There is nothing to say they can't regain such an advantage.

Moreover, nothing guarantees Blacks and Hispanics will continue to support Democratic candidates in the future. If Republicans can find a way to appeal to racial/ethnic minorities, the demographic trends could just as well work in the favor of Republicans. Bush achieved respectable levels of support among Hispanics in his victory over Kerry (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005). It's entirely possible Republicans can do likewise with Hispanic voters, other minority groups, or even younger voters.

Candidate choice may also be to blame for Republican woes and Democrat success in the elections featuring Obama. Campbell, Jacobsen, and Mayer focused on a number of problems that the Romney campaign had, with Campbell and Jacobsen citing the lack of passion that core Republican supporters had for Romney (Campbell 2013, Jacobsen 2013, Mayer 2012). Although this was not a major theme in the 2008 writings, McCain did not do a good job of exciting the Republican base either. Campbell did point out that Republicans were also not too passionate about McCain (Campbell 2010). The choice of those two candidates failed to excite the conservative base of the Republican Party, and it's reasonable to believe turnout may have been down among the White-voting bloc during the previous two elections. This is important given White voters typically favor Republican candidates. White voters favored Bush by 17% in 2004, McCain by 12% in 2008, and Romney by 20% in 2012 (Edison Research 2012).

Additionally, while the newest of generation of voters is liberal in their political beliefs, it's possible many in this generation were negatively influenced into adopting those views. As noted by Abramowitz and Stone, George W. Bush alienated much of the public (Abramowitz and Stone 2006). Not only was he unpopular with much of the public, but also he was very unpopular with young people (Fisher 2010). Bush's unpopularity benefited Obama because it predisposed young people to have an unfavorable view of the Republican Party (Fisher 2010), which more than likely hurt McCain in his quest for the presidency. Even four years later, Bush's legacy would put Republicans at a disadvantage once again in. Mayer pointed out that Bush was still seen as the cause of the existing economic woes, harming Romney because of his

Republican affiliation (Mayer 2012). As a result, it's plausible to believe those younger voters were still reluctant to throw their support in 2012 behind the Republican Party because of this.

Abramowitz and Fisher argued there is evidence to suggest these young voters will be Democrats for life (Abramowitz 2010, Fisher 2010). However, both the 2008 and 2012 election came right after the unpopular Bush presidency. This was fresh on the minds of voters both young and old in those election cycles. The 2016 election will be 8 years removed from Bush's time in the Oval Office. No longer will voters be voting on how they feel with regards to President Bush, but instead will be voting on how they have felt about Obama.

Obama does maintain a 62% approval rating with voters ages 18 – 29 as of early November of 2015 (Gallup 2015). Yet, as of that same time period, he has a 47% approval-rating overall with voters regardless of age (Gallup 2015). If Obama governs poorly with the remaining time he has in office, or the economy were to turn unfavorably prior to Election Day next year, Millennials may come to feel the way voters overall currently feel about him. This could set the stage for young voters to defect to a Republican candidate. For example, a candidate like Donald Trump who could offer a compelling persona like Obama did, and in addition could present a fresh set of ideas to counter any failed policies of the Obama administration.

Finally, along with demographic trends, there is another ongoing phenomenon likely to continue for quite some time. However, this is one working against the idea of realignment. This is the trend of polarization.

In some ways, this helps the Democrats by allowing them to maintain their grip on some of the most populous states in the Electoral College. On the other hand, the trend of polarization conflicts with the idea of our nation undergoing a political realignment. If the nation is truly becoming more liberal, there should be less polarization, not a continuation of it. The existence of polarization exists indicates our country is still deeply divided between conservatives and liberals. The trend of landslide presidential election results has proven states are becoming more closely aligned with the dominant party currently existing in those states. If a liberal political realignment was going on within America, we should only be seeing landslide elections results

in states won by the Democratic Party. Republican states should be falling more into play which was not the case in the last election. All but one of the states won by Romney was won by a margin of at least 8% (Lewis and Ceaser 2013). Overall, there should be evidence of continual Democratic expansion on the Electoral map. This was not apparent in 2012. Compared to 2008, Obama lost ground nationwide in both the Electoral and popular vote counts 2012 (Peters and Woolley 2015). As Lewis and Ceaser noted earlier, Obama was the first president to win another term by not improving on his initial Electoral and popular vote counts (Lewis and Ceaser 2013).

