Beyond Polarization?

The Future of Red, Blue, and Purple America

Ruy Teixeira

Change is in the air. This fall we shall see if America takes the extraordinary step of electing its first African American president—an African American, moreover, whose mother was white, whose father was Kenyan, and who spent part of his childhood in Indonesia. The very fact that such an individual could be the nominee of a major political party says a great deal about how much change is occurring in the American electorate and how rapidly.

Although Barack Obama is the most visible sign of this change, many broad social trends underlie the transformation of today's electorate and make a candidate like Obama possible. Some groups, such as Hispanics and Asians, are growing rapidly; others, like the white working class, are in decline. Outer suburbs and exurbs are increasingly important and are a locus of exceptionally fast population growth. Population migration favors some states and regions at the expense of others. Immigration is changing the face of communities far from the coasts, deep in the South, and in America's heartland. Family structure is shifting, as married couple households with children decline and single and alternative households expand. Educational levels continue to rise, and the occupational structure of the country continues to shift away from manufacturing and unskilled work. Women play an increasingly strong role in every facet of the economy and society. A younger generation, whose attitudes are quite different from older generations and whose diversity is unprecedented, is on the rise. At the other end of the age structure, the baby boom generation is transforming the nature of the senior population.

The ranks of highly observant, white Christian evangelical denominations are increasing, but so are the ranks of the secular, the highly nonobservant, and those who practice nontraditional religions.

These trends present the political parties with huge challenges in forging and maintaining majority electoral coalitions and in governing effectively to meet the needs of rapidly changing constituencies. But the phenomenon of demographic and geographic changes reshaping American politics and public policy is nothing new. Indeed, the evolution of American politics and policy since World War II has been intimately bound up with these kinds of change. Right after World War II, for example, the anticipated wave of returning soldiers led to passage of the GI Bill of Rights, which, among other things, paid the costs of higher education for GIs and provided them with low-interest, zero-down-payment home loans. These provisions, in turn, promoted the expansion of the public university system to accommodate the sudden influx of new students and accelerated the suburbanization of metropolitan areas as returning GIs used their loans to buy inexpensive houses in the suburbs. Suburbanization, in turn, promoted the development of the interstate highway system, which led, of course, to even more suburbanization.

The rapid advance of suburbanization in the years after the war was quite extraordinary. Between 1940 and 1950 the suburban share of the population increased from 15 percent to 23 percent, while cities' share was basically unchanging, at around 33 percent. By 1960 suburbs accounted for 31 percent of the total, with cities' share slightly declining, to 32 percent. By 1970 there were, for the first time, more suburban residents (38 percent) than city residents (31 percent), and by the 1990s suburban voters were casting the majority of ballots in national elections.[1]

Another important postwar development is the rise of the baby boom generation—the roughly 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964—the largest generation up to that point in American history. Boomers' attitudes toward everything—from the nature of authority, the roles of women and minorities, to, of course, American foreign policy and the Vietnam War—had tremendous effects on American society and politics. Indeed, all the various "movements" of the sixties—civil rights, women's liberation, environmental, gay liberation, antiwar, and so on—drew their shock troops from the ranks of the baby boomers and would have been inconceivable without the energies of that generation. So, too, would the raft of legislation—from the Civil Rights Act and other antidiscrimination statutes to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency—that grew out of these movements.

Although all of these social movements were and are important, a special note should be made of the women's movement and the structural changes that propelled it. It was not so long ago (1950) that only about a third of adult women were in the workforce. But that figure rose to 38 percent in 1960, 43 percent in 1970, 52 percent in 1980, 58 percent in 1990, and 60 percent in 2000. Among twenty-five-to-thirty-four-year-old women—those who would be expected to leave the workforce after marriage—participation rates went up by an astonishing 42 percentage points between 1950 and 1998 (including a 21 percentage point increase during the 1970s alone).[2] As women entered the labor force, they also moved up within it. In 1970 less than 10 percent of medical students and 4 percent of law students were women.[3] By the early 1990s more than 40 percent of first-year law and medical students were women; today it is about 50 percent.[4] By the end of the twentieth century, 55 percent of all professionals were women.[5]

These structural changes reinforced shifting social norms about the role of women and led to the emergence of the gender gap, as women began to see the Democratic Party as the party most supportive of these changes. In 1964 women began to vote slightly more Democratic than men, and in 1968 and 1972 the trend grew. Then, after subsiding for the 1976 election (when the Republican candidate was the pro-choice, pro–equal rights Gerald Ford), it reappeared in force in 1980. According to the CBS/*New York Times* exit poll, men in 1980 supported Republican Ronald Reagan over Democrat Jimmy Carter by 55 to 36 percent, while women supported Reagan by only 47 to 45 percent. Gender gaps of that magnitude are now commonplace in American politics. In the 2000 presidential race, men supported Republican George Bush by 53 to 42 percent, but women supported Democrat Al Gore by 54 to 43 percent.[6]

Another critical change was dramatically increased levels of educational attainment. Incredible as it may seem today, in 1940 three-quarters of adults twenty-five years old and over were high school dropouts (or never made it as far as high school), and just 5 percent had a four-year college degree or higher. But educational credentials exploded in the postwar period. By 1960 the proportion of adults lacking a high school diploma was down to 59 percent; by 1980 it was less than a third; and by 2005 it was down to only 15 percent. Concomitantly, the proportion with a bachelor's degree or higher rose steadily, reaching 29 percent in 2005. Moreover, those with some college (but not a four-year degree) constituted another 25 percent of the population, making a total of 54 percent who had at least some college education.[7] Quite a change, this move from a country in which the typical adult was a high

school dropout (more accurately, never even reached high school) to a country in which the typical adult not only has a high school diploma but some college as well. This shift had tremendous effects on the character and aspirations of voters, especially working-class voters.

