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Midterm

The 2012 Presidential election seemed all but decided a month ago, but following the first debate performance by Governor Mitt Romney, a resurgence of his campaign has narrowed the polling data and has made this election a true toss up. The key to this election is going to be a mix of many factors, such as demographics and voter turnout. The campaign that is able to reach the most voters, particularly voters who describe themselves as independent moderates, is likely to have an advantage in this election. Ultimately, this campaign is going to come down to which candidate can pitch their platform better to the voters who have yet to make up their mind.

I believe there will be a slight shift from the 2008 electorate compared to the 2012 electorate, however the overall demographics and turnout will be extremely similar. First and foremost, it's unlikely that President Obama will receive the same high support that he received in 2008. That election had a lot of factors which led to the high support that Barack Obama received, such as the fresh, new image he presented to the American people and the overall difference between him and the former President, George W. Bush. That being said, the President will still receive strong support from women, racial minorities, young adults, and postgraduates than he will men.

On October 26th, Gallup released data which suggests the electorate will be generally the same as the 2008 election.<sup>1</sup> The implications of this suggest that the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158399/2012-electorate-looks-like-2008.aspx>

President, given his 7-point victory in 2008, can lose some support in many of these groups, such as with women and independents, but still win the election. In order to do this, he will have to make sure that the turnout of those who do support him is higher than those who do not. On the other hand Governor Romney must try to take away more voters, particularly women and independent voters, than the President can make up with in other areas.

The area where Governor Romney has the best chance to make up for the President's strong coalition of racial minorities, postgraduates, and young adults is by appealing to blue collar women under 40 years old and suburban women over 50 years old.<sup>2</sup> However, we've seen the Republican party consistently, for the lack of a better expression, stick their foot into their mouths with women voters. First it was Rush Limbaugh verbally attacking a Georgetown Law student, then it was Todd Akin's "legitimate rape" comment, and most recently it was Richard Mourdock's comment that "God intended" pregnancies resulting from rape.

These recent comments are going to hurt the GOP moving forward to 2012. Women voters are key to electoral victories, and it's why we consistently see each party fighting over soccer moms, security moms, waitress moms, etc. The female demographic, because they turn out in such high numbers, is key to winning elections. If the GOP continues to move further to the right on issues such as abortion and contraception, we're going to see women continuing to overwhelmingly support Democrats in elections and the gender gap may not be bridgable.

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<sup>2</sup> Lecture III, pg. 37

So, in order for the GOP to make up for this, they must extend their influence over the Working Class vote. In *Grand New Party*, Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam argue that the GOP has to become the “Party of Sam’s Club” and appeal to the Working Class.<sup>3</sup> They argue that the Republican Party has recently had the support of the Working Class, however they need to do more to appeal to them and solidly win them over. If the Republicans fail to appeal to the Working Class, then they will move towards Democrats. We’ve seen this already, particularly in 2008, when President Obama was able to gain strong support in white, working class suburbs - generally a Republican stronghold.

Still, the 2012 election hinges on President Obama’s ability to maintain support amongst women, to hold a strong base amongst racial minorities, and to maintain some level of support in suburban areas. If he loses 4%-7% amongst women, he’s going to have a harder time being reelected than he would if he only loses 1%-3%. Likewise, if the turnout amongst racial minorities drops by even a few percentage points, the President will again have a harder time being reelected. This is why we see his campaign focusing so much on voter turnout. I think that the recent GOP comments about rape and contraception will help the President maintain support amongst women, the GOP’s stance on the Dream Act will help him maintain support amongst racial minorities, and the auto bailout will help him maintain support in the suburbs of the crucial states of Michigan and Ohio.

Democrats have to be worried about losing too much of the “40 within 40”

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<sup>3</sup> *Grand New Party*, pg. 131

electorate, which is key to an electoral victory.<sup>4</sup> If they do lose this support by taking left-leaning stances on social issues and economic issues, they may face the chance of losing the election altogether. With the recent passage of “Obamacare,” many independent voters are split on whether or not they support this bill. The short-term effects of this legislation could be that they lose support amongst middle class voters who are worried their taxes are going to be increased or they’re going to have to change their health care plan. Again, these moderate votes are key to an electoral victory.

I believe this election will continue a history of dealignment in the United States. I see no evidence to support the idea that a large number of voters are going to shift their support to one party or the other. We live in a period of polarization, and at this point most of the electorate has already made their mind up. I would have possibly argued that the 2008 election was a realigning election, until the 2010 midterm elections when the electorate flopped back to the GOP. This election, I believe, will not ultimately lead to a realignment.

However, I’ll go a step further and argue that we’re due for a realigning election in the next 8 years. I believe that the shifting demographics favor a Democratic realignment at this time, however if the Republican Party is able to shift their policies affecting women and hispanic voters, they have a good shot at becoming the majority party in the United States. We’ve seen rhetoric from the likes of Karl Rove and Jeb Bush suggesting the party has to change their policies that affect hispanic voters because they will be key to winning any election in the next 50 years of American

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<sup>4</sup> Lecture 1

politics.

As it stands, I believe that President Barack Obama has a good chance to be reelected. With a little more than a week left in this election, I don't forecast a huge shift in the electorate, which appears to give the President a slight advantage. The President maintains slim leads in the key swing states of this election, and ultimately has more paths to victory than Governor Mitt Romney. The Governor did a good job of improving his image following the first Presidential debate, but I do not believe that was enough to move the electorate far enough to give him a victory.