The nation has certainly become more Democratic Blue since Kerry unsuccessfully ran for office, as Obama was able to win several states Bush carried in 2004. While these victories may seem significant given the number of states Obama won, and the massive electoral shift created in favor of the Democrats, Obama won states which have been competitive for both parties over the past two decades. With the exception of Virginia, all of the former Bush states Obama won in both of his victories have flipped party allegiance at least twice in the time period stretching back to the 1992 election (Peters and Woolley 2015). Thus, it's a bit of a misnomer to believe victories in these states signify something politically significant.

Making this suggestion is no more valid than believing Bush's victory in 2004 was a turning point in political history because he was victorious in New Mexico and Iowa, both of which were won by Democrat opponent Al Gore four years earlier (Peters and Woolley 2015). A presidential candidate being able to pull off a one or two victories in historically competitive states doesn't signify any sort of shift in Electoral advantage for either party. Repeat victories by one party in such states would suggest such an alteration, but not one or two isolated ones. As Lewis and Ceaser also mentioned, Clinton could have a stronger case for establishing a realignment than Obama, given that many of the states that Clinton won in the 1990's have become sources of Democratic strength (Lewis and Ceaser 2012). Obama has essentially picked up where Clinton began in the Electoral College, adding only Virginia to the mix (Lewis and Ceaser 2012).

As the result of polarization, the two parties have essentially won or lost the presidency for the last three elections based upon territory in the middle. Neither party has won by seizing long-standing strong holds. There is no indication this pattern will change anytime soon. Obama's victories simply signify our nation is "tipping blue," but certainly don't serve as evidence it's "bleeding blue."

State-Level Case Studies

If demographic trends are the driving force behind any potential realignment, how much do these trends by themselves help the Democratic Party? Can Democrats simply rely on an increasingly diverse and younger electorate to bring them election success regardless of how much support these voters bring to the table, or regardless of how many of them actually show up to the polls to begin with? The following case studies will test this proposition on a state level. The results will show a potential realignment will only occur if future Democratic presidential candidates are able to match or equal the support and turnout Obama received from minority and young voters. It will also show in some cases, turnout from White-voters was down in 2012 and 2008 compared to 2004, thus potentially hurting the Republican Party and their candidates.

To do this, calculations will be done seeing how Obama fares in 2012 using Kerry's level of support in 2004. Although data from the 2008 election is examined, hypothetical simulations on the 2012 election are done for the sake of brevity, and since it was the most recent. This data will be used in conjunction with the numbers representing the increased amount of Hispanic/Latino, Black, and voters ages 18 – 29 in the electorate seen in the 2012 election. The goal here is to see if higher shares of minorities and young voters in the electorate would have been enough to offset the reduced support Obama would have received if he performed in the same manner as John Kerry.

Three states have been chosen to look at: Florida, Ohio, and Virginia. These states were selected because they were some of the most competitive in the last election (Federal Elections Commission 2013). Florida was first, Ohio was third, and Virginia was fourth in terms of

smallest margin of victory in the 2012 election (Federal Elections Commission 2013). These states were also selected because they were won by Bush in 2004, flipped by Obama in 2008, and won by Obama once again in 2012 (Peters and Woolley 2015). Hence why North Carolina, the second closest state in terms of size of victory (Federal Elections Commission 2013), was omitted in favor of Virginia.