Other demographic and geographic changes pushed the country in a very different direction from that of the baby boom–driven movements of the sixties. These changes were identified by Kevin Phillips in his 1969 book, *The Emerging Republican Majority,* and by Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg in their 1970 volume, *The Real Majority.* Among these changes were a growing middle class less dependent on unionized, blue-collar jobs; the movement of whites, especially working-class whites, to the suburbs in search of order, security, and living space; and the increasing population of the Sunbelt. These trends fed a reaction both against the excesses of the boomer-led movements and against the failures of the postwar liberal approach to government, which could not seem to cope with the great changes sweeping the nation.

Of course, demographic-geographic changes did not stop with those identified by Phillips and Scammon/Wattenberg. One obvious example: immigration. Since 1970 immigration flows have increased and become heavily dominated by immigrants from Latin America and, secondarily, Asia. By 1990 over a million immigrants a year were entering the country, and by 2000 that figure had increased to 1.5 million, with unauthorized immigrants starting to outnumber authorized immigrants. Since then that number has subsided to around 1.2 million, but countries of origin and high proportions of unauthorized immigrants remain the same.[8]

Immigration has hardly been the only structural trend reshaping American politics in the last several decades. Indeed, behind every political icon lionized by the press (since Scammon and Wattenberg introduced the "Dayton housewife" in their 1970 book) lies some recent demographic or geographic trend whose force is real, if poorly understood. Here are some examples from the last fifteen years of media-driven political discourse:

—Angry white men. This term rose to prominence around the 1994 election, when a Republican tsunami rolled over the U.S. Congress. Like most of these terms, it was never very precisely defined but appeared to refer primarily to blue-collar white men who were moving into the Republican camp. Little noticed in the brouhaha was the fact that blue-collar white men were becoming fewer: only a quarter of even non-college-educated white men had blue-collar jobs or worked in manufacturing.[9] More attention should have been paid to the huge transformations that had moved the bulk of less-skilled white men out of blue-collar occupations and into low-level white-collar and

service jobs. If white men were angry and voting Republican, the real story was likely among white men with these jobs, not blue-collar ones.

—Soccer moms. The concept of angry white men gave way in the 1996 election to that of soccer moms. Soccer moms were generally thought of as college-educated suburban women with children who were moving in the Democratic direction. And certainly college-educated women were a growing group newly leaning Democratic (college-educated women tripled as a percentage of women in the years after 1970).[10] But most women in the suburbs were not college educated, and large numbers did not have children. These suburban women were much more important to the 1996 election than well-educated mothers driving their kids to soccer practice.

—Wired workers, office park dads. Both of these terms came into use in the run-up to the 2000 election and were attempts to label groups of voters who were allegedly becoming more conservative by dint of job trends—the increase in occupations involving computers and working in teams (wired workers) and the rise in office jobs for men and the concomitant decline in manufacturing jobs (office park dads). Remarkably fuzzy even by the standards of these catch phrases, the terms quickly fell into disuse due to their inability to explain anything about the 2000 election—or even general attitudes about government. But in their brief lives the terms still managed to muddy the waters considerably about what are, in fact, some very real trends in the occupational structure.

—Exurban voters. The 2002 election, which seemed to signal a sharp turn toward the right in American politics, saw the rise of yet another political icon: the exurban voter, famously encapsulated by commentator David Brooks in an influential *New York Times* op-ed, "For Democrats, Time to Meet the Exurban Voter." In that article Brooks argued that the rise of America's exurbs—those fast-growing counties at the fringes of metropolitan areas populated by legions of conservative white voters—contributed mightily to the GOP's success in that election and would continue to do so in the future, putting the Democrats on the demographic ropes, so to speak. But while the growth of exurbs is real, the true significance of the trend can only be assessed as part of the overall story about America's changing suburbs—a story that includes very important changes taking place in closer-in suburbs, the relatively small size of exurbs compared to other types of suburb, and the tendency of exurbs themselves to become less conservative as their rapid growth brings higher population density and a more cosmopolitan and diverse population. These subtleties were lost in the media hype about this new category of voter.

—White evangelicals. In 2004 it was white evangelicals' turn to be anointed as the voter group that was remaking American politics. This group was widely credited with reelecting George Bush. It was typically asserted that 23 percent of voters were white evangelical Christians, up from 14 percent in 2000, and that these voters overwhelmingly supported Bush. The part about overwhelmingly supporting Bush was correct, but the part about a spike in white evangelical voter turnout was not: the 14 percent figure was based on a very different question asked in the 2000 exit poll about being part of the religious right. Other data indicate that, no, there had not been much change in the proportion of white evangelical voters across the two elections and, indeed, that Bush had gotten bigger increases in support from the moderately observant in 2004 than from the highly observant.[11] Furthermore, the nonobservant and the purely secular voted very heavily against Bush, and there is some evidence that these groups have been growing steadily as a proportion of voters. But again, the complexities of the changing American landscape of religion and religious observance were lost in the media urge to concentrate on one part of that landscape.

