

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

The Mind of the Voter - 2012

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Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the competent and timely data collection accomplished by the professionals at Qualtrics. They are very helpful, and the technical advances they use are raising the quality of web-based opinion surveys.

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FORWARD: By way of apology and explanation...

I must apologize for the fact that this project, and the report I've written, presents an unfamiliar, perhaps unique, perspective on writing and thinking about politics. The reason I approached this investigation from the odd direction is simple: I was concerned that the assumptions made by the academic community, the media, and the general public, are oversimplifications of a complicated decision-making process.

Some of the assumptions are, I fear, based on faulty data. As this is written, it is but two weeks after the Presidential election of 2012, and much has already been written about who voted for whom. What were the demographics of people who turned out to vote? How much more or less than their percentage in the nation was the turnout of whites and nonwhites, young and old voters, men and women? The problem with the answers I and anyone who is interested in the voting process have been reading is that they are taken from "exit polls", which leave much to be desired. I am not alone in this opinion, but here are a few reasons for my distrust:

- In 2012, exit polls were conducted in 31 states. Most of the "battleground" states were surveyed, but other states where the outcome was not in doubt (e.g. Massachusetts) were included because of other races (MA Senate contest)
- Since exit polling has begun, Democrats have been oversampled, Republicans undersampled. Reasons are speculative, but sampling discrepancy is firm
- A substantial number of 2012 voters cast their ballots before Election Day. Some telephone interviews were conducted on this segment and weighted on the basis of guesswork as to the proportion of early voting in the state, not the precinct level
- Forced post-hoc conforming to actual vote proportions and changes in methodology¹ that weaken the credibility of country-wide generalizations

When I applied for the grant, my primary purpose was to satisfy my curiosity about what it means when voters are classified as Republican or Democratic party adherents, or Independents. How is the classification established? I wanted to compare the label voters attach to themselves to their voting history. I kept reading and hearing that we are a "center-right" country, with about 20% of voters being Independent...or was it 30%, or 40%? That led me to question what sort of views people had on social and fiscal issues – how many are conservative, liberal, middle of the road.

¹ the National Exit Poll...is always **forced to match the recorded vote** and shows that Obama was a 50-48% winner. **All demographic crosstabs were forced to conform to the recorded vote**. About 80 questions were asked of over 25,000 exit poll respondents, but the most important was missing: Who did you vote for in 2008: Obama, McCain or Other?

The past vote question has always been asked in prior exit polls. It is used as the basis for the True Vote Model to measure prior election voter turnout and vote shares in the current election. The returning voter mix displayed in the adjusted Final National Exit Poll has been determined to be impossible in at least four presidential elections – a clear indicator of a fraudulent vote count. Ref: <http://richardcharnin.wordpress.com/tag/exit-polls/>

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When I thought a little more about the election, I went back to my academic roots. I'm not a political scientist, nor an economist, and in no way am I an ideologue. My view is that elections are choices made by individuals. We do not vote for a plan to raise or lower taxes, or to legalize or outlaw same-sex marriage, or to support one side or another in a foreign conflict. We vote for an individual who we think will best perform the duties of President for the next four years.

For some people, the choice is a simple one.

There is a group of people who strongly identify themselves with a political party, and they simply would not ever consider voting for a candidate for the opposition. I cannot imagine either of the former Presidents Bush voting for a Democrat, nor former President Clinton or current President Obama ever voting for a Republican. But that's just my guess. We all vote by secret ballot

For everyone else, the decision of who gets our vote is more complex. Some component of our decision model will be how we see the candidates as people, another component might be the stands they take on issues. In 2012, Romney and Obama seemed to many to be polar opposites of each other, both in terms of their plans for what they would do as President and their personal characteristics.

- Obama was calling for a tax increase for wealthy citizens, Romney was opposed;
- Obama had shepherded a national healthcare law, Romney pledged to repeal it "on day one" of his Presidency;
- Romney was a white man born to wealth and power, who was close to his father - a popular state governor and at a different time the head of an automobile company - for 48 years of his life. Obama was born into a poorer family, who saw his father only once in his life at age 10. There were more differences, but time and space do not permit a complete listing.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

One can easily imagine that an individual might prefer the candidate who wanted to reduce tax rates but likes the healthcare law that the other candidate brought into being. That individual cannot have her wishes granted on those two issues by either candidate. If she chooses the low tax candidate and casts her vote for him, she will represent TO HERSELF that taxes are more important than healthcare.

The situation is the same whenever we consider a choice between competing alternatives. It may be whether to go to the better, but more expensive restaurant, or choosing between a Chevrolet or a Ford, or a Lexus or a Mercedes. Once we've made a choice, the term cognitive dissonance refers to our need to transform what was a close call into an obviously correct choice. Cognitive dissonance is how we dispel self-doubt, the nagging notion that we might have been wrong.

And cognitive dissonance explains the most statistically obvious fact of Presidential elections, which is that unchallenged incumbents win, and challenged incumbents lose. Of course all incumbents face a challenge on election day, but some face a challenge for their party's nomination.

Since 1940, there have been 13 - including 2012 - elections with an incumbent President running for re-election. Three - Ford, Carter, and GHW Bush - faced robust challenges from within their own party

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(from Reagan, Ted Kennedy and Perot, respectively) and each lost. There were six elections with no incumbent; in 1952, Truman chose not to seek the nomination, and in 1968, Johnson chose not to run when he was defeated in a primary contest – in essence, two more incumbents who had lost their party's support. In 1960, 1988, 2000 and 2008 the incumbent was prevented from running by the 22d Amendment to the Constitution.

In order for an incumbent to lose, the voters who chose him previously would have to change their minds, in effect admitting they were wrong four years ago. Historically, this happens only when there is a significant movement within the incumbent's party to choose another candidate, which is in effect a vote of no confidence, freeing the voters who had supported the incumbent of any future.

Finally, the decision process that each voter uses to select who she's going to vote for is unique to that person. To use a medical analogy, take two people with the same disease. The disease – for example, lung cancer – is the same disease no matter whose body is afflicted. But each person with that disease has a distinct and unique history of smoking or not, age, education, race, sex, occupation, physical condition, height, weight... So it is with voting. A vote for Romney or Obama is the same no matter who cast the vote, but the process by which the voter came to choose will be unique to each person. For most, I submit, most voters are unaware of major components of that process in themselves, or even that such components exist.

My hope is that this report will give the reader a broader, and better, sense of who determines our President, and the reasons

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The data were collected immediately after the conventions, when the national attention was largely focused on the potential outcome of the election. Although I disclaimed prediction on the basis of this sample, which excluded first- and second-time voters, I did predict the outcome correctly, and gave my reasoning.

The unique aspect of this study was the respondents' complete voting history in previous Presidential elections. I used this history to group the sample as having voted only for Democrats or Republicans, or for at least one of each. I also asked what label – Democrat, Republican, Independent or something else, the respondents would attribute to themselves. Whether by attribution or voting history, Democrats outnumbered Republicans. The difference was in the percent of Independents. **There were more voters who had voted Independent than called themselves Independent.**

On the issue of the political orientation of the country, the preponderance of Democrats over Republicans would imply that we are a center-left, or liberal-leaning, country. But when respondents rate themselves on a scale of conservative to liberal, with middle-of-the-road as the in-between category, they line up center-right, or conservative-leaning. My conclusion is that **it is a mistake to assume ideological orientation as closely following party orientation or lack thereof.**

Another notion that I question is that a Democrat, Republican, or Independent is demographically the same no matter where he or she lives and votes. I grouped the states as to whether they had been designated likely Obama or Romney voters, or Tossups, by the RealClearPolitics website. **Voters who call themselves Democrats, Independents and Republicans differ significantly in demographics in the three different blocs of states.**

Given that the majority of voters can be counted on to vote on party line, a minority of at least 25% and possibly as high as 40% will choose a candidate on the basis of his personal characteristics. We asked the respondents to choose between 18 polar adjectives describing personal characteristics they want to see in a President.

- **The most desirable characteristic is honesty; all voters see their candidate as honest**
- **The most divisive characteristic is deep religious conviction**

When asked what contributes most to voters self work,

- **personal relations with others and family, and job performance are most important**
- **politics is the least important facet of the respondents' lives in determining self-worth**
- **the only item on which voters disagree by whom they chose to vote for is religion: important to Romney voters, not to Obama voters**

Obama voters access information about news and politics more than Romney voters, and Undecided voters access less than Romney voters.

Voters generally decide very early whom they will support, and most likely will not change their mind.

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Every four years the United States holds an election to determine who will be the chief executives – President and Vice-President – for the next four years. My purpose in this study was to determine as closely as possible the characteristics of the voters.

- how much Democrats, Independents and Republicans differ from each other in five major demographic variables: Age, Race, Sex, Household Income and Highest Level of Education.
- After that, I wanted to find out how it all played out in the context of how we elect our Presidents. In 2012 much was written about the accuracy of public opinion polls: with the election five days out (November 1, 2012) every poll that tallied the Electoral College Vote was predicting a win for Obama, while polls tallying the overall vote had the two candidates very close in percentage of support: in the six most recently conducted on that date, Romney was leading in two, Obama in two, and two were tied.
 - This led me to ask whether Democrats and Republicans and Independents in different blocs of states – states where Obama was predicted to win vs. those thought to favor Romney vs. the “tossups” – were demographically different in different blocs, and if so, what those differences were

Next I wanted to go beyond demographics, party affiliation and voting record, and delve into how voters decide for whom they are going to vote, including the following questions:

- How do voters value the personal characteristics of a candidate, above and beyond his party affiliation and stands on issues?
- What areas of their lives are most important to voters in determining their own sense of self-worth?
- How important is political ideology – conservative to liberal - regarding social and fiscal issues?
- How important is a voter’s religious affiliation, and religious history?

In addition to these, I asked about family background (U.S. citizenship vs. other), family structure, marital history, involvement in military and law-enforcement, sources of information...and if and when they had decided on their vote for 2012, and how likely were they to change their minds.

The findings below are my attempt to address these issues, and more.

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METHOD:

A questionnaire was constructed by myself, with input from Dr. Roberts, Dr. Hembroff and Ms. Clark. A Microsoft Word version of the questionnaire appears in the Appendix. The questionnaire was designed as a web-instrument. It was administered by Qualtrics, a research organization that provides samples to specification. They use individuals who have volunteered to take surveys online for pay. We specified that we wanted a sample of 1,500 individuals who had voted in at least two previous Presidential elections.

The data-collection began on Saturday, September 1, 2012, immediately following the conclusion of the Democratic Party national convention – which itself followed the Republican Party convention held two weeks before. We decided to wait to be absolutely sure that the party platforms and candidates for President and Vice-President had been specified. Data collection went on for five days, ending on midnight Wednesday, September 5, 2012

We received 1,600 completed questionnaires. After culling for logical inconsistencies we arrived at a dataset of 1,356.

STANDARD SCORE (Z-Score) Conversion

Because I wanted to show how the various voting blocs compare on disparate demographic variables – age, race, sex, income and education – I decided to convert all the data on these variables into what are termed standard scores, or z-scores. The arithmetic for this conversion is very simple. The average over the entire sample is computed, and then subtracted from each score; the result of the subtraction yields a z-score. Thus, if a person scores 7 on a given scale, and the average is 6 and the standard deviation is 2, that would work out to $7 - 6 = +1$, which is then divided by 2 for a standard score of $+0.50$. Similarly, a score of 4 would be computed as $4 - 6 = -2$, divided by 2 to get a standard score of -1 .

This allowed me to construct easy-to-read graphs where a group's deviation from the average would be shown as positive or negative in the same units – standard scores – for age, race, sex, income and education.

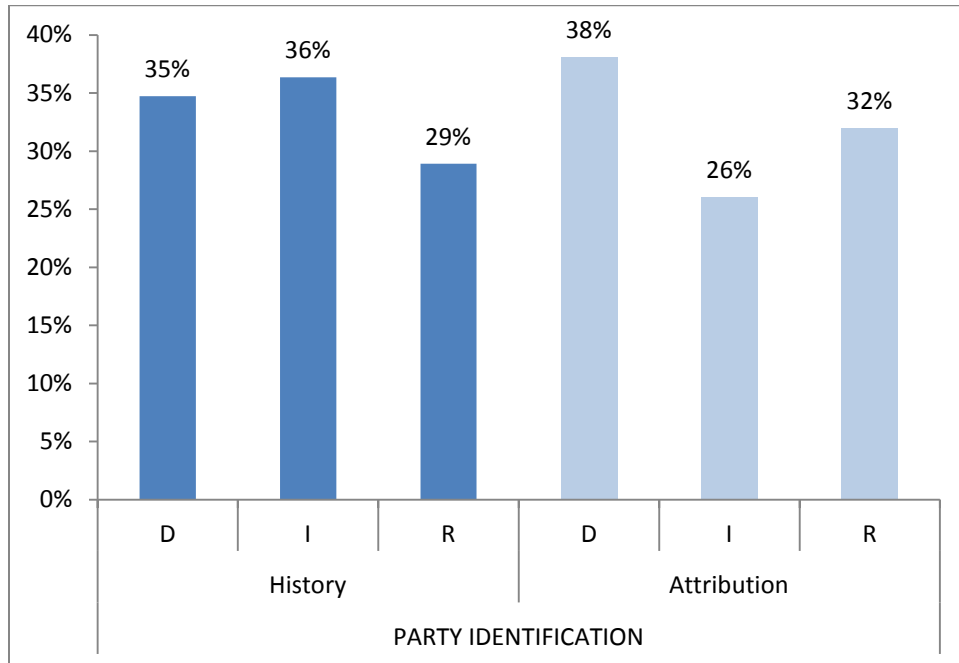
In addition to converting Demographics to z-scores, I did the same with several other measures, as the reader will see in detail.