For each state, a key demographic group is analyzed. Hispanics were chosen for Florida, as it had the largest Hispanic population of the three, with 23.6% of Floridians claiming to be Hispanic or Latino (Proquest 2015). For Black voters and voters ages 18 – 29, Ohio and Virginia were chosen respectively. Although Virginia has a larger Black population (Proquest 2015), voters age 18 – 29 increased their share of the electorate Virginia in 2012 when compared 2004 levels (Edison Research 2012). During 2012 election in Ohio, the reverse occurred as voters age 18 – 29 decreased their share from 2004 totals (Edison Research 2012). The opposite was found with Black voters in the two states. Black voters made up a larger portion of the Ohio electorate in 2012 than they did in 2004, but were a smaller percentage of the Virginia electorate in 2012 when compared to 2004 (Edison Research 2012). Since the goal was to examine how Obama performs using Kerry's numbers in an electorate potentially more favorable to Obama, it makes more sense to use Ohio to examine the influence of Black voters, and use Virginia to look at the influence of younger voters.

To test the validity of realignment, three types of data were examined. The first is voting results from the 2012 election. This was used to make calculations to see how Obama would have performed using Kerry's level of support. All calculations were done with a simple calculator. For the sake of simplicity, it is assumed the other candidate equally gains/losses any votes gained/lost by the opposing candidate. The effects of third party candidates are not factored into these models. These calculations also factor in exit polling data.

The second is voter turnout data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau for the 2004, 2008, and 2012 presidential elections. In surveying these three states, turnout data was studied for

Hispanics in Florida, Blacks in Ohio, and voters ages 18 – 29 in Virginia. For each of those states, White voter turnout was examined and compared as well.

Turnout for Hispanic voters was determined by looking at data provided by “Hispanic” respondents, and turnout for Black voters was based upon looking at data provided by “Black non-Hispanic” respondents. Turnout for voters ages 18 – 29 was determined by looking at data provided by “18 – 29” respondents. Finally, turnout for White voters was found by pulling from data provided by “White, non-Hispanic alone” respondents. For each voting subgroup, the turnout rates calculated are based upon looking at the measurement of the turnout among citizens who are eligible to vote. In other words, the voting aged citizen population. An alternative way of measuring the turnout rate would be to look at the turnout rate against the population as a whole. However, the former of the two methods is a more accurate measure of voting turnout because only U.S. citizens are able to vote in elections. Thus, this is what will be used to examine voter-turnout in the following case studies.

Finally, exit-polling data for those same elections was reviewed to help make calculations on how Obama performs using Kerry’s numbers, and to see how much the aforementioned voting groups made up the electorate. Exit polling data for each of the voting groups in focus was provided by looking at data given for the racial/ethnic or generational category of the same name.

Florida

First up is Florida. Exit polling data shows Hispanics increased their share of the electorate in 2012 compared to 2004. Republicans lost significant support in 2008 and 2012 among such voters, Romney performing the worst. The 2004 literature mentioned Bush performed well with Hispanics (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2005), something reflected in the first table below. Not only did Bush do better than McCain and Romney, he had a 12 point advantage over Kerry with Florida Hispanics in 2004.

Table 1: Hispanic Voters in Florida

	2004	2008	2012
Percentage Size of the Electorate	15 %	14%	17%
Percentage won by the Democratic Candidate	44 %	57%	60%
Percentage won by the Republican Candidate	56%	42%	39%

Sources: (Edison Research 2012).

If Romney had been able to appeal to Hispanics like Bush did, and siphon away votes from Obama, the results of the election would have been much different.

Table 2: Simulated Obama Vote in Florida for Hispanic Voters Using Kerry's Support

Total Votes Cast in 2012	Size of Victory in Votes	Estimated Number of Votes by Hispanic Voters Using Share of Electorate From 2012	Estimated Votes Won by Obama from Hispanic Voters in 2012	Estimated Votes Won From Hispanic Voters by Obama Using Kerry's Numbers	Additional Romney Votes at Obama's Expense	Obama's New Spread of Victory in Votes
8474179	74309	0.17 (17%) x 8474179 = 1440610	0.60 (60%) x 1440610 = 864366	0.44 (44%) x 1440610 = 633868	230498	74309 – 460996 = -386657 (Romney gains 230498 votes, while Obama loses same amount. Thus 230498 x 2 = 460966)

Sources: Vote Totals (Peters and Woolley 2015); Electoral Share and Voter Percentages (Edison Research 2012).