—White working-class voters. In the 2008 campaign, white working-class voters have been the group receiving the most attention, starting with their tendency to support Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama in the Democratic nomination contest. This is indeed a large and important group. But confusion abounds about who these voters are, with media accounts frequently referring to them as blue-collar and stressing their connection to America's declining manufacturing sector. But today most white working-class jobs are not blue-collar but are rather in low-level white-collar (technical, sales, clerical) and service occupations. Only about a sixth of the white working class holds manufacturing jobs (even among men, the proportion is still less than a quarter). In fact, the entire goods-producing sector—which includes construction, mining, and agriculture, as well as manufacturing—provides less than three in ten white working-class jobs. This leaves the overwhelming majority—over seven in ten—in the service sector, including government. There are about as many members of the white working-class working in trade alone (especially retail) as there are in all goods-producing jobs.[12]

These examples show that there is certainly an awareness that big changes are reshaping our politics. But they equally demonstrate that there is precious little real understanding of what these changes actually are and how they are likely to reshape the contours of red, blue, and purple America. Instead, the speculative and superficial have completely dominated the serious and ana-

lytical. This impoverishes the public conversation and undermines our ability to understand the shifting fault lines of American politics. And worse, superficial analysis reinforces the natural tendencies of both parties to believe that they can accommodate change without really changing; that is, to assume that a changing public—neatly sorted into red, blue, and purple states—can be easily assimilated into current political models. A deeper understanding, one suspects, would be far less comforting.

Based on papers produced for the Brookings-American Enterprise Institute project, The Future of Red, Blue and Purple America, this book aims to provide that deeper understanding through in-depth examination of seven trends reshaping the American electorate. The trends, each covered by a separate chapter in the book, are

—The changing face of suburbia and the growth of exurbia

—The increased political homogeneity of American communities

—The minoritization of America

—The decline of the white working class and the rise of a mass upper-middle class

—The growth of unmarried and alternative households and the decline of traditional values

—The concomitant rise of white evangelical and secular, nonobservant religious populations

—The rise of the millennial generation and the aging of the baby boomers

Here are a few of the many findings from these chapters, selected to highlight the scale and dynamism of the changes transforming the American electorate. In chapter 1, "The New Suburban Politics," the geographers Robert Lang, Thomas Sanchez, and Alan Berube point out that 53 percent of the population now resides in the top fifty metropolitan areas in the country (which roughly correspond to those with a million or more in population). Using commuting patterns, land use and population density, and population growth, the authors classify the counties in these metropolitan areas into five categories: core, inner suburbs, mature suburbs, emerging suburbs, and exurbs. Inner and mature suburbs may be thought of as urbanizing suburbs, while emerging suburbs and exurbs constitute the metropolitan fringe.

The distinction between emerging suburbs and exurbs is an important one. Emerging suburbs may be thought of as halfway between borderline-rural exurbs and fully developed suburbs. It is these counties that political observers generally have in mind when they talk about exurbs, using examples like Loudoun County, Virginia; Douglas County, Colorado; and Warren County, Ohio. But all of these counties are properly classified as emerging

suburbs based on their relatively high densities and land use patterns. As a group, emerging suburbs are far more politically consequential than true exurbs, having much larger populations and faster growth rates than their lower-density, farther-out cousins on the metropolitan fringe (think Loudoun County versus Fauquier County in Virginia, for example).

Lang, Sanchez, and Berube find that Democrats dominate core counties and are starting to dominate urbanizing suburbs, while Republicans do well on the metropolitan fringe. More generally, they find a strong relationship between population density and voting behavior: with increasing distances from the urban core and declining density, Democratic voting declines. The authors argue that the political battle line in these large metropolitan areas, therefore, comes down to how far out in the suburbs the dividing line falls between Democratic and Republican dominance. In 2002 and 2004 the dividing line was relatively close in, while in 2006 it was much farther out, with Democrats dominating suburban rings out through mature suburbs and being competitive in emerging suburbs. A battle line that far out in the 2008 election would decisively advantage Democrats.

Lang and his colleagues note that although both components of the metropolitan fringe (emerging suburbs and exurbs) are growing significantly faster than closer-in urbanizing suburbs (inner and mature suburbs), the combined population weight of the metropolitan fringe in these large metro areas is still much smaller than that of urbanizing suburbs (20 percent of these areas, compared to 64 percent for urbanizing suburbs). Moreover, inner suburbs in particular are so populous that despite their relatively slow growth rates, they are actually adding more people to these areas than either exurbs or emerging suburbs. This situation is unlikely to change any time soon.

Indeed, as these areas continue to grow (America will add its next 100 million people by 2037, faster than China will add its next 100 million, with that growth heavily concentrated in large metro areas), the percentage of population gains in the metropolitan fringe is likely to drop significantly due to changing consumer preferences, more singles and childless couples, and greater land use regulation and resource constraints. This means that fewer very-low-density suburbs, of the kind that have been so reliably Republican, are likely to be built. This factor will enhance the political importance of urbanizing suburbs and the policy issues linked to these built-up areas, such as reinvestment in adequate infrastructure and schools. And as the political importance of urbanizing suburbs grows, the GOP will be forced to try to move the political battle line back into urbanizing suburbs, where they will have to engage Democrats on these very same policy issues. Retreating to their

political corner, so to speak—the metropolitan fringe—would not appear to be a viable strategy over the long haul.

In chapter 2, "The Big Sort," the political analyst Bill Bishop and the sociologist Robert Cushing argue that Americans have become increasingly likely to live in close proximity to those who look, act, and think like they do. In the very close presidential election of 1976, just 27 percent of voters lived in landslide counties—counties in which the winning presidential candidate had a margin of 20 points or more. That figure rose throughout the 1980s and 1990s, reaching 45 percent in the even closer election of 2000. Even that figure was topped in the 2004 election, when almost half of the country's voters (48 percent) lived in landslide counties. Looked at another way, 60 percent of voters in the 2004 election lived in counties that had not changed their presidential party preference since 1988.

