

in 1980,

the year conservative political icon Ronald Reagan was elected president, 79% of the nation's eligible voters were white. The national debt was slightly under \$1 trillion and gasoline prices had just pierced the \$1 a gallon mark.

In the 32 years since, the national landscape has changed dramatically. Debt has soared 16-fold and gasoline prices have more than

quadrupled. And the number of white voters has tumbled by 16 percentage points to 63%, according to Penn State's Department of Sociology and Population Research Institute.

In the America of 2012, Hispanics, followed by Asians, have made up the ground lost by whites over the decades. A record 23.7 million Latinos are eligible to vote in the 2012 presidential election, according to the Pew Hispanic Center's analysis of 2010 Census Bureau data. That's a rise of 4 million since the 2008 election. If current demographic trends continue, 50,000 new Hispanics will reach voting age every month for the next two decades.

But Hispanic voting clout is only one demographic factor that will weigh heavily during the upcoming election. "Go West, young man" — an axiom attributed to Horace Greeley, a 19th-century founder of the Republican Party — is no longer just a saying. The Census Bureau's list of fastest growing metropolitan areas reveals many names that are not exactly of the household variety, such as Provo, Utah; Bend, Oregon; and, appropriately enough, Greeley, Colorado.

Reflecting that growth trend, the western and southern regions of the US will dominate the government come 2013, with a majority of the 113th Congress's representatives hailing from

these regions. Southern states will account for 37% percent of Congress, while 23% of the nation's elected representatives and senators will be from the West. The northeastern states, due to population losses, will control only 18% of the Congress.

What do these demographic and population shifts portend for Election Day?

"The fastest-growing states in population are mostly historically Republican," says Dr. Joshua Comenetz, head of the Washington DC-based Population Mapping Consulting. However, voters do have a way of confounding the demographers. Comenetz says no one could have predicted how population growth, especially among minorities, would eventually turn states like California — Ronald Reagan's home state — into a solidly Democratic one. "Some political experts expect that even Texas might evolve that way, based on migration from other states plus a growing Hispanic population," added Dr. Comenetz.

Migrants often bring along their political views when they relocate, subtly shifting the dynamics of their new home states. For example, middle-aged and senior citizens who head south as they age tend to be highly set in their political views, says University of Florida political science professor Kenneth D. Wald. Younger newcomers and their children, however, are more likely to be influenced by the region's historical conservative bent.

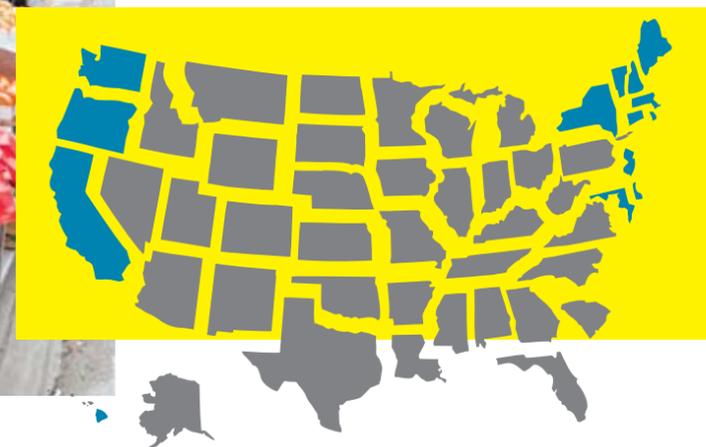
As a result of those demographic shifts, a recent Gallup Poll finds Obama and Romney fairly evenly matched in the Midwest and West. Obama enjoys a decisive advantage in the East while Romney has a comfortable lead in much of the South.

If Gallup is on the mark, then this year's election is more likely to echo past performance than reflect the new demographics. The Democratic candidate has won the East in every election since 1988, while the Republican has prevailed in the South in most elections since 1980. While the West has leaned Democratic in recent tallies, the Midwest has been downright fickle; backing the Democrat in 1992, 1996, and 2008, and the Republican in 1988, 2000, and 2004.

So what's in store for November 6? While most election maps divide the country into red states for the Republicans and blue states for the Democrats, it might be a lot more instructive to subdivide the nation into five specific regions that share similar demographic characteristics and voter preferences. For each region, experts in election demographics were asked to provide local background and color, pinpoint what's making their voters tick, and isolate each region's hot-button issues. The result is an incisive analysis of how America may vote in two weeks.