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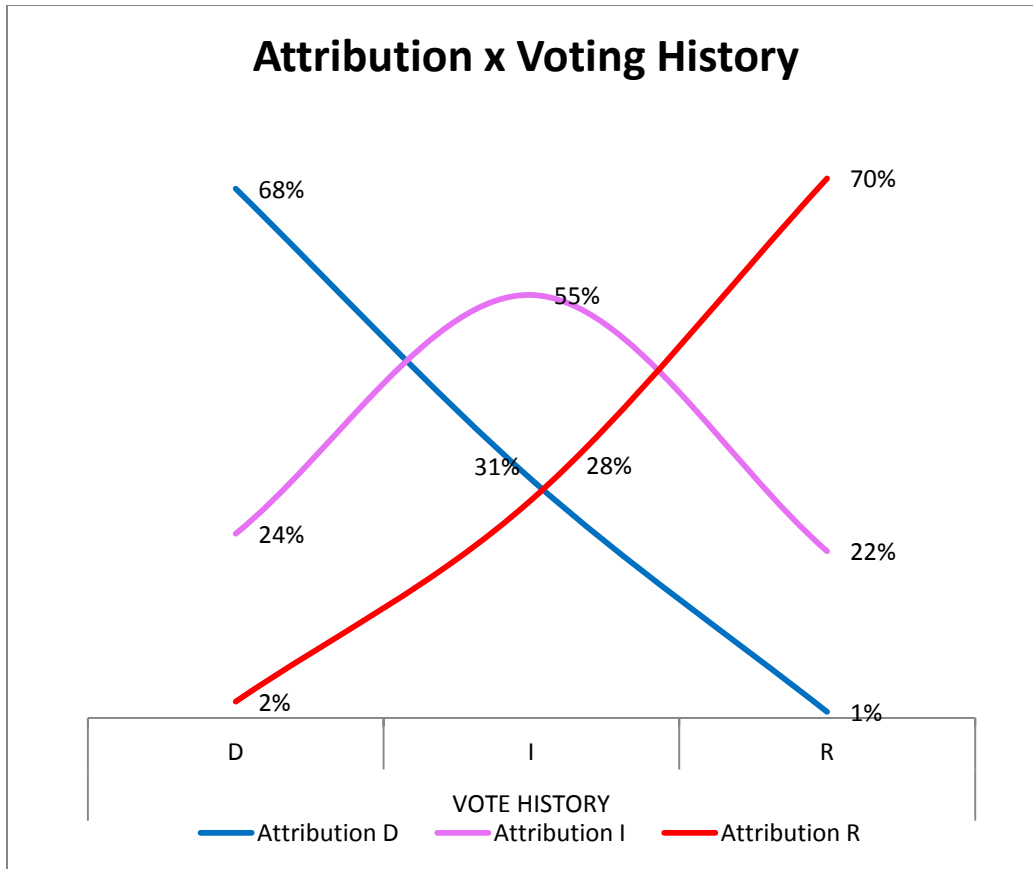
RESULTS

Democrats, Republicans, and Independents: how many of each?

We employed two measures to determine party affiliation; we looked at voting history and asked respondents which label they would feel most comfortable with. In assessing voting history, a record of voting for at least one Democrat and one Republican was called an Independent (I), while a record of voting for only one of the major parties (discounting voting for “Other”) was designated Democrat (D) or Republican (I).



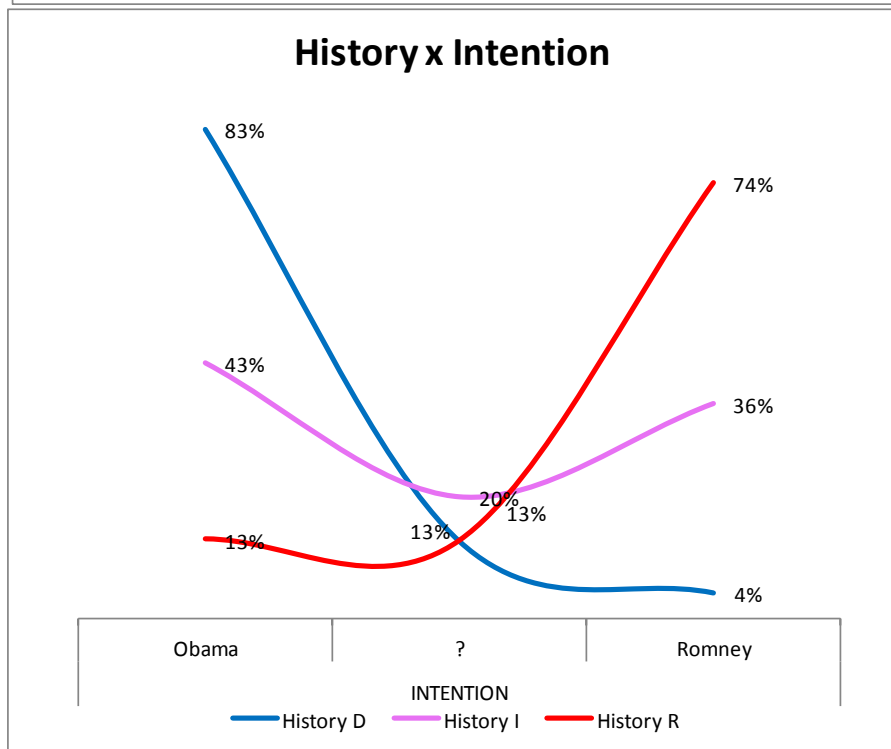
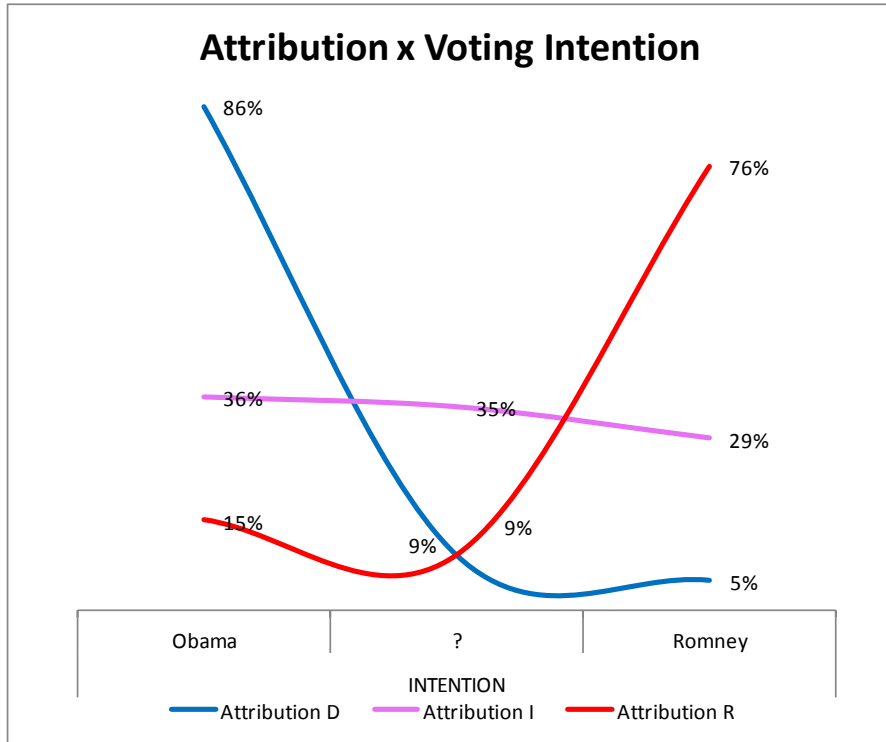
Democrats outnumber Republicans, no matter which way the results are determined. But 36% of the sample have voted for at least one D and one R, compared to 26% of the sample who call themselves Independents.



The chart² above shows the relationship between what voters called themselves on the questionnaire and how they voted. The colored lines represent what they called themselves, the categories on the horizontal scale represent how they voted. It's quite clear that declarations are strongly related to vote history, but the relationship is hardly perfect. 31% of declared Democrats have voted for at least one Republican, and 28% of declared Republicans have voted for at least one Democrat...and 24% of self-attributed Independents have a straight Democratic voting record, while 22% have a straight Republican record.

In the same way, we can classify voters in the sample as intending to vote for Obama, or Romney, or something else – these voters had either expressed indecision, a desire to vote for a third-party candidate, or not vote at all.

² Throughout the report, I have used the color scheme Red / Purple / Blue to refer respectively to: Republicans / Independents / Democrats; Romney voters / Undecideds / Obama voters; and Conservatives / Middle-of-the road / Liberals.



The two charts on this page are noteworthy for two reasons:

First, the similarity of the pattern of voting intentions of Democrats and Republicans: whether declared or determined by voting history Democrats supported their candidate more than the Republicans, and were less willing to support the other party. Both had a similar percentage of undecideds.

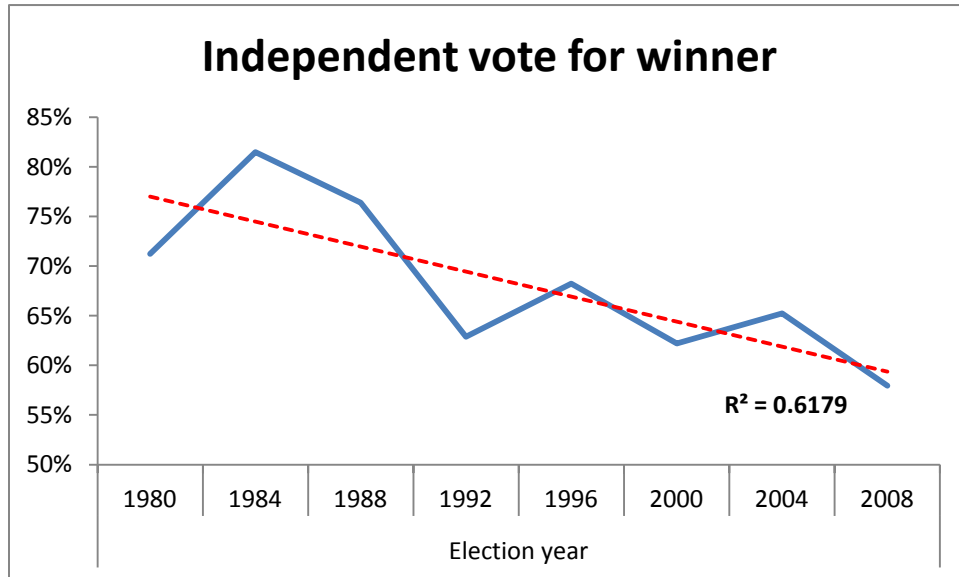
Second, the dissimilarity of Independents in the two charts. Historical were more likely to have made a commitment to vote for either Obama or Romney – although in both cases, they clearly favored Obama.

Since voters with an Independent history are more decisive than declared Independents, I choose to have more confidence in saying that **more than one-third of voters – 36% - who have voting experience are true independents.** A second conclusion, since

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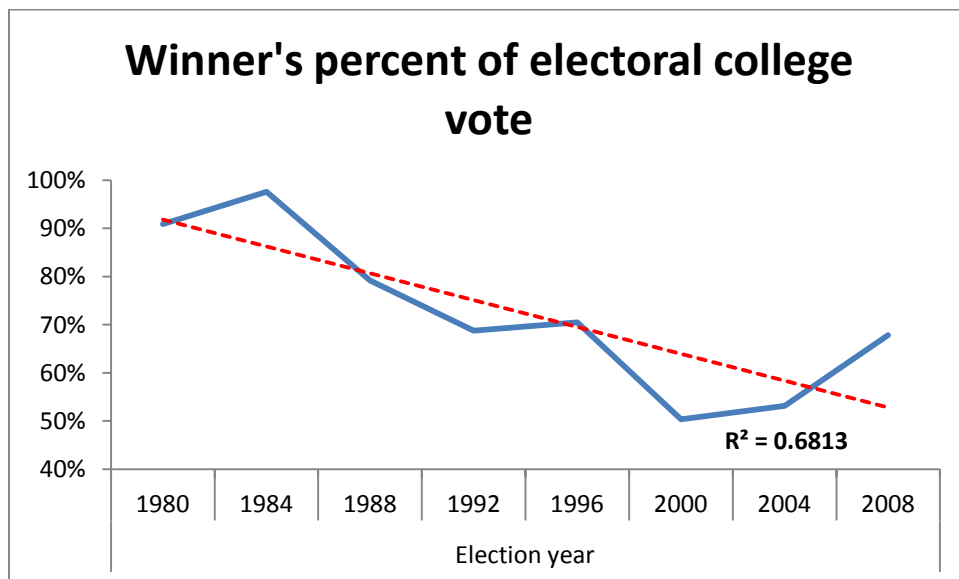
Democrats outnumber Republicans by declaration and history, I conclude that we are a left-center country

It has been stated that winning Presidential elections is often a function of being able to get support from Independent voters. For our sample, that is historically true, but



it was more true 32 years ago than 4 years ago. In fact, over the last eight elections, the correlation (r) between the percentage of Independents who voted for the winner and the year of the elections is strongly negative (-0.79). A useful way to evaluate the influence of a correlation is to square it. Squaring -0.79 yields $+0.62$, which statisticians label R^2 [calculated and displayed on the chart, under the red linear trendline as 0.6179], or the amount of covariance accounted for by the correlation (62%).