Bishop and Cushing unpack the reasons for this increased political homogeneity. Above all, the driving force is geographic mobility: Americans choose to live near those similar to them. Take people with college degrees. In 1970 these highly educated Americans were evenly distributed across cities, but since then they have tended to concentrate in certain places. In 2000 in sixty-two metro areas less then 17 percent of adults had college degrees, while in thirty-two cities 34 percent or more had college degrees (45 percent of the population of Austin, Texas, for example, had college degrees).

Those with college degrees tend to concentrate in Democratic-leaning areas. Adults in landslide Democratic counties in 2000, for example, were 29 percent college educated, while just 20 percent had that level of education in landslide Republican counties. The foreign-born too tend to settle in Democratic counties: landslide Democratic counties were 21 percent foreign-born in 2000, compared to only 5 percent in Republican landslide counties.

White voters, on the other hand, have migrated to Republican counties. Back in 1970 today's Democratic and Republican landslide counties each contained about a quarter of the nation's white population. By 2000, however, Democratic landslide counties contained just 18 percent of the nation's white population, while 30 percent resided in the Republican landslide counties.

More generally, Bishop and Cushing find that people who migrate from a Republican-leaning county are two and a half times more likely to move to another Republican-leaning county than to move to a Democratic-leaning one. In Colorado people moving from out of state into the Democratic-trending Denver suburbs are three times as likely to be from Democratic-leaning counties as are people moving from out of state into heavily Republican counties along the Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska borders.

Bishop and Cushing expect this sorting process to continue, with consequent growth and reinforcement of communities of interest. In their view, this will promote something we are already seeing quite a lot of: lopsided congressional districts and, more generally, a politics focused on mobilizing parties' landslide communities along with microtargeting designed to pick off parties' supporters that reside in "enemy" territory. The way to undercut this tendency, the authors believe, is for issues that cut across current communities of interest to become salient. This outcome may depend on political parties moving beyond many of the culturally tinged issues that currently divide communities—or on the rise of a younger generation that simply sees these issues as less important.

In chapter 3, "Race, Immigration, and America's Changing Electorate," the demographer William Frey takes a detailed look at the shifting race-ethnic composition of the electorate. He notes that growth in the minority population accounts for more than four-fifths of U.S. population growth in this decade. Hispanics and Asians were up by nearly a third in just the first six years of the decade, while blacks increased by 10 percent and non-Hispanic whites by just 2 percent. These trends mean that by 2016 the white share of the population will be down to 62 percent.

Frey cautions, however, that the impact of these trends on the eligible electorate is blunted for Hispanics and Asians—the immigrant minorities—by the fact that so many in these populations tend to be under eighteen years old or not citizens. This creates a translation gap between demographic strength and voting strength. Only about five in ten Asians and four in ten Hispanics are actually eligible to vote, compared to almost two-thirds of blacks and 77 percent of whites. In addition, Hispanics and Asians who are eligible to vote tend to register and vote at lower rates than do blacks and whites. The end result, according to Frey's estimate, is that for every hundred Hispanics in the United States, only nineteen will vote in the 2008 election; and for every hundred Asians, only twenty-two will vote. The comparable figures for whites and blacks are fifty-two and forty, respectively.

Frey stresses that these race-ethnic changes are not equally distributed across states. This can be seen quite clearly when states are broken out by political leanings: solid red (voted for Bush in 2004 by 10 points or more); slow-growing purple; fast-growing purple; and solid blue (voted for Kerry in 2004 by 10 points or more). Eligible voters in solid blue states are 34 percent minority, while in solid red states they are 26 percent minority. In slow-growing purple states (such as Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, and Missouri) eligible voters are just 16 percent minority, while in

fast-growing purple states (such as Nevada, Colorado, Florida, Virginia, Oregon, and New Mexico) they are 25 percent minority. Moreover, eligible voters grew at a 12 percent clip in the fast-growing purples between 2000 and 2007, with about half of that growth from minority voters.

Frey notes that despite the gap between demographic numbers and voting strength, young, eligible voters are becoming strikingly diverse. In twenty-one states over 30 percent of eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-old voters are minorities. In California 56 percent of young voters are minorities, compared to 36 percent of all voters. In Texas the analogous figures are 51 and 33 percent; in Arizona they are 42 and 23 percent.

Given current political leanings, these race-ethnic shifts favor Democrats. Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians are all strongly Democratic (89 percent, 69 percent, and 62 percent, respectively, in the 2006 election), and recent polling data suggest that these loyalties are likely to continue into the 2008 election. But Frey emphasizes that these leanings should not be taken for granted over the long haul. Hispanics, in particular, vary substantially in their pro-Democratic leanings by area of the country, and as recently as 2004, 40 percent voted Republican nationwide. Moreover, these race-ethnic shifts are likely to present both parties, not just Republicans, with significant policy and political challenges in the years ahead.

Take the fast-growing purple states mentioned above, where immigration is such a big factor. For Democrats there will be a premium on immigration reform to consolidate their hold on Hispanic voters and to defuse white hostility to immigrants (particularly among low-skilled whites) that could divide the coalitions that Democrats are trying to build in these states. Democrats may also want to emphasize aspirational issues like education and home ownership, which appeal to the younger, more dynamic populations of these states. But even if successful, such an approach could produce problems in slow-growing purple states, which are heavily white, older, and more oriented toward economic security issues like health care and Social Security. Republicans for their part will have to decide whether to soften their currently tough stance on immigration to try to reach the burgeoning Hispanic population in the fast-growing purples or whether to retain that stance and perhaps emphasize economic security issues in a bid to reach voters in the slow-growing purples. Neither set of choices presents the parties with easy options, but they are options that will have to be considered as race-ethnic change continues.