Using Kerry's numbers, Obama loses Florida by roughly 460,966 votes, or 5.44%. This is a huge swing considering Obama only won the state by less than one percent (Peters and Woolley 2015). With regards to turnout, Census data shows Hispanics have increased their turnout numbers since 2004. This is the opposite for White voters as their turnout has been on a downward trend every year during the same time period.

Table 3: Hispanic & White Voter Turnout for Florida

	2004	2008	2012
Turnout for “Hispanic (of any race)” Respondents	57%	62%	62%
Turnout for “White, non-Hispanic” Respondents	67%	65%	62%

Source: (United States Census Bureau 2012).

Ohio

As mentioned Blacks made up a larger share of the Ohio electorate in 2012 than they did in 2004. The same was true in 2008. Like Hispanics in Florida, Bush also did much better than Romney with Black voters in Ohio.

Table 4: Black Voters in Ohio

	2004	2008	2012
Percentage Size of the Electorate	10 %	11%	15%
Percentage won by the Democratic Candidate	84 %	97%	96%
Percentage won by the Republican Candidate	16%	2%	3%

Sources: (Edison Research 2012).

Once again, the vote totals come out to be much different once Obama’s numbers are adjusted for Kerry’s support.

Table 5: Simulated Obama Vote in Ohio for Black Voters Using Kerry's Support

Total Votes Cast in 2012	Size of Victory in Votes	Estimated Number of Votes by Black Voters Using Share of electorate from 2012	Estimated Votes Won by Obama From Black Voters in 2012	Estimated Votes Won by Obama From Black Voters Using Kerry's Numbers	Additional Romney Votes at Obama's Expense	Obama's New Spread of Victory in Votes
5580822	166214	0.15 (15%) x 5580822 = 837123	0.96 (96%) x 837123 = 803638	0.84 (84%) x 837123 = 703183	100455	166214-200910 = -34696 (Romney gains 100455 votes, while Obama loses same amount. Thus 100455 x 2 = 200910)

Sources: Vote Totals (Peters and Woolley 2015); Electoral Share and Voter Percentages (Edison Research 2012).

Like Florida, Obama loses once again. Romney comes out as a narrow victor, winning by 34,696 votes, or roughly 0.62%. Turnout data demonstrates an increase every year for Black voters. To the contrary, White voter turnout has been on a decline since 2004.

Table 9: Black & White Voter Turnout for Ohio

	2004	2008	2012
Turnout for "Black non-Hispanic" Respondents	67%	70%	72%
Turnout for "White, non-Hispanic" Respondents	66%	65%	62%

Source: (United States Census Bureau 2012).

Virginia

Finally, the last state to look at is Virginia. Like the other two examples, exit polling shows voters ages 18 – 29 made up a larger share of the electorate when Obama was the Democratic candidate, and Romney earned 10% less of what Bush earned with these voters in 2004.

Table 10: 18 – 29 Year-Old Vote in Virginia

	2004	2008	2012
Percentage Size of the Electorate	17 %	21%	19%
Percentage won by the Democratic Candidate	54 %	60%	61%
Percentage won by the Republican Candidate	46%	39%	36%

Sources: (Edison Research 2012).