However...



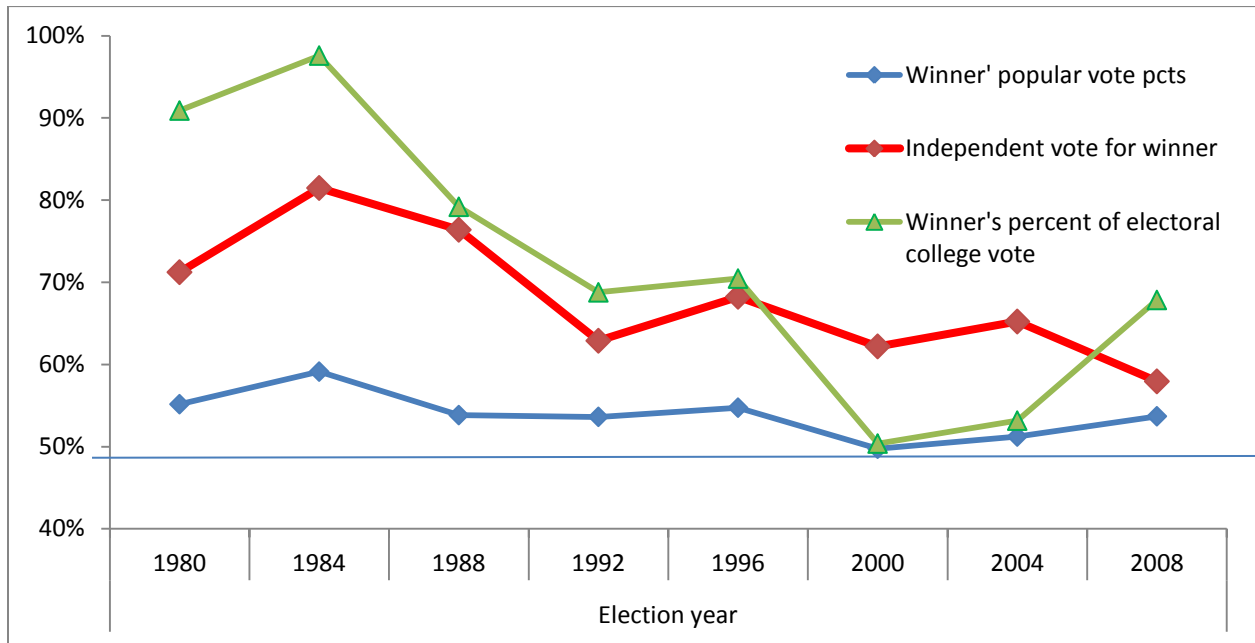
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the correlation between the winner's electoral college vote and the election year is -0.83 (R^2 68%).

Finally, the correlation between the winner's percentage and the independent percent for the winner is $+0.77$. All this taken together means we can conclude that:

THE SPLIT AMONG INDEPENDENT VOTERS IS CLOSELY RELATED TO THE SPLIT IN THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE.

This piqued my curiosity. What is the correlation between year and *popular* vote totals? That turns out to be strongly negative, as well, but $[-0.064]$ lower than the previous correlations. What is the relationship between popular vote totals and the independent and electoral college percentage?



All three are going down over time, but Electoral College percentages show the greatest variability (standard deviation $\sigma=0.17$, and popular vote is the most stable [$\sigma=0.03$]).

	AVERAGE	HIGH	LOW
POPULAR	53.9%	59.1%	49.7%
INDEPENDENT	68.2%	81.5%	57.9%
ECV	72.3%	97.6%	50.4%

Given the numbers in the table at left, I would conclude that **THE INDEPENDENT VOTE IS THE BEST PREDICTOR OF THE ELECTION OUTCOME.**

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DISCLAIMER

Although the data were collected well in advance of the election, the sample **by design** was not a representative sample of the electorate, since only voters who had participated in at least two previous elections – and would have to be a minimum of 26 years old – I would not have made a prediction based on the sample in any conventional way.

But...I expected an Obama win for the following reasons:

1. In the eighteen elections in my lifetime (b. 1940), there have been nine incumbents who have run for election without significant opposition for renomination, and all have won. Three incumbents (Ford, Carter, and GHW Bush) were challenged (by Reagan, EM Kennedy, and Perot) and lost. Obama is running as an incumbent with no challenges to his nomination
2. Democrats were more likely to vote for Obama than Republicans were to vote for Romney. That is another indication, one which is not based on counting Republicans and Democrats, but has to do with enthusiasm
3. Independent voters in the sample were slightly in favor of Obama
4. 20% of the sample who supported McCain in 2008 said they would vote for Obama in 2012, vs. 11% of 2008 Obama voters who said they were now willing to vote for Romney
5. Several different websites (RealClearPolitics, HuffingtonPost, FiveThirtyEight, etc., etc.) have computed Electoral College Outcomes. At no time has any one predicted anything but a win for Obama

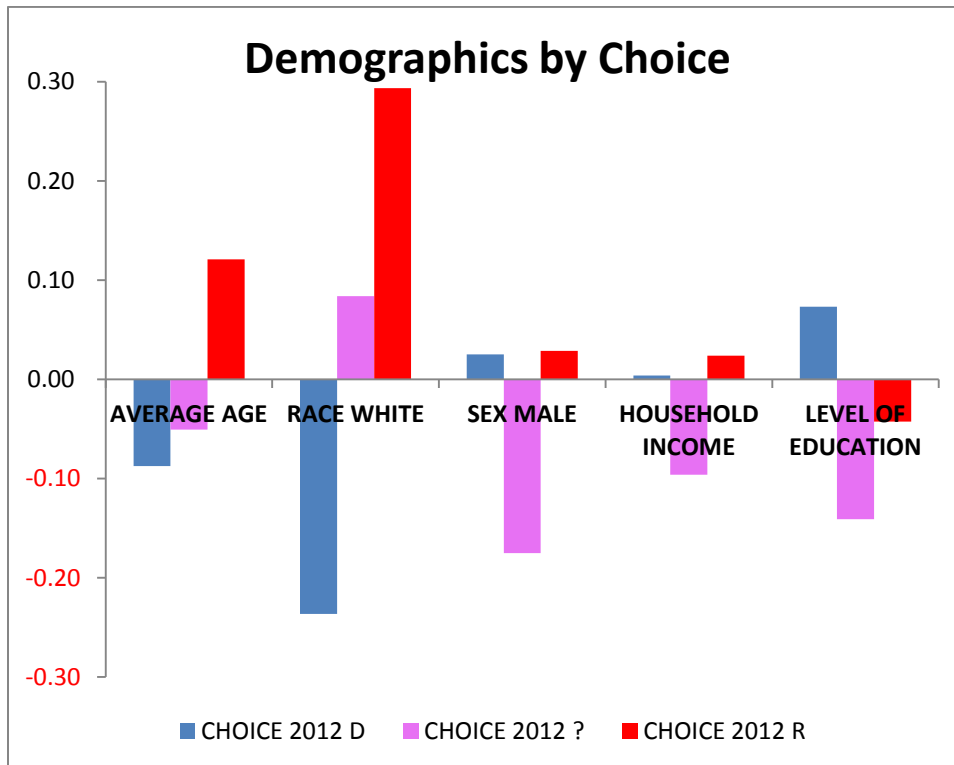
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DEMOGRAPHICS AND CHOICE

Having settled my earlier concern about party identification, the next step was to work on the descriptions of the **three voter groups: Obama (D), Romney (R), and Undecided (?)**.

As stated in the introduction, I converted all of the metrics of demography – age, race, sex, income and education – into z-scores, so that each group can be displayed as how their value compares with the sample.

Starting with age, we find that...



The greatest difference between Obama and Romney is race. Romney voters much more likely to be white, older, and somewhat less educated. The undecideds fell between the D and R voters in age and sex, and were the lowest in males in the group, income, and education.

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Here is the table of z-scores from which the chart is constructed.

	CHOICE 2012		
	D	?	R
AVERAGE AGE	-0.09	-0.05	0.12
RACE WHITE	-0.24	0.08	0.29
SEX MALE	0.03	-0.18	0.03
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	0.00	-0.10	0.02
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	0.07	-0.14	-0.04
Correlation w/?	-0.96	1.00	0.94

The bottom row shows the calculation of the correlation coefficient between the Undecideds (?) and the Democratic and Republican voters. Obviously, the Undecided pattern is very similar to the Republican, and virtually the mirror image of the Democratic pattern.

But I must caution here that generalizations about a single, specific demographic group are specious and misleading. Take, for example, the statement that women preferred Obama. Really?

- 94% of women who have been loyal Republican voters to vote for Romney
- 96% of loyal Democrat women intended to vote for Obama, and
- 51% of women who had an Independent voting record went for Romney.

That works out to a 49.6667 to 50.3333 edge for Obama. In other words, gender is trumped by previous voting record. The “women prefer Obama” stat is due to distribution: In the sample, 43% of women were loyal Democrats, vs. 26% s Republicans, and 31% Independents.

Obama did have an advantage with nonwhites, but it wasn't as strong as one might imagine. Of the 8% nonwhites who were loyal Republicans, 78% chose Romney. Not as Loyal as women, but 78% of male Republican loyalists chose Romney...the same percentage as nonwhites. Obama got 95% of the male loyal Democrat vote, and 59% of the male Independents voted for Obama.

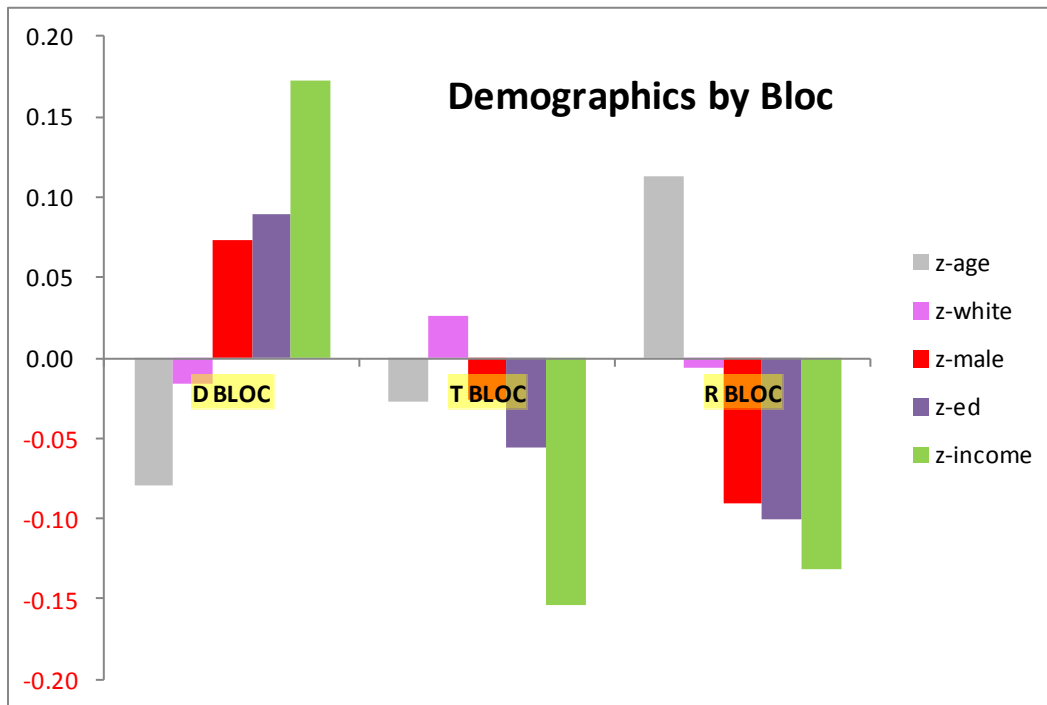
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DEMOGRAPHICS IN STATE BLOCS

Presidential elections are determined on the basis of the Electoral College³, where each state gets a proportional number of votes, with no state getting fewer than three. There are a total of 538 votes, and it takes a majority – 270 or more – for a candidate to win. On October 30th, 2012

- Democrats were expected⁴ to win in 17 states with a total of 201 Electoral College Votes (ECV)
- Republicans were counting on 24 state wins totaling 197 ECV, and
- 10 states, with 140 ECV, were called Tossups.

I wanted to investigate the demographic characteristics of voters in the three blocs of states.