In chapter 4, "The Decline of the White Working Class and the Rise of a Mass Upper-Middle Class," the political scientists Alan Abramowitz and Ruy Teixeira examine the shifting class structure in the United States since World

War II and the way it has shaped—and will continue to shape—American politics. Abramowitz and Teixeira note that while America was once overwhelmingly white working class, it is no longer. Across a wide range of definitions of white working class—by education, by occupation, or by income, broad or narrow—they find a 30–50 percentage point decline in the proportion of American adults in that group. But they are still a formidably large group. By a broad education-based definition (as whites without a four-year college degree), they are still 48 percent of voting-age Americans.

The white working class has also gone through some profound transformations as it has declined. The typical member of the white working class today is not blue-collar and certainly does not work in manufacturing; instead, he or she is likely to work in the service sector in a low-level white-collar or service job. Moreover, two-fifths of the white working class now has some college, and only 14 percent are high school dropouts. And the median income of white working-class families has gone up 150 percent since 1947.

Accompanying the decline and transformation of the white working class has been a significant shift in their political orientation, from pro-Democratic in most respects to pro-Republican, especially on the presidential level. By the 1968–72 period, just 35 percent of the white working class (once the bulwark of the Democrats' New Deal coalition) was voting Democratic, a number that was repeated in the 1980–84 period. Bill Clinton, however, did manage to carry this group's vote by a slender 1 point margin in 1992 and 1996 (though he averaged only 41 percent white working-class support across the two elections, as many of these voters preferred Ross Perot to the Democrats). Al Gore and John Kerry were not able to duplicate Clinton's success: they lost the white working class by 17 and 23 percentage points, respectively, pulling an average of just 39 percent support from this group.

Abramowitz and Teixeira argue that white working-class defection from the Democrats can be attributed to both a cultural reaction against the social movements of the sixties (especially around race) and an economic reaction to post-1973 trends of slow growth, declining wages, and stagnating living standards—trends that stand in stark contrast to the white working class's experience in the 1946–73 period. These voters came to doubt that the Democrats had their concerns and values at heart or that the government programs that Democrats proposed were in their interest. Abramowitz and Teixeira point out that this disaffection with the Democrats not only played out on the presidential level but manifested itself in a long-term decline in Democratic party identification among white working-class voters. They also note that the decline in party identification among these voters was concentrated among

those who self-identify as conservatives and that it cannot be explained simply by hot-button issues like abortion, which appear to have had more effect on white voters of higher socioeconomic status.

Looking at the 2008 electoral landscape, Abramowitz and Teixeira observe that ten of the twelve states with the closest vote outcomes in the last two presidential elections have proportions of white working-class voters well above the national average: Iowa (70 percent), Wisconsin (64), Oregon (64), Ohio (60), New Hampshire (60), Michigan (59), Minnesota (58), Missouri (58), Pennsylvania (56), and Nevada (56). They point out that Democrats need not win the white working class to be successful in 2008 but that they do need to avoid a Kerry-style loss. They estimate that a deficit of around 10–12 points nationally would be adequate for a solid popular vote victory, with deficits slightly below that necessary to carry the highly competitive states just listed.

On a more long-range basis, they believe that the changing white working class is more accurately characterized as aspirational, rather than downtrodden. This presents a challenge to Democrats, who have been more inclined toward a simple economic populism that stresses economic security than toward an aspirational populism focused on helping these voters move ahead. For Republicans, electoral victories will depend on increasing supermajorities of the white working-class vote as the white working class shrinks (down to a little over 40 percent of the population by 2020). But this presents a challenge, since the white working class is likely to become more socially liberal as younger cohorts replace older ones and is already showing signs of impatience with reflexively antigovernment approaches to solving their economic problems. The GOP may therefore need to rethink its approach to both social and economic issues if it wishes to maintain the loyalties of these voters.

That need is underscored by another trend explored by Abramowitz and Teixeira: the rise of a mass upper-middle class. In the 2006 election 23 percent of voters reported household incomes of $100,000 or more. By the year 2020 a third of families may have incomes over $100,000; and by 2030, 40 percent could have incomes that high. But this rich trove of potential voters will include a very large segment of professionals, who tend to be liberal on social issues and moderate on economic ones. Reaching these voters will be difficult with the GOP's current mix of social conservatism and antipathy toward government programs. But Democrats, while more simpatico on social issues with these voters, may not find many takers for an uncomplicated populism focused on economic security issues. So, as with decline and change in the white working class, future trends are likely to present both parties with uncomfortable choices to make.

In chapter 5, "Changes in Family Structure, Family Values, and Politics," the sociologist Tom Smith takes a detailed look at how the American family and social values have changed over the last four decades. He points out that marriage, while still a central institution in American society, is far less dominant than it once was. In the early 1970s three-quarters of American adults were married. That proportion declined to 56 percent in the 2000s. The average age of first marriage has gone up over the same time period, from the early twenties to twenty-seven years old for men and twenty-five years old for women; the divorce rate has doubled. Married couples with children now account for fewer than one in four households, a share that has been cut in half since 1960. And the share of children being raised by continuously married couples declined since 1972 from 73 percent to 50 percent, while the proportion being raised by single parents has increased from 5 percent to 16 percent.