Repeating the same method employed with the other three states, a closer election is also seen in Virginia:

Table 11: Simulated Obama Vote in Virginia for Voters Ages 18 – 29 Using Kerry's Support

Total Votes Cast in 2012	Size of Victory in Votes	Estimated Number of Votes by Voters Ages 18-29 Using Share of Electorate From 2012	Estimated Votes Won by Obama in 2012 From Voters Ages 18-29	Estimated Votes Won by Obama From Voters Ages 18-29 Using Kerry's Numbers	Additional Romney Votes at Obama's Expense	Obama's New Spread of Victory in Votes
3854490	149298	0.19 (19%) x 3854490 = 732353	0.61 (61%) x 732353 = 446735	0.54 (54%) x 732353 = 395471	51264	149298-102528 = 46770 (Romney gains 51264, while Obama loses same amount. Thus 51264 x 2 = 102528)

Sources: Vote Totals (Peters and Woolley 2015); Electoral Share and Voter Percentages (Edison Research 2012).

Unlike the first two examples, Romney still loses the election despite the adjusted results. However, he would have made the election a much narrower victory for Obama, losing by 45,868 votes, or roughly 1.21%. In terms of voters ages 18 – 29, turnout improved 16% in 2008, and roughly 9% in 2012 when compared to 2004. With regards to White voter turnout, the data indicated turnout for Whites was actually higher in 2008 and 2012 than it was in 2004. However, in both cases, it was a very narrow improvement of 1 – 2%.

Table 12: Voters Ages 18 – 29 & White Voter Turnout for Virginia

	2004	2008	2012
Turnout for “18 – 29” Respondents	43%	59%	52%
Turnout for “White, non-Hispanic” Respondents	67%	69%	68%

Source: (United States Census Bureau 2012).

Conclusion

The research presented challenged the notion put forth by Davis, Douthat, Judis, and Meyerson (Davis 2008, Douthat 2012, Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008) stating a political realignment had occurred following Obama’s presidential victories. Instead, it was asserted the realignment claims made by the aforementioned commentators were made prematurely, and without substantial proof Democratic victories will continue in future presidential contests. While it has been established America is going through changes both racially and generationally, these changes were not the only factor driving recent Democratic success, and did not create a potential realignment. Instead, it was demonstrated Obama’s wins in 2008 and 2012 were not the byproduct of political realignment, but rather the cause of a combination of temporary dynamics. These dynamics included increased support and turnout for Obama from minorities and voters ages 18 – 29, poor candidate choice on the part of the Republicans, and other influences which may not be existent in future elections. Examining the recent racial and generational trends, hypothetical simulations were done on three key states in the 2012 election, examining how Obama would have fared with the support Kerry received from minorities and voters ages 18 – 29. It has been revealed a potential realignment rest upon future Democratic presidential candidates being able to match, or improve upon, the support and turnout Obama received from these key constituents in the two prior presidential elections.

If Obama’s victories were simply the result of his campaign taking advantage of demographic trends by inducing higher turnout and support, this wouldn’t fit Key Jr.’s definition

put forth earlier regarding realignment. Taking from the original definition, the victories in 2008 and 2012 may be elections “in which voters are, at least from impressionistic evidence, unusually deeply concerned, in which the extent of the electoral involvement is relatively quite high, and in which the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate” (Key Jr. 1955, 4). However, if these victories are the byproduct of high levels of turnout, it doesn’t provide the greatest foundation to ensure any supposed realignment will “persist for several succeeding elections” (Key Jr. 1955, 4). This would only make sense to believe if there was solid evidence to show such turnout levels would have occurred regardless of which candidates were on the ballot, how good or poor the economy was, or how well the two parties were able to mobilize their respective supporters. If such turnout trends continue regardless of those factors, and the Democrats continue to achieve victories similar to Obama’s in future elections, then it may be reasonable to believe a true realignment has occurred. More election cycles would have passed, providing the opportunity to see how turnout rates would change with a different set of candidates, political climate, or mobilization efforts.

What can be concluded is the Democrats have found a recipe for success. In order for the Democrats to continue their recent string of victories, the Democrats will have to match the mobilization efforts mounted in 2008 and 2012 for all future elections. They will also need to make sure they don’t make the mistake of putting another candidate like John Kerry on the ballot. A candidate like Obama, one who can drive the turnout of minorities and young people, will be needed for the Democrats to be successful in 2016.