The Liberal Coasts

MARYLAND, DELAWARE, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, CONNECTICUT, RHODE ISLAND, MASSACHUSETTS, VERMONT, NEW HAMPSHIRE, MAINE, CALIFORNIA, WASHINGTON, OREGON, HAWAII, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



MAIN VOTER CONCERNS Jobs, the Economy

THE DEMOGRAPHICS: The "liberal coast" states — chiefly situated off the Northeast Atlantic Coast from Maryland to Maine, including New York and New Jersey, and along the Pacific Ocean, including California, Oregon, and Washington — tend to vote Democratic. Why?

Demographically, these states are home to large numbers of racial minorities and immigrants, a major component of the traditional Democratic Party voter base. In contrast, their percentages of predominantly Republican evangelical Christians are comparatively low, says Dr. David Karol, a professor of American politics at the University of Maryland.

Immigrants' first port of call tends to be in coastal cities, and many remain there, but the coastal location doesn't tell the whole story. The fact that most of the Democratic Party's voter base resides along the coasts, while the Republicans' stronghold is anchored in the central US, can be chalked up to the natural divide between urban and rural areas.

Urban areas are generally solidly Democratic, while those that are less densely populated tend to go Republican. The coastal states are more liberal precisely because they have the biggest cities and are industry hubs, says Dr. Matthew Baum, a public policy professor

at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Industry hubs attract unions, which have historically comprised an important base of Democratic Party support and unions use the clout they have with their members to push them out the door to vote.

If city voters are more kindly disposed to big government, it is due to the fact that seats and important departments of state governments are primarily located in larger cities, providing residents with employment opportunities and more chances to interact with government and benefit from public programs.

VOTING: PAST AND FUTURE There's no question that the liberal coasts will go solidly for Obama, says Dr. Karol, who contends that most states will vote in line with patterns established in recent elections. "There's a lot of stability in the electoral map. One interesting thing people say about the map is that most of the big states aren't close, even though the election overall is close."

The only competitive liberal coast state is New Hampshire, Mitt Romney's current home state. New Hampshire has historically been a swing state. In the past ten presidential elections, the Granite State went Republican six times and Democratic four, although since 1992, it has only once given its electoral votes to a Republican.

The #1 Hot-Button Issue

The Economy

"It's all about jobs and the economy," says Dr. Baum, noting this is so especially in California, where the economy has failed miserably. In these regions, "there is no secondary issue — that's the one issue that's going to turn this election."

VIRGINIA,
WEST VIRGINIA,
NORTH CAROLINA,
SOUTH CAROLINA,
GEORGIA,
ALABAMA,
MISSISSIPPI,
LOUISIANA,
ARKANSAS,
TENNESSEE



The South

MAIN VOTER CONCERNS Family Values, Religion, Liberal / Conservative Divide

THE DEMOGRAPHICS To understand the South well requires taking a time capsule back to the Civil War period.

The Deep South states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana formed the core of the pro-slavery Confederate states that seceded from the Union, even though the northernmost tip of the Confederacy extended to Virginia.

The Civil War president was Abraham Lincoln, a “Yankee” from the northern state of Illinois, who was also the first president of the then brand-new Republican Party. Lincoln’s anti-slavery stance and the subsequent defeat of the Confederacy led to decades of Southern hostility to the Republican Party.

The Democrats dominated the South until South Carolina senator Strom Thurmond, a Democrat who defected to the GOP, and then former vice president Richard Nixon devised a “Southern strategy,” which conservative columnist Pat Buchanan once described as “built on a foundation of states’ rights, human rights, small government, and a strong national defense. Nixon said he would leave it to the Democratic Party to squeeze the last ounce of political juice

out of the rotting fruit of racial injustice.”

Their strategy proved to be a smashing success, even if they did not build it on the anticipation of how tight a grip evangelical Christians would eventually hold over the southern Bible Belt states that found their soul mates in thinkers like Buchanan and Nixon.

Still, many white voters in the “New South” states of Virginia and North Carolina are a breed apart; better-educated, more prosperous and more moderate to liberal (read: Democratic) in their voting habits. The cosmopolitan New South, with its array of prestigious universities, has attracted heavy migration from the Northeast and other parts of the country, with younger professionals and federal employees giving Virginia, in particular, a more Democratic and liberal tilt. Immigration of senior citizens and military families who tend to be politically conservative has balanced that trend, to an extent.

Despite the more liberal tilt acquired by the New South, the region still retains some marked conservative bearings compared to the rest of the country, such as the overt importance of religion in politics and the value placed on candidates’ personal and family character.

VOTING: PAST AND FUTURE If you want to predict who the South will vote for, take a look at who heads the presidential ticket.