Another profound change is the decline of the traditional gender role family, in which the husband works and the wife keeps house. In 1972, 53 percent of all married couples fit that definition; just 26 percent do today. And over the same time period, the proportion of married couples that both work outside the home has risen from 32 to 52 percent. Even among married couples with children, the traditional gender role family has declined, from 60 to 32 percent, while the modern arrangement has increased from 33 to 62 percent.

Accompanying these structural shifts have been substantial changes in attitudes toward sexuality and marriage. About half of adults now say that it is a good idea for couples to live together before they get married, and only about a quarter now believe that premarital sex is always wrong. A little over half now say homosexual sex is always wrong, down from almost three-quarters in 1973. And the proportion disagreeing that homosexual couples should have the right to marry dropped from 73 to 51 percent just over the 1988–2002 time period.

The changes in attitudes toward gender roles are even more dramatic. In 1972, 67 percent approved of a wife working if a husband could support her; by 1998 that figure had risen to 82 percent, after which the General Social Survey (GSS) stopped asking the question because answers were approaching consensus level. In 1977 less than half agreed that a mother who works can be as close to her children as one who does not work, but now two-thirds agree. Also in 1977 only 43 percent disagreed that it is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself. Twenty years later, in 1998, 81 percent disagreed (after that year, the GSS stopped asking the question). Similarly, in 1977 a mere 34 percent disagreed that it is best for the man to be the achiever and the woman to take care of home and family; thirty years

later that number was up to 65 percent. And over the same time period the number disagreeing that preschool children suffer if the mother works rose from 32 to 59 percent. Finally, just in the 1988–2002 period, those agreeing that both spouses should contribute to household income rose from 49 to 68 percent.

These are momentous changes, and they have been associated with a widening political gap between those in more traditional family structures and those who are not. For example, in 1968 married voters were 6 points more likely to vote Republican than Democratic, while never-married voters were 2 points more likely to vote Democratic than Republican. By 2004 that modest marriage gap had turned into a chasm: married voters were 12 points more likely to vote Republican, while never-married voters were 25 points more likely to vote Democratic (separated voters were even more Democratic—35 points more likely to vote Democratic). Among married voters, those with children were 11 points more likely to vote Republican than those without, while among single voters those with children were 8 points more likely to vote Democratic than those without.

Smith expects this evolution away from traditional family forms and family values to continue in the future (with some exceptions, like approval of extramarital sex and support for abortion rights, where change is not currently evident). This is because the trends away from tradition reinforce one another—nontraditional family forms promote nontraditional values, and vice versa—and because younger cohorts are so much more likely than older cohorts to embrace nontraditional values. As younger cohorts continue to replace older ones, most family values will trend in a nontraditional direction. Smith argues that the political appeal of positions based on traditional values will therefore steadily diminish in the future.

This means, he suggests, that appeals to family values will themselves have to evolve to be effective. There will simply be fewer and fewer voters from traditional families to respond to traditional appeals; more broadly, the family values of the twenty-first century will not be our parents' family values. The parties must recognize this reality and adapt their rhetoric accordingly. Smith also stresses that parties' policies should evolve to fit the needs of twenty-first-century families, especially nontraditional ones, whose weight in the population is large and increasing. Possibilities he mentions include quality, affordable day care, after-school programs for children of working parents, financial and other assistance for single parents, and workplace nondiscrimination policies for those in nontraditional families. Of course, the GOP might prefer to support policies that promote traditional family forms, like promarriage

incentives, divorce-avoidance programs, and faith-based initiatives, but the implication of Smith's analysis is that such policies are unlikely to be effective substitutes for policies that address the diverse realities of twenty-first-century families. Elaborating those policies, in fact, will be the task for both parties, as the modern American family continues to evolve.

In chapter 6, "Religion and American Politics," the political scientists John Green and E. J. Dionne trace the changes in religion and religious observance since World War II and analyze their effects on past, present, and future politics. The authors point out that both a secularization trend and an evangelical trend have had large effects on America's religious landscape in the postwar period. Consider secularization: from 1944 to 2004 the percentage of adults reporting no religious affiliation rose steadily, from 5 to 14 percent. By 2024 the authors project that 20 percent of adults will be unaffiliated. As for white evangelical Protestants, the gain has been more modest: rising from 18 to 23 percent of adults over the 1944–2004 period. However, the gain was larger among the observant (attend church weekly or more), who grew from 6 to 14 percent; the less observant declined by 2 percentage points. By 2024 Green and Dionne project that the group overall will gain only slightly—to 25 percent of adults; again, the observant will gain more and the less observant will decline.

But these have hardly been the only changes. In fact, the biggest change has been the decline of white mainline Protestants, down from 44 to 18 percent of adults in the 1944–2004 period (20 points of this decline was among the less observant). And those of "other faiths" (not Catholic or Protestant) have increased from 8 to 19 percent.

Green and Dionne note that levels of observance overall have remained fairly stable over the 1944–2004 period, at least in terms of the broad distinction between the observant and the less observant. The observant group equaled 42 percent of adults in 1944 and 43 percent of adults in 2004: that is, practically no change. But these endpoints conceal a substantial trend toward more observance between 1944 and 1964 (up to 51 percent) and then a substantial trend downward after that (back to 41 percent by 1984).