To my eye, the most noticeable aspect of differing demographics in the blocs is that the D (Democratic Party) bloc shows opposite demographics from the R (Republican Party) bloc in age, male voters, education and income. Both show a slight under-representation of whites. Voters in the tossup states are in the same direction as R-bloc voters in income, education and sex, and in the same direction as D-bloc voters only

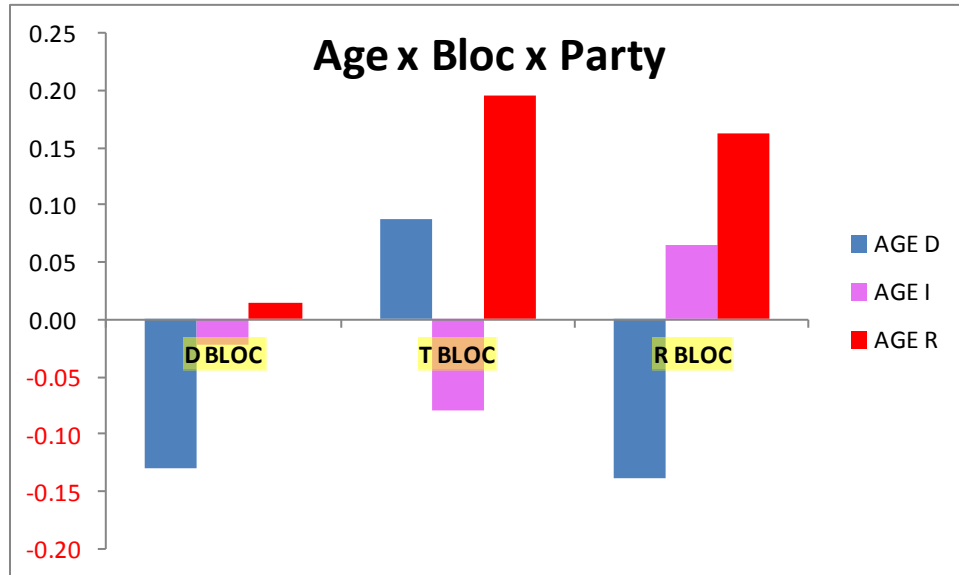
³ In the seven months between the time Mitt Romney secured the de facto nomination of his party and the election, more than 400 published polls asked an average of 700 people – roughly 280,000 - all across the country the same question: if the election was held today, would you vote for Obama or Romney? Journalists debated the importance of the popular vote as if they did not understand that we do not elect Presidents by counting all the ballots in all the states in one lump, and anointing the man who gets the most as President. Ask President Gore.

⁴ According to RealClearPolitics.com, a Republican leaning website.

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Next we can examine the demographics – age, race, sex, income and education - of the people who call themselves Democrats, Independents and Republicans in the three voting blocs.

AGE

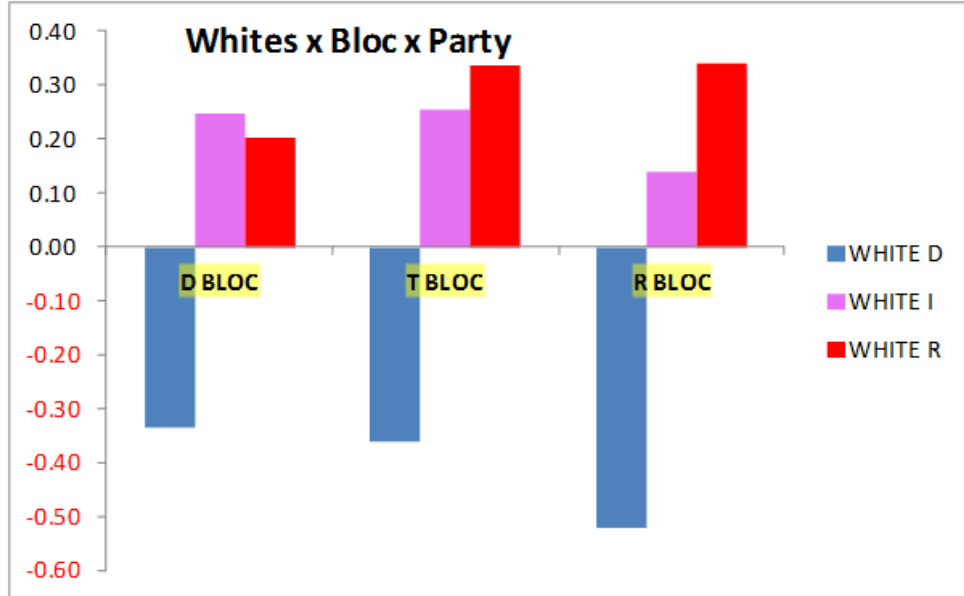


When it comes to age, Democrats, Republicans and Independents vary dramatically from bloc to bloc

- Democrats in the tossup states are older than the sample average, but younger in the D and R blocs
- Republicans are much older in the T (Tossup) and R bloc states than in the D bloc states
- Independents are older in the R states, younger in the T states, and close to the sample mean in the D states

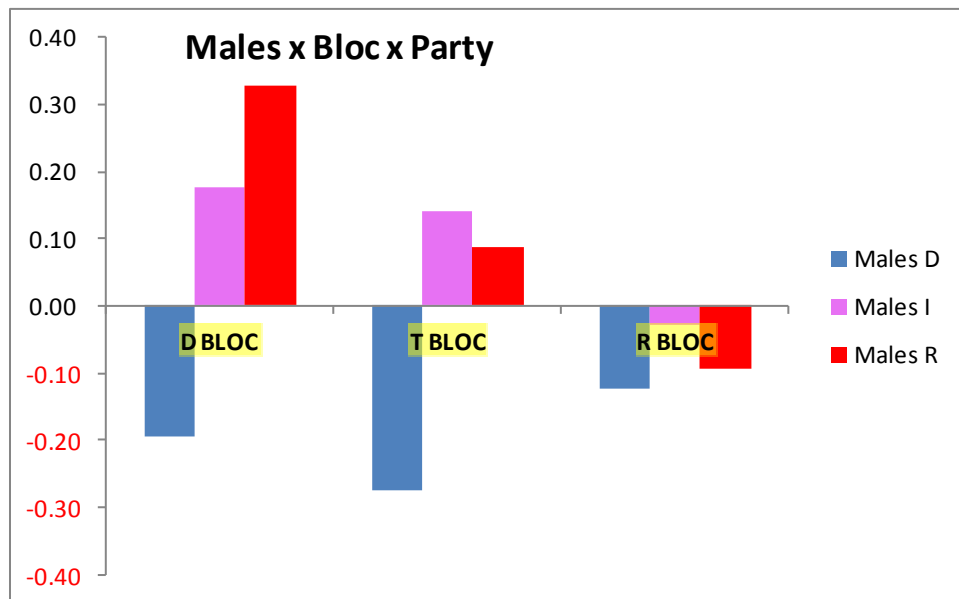
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RACE



Here, the differences are virtually nonexistent. Democrats tend to be nonwhite in every bloc, but more so in R bloc states; Republicans are predominantly white in all states, as are Independents.

SEX

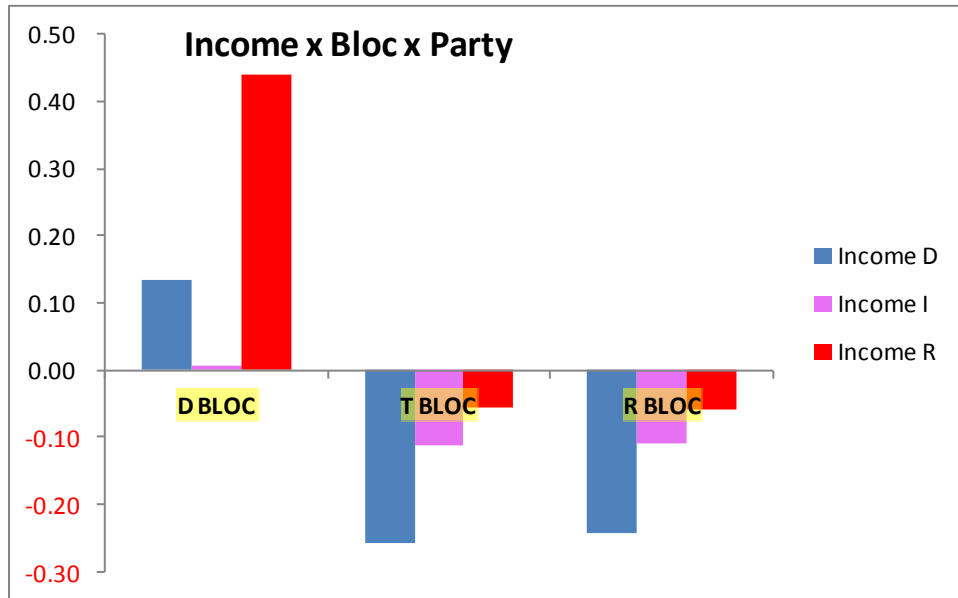


Here we have a clear differentiation between two patterns

- Democrat voters have a lower percentage of males in all blocs
- Republicans are overwhelmingly male in D bloc states, still above the line in T bloc states, and slightly on the distaff side in R bloc states – and so, to a lesser extent, are Independent voters

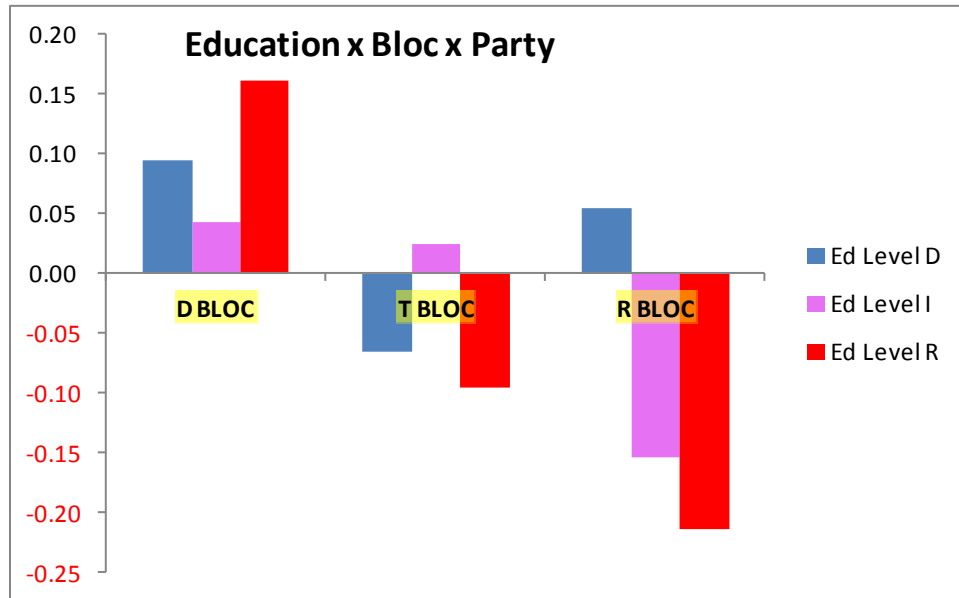
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INCOME



Another unique pattern. Republicans are very wealthy in D-bloc, Democrats are also above the line, but nowhere near the extent of the Republicans. In the T and R blocs, all the voters are below the mean, Democrats more than twice as poor as Independents and more than three times poorer than Republicans.

EDUCATION



All parties, but especially Republicans, are above the line in the D bloc states. The level of education of Republicans drops below the sample average in the T bloc states, and is the lowest value of all in the R bloc states. Independents follow the Republican pattern, but are closer to the average in all blocs.

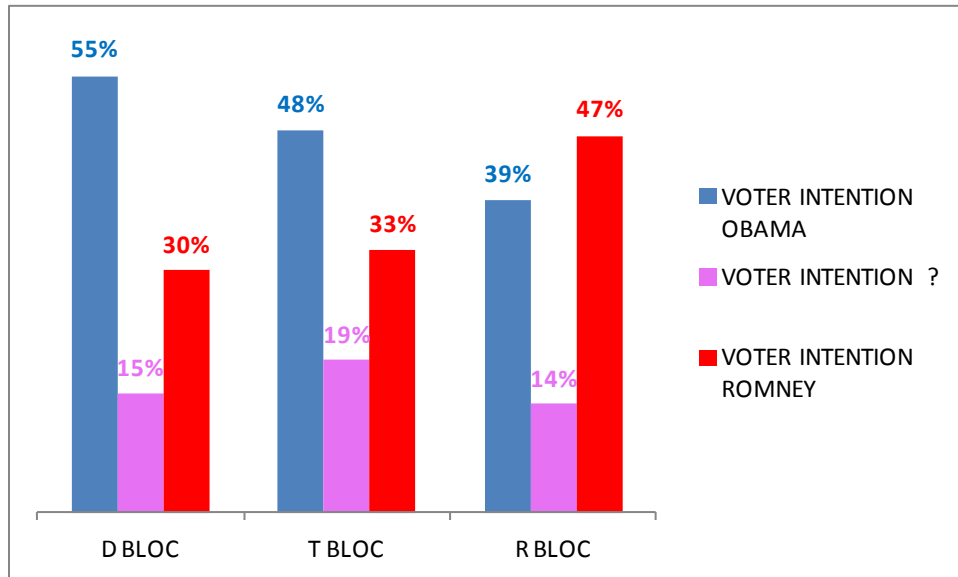
The conclusion is that, with the exception of race, the demographics of self-labeled Republicans and Democrats and Independents vary according to where they live.

