

The Increasingly Monolithic Republican Party

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American politics is increasingly defined by a two party system where one party, albeit imperfectly and generally not easily, reflects the racial, ethnic and other diversity, tensions and strength that is central to 21st century America, while the other is increasingly simply a party of white, heavily Christian Americans. Today Americans who are non-white, non-Christian or non-straight are far more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. This is true at the level of ordinary voters, grassroots activists and elected officials.

Although this can easily be seen either through studying data or anecdotally from looking at campaign events for both parties, it is often unstated or even considered inappropriate or playing the race card to point this out. Republicans, for their part, often speak vaguely about being a "big tent" party or of how they need to reach out beyond their base, but these words are rarely supported by any actions; and these actions even more rarely manage to persuade, for example, gays, Muslims or Latinos to support the Republican Party.

Each election season, the Republican leadership expresses some concern about this both because it is getting more difficult to win a presidential election drawing almost entirely on white, straight and Christian voters and because showing concern for a broader swath of Americans, even those who are unlikely to vote Republican, helps the Republican Party to appeal more to moderate white swing voters. Because a huge majority of African Americans votes Democrat and courting gay and lesbian voters would create major problems with the Republicans base, the party usually makes a visible play for Latino, Asian or Jewish voters.

This year, Latinos are once again the primary non-white targets for the Republican Party generally and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney specifically. Latinos are important because they are a fast growing demographic group that leans heavily Democrat and whose growing numbers in regions like the southwest have made states like Nevada and New Mexico much more difficult for the Republicans to win than was the the case twenty years ago.

Republican efforts to woo Latino voters are based on some combination of trying to present their party as not being radically anti-immigrant, appealing to what they believe to be are strong traditional values held by many Republicans and the usual right wing pablum about lower taxes and the failures of the Obama administration. In addition, Romney is said to be giving serious thought to putting a Latino, most likely Florida senator Marco Rubio or New Mexico governor Susan Martinez on the ticket.

None of these approaches are likely to work, even an environment where winning 45 percent of the Latino vote would be an enormous sign of success. Latinos are unlikely to be swayed by Romney's views on immigration and will likely remain concerned about his party's anti-

immigrant positions. Republican appeals to conservative social values will not be enough to overcome their party's economic policies in their efforts to win Latin votes.

When the noise about Republican efforts to win Latino votes in 2012 dies down, we will be left with a polity where one major party looks much more like contemporary, and future, America, while the other party will continue to look more like what the U.S. used to be. A major party that enjoys little support from numerous demographic groups, and therefore has little reason to appeal, or even speak to those voters, other than half-hearted election year attempts to win votes with some groups, will be less able to understand the struggles and concerns of those Americans and will be more susceptible to using intolerance as a way to win votes. While it is encouraging to see the times changing with regards to marriage equality, for example, the enthusiasm with which Republican operatives, proposed anti-marriage equality initiatives as a way to mobilize the Republican base, demonstrates the power of this intolerance. The racism which reared its head at some Tea Party rallies, and the silence from much of the Republican leadership with which this was met is another disturbing example of this dynamic.

In the short run this is good for the Democrats as it is possible that for a few election cycles the demographics will conspire against the Republicans as their base shrinks and their narrow support becomes more of a barrier to success. In the bigger picture, however, this is obviously not a healthy dynamic, nor is it one that can continue for more than a few more election cycles. Changing demographics and age replacement will eventually force the Republican Party to either modernize its appeal or collapse entirely, but the process over the next few years will be complex and perhaps even destabilizing.