Changes in the mix of religious affiliations, while large, have been accompanied by other changes that are just as important. This has to do with the rise of a gap in voting between the observant and the less observant, which parallels, and in some respects now overshadows, the traditional gap in voting among those of different religions. For example, in the 2004 election less-observant white Protestants voted Republican over Democratic by 6 points, while their observant counterparts voted more Republican by 14 points. More

spectacularly, less-observant Catholics voted Republican over Democratic by 6 points and the observant by 24 points. Less-observant other faiths voted Democratic over Republican by 32 points, while observant members of this group voted Republican over Democratic by 3 points. This pattern extended to white evangelicals: less-observant white evangelicals voted Republican over Democratic by a very strong 44 points, but their observant counterparts topped that with a 64-point margin in favor of the GOP. Comparing 2004 voting patterns with those of 1944, Green and Dionne find declines in Democratic presidential voting of 34 points among observant white evangelicals, 31 points among observant white Catholics, 21 points among observant other faiths, and 8 points among observant white mainline Protestants.

Green and Dionne tie this large attendance gap, which emerged in full force in the 1980s and 1990s, to that era's rise in the political relevance of cultural issues. Before that, cultural issues played less of a role in politics, and the attendance gap was consequently smaller. They speculate, based on recent trends, that an era of culturally based politics (say from 1980 to 2008, when religious values regarding individual and family behaviors were intertwined with political choices) may be coming to an end. Other issues like global warming and economic justice are receiving more attention from the observant even among white evangelicals. And pressing economic and foreign policy issues seem to be overshadowing the culture wars we have gotten so used to. If so, the attendance gap may moderate as we move into an era in which these issues predominate—an era more similar to the 1940s or the 1960s than to the recent past. This shift will present a challenge to both parties as they confront the need to reorganize their coalitions and reach out to the observant (on the Democrats' part) and to the less observant (on the Republicans' part).

In chapter 7, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials," the survey researcher Scott Keeter analyzes generational change and its impact on American politics. His chief focus is the millennial generation, who are, according to his definition, those born in 1977 and thereafter. He estimates there are 58 million American adults (ages eighteen to thirty-one) who are members of this generation.

Keeter believes that the millennials are distinctive in several social and demographic ways from preceding generations. They are less likely than earlier generations to have grown up in two-parent families and to have had two married parents and more likely than earlier generations to have had a mother who worked full time outside the home. Keeter notes, however, that despite the fears of many that millennials' relative lack of connection to traditional families would lead to social dysfunction this cohort has actually

experienced lower levels of teen pregnancy, flat or declining levels of substance abuse, and lower rates of violent crime.

The millennial generation is also highly diverse. In 1972 almost nine in ten eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds were non-Hispanic whites; today, that figure is about six in ten. About 20 percent are Latino, 13 percent are black, and 5 percent are Asian.

Millennials have also been affected by the broad trends that characterize the era they are growing up in. Certainly one such trend is the persistent combination of increasing national wealth with growing inequality and insecurity. But perhaps the most distinctive imprint on this generation has been made by the extremely rapid pace of technological change. This imprint is demonstrated by the cohort's essentially universal use of the Internet and its enthusiastic embrace of communication innovations like instant messaging, text messaging, and social networking sites. This generational difference seems likely to persist as new innovations extend the boundaries of electronic communication and information access.

Millennials so far are exhibiting a distinctive political orientation. Those who have come of age since 1997 (eighteen-to-twenty-nine-year-olds) identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party by 18 points over the GOP. Gen X (born 1965–76) and late boomers (born 1956–64), by contrast, are much more evenly divided, with only a modest advantage for the Democrats. In fact, the only other generation in the electorate that comes close to the orientation of the millennials is the early boomers (born 1946–55), with those born 1951–54 being particularly pro-Democratic. Given the stability of party identification, millennials' pro-Democratic orientation is likely to persist as the generation ages.

Other attitudes, particularly about social issues, are distinctive among millennials. On gay marriage, for example, 58 percent favor allowing gays to marry, compared to 35 percent who are opposed. Among older cohorts, it is the reverse: 60 percent are opposed, and only 31 percent in favor. There is essentially universal acceptance among millennials (94 percent) of interracial dating and marriage and less concern about the economic or cultural impact of immigration. However, the millennial cohort is no more accepting of abortion than older cohorts.

On religion, millennials are less likely to express traditional beliefs about Judgment Day, the importance of prayer, and the existence of God. And they are significantly more likely to be secular—that is, unaffiliated with any religion: 19 percent are unaffiliated, compared to 14 percent of Gen X, 11 percent of early boomers, and 5 percent of older cohorts. Keeter notes that lack of

religious affiliation tends to persist across the life course, so high levels of secularism among millennials are likely to continue.

Millennials express far greater support for active government than older cohorts. For example, they overwhelmingly say they prefer a bigger government providing more services to a smaller government providing fewer services, a view not shared by older generations. Keeter believes, however, that this relatively high level of support for active government is an age-related phenomenon and therefore will largely disappear as millennials get older. He also notes that millennials are more likely to favor private Social Security accounts and that they are significantly more pro-business than other age groups.

On foreign and military issues, Keeter points out that millennials were actually somewhat more supportive than the rest of the population of military action in Iraq before the invasion and in the initial phases of the war. Now, however, millennials are more likely to believe that the country did not make the right decision in using military force and that the United States should remove troops as soon as possible—though their differences from older age groups, Keeter stresses, are fairly modest. Millennials are also significantly less likely to think that the best way to achieve peace is through military strength.