We should note, now that the election is over, that every D bloc state went for Obama and every R bloc state went for Romney. The demographics in the tossup states were closer to those in the Republican states in age, education, and income, not close to either party in sex, and all three showed the same pattern on race. So the logical prediction would be that a majority of those tossups would be won by Romney.

And yet, Romney won North Carolina, Obama won the other nine.

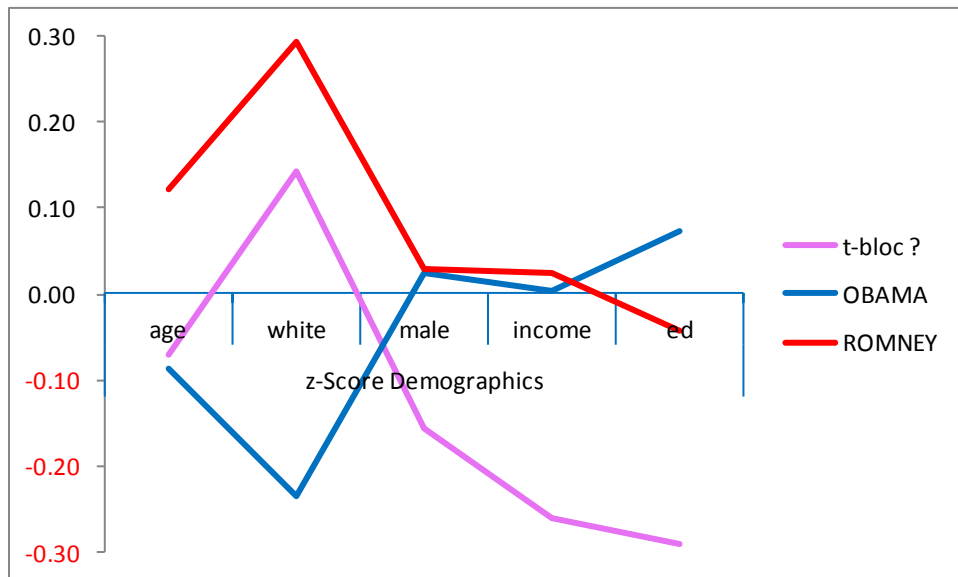
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Looking at the undecided voters in the different blocs,



The chart shows that 81% of the voters in the T bloc favored Obama by 15%, more than Romney's margin over Obama in the R bloc and less than Obama's margin in the D bloc.

Finally, we can ignore the D and R blocs, and the Voters who had decided in the T bloc and just peruse the demographics of the Undecideds in the T bloc.



The chart indicates that the t-bloc undecideds are about the same age as all the Obama voters in the sample, more likely to be white, which puts them closer to the Romney voters, but much more likely to be female, poor and less educated than all of the Decideds. **Taken together with the 15% T bloc Obama advantage, the Undecideds would have had to split 17:2 just to make a tie between Obama and Romney.**

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

PERSON PERCEPTION I asked the voters what they wanted the President to be as a person, not a politician.

The question about personal characteristics was worded as follows:

For the next question, we ask that you state your preferences for personal characteristics of a President, REGARDLESS OF THE CANDIDATE’S PARTY AFFILIATION OR STANDS ON ISSUES. You may choose by clicking on the button closest to your preference. For example, if the choice was Right Handed vs. Left Handed, and you were completely in favor of a right handed candidate, you would select the button closest to right handed:

Right handed **X** O O O O O Left handed If you were just slightly in favor of a right handed candidate, you would select the button that was two buttons away from right handed:

Right handed O O **X** O O O Left handed

If you were completely in favor of a left handed candidate you would select the button closest to left handed:

Right handed O O O O O **X** Left handed

For each of the following personal characteristics of a President, REGARDLESS OF THE CANDIDATE’S PARTY AFFILIATION OR STANDS ON ISSUES, please rate based on your preference. Notice that there is no "No preference" - if you can't say you have any preference, just leave that item unchecked.

The polar opposites were...

Older:Younger, Highly educated:Less educated, Born poor:Born to wealth, Served in military:Never served, Male:Female, Deeply religious:Irreligious, Truthful:Untruthful, Changeable:Constant, Single:Married, Nonwhite:White, Homosexual:Heterosexual, Playful:Serious, Good looking:Average or less in appearance, Aloof:Engaging, Pessimistic:Optimistic, Held elective office:Newcomer to politics, Tall:Short, Planful:Impulsive

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

The table below shows the value placed on the eighteen selected qualities.

QUALITY	CHOICE 2012			WEIGHT
	D	?	R	
Truthful	71%	68%	71%	70%
Optimistic	51%	51%	55%	52%
Engaging	51%	49%	49%	50%
Highly educated	56%	40%	49%	48%
Heterosexual	36%	47%	59%	47%
Planful	39%	40%	48%	42%
Married	37%	32%	44%	38%
Held elective office	27%	16%	27%	23%
Constant	17%	18%	29%	21%
Serious	12%	18%	31%	20%
White	4%	21%	28%	18%
Male	14%	11%	27%	18%
Tall	15%	12%	14%	14%
Served in military	-2%	9%	30%	14%
Deeply religious	-4%	6%	30%	13%
Born poor	20%	17%	-1%	12%
Older	-8%	10%	13%	10%
Good looking	8%	-2%	0%	3%

A negative number (red) means that the opposite quality was valued higher. The WEIGHT column is the average of the three absolute values, and the table is sorted on a descending scale of weight. The only qualities where there is a difference of opinion between voter groups are the five lowest in weight.

While each of the qualities deserves scrutiny⁵, the most valued quality for all voters is truthfulness. The values for truthfulness expressed by loyal and switch voters is shown in this table. It shows that party loyal voters place a higher value on truthfulness in the candidate than those who switch.

	12 Romney	12 Obama
08 Obama	52%	71%
08 McCain	74%	66%

Note that the difference between Republican and Democratic Party loyal voters is 3%, but there is a 14% gap between the voters who switch to Obama from McCain and those who go from Obama to Romney.

One of the features of the campaign – which began in earnest after these data were collected – was an attempt by both sides to portray the other candidate as less than truthful. Taken with the data describing the personal characteristics of switchers, the investigation of desired characteristics indicated that **the single most important quality desired by the American voters in 2012 was honesty.**

⁵ Appendix A treats each of the eighteen attributes in detail.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

In my opinion – and that’s all I have – 2012 was not a unique year. We say we want honesty, and we make judgments of honesty both objectively – the individual is proven to be a liar – and subjectively – we pick up cues from facial expressions, voice patterns, body language.

In addition, we conflate honesty with other characteristics. For example, the least valued characteristic of all is “good looking”⁶, with an average weight (absolute) of 3%. It is also the only characteristic of the eighteen which is valued positively, negatively and not at all by the three voting groups. There is a significant body of research – literally hundreds of studies⁷ - that point to the fact that even a fleeting glance of a 100 milliseconds at two unfamiliar faces followed by an answer to the question, “Which face did you like better, the one on the left or the one on the right?” was sufficient to predict which of two candidates for political office won his or her race between 65% and 80% of the time – even when the judgment is made by a five-year old, or by an adult from Europe looking at pictures of local American election contestants.

These judgments are beyond those observations of facial and linguistic expression and posture. Facial quality – which has been objectively measured and catalogued – is a genetic endowment. We want, very much, to believe what “good looking” people say, because honesty is good. At the same time, we want to believe that a person’s appearance is a trivial characteristic of leadership, but that belief is a denial of biological fact.

In many ways, whether we are novices or experts, we put our trust in our instinctual responses to appearances in general and faces in particular.

Consider the influence of Sabermetrics. Over the past fifteen years, the value of baseball players has moved in the direction of the analysis of statistical metrics away from the judgment of scouts, managers, and other experts. But resistance is prevalent, and is rooted in illogic. Even simple, indisputable facts are ignored. And this extends to strategy as well.

For example, there is the matter of the sacrifice bunt in baseball. With less than two outs and a runner on first base, a manager may call for the batter to bunt – hit the ball softly – so that the runner can safely advance to second base, while the batter is thrown out at first. There is overwhelming evidence that in the bunt/no bunt situation just described, the runner is less likely to score if the batter bunts than if he doesn’t. And the logic is simple: if a runner is on second base, he is more likely to score if there are no outs than if there is one, and more likely to score if there is one out than if there are two. Bunting is a way of almost always giving up an out to advance the runner. After all, there are ways the runner can advance without giving up an out; the batter can hit safely or be given a base on balls, the runner can steal second, the pitcher can make a wild pitch or commit a balk, but none of these can happen if one bunts. Even if the baseball “expert” accepts the logic, he’ll say that you should bunt occasionally, because sometimes it will work.

⁶ I purposely used this wording, rather than handsome or beautiful, to leave the definition of the term up to the respondents.

⁷ A review of this literature is in Appendix A

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Rational thinking leads one away from this belief. If I know a coin is biased in favor of tails I will call tails for every toss of the coin. It doesn't matter if the bias in 100 tosses is 51-49 in favor of tails, or 65-35, or 99-1, it never makes sense to bet on the less likely alternative.

For this reason, I am not hopeful that many readers of this report will accept the theory that, once you get past the indeterminate number of voters who are always going to vote for their party, the decision of which candidate to support becomes more a matter of who the person seems to be than what the person proposes to do.

Before we leave the eighteen characteristics⁸ here is another ordering of the results.

QUALITY	CHOICE 2012			High-Low
	D	?	R	
Deeply religious	-4%	6%	30%	0.34
Served in military	-2%	9%	30%	0.32
White	4%	21%	28%	0.24
Heterosexual	36%	47%	59%	0.23
Older	-8%	10%	13%	0.21
Born poor	20%	17%	-1%	0.21
Serious	12%	18%	31%	0.20
Male	14%	11%	27%	0.17
Highly educated	56%	40%	49%	0.16
Constant	17%	18%	29%	0.12
Married	37%	32%	44%	0.12
Held elective office	27%	16%	27%	0.11
Good looking	8%	-2%	0%	0.10
Planful	39%	40%	48%	0.09
Optimistic	51%	51%	55%	0.04
Tall	15%	12%	14%	0.03
Truthful	71%	68%	71%	0.02
Engaging	51%	49%	49%	0.02

In this table, the qualities are sorted from the greatest to smallest discrepancy⁹ between the high and low scores, regardless of total weight. The six qualities at the top of the table are the most divisive – depth of religious belief, military service, race, sexual orientation, circumstances of birth. In each one, the contrast of high and low is between Obama and Romney voters – the undecideds produce the median value. Only one – how deep is the candidate's religiosity – of the most divisive is a matter of judgment; the rest can be objectively measured. And in five of the six, the winning candidate's supporters produced the lowest value.

⁸ I do not think this is "the definitive list" – it's just what I happened to pull together one morning.

⁹ I label this "Divisiveness"

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

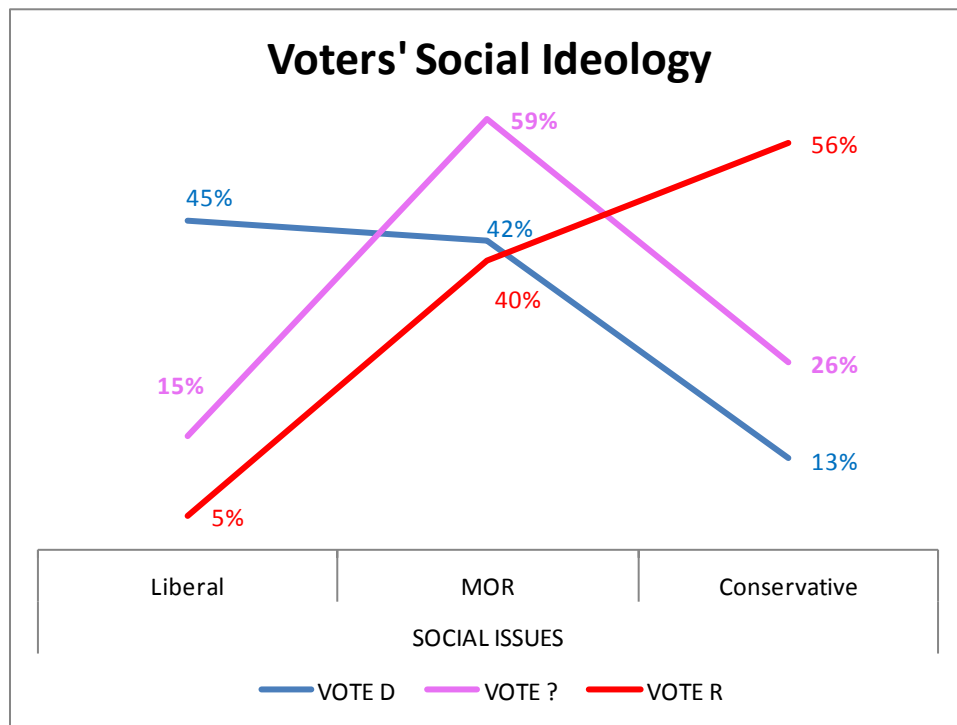
At the low end of the scale, there is good agreement, and only one quality – the height of the candidate – can be objectively measured. In four of the bottom six, Obama voters produced the highest value.