The Democrats devised a southern strategy of their own, nominating southerners like Lyndon Johnson (Texas, 1964), Jimmy Carter (Georgia, 1976), Bill Clinton (Arkansas, 1992 and 1996) and Al Gore (2000). Even then the south tends to split its vote, with the exception of 2000 and 2004 when Republicans nominated a southerner of their own – George W. Bush of Texas, who engineered a clean sweep of southern states.

President Obama’s 2008 victory broke that tradition when he became the first non-Southern Democratic presidential candidate to win North Carolina in 32 years, and Virginia in 44 years. Obama has an advantage in that Democratic African-Americans comprise 20% to 30% of the Carolinas, Georgia, and Virginia.

However, the Southern states look to be mainly solid Romney supporters in 2012, with the exception of Virginia and North Carolina, which still seem up for grabs. Regardless of this year’s result, the liberalizing influence of the “New South” will be a demographic force to be reckoned with for the foreseeable future.

The South is a very traditional part of the US, says Dr. Lance DeHaven Smith, a professor in the public administration and policy department of Florida State University. “Women are treated in a different way. They’re put on a pedestal; men are more likely to go hunting and are a little bit more macho, and [same-gender] marriage issues are something that turns many people here into Republicans.”



The #1 Hot-Button Issue

Respect and Equality

“In politics, demographics is not necessarily destiny, but rather an opportunity for change,” observes University of Florida professor Kenneth Wald, who says that both parties would be wise to aggressively target younger voters, particularly Hispanics repelled by Republican anti-immigration rhetoric.

The Hispanic Belt

Almost 20% of Florida’s registered voters are Hispanic, mainly Cuban. Unlike the typical Hispanic voter profile, they tend to vote Republicans, – partially out of historic animosity to Democratic president Kennedy’s bungled Bay of Pigs invasion, the failure of which helped entrench their nemesis, Fidel Castro, to outlast eight US presidents in power. Florida’s Cuban and other Latino immigrants also tend to be better-heeled financially; making them more apt to support tax-cutting Republicans.

Hispanics comprise some 30% of Arizona’s, 27% of Nevada’s, and 20% of Colorado’s fast-growing populations. The states in the region with even greater Hispanic populations, such as California (38%) and New Mexico (46%), are now solidly Democratic.

California has 55 cities whose population exceeds 100,000. Overall, the largest cities in America vote more liberal than smaller cities according to the Bay Area Center for Voting Research: “In fact more than half of the twenty most populated cities in America vote in a liberal fashion overwhelmingly, with eleven cities registering over 70% of their votes for liberal candidates.”

Arizona has become ground zero in the nation’s immigration battle, with many of its citizens angered by the influx of illegal immigrants and prevalence of crime perpetrated by Mexican gangs. Most of the state’s controversial law allowing law enforcement officers to crack down on illegal immigrants – which also sparked Hispanic resentment – was struck down by the US Supreme Court this summer.

The three most contested “Hispanic” states in this year’s election are Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico, says political scientist Dr. Ruy Teixeira, a Democratic Party strategist and senior fellow at both the Century Foundation and the Center for American Progress. “New

Mexico is a majority-minority population state,” he says, referring to a situation where a majority of the state’s voters are members of minorities. Since the minority populations in these three states are growing at a rate that outpaces the national average, with each election, the percentage of eligible minority voters increases.

VOTING: PAST AND FUTURE Despite providing Republican George W. Bush with crucial electoral votes during both of his tight races for the White House, Colorado and Nevada helped elect Barack Obama in 2008. Nevada tilts toward Obama this year too, and Colorado remains a toss-up that Mitt Romney can ill afford to lose. Although Arizona voted for the Republican favorite son John McCain in the last presidential election and leans to Romney this time, recent polls show a surprisingly close presidential contest.

Texas is the lone state in the region that despite a 38% Hispanic population has remained firmly in the Republican camp, with a legendarily conservative core population and less politically active Hispanic community. However, University of Nevada political science professor David F. Damore warns that Republicans must work aggressively and quickly to overcome their image of heavy-handed conservatism on social issues. The party’s most urgent calling, he feels, is to woo regional Hispanics from going the California way.

Professor Damore notes that even young, American born, and well-assimilated Hispanics are sensitive to immigration-related issues, due to their familiarity with illegal immigrants in their communities. “The only Hispanics that split from this trend are the wealthier ones,” he relates, “and there aren’t enough of them [to benefit the Republicans].”