Keeter believes the millennial generation shows encouraging signs of civic engagement that compare favorably with earlier generations. In terms of voter turnout, while young voters continue to lag older ones, the turnout gap shrank significantly in recent elections as millennials have come to dominate the ranks of the youth vote. Millennials are also catching up with older cohorts in other forms of electoral engagement. In 2004 young voters were more likely than older voters to try to influence the vote of other people, to attend a campaign event, and to support a candidate by displaying a sticker, button, or sign. Millennials are also participating in civic activities—volunteering, community problem solving, and charitable giving—at rates comparable to older cohorts.

The current political leanings of millennials should be a substantial benefit to the Democrats in the 2008 election, Keeter observes, especially since, judging from this year's primary contests, their turnout could be high. And since Barack Obama, who has generated exceptional excitement among millennials, is the Democratic nominee, the Democrats could benefit even further. Keeter stresses, however, that young voters' turnout will still likely be substantially below that of older voters. And over the longer run, the relatively pro-Republican and conservative late boomers and Gen Xers should be gaining political weight as the early boomers move into retirement. This could provide some counterweight for the GOP to the rise of the millennials.

Keeter is skeptical that the relatively liberal views of millennials on government will provide much of an impetus toward activist government. This is partly because of the life-cycle effect mentioned above and partly because millennials tend to be cynical about the ability of today's politicians in either party to accomplish the tasks government should perform. Other priorities of the millennials—like education, the environment and global warming, and a less force-oriented American role in the world—could have more staying power, though Keeter is not sure millennials' views in these areas hold enough intensity to have much of an impact on politics.

Keeter is more certain that millennials' distinctive views on social and cultural issues will have an impact. An orientation toward tolerance and away from racism, sexism, and nativism will surely have an effect on the political culture, perhaps lessening some of the more acrimonious differences between the parties and facilitating solutions to the immigration problem. He also thinks that the millennials' religious profile could contribute to less polarization, due to the large numbers of unaffiliated and high levels of religious diversity. Millennials also seem fairly uninterested in the standard association of liberal economic views with liberal social views and of conservative economic views with conservative social views. That would undermine a key basis of today's political polarization.

Each of these chapters contains critical lessons for our political parties. Looking across all the chapters, though, several overarching themes stand out. The first is that the days of the culture wars may be numbered. Generational change and changes in family and class structure and religious trends are all likely to reduce the salience of these issues over time and, consequently, the political premium to be gained by emphasizing these issues.

The second is that a set of issues is coming to the fore that both parties will have to engage. The needs of urbanizing suburbs for investment in education and infrastructure seem likely to become increasingly important. The central role of immigration in population growth, including in some of the most politically contested states, indicates that the urgency of reforming the current system (or nonsystem) will rise. The growth of nontraditional families should increase the salience of issues like quality day care and after-school programs. And changes in the race-ethnic and class structure are likely to increase the demand for programs that promote upward mobility (access to college and advanced training, affordable homeownership) and that remedy obstacles to upward mobility (lack of access to health care, poor or no retirement options).

Together, these changes are likely to mean that both parties will need to substantially retool their political approaches. Democrats will have to actively

cultivate the set of the issues just mentioned if they hope to retain the loyalties of a group of emerging constituencies that have been favoring them (such as Hispanics, millennials, nontraditional families, and urbanizing suburbs). And they will need to update their economic populism to focus on opportunity and aspirations, not just security, if they hope to attain adequate support levels among the dwindling, but still important, white working class. Republicans, for their part, will need to rely less on cultural conflicts and, instead, directly engage Democrats on the same set of issues to build support in urbanizing suburbs, in nontraditional families, among Hispanics and youth, in the professional class, and so on. Otherwise, they will be forced to pile up ever-larger supermajorities among the white working class, a difficult task, since that group of voters is displaying less interest in what the Republicans currently have on offer.

It is difficult to look at these changes and the political pressures they will put on the parties and believe that politics will continue to be as polarized and gridlocked as it is today. The electoral logic of moving to the center—the new center—of this emerging American electorate will simply be too relentless for the parties to ignore. This is likely to overwhelm, in the end, the various factors like media hype, ideological elites, partisan redistricting, and cultural sorting that are said to keep our parties in a contentious, unproductive equilibrium. Demography may not be destiny, but it is awfully hard to ignore.

Notes

1. Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

2. Data on women's labor force participation from Howard N. Fullerton Jr., "Labor Force Participation: 75 Years of Change, 1950–98 and 1998–2025," *Monthly Labor Review,* December 1999, pp. 3–12.

3. Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, "On the Pill: Changing the Course of Women's Education," *Milken Institute Review,* 2nd quarter (2001): 12–21.

4. Alvin P. Sanoff, "Competing Forces," *Prism,* October 2005 (www.prismmagazine.org/oct05/feature_competing.cfm).

5. U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Occupations: 2000," Census 2000 Brief (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

6. Author's analysis of 2000 Voter News Service national exit poll.

7. Data for 1940–2000 from U.S. Census Bureau, *Educational Attainment of the Population 25 Years and Over: 1940 to 2000;* data for 2005 from Current Population Survey, "Educational Attainment," historical table A-1 (www.census.gov/population/socdemo/education/cps2006/tabA-1.xls).

8. Data in this paragraph from Jeffery S. Passel and Roberto Suro, "Rise, Peak, and Decline: Trends in US Immigration, 1992–2004" (Washington: Pew Hispanic Center, 2005).

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

10. From author's analysis of census educational attainment data.

11. Data in paragraph from author's analysis of 2000 Voters News Service and 2004 national exit polls.

12. Teixeira and Rogers, *America's Forgotten Majority.*