IDEOLOGY:

The questionnaire posed the question, “Which category best describes your views on financial and social issues?” and the respondent could choose to answer “Very Conservative / Conservative / Lean to Conservative / Middle of the Road / Lean to Liberal / Liberal / Very Liberal.

I wanted to simplify the issue to roughly correspond to the three-label Party Attribution (Democrat, Independent, Republican), so I collapsed the categories Very Conservative and Conservative, Liberal and Very Liberal, to define the endpoints, and then put the leaners and middle-of-the-road together.

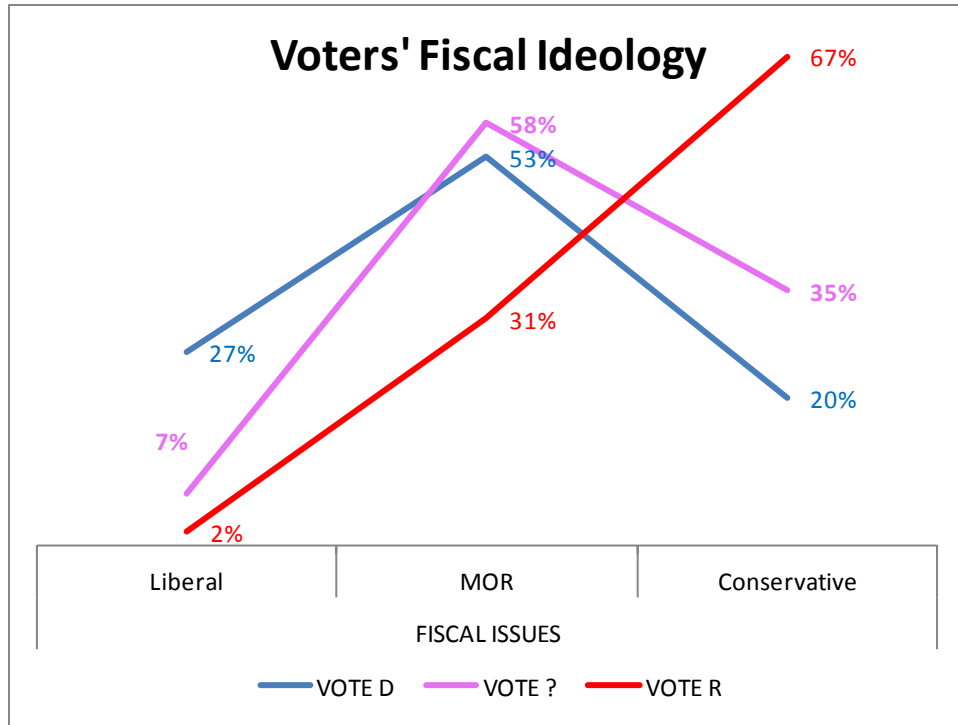
Here is how the respondents who had decided to vote for either Romney or Obama were distributed on the scale of social ideology.



The social ideologies of Obama voters and Romney voters are nearly mirror images of each other. The undecided voters look more like Romney voters at the Liberal end, and more like Obama voters at the Conservative end – but they are primarily Middle-of-the-Road. The Romney voters approach a straight line more than the Obama voters, indicating a more deeply-felt, or stricter, ideology.

My conclusion from the distribution of social ideology is that Undecideds broke close to even between Obama and Romney.

The fiscal ideology chart shows some similarity, and some differences, from the social voting graph.



Again, the undecided voters are more like the Romney supporters at the Liberal end, more like the Obama supporters at the Conservative end. The Romney voter distribution is even steeper – more doctrinaire – than the social chart. But the major difference is that both Obama voters and Undecideds have clear majorities in the center, or MOR. Away from the center, the Undecided voters are tilt sharply Conservative (a 1:5 ratio of Liberal to Conservative) where the Obama voters lean very slightly Liberal (a 1.35:1 Liberal to Conservative ratio).

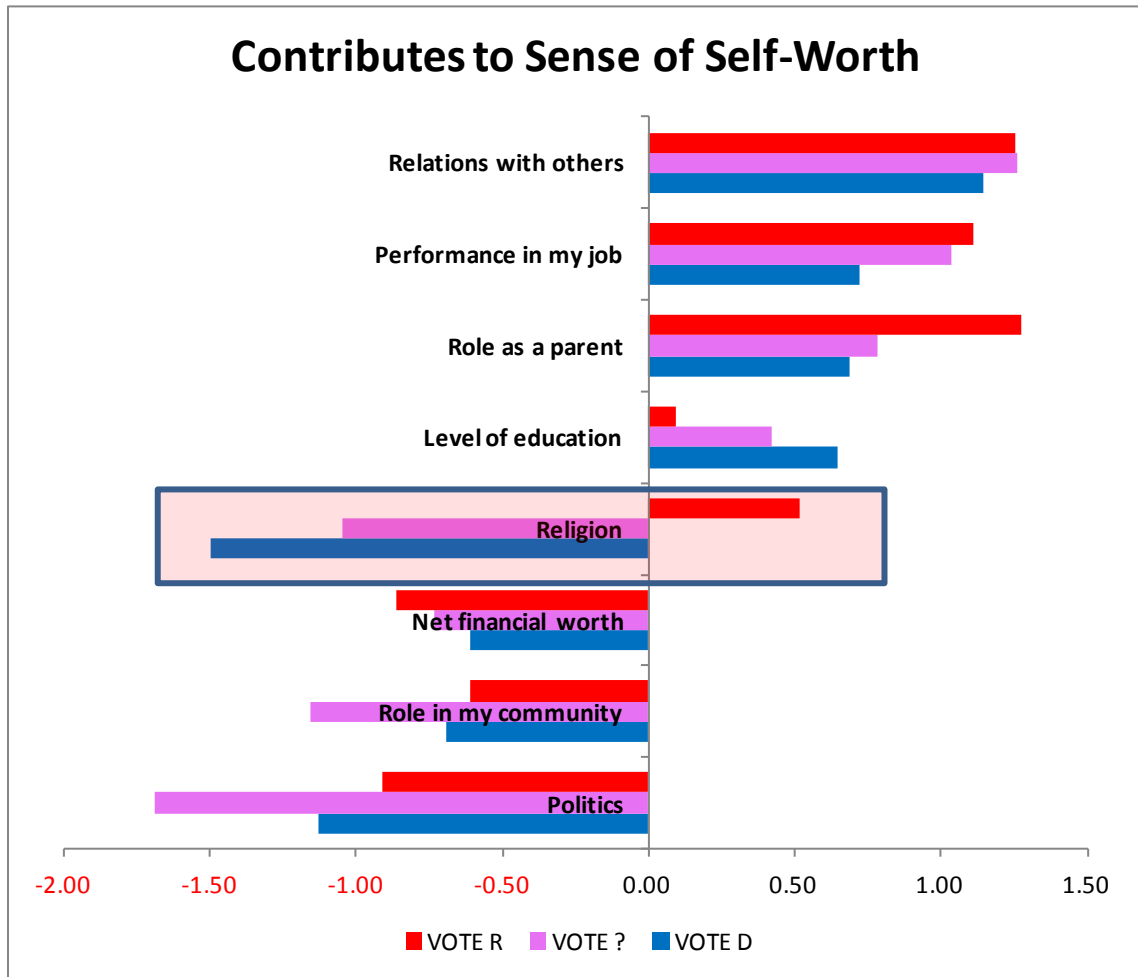
My conclusion from the distribution of fiscal ideology is that Undecideds broke strongly for Obama: the patterns, with a majority of each in the MOR, is one factor; logically, those who start out with an indeterminate viewpoint will be less likely to move to an extreme ideology. The undecided had 35% in the conservative end, 15% away from the Obama voters, 32% away from the Romney voters. No voter group had a majority in the Liberal end in either chart, so that would **support the claim that we are, indeed, a center-right nation.**

More importantly, although there is a near equivalency between ideology and political party among politicians, that relationship does not hold for the voters. Voters' party affiliations lean Democratic, by both voting record and self-attribution, but their ideologies lean Conservative, no matter whom they choose to support with their votes.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

PERSONAL WORTH

We asked the respondents, “How much do the areas of your life listed below contribute to your sense of self-worth?” The list included the eight The response set was Very Important (+1)/ Somewhat Important (0), and Not Important at All (-1). The respondents saw only the response words, not the numbers. I computed averages (they were all positive) then converted them to z-scores to show the relative weight placed on each aspect of self-worth determinants.



The chart is sorted on a descending scale of the relative contribution of each area of the respondents’ lives that contribute to their feelings of self worth.

- The shaded value, Religion, is the only area where Romney voters are on one side, the positive side, and the Obama voters are on the negative side. Recall the chart of desirable qualities, and the most divisive of those qualities...

QUALITY	CHOICE 2012		
	D	?	R
Deeply religious	-4%	6%	30%

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

If nothing else, the notion that religion being a critical divide is reinforced by this finding, and again by the mirror-image of Obama and Romney voters on social ideology.

Finally, it is hard to argue against the premise that voters want to support people who share their values. In the way these questions are answered, they are expressing a desire to be like and liked by and like-minded with their leaders¹⁰.

- Politics is at the bottom – least important to self worth – for all voters. Hard as it is to believe for those of us who pay attention to the next election a week after the last one is over, but politics is the last item on this list.
- The voters derive the greatest amount of self-worth from their relations with people they know, work with, and are related to.

¹⁰ I must make a personal observation and full disclosure at this point. My voting history is not that of a party loyalist. I've done it all, voted for Democrat and Republican losers and winners, third party candidates (three of them) and sat one out, not because I didn't have a preference, but because the result was never in doubt. I read and listen and watch from both the far-left and far-right.

Just as managers won't give up the bunt, the far-right spokespersons – Limbaugh, Hannity, Beck, O'Reilly, Buchanan etc. – don't seem to understand that you don't win elections by telling the people who didn't vote the way you want or agree completely – "megadittoes, Rush" – that they are lazy, stupid, un-American moochers. Or write off 47% of the electorate as takers. Voters, not corporations, are people, and they want to be addressed as such.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE (Continued)

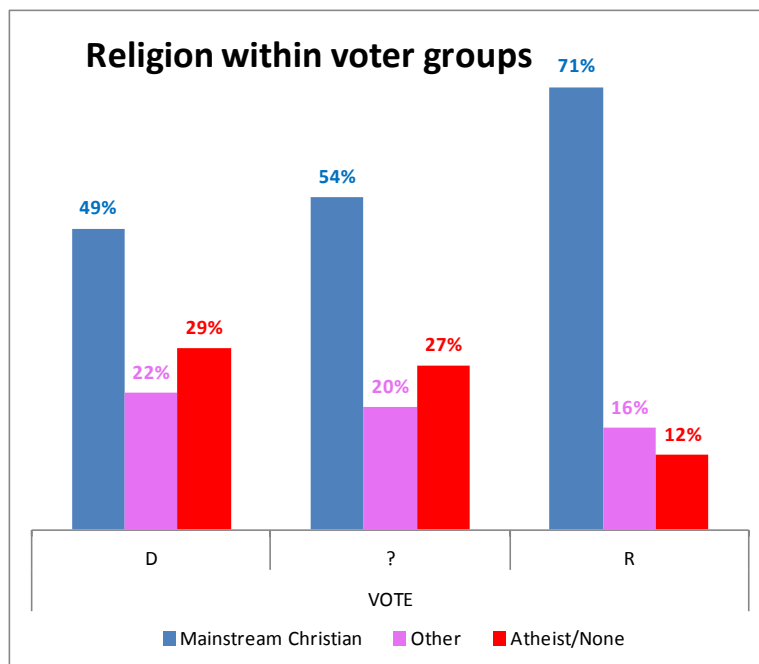
The respondents saw the item,

“To what religious faith or discipline do you adhere now?”