Moreover, despite what may be implied by the pundits, the 2008 and 2012 elections did not spell the end of the Republican Party. The 2016 election is winnable if the Republicans can nominate an individual who could rally the GOP base. Additionally, the same candidate will need to broaden the support of the party, by performing in the same way Bush was able to do so with young and minority voters. The good news for the GOP is their candidate doesn’t need to be majority favorites with these groups to win. Bush was re-elected in 2004 by earning support from only 44% of Hispanics, 45% of voters 18 – 29, and 11% of Black voters (Edison Research 2012).

The simulations done earlier are simple in nature, and could be improved if the effects of third-party candidates were added in. It's possible the accuracy could also be improved by using more statistical methods of analysis, and by increasing the sample size by looking at more states. Yet, as simple as they may be, the case studies can still provide a rough estimation of how much support Democratic candidates will need to continue the party's recent success in the Executive Branch. Based upon the calculations, simply getting majority support from minorities and young voters will not be enough. Should they fail to match or equal Obama's support in 2016 and beyond, future elections will be much more competitive. Adjusting the 2012 Electoral Map to reflect the results of the simulations, Obama's victory in the Electoral College is reduced to a spread of 285 – 253. If Romney had been able to win Virginia, Obama's advantage becomes 272 – 266. That would only leave Romney a medium-size state away from capturing the presidency.

Looking at our case studies, it is clear the Democrats success in 2008 and 2012 was very dependent upon minorities and younger voters. The Democratic Party will need to continue to turnout and support Democratic presidential candidates in a similar manner for future elections. This is not just to ensure these groups show up in high numbers and cast their votes for the Democratic candidate. It's also to keep the electorate shaped in their favor. The exit polling data indicates the share of Latinos, Blacks, and younger voters among the electorate increased in 2008 and 2012 when compared to 2004 levels (Edison Research 2012). This supports much of what was stated in the literature regarding the changing demographics in America. More importantly, it supports the importance Douthat, Judis, and Meyerson, placed on minority voters (Douthat 2012, Judis 2008, Meyerson 2008). It also highlights the importance that Douthat saw with younger voters (Douthat 2012).

While such increases may mirror corresponding growth within the overall population, it could be argued the increase share of the electorate seen with these groups in the exit polling was simply the result of more Latinos, Blacks, and younger people deciding to show up at the polls. It's possible these groups increased their share of the electorate because other groups decided to stay home, most notably White voters. If White voter turnout decreased while turnout among

minorities and young voters increased, this may very well explain why minorities and young people made up a bigger share of voters in 2008 and 2012.

The turnout data reviewed would seem to indicate this is true. In both Florida and Ohio, White voter turnout in 2012 was below 2004 turnout levels. It was likewise the same way with 2008 levels. Virginia was the lone exception. The drop-off seen in Florida and Ohio going from 2004 to 2012 was roughly 4 – 5%. Although this is not overly substantial, any drop off would have hurt the Republicans given White voters remain the largest demographic group in America. Whites voters represented 72% of the electorate according to 2012 exit polls (Edison Research 2012), meaning a small drop in turnout still constitutes a large swath of voters.

Just as it would be too early to call a sports team a dynasty after one or two championship wins, it is also too early to declare realignment after one or two election victories. If the public has shifted politically, candidate selection and mobilization should not matter. A shift in ideology should be the main factor driving any sustainable political shift, as this would be the most sustainable way to make a realignment last. The 2016 election will serve as a great opportunity to gauge whether or not the previous two elections were more influenced by a public shift in ideology, or increases/decreases in turnout among various voting groups. The upcoming election will provide voters with two new candidates for each party, no incumbents, and plenty of time for the Republicans to make adjustments in light of their losses to Obama. This will hopefully provide a much better idea as to whether or not the Obama's victories in 2008 and 2012 established a new political era in American politics.

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