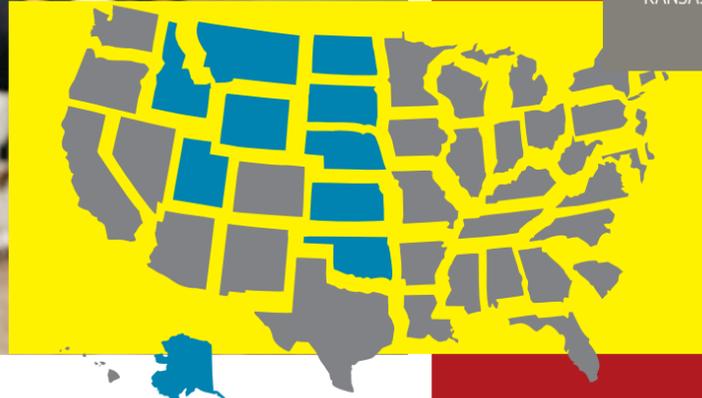
ARIZONA,
COLORADO,
FLORIDA,
NEVADA,
NEW MEXICO,
TEXAS

MAIN VOTER CONCERNS Education, Jobs, Personal Advancement

THE DEMOGRAPHICS: Hispanics – sometimes known as Latinos – hail mainly from families that originated in Mexico, Cuba, and other parts of Central and South America. They are the nation’s fastest growing demographic group and traditionally vote 2-1 in favor of Democrats, although a group that calls itself Resurgent Republic, led by Ed Gillespie, former chairman of the Republican National Committee and advised by Haley Barbour, Mississippi’s former Republican governor, predicts that as many as 46% of the Hispanic vote will spring for Romney.

The #1 Hot-Button Issue

Candidates’ Character



IDAHO, MONTANA,
WYOMING, UTAH,
NORTH DAKOTA,
SOUTH DAKOTA,
NEBRASKA, ALASKA,
OKLAHOMA, AND
KANSAS

Republican Heartland

MAIN VOTER CONCERNS Infrastructure, Environment, Energy, Federal Regulation

THE DEMOGRAPHICS The Mountain States in this region, namely Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, derive their nickname from the fact that the Rocky Mountains runs deeply through them. But so does a fiercely independent political streak.

Robert Cherny, a history professor at San Francisco State University, notes that Montana and the Dakotas were latecomers to the Union, becoming states only toward the end of the 19th century. Oklahoma remained a territory into the 20th century. Throughout these territorial days, residents could not elect their own governors, nor participate in presidential elections, so for them, presidential elections were non-events.

Along with their lukewarm voting history, these sparsely populated states currently have few major urban centers — a profile that often portends Republican tendencies. Characterized by an overwhelming white majority, it has been extremely difficult for Democrats to carve out a sustainable voter base in the region.

The economy is not an issue in many of these states. Unemployment in North Dakota is a paltry 3% and joblessness barely grazes 4%

in Nebraska. “They’re having some real good economic times with exploration of natural gas and oil reserves,” says Grant Neeley, associate professor and director of the public administration program at the University of Dayton–Ohio.

VOTING: PAST AND FUTURE America’s heartland states pack the least clout on Election Day due to their small number of electoral votes. But you can be pretty sure those paltry votes will be red.

However, there are some nascent signs of change that the Republicans would be well advised to note. Some of these states are rapidly outgrowing their rural roots and it will be interesting to see if newcomers inspire changed political attitudes in future years. Idaho’s population grew more than 20% between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, while South Dakota, officially considered part of the Midwest, has been the fastest growing Midwest state with a population gain of almost 8% since 2000.

Idaho, particularly, could become a battleground state, given the increase in its population and demographic diversity, according to a report for the Brookings Institution by Dr. David Damore, of the University of Nevada–Las Vegas.

The #1 Hot-Button Issue

Small Government

“This is a region whose political culture is built on rugged individualism,” says the University of Dayton’s Grant Neeley, putting the region’s Republican leaning in historical context. “Settlers moving across the plains communally built schoolhouses and institutions in days when there was no government assistance. Their attitude is basically that government should not get in the way of individuals. Governments exist to meet essential needs only, and leave everything else to the individual to accomplish and to attain.”



Midwest/ Border States

MAIN VOTER CONCERNS Jobs, National Defense, Family Values

THE DEMOGRAPHICS If the Northeast and Northwest are solid blocks of Democratic blue and the Plains, Upper Mountain, and much of the Southern states are splashes of Republican red, then the Midwest is typified by shades of pink and gray used to depict “undecided” and “leaning” states on electoral maps.

At press time, five of the ten Midwestern states could be considered toss-ups, with Obama’s home state of Illinois the only one in the region that’s solidly in his column.