The possible responses were:

- Agnostic/Atheist
- Roman/Eastern Rite Catholic
- Protestant
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Mormon
- Other
- None

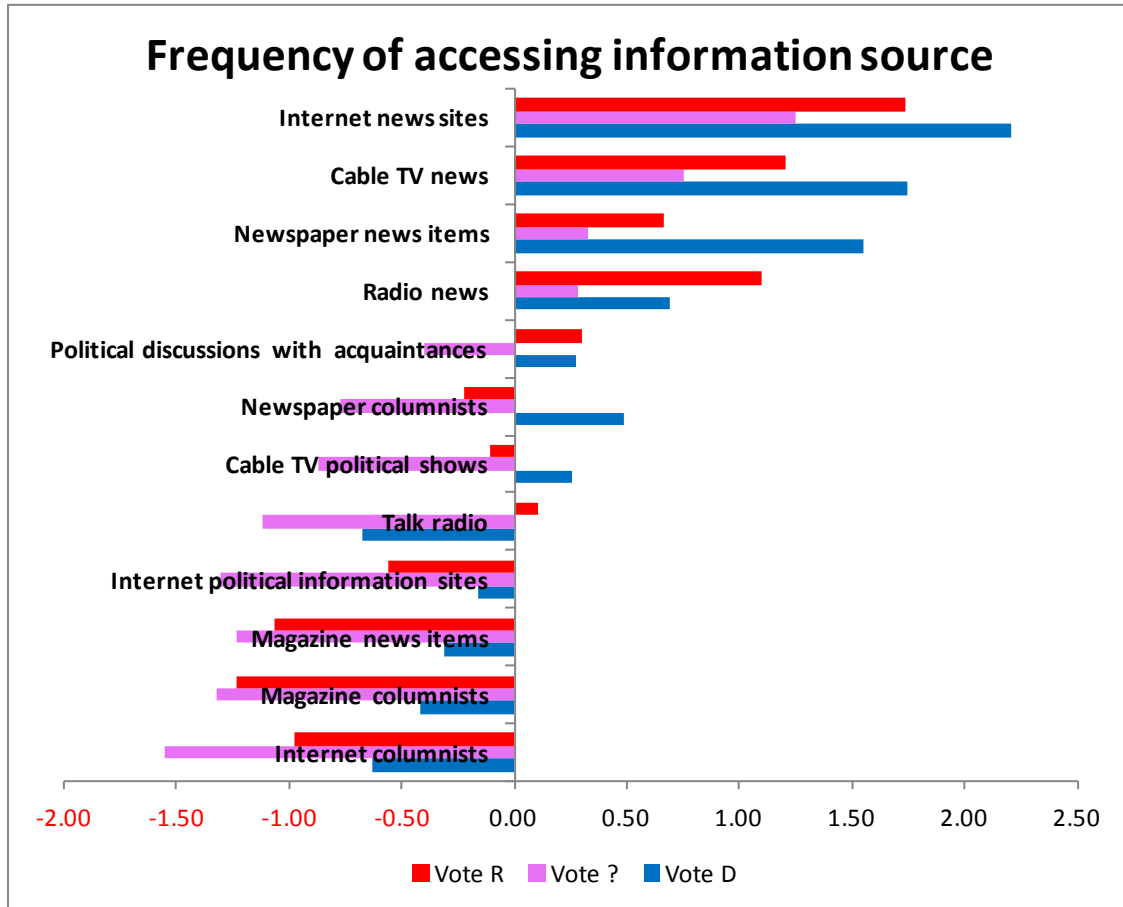
I grouped Catholic and Protestant as “Mainstream Christian”, Jewish, Muslim, Mormon and Other as “Other”, and nonbelievers and none as “Atheist/None” in the chart below.



Yet another illustration of the religious divide, but seen here as makeup of the voter groups. As one moves from left to right, Obama to Romney, mainstream Christian membership rises precipitously, and atheism, agnosticism and no religion cited drop just as steeply, as do the “Other” religions.

INFORMATION ACCESS

We asked how frequently, on a seven point scale, voters accessed eight different information sources¹¹, and converted the average scale values into z-scores. Here is the distribution.



The graph is sorted descending top to bottom by the total sample average z-scores. The top three items have an average z-score of +1.27, and the voter group that accesses each of those most often are the Obama voters. The Undecided voters see those sources least frequently.

¹¹ Every study contains at least one serious mistake. I hardly ever watch TV news (except for Cable) and so I neglected to include that source!

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Since these are z-scores, which are defined as having a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one, we can add across all the categories to get a sense of how much the different voter groups get information.

	z-Access
Vote D	5.00
Vote ?	-5.95
Vote R	0.95
Sample	0.00

The sample frequency is properly computed as zero (sample average minus sample average divided by anything is going to be zero). Overall, the undecided voters show very little effort at getting information. Romney voters lead in access to Radio news, Political discussions with acquaintances, and Talk radio, Obama voters lead in the other nine sources.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

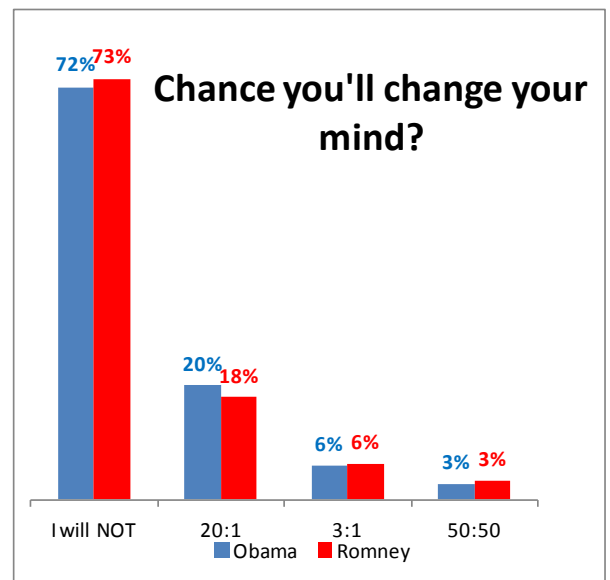
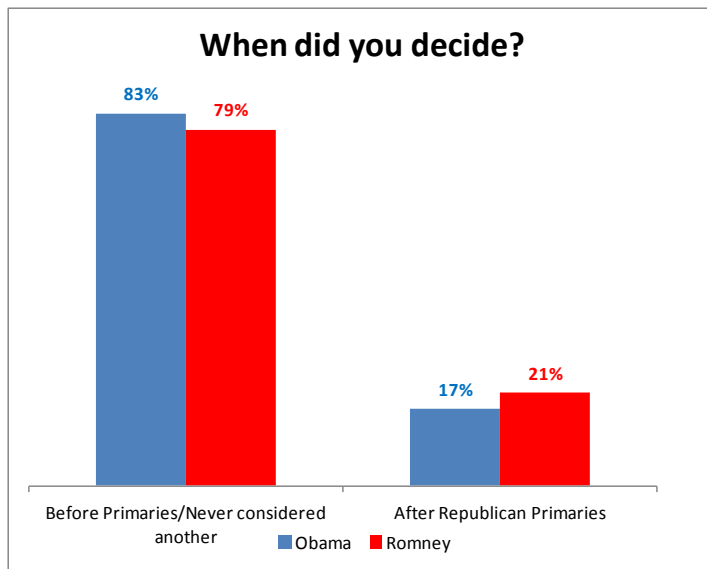
CHANGING CHOICE

One issue that all of us wanted to explore was trying to guess how effective campaigning is. Lots of money is spent on shooting and distributing TV ads, flying candidates and their entourages - makeup artists, speechwriters, debate coaches - around to “battleground” states. As polling results change from day to day, people comment on momentum, gaining or losing supporters as a function of positive and negative publicity – or sampling changes.

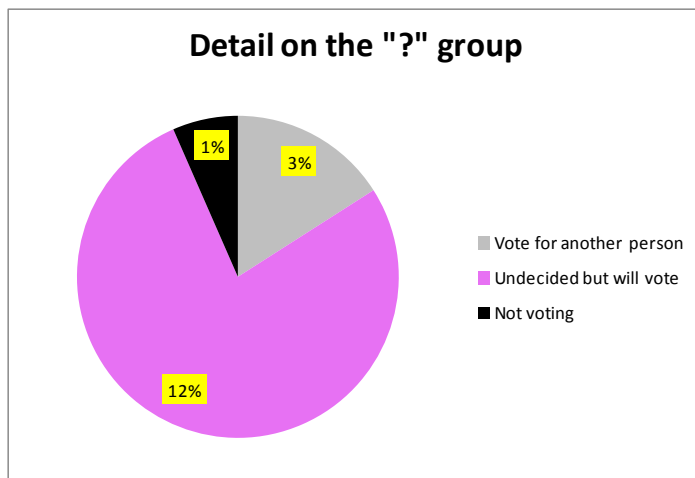
Accordingly, we asked or the respondents who had come to a decision (88% of the sample)

- if they had ever considered the alternative
- when they made up their mind and
- how likely they were to change their minds

The results...



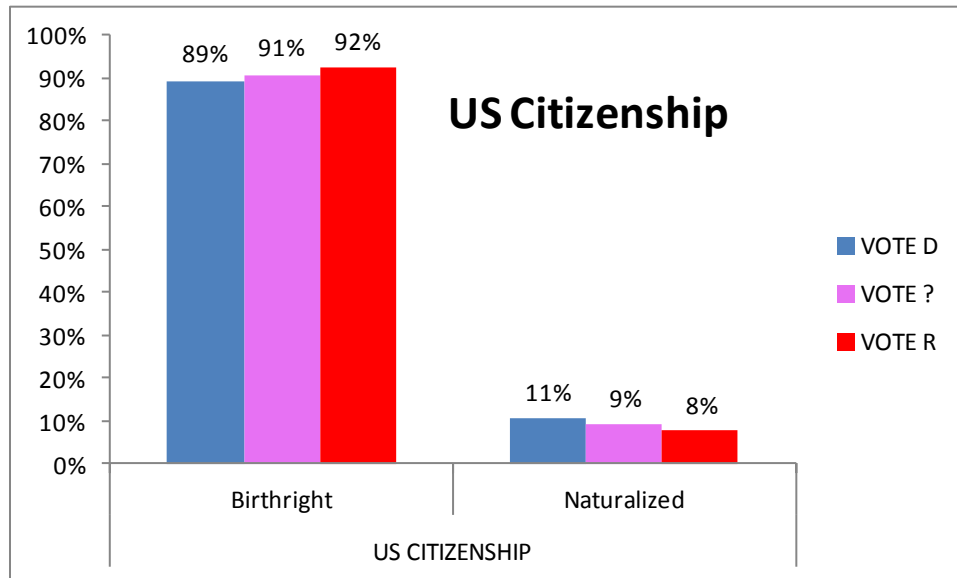
The overwhelming majority of voters for both candidates made up their minds well in advance of the campaign, and there is very little chance that anyone will change her mind. My conclusion is that the vast amounts of advertising had little or no effect on changing anyone’s mind, but possibly on the Undecideds. Note that the declared undecideds make up only 12% of the sample, and as we have seen, they are the low information voters who resemble Obama voters in fiscal ideology and are unique in their social view.



UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

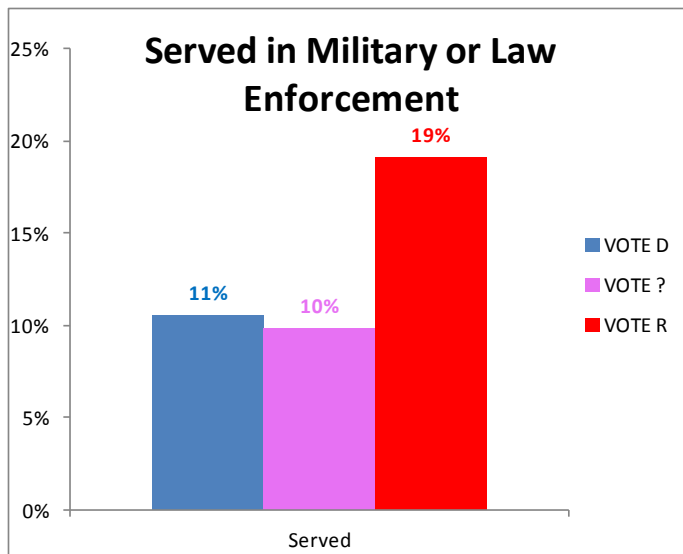
FOREIGN ROOTS

We asked a series of questions about the respondents' status as citizens.



This shows that the Romney voters are more likely to have been citizens since birth, as opposed to naturalized, and that birthright declines as we move through the undecideds and finally to Obama voters. Is this statistically significant? Hardly. But statistical significance simply means that the effect would not occur by chance more than five times in 100 in a random world. However, this is exactly the outcome one would expect.

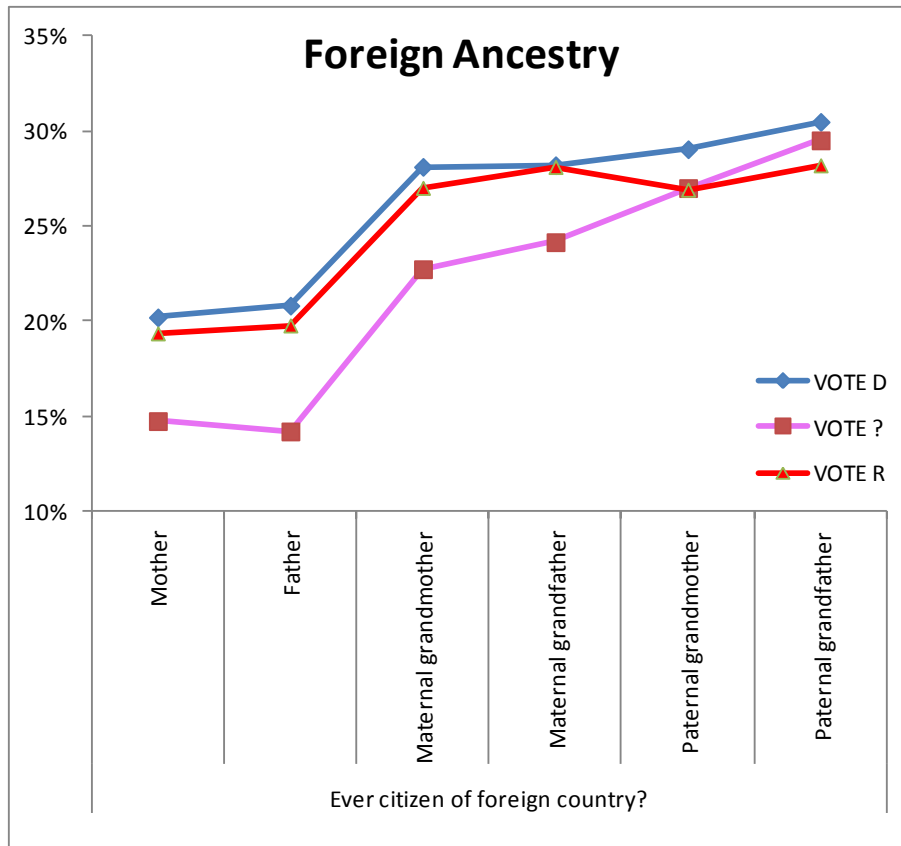
We also asked about military and law enforcement experience.



Romney voters were twice as likely to have served than either Obama voters or Undecideds.

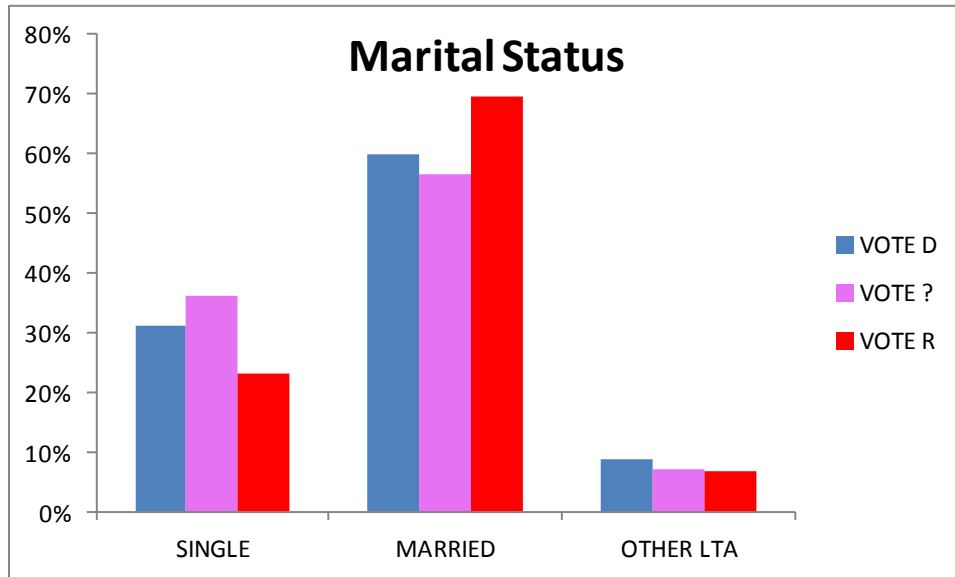
UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Continuing in the same vein, we asked the respondents to indicate whether their parents or grandparents ever were citizens of a foreign country.



Here it is quite clear that the undecided voters are the outliers, having far fewer foreign citizens in their ancestry among their parents and maternal grandparents. Obama and Romney voters are quite close until we get to the paternal grandparents. We also note that the Obama voters top the foreign ancestry percent in every one of the categories.

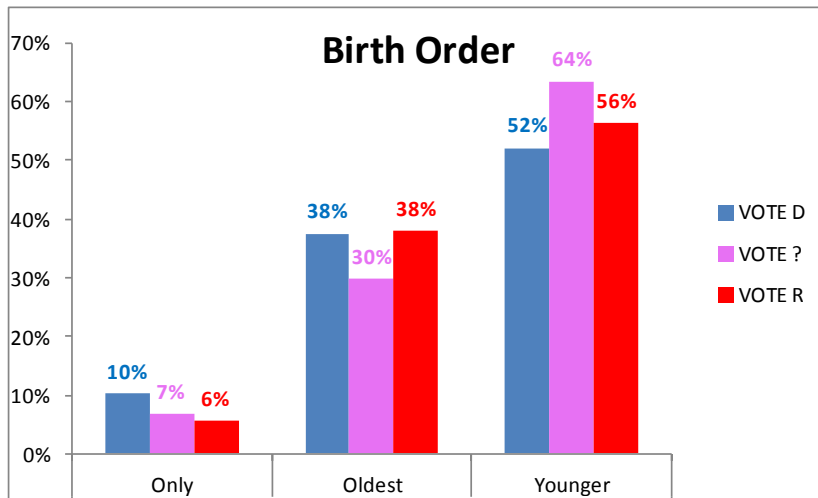
MARITAL STATUS



Single included all those living alone, both never married or no longer married, and married included married to the first spouse or to an nth spouse where n>1. Those who responded that they were in civil unions, otherwise coupled, or simply “other” are in the “OTHER LTA¹²” group.

Married voters are preferred Romney, Singles preferred Obama.

And we asked about birth order. Almost half 48% of the Obama voters are either only children or the



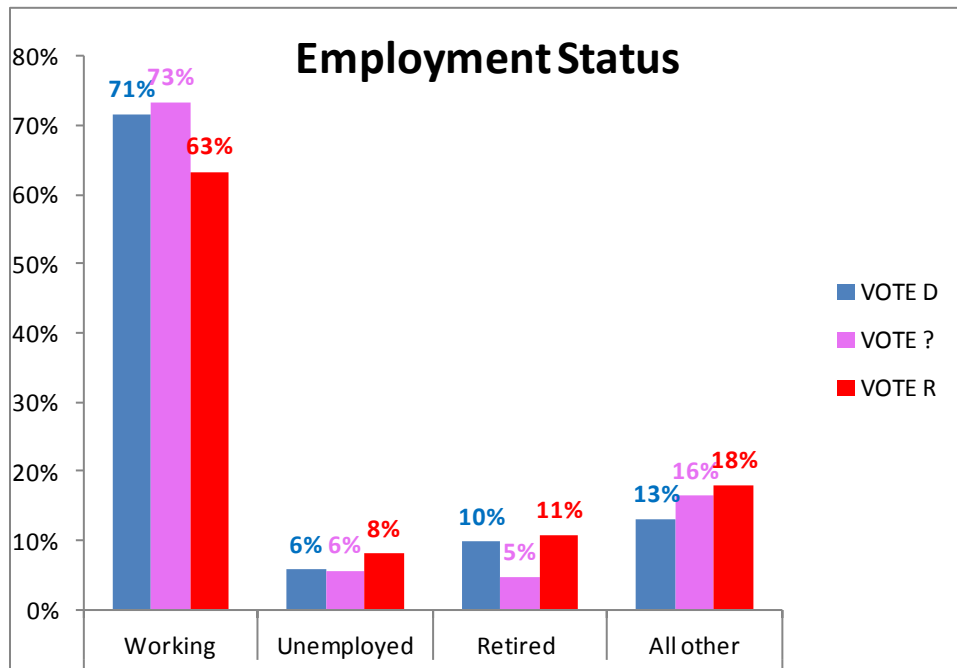
oldest of multiple siblings. By contrast, 64% of the Undecideds are the younger brothers and sisters of a multi-child environment.

Obama was the first and only child of his mother and father; he has a half-sister from his mother’s second marriage. Romney was the fourth and youngest of his parents’ children, six years’ junior to the next youngest.

¹² LTA=Living Together Arrangement

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

We collapsed nine categories of employment status into four.



A smaller percentage of Romney voters are working either full or part time, but they have the highest percentages in the other categories –unemployed, retired, students, on disability, volunteering and “other”. Once again, the Undecideds are in everything but the All Other category, the opposite of the Romney voters.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

ONE MORE THING...

The questionnaire concluded with the questions,

“Would you approve a change in which the federal government ran a separate election, just for the office of President, either as currently conducted via the electoral college or by some form of popular vote election? “

“We elect a President on the basis of state-by-state results in the apportionment of the electoral college votes. As a result, we have elected Presidents who have lost the popular vote and/or failed to get at least 50% of the vote. Would you prefer that we leave the system as is or go to some form of popular vote?” (I listed three different popular vote alternatives.)

On the first issue, a majority of respondents declined to support a separate election.

On the second issue, 67% of the respondents stated they would prefer a change to some form of popular vote. The table below shows the degree to which various voting, party affiliated and demographics support going to a popular vote.

GROUP	POPULAR
Vote Obama	72%
Loyal I	70%
YOUNGER	70%
Loyal D	70%
HIGHER ED	70%
RICHER	70%
WHITES	69%
Attrib D	69%
Attrib I	67%
Undecided	67%
WOMEN	67%
MEN	67%
Attrib R	64%
OLDER	64%
POORER	64%
LOWER ED	63%
Vote Romney	62%
Loyal R	59%
NONWHITES	57%

This table is noteworthy in that no subgroup favored staying with the Electoral College. At this point in time, the National Popular Vote bill, which would preserve the Electoral College while ensuring that every vote in every state will matter in every presidential election, has been enacted in nine states and the District of Columbia possessing 132 electoral votes. Unsurprisingly, all of the states that have adopted the law are solidly Democratic and range from 3 ECV – DC and Vermont – to California’s 55 ECV. My guess is that after the emotions cool down from the 2012 election, the Republican states that are on the verge of endorsing the bill – Missouri, Oklahoma, and South Dakota – will come on board. New York will follow. And before 2016, Texans will decide to make their votes count as well, bringing the total to 219. After that...as long as the count reaches 270 before Election Day in 2016, the next election will be a whole new ballgame.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

SUMMARY

To this point, I have been working as a statistical analyst, putting my own personal preferences to the side. But this section is my chance to pontificate, and I will do so.

I think that the Republican Party lost for the following reasons. Ranked in order of importance, they are

1. **RIGIDITY OF THINKING.** Recall the ideology charts [p26-7]. The Romney Liberal-Conservative trendline is much steeper than the Obama, and the Undecided trendline is pretty flat. The steeper the line, the “purer” the ideology, the more hostile to the alternative viewpoint, the greater the number of people who will be uninterested in joining forces with you. And elections are only about numbers. As of November 5th, 2012, the Republican Party was the most exclusive club – fewest members in town.
2. **RELIGIOSITY.** This goes right along with rigidity of thinking. The more fervent a member of a church is, the less tolerant she is to unbelievers, followers of a different religion, even coreligionists who differ in their degree. The telling moment for me was in the Vice-Presidential debate, when VP Biden affirmed his Catholic faith and agreement with the dogma that abortion is murder, but then said he wouldn’t impose his beliefs on others. To my mind, this made him a better choice as second-in-line for the Presidency...and less Catholic than Ryan.
3. **NAKED HOSTILITY.** Statements like “I hope Obama fails” [Limbaugh]; “Our #1 objective is to make Obama a one-term President” [McConnell]; “You Lie” [Wilson]...and other comments by Palin, Sununu, Trump impugning the citizenship, religion, and intelligence of the elected President were, again, unlikely to change the minds of anyone who had voted for Obama in 2008.
4. **IRRATIONALITY.** When every Republican candidate in the primary season swears that he or she wouldn’t take a one-dollar tax increase in exchange for a ten-dollar spending cut, one has to ask “how does that make sense?” Would you go for 1:20? 1:100? Add to that denial of global warming, hostility to the very idea of environmentalism, the definition of taxes as “your money”? Evolution is not proven? The earth is less than 10,000 years old? SERIOUSLY???
5. **RACISM.** Limbaugh’s airing of the song, “Barack the Magic Negro” was one of the few public displays. But under the surface...I have received some disguised and some outright anti-Obama racist slurs. You can’t be a little bit racist. Just because blacks average lower scores on IQ test – yes, they do – doesn’t mean that the dumbest white man is superior in intelligence to the smartest black man.
6. **REGRESSION.** The voting population is becoming younger, less white, poorer, less religious. The makeup of the Republican party is counter to all of those trends; the Democratic party is ahead of the curve. Just as surely as the polar ice caps will continue to shrink and the world’s supply of fossil fuel will continue to diminish, the demographics of voters will continue the trend into the future. It’s hard to turn a battleship around; it’s impossible to reverse physical changes as the planet ages and technology grows.

I believe we will continue to have a two-party system. I hope that the Republicans will tone down their ideology and become the loyal opposition, rather than the sworn enemy, of the Democrats.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

APPENDIX A. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

PRESIDENTIAL VOTING 2012

Greetings! Because you have voted in at least two Presidential elections, you have been chosen to participate in a research project being conducted by Michigan State University's Office for Survey Research [OSR], under the auspices of the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research. The questionnaire should take about 15 minutes for you to complete. The survey is administered by a private data collection agency, and they will use your identifying information, which you provided them at your initiative, to distribute the survey and collect the data. No one will EVER have access to any information that identifies you as an individual. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you feel that you do not want to provide the information we ask for please choose the "decline to respond" button. If you consent to take the questionnaire, I hope that you will provide answers to each of the questions to the best of your ability. Questions? email me at ehrlichn@msu.edu or call 517-353-2639. Thank you, in advance, for your cooperation. Nat Ehrlich, Research Specialist, Office for Survey Research, Michigan State University.

CONSENT TO TAKE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

DECLINE TO RESPOND

- I have NOT voted in two previous Presidential Election

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