“A lot of that diversity is due to the mixed economic base of the Midwest,” explains Professor Neeley, who noted that Ohio is a state that gave America John Boehner, the current House Speaker and a staunch, conservative Republican; as well as Rep. Dennis Kucinich, one of the leading Congressional liberals.

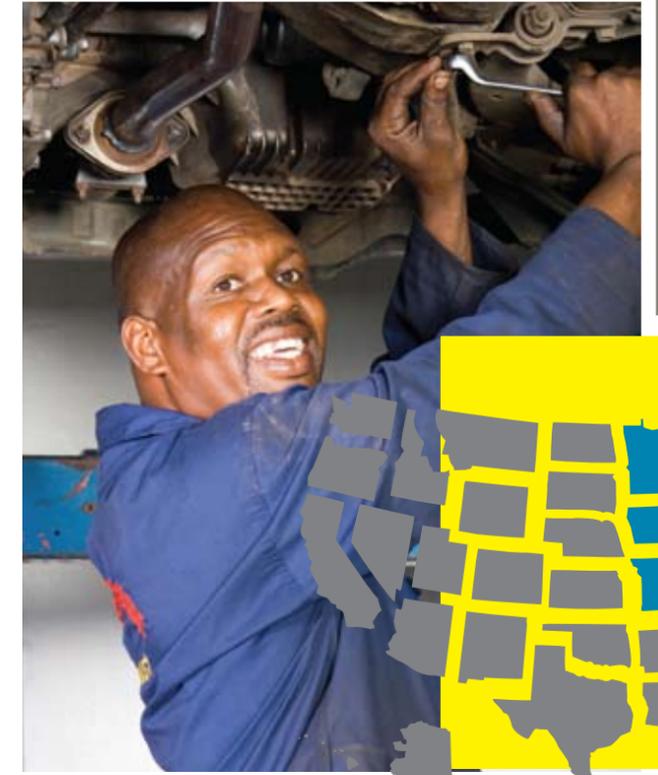
The checkered character of Ohio is partially due to the fact that Northeast Ohio is dominated by Cleveland, which tilts very Democratic; while the southwest region, outside the core of downtown Cincinnati, is very Republican.

Michigan also has an interesting dichotomy. It is home to Detroit, which benefitted greatly from the federal bailout of the auto industry, yet it was also the state where Mitt Romney’s father, George, once served as its popular governor and titan of the automotive industry back in Detroit’s glory days.

The auto industry will factor into the vote in Ohio as well. The fact that the economy is doing better than the national average in Ohio — which supplies many products to the

The #1 Hot-Button Issue

Support for the Military



PENNSYLVANIA,
OHIO,
MICHIGAN,
IOWA,
WISCONSIN,
MINNESOTA,
MISSOURI,
KENTUCKY,
ILLINOIS,
INDIANA

automobile industry — tends to help Obama in that critical state.

Pennsylvania also has a bit of a split personality. The eastern part, where Philadelphia is located, has a liberal coast feel, while the western section, dominated by Pittsburgh, is far more conservative.

Obama’s home state of Illinois is another study in contrasts. The bulk of the state is agricultural and rural. But because the city of Chicago has such a large population, the Democratic tilt dominates, and the state has remained solidly Democratic.

VOTING: PAST AND FUTURE The Midwest has typically been the most competitive region and usually backs the eventual winner. According to the Gallup Poll, this region will once again play a pivotal role in the 2012 campaign, likely determining the outcome of the election.

Obama has enjoyed at least a slight edge

there since June, consistent with his overall slight national lead. Considering Minnesota’s Democratic voting record in the last nine elections, he is expected to take it as well.

While voters are typically expected to elect home-grown candidates, an increase in minority voters in Wisconsin is cited as one reason why Congressman Paul Ryan’s presence on the GOP ticket may not be enough to color it red. “How much can selecting Paul Ryan as the ‘favorite son’ vice president really help?” asks Ruy Teixeira. “It helps, but not a lot — not enough to tilt it.”

The swing state here is Ohio. While many pundits say that Mitt Romney cannot win the election without winning Florida, others contend Ohio is just as pivotal, because it too, like Florida, has a diverse and balanced population that reflects the national composite of urban Democrats and suburban or agriculturally based Republican voters. ●

“I think it’s just kind of a streak of nationalism and pride,” says Grant Neeley, who counterintuitively contends that defense issues could actually favor Obama, as many Midwest voters credit the president for running a well-balanced foreign policy, extricating the US from Iraq on the one hand, while picking his spots in the ongoing war on terror. Hunting down Osama bin Laden and sending him to his watery grave won’t hurt Obama’s chances in this very traditional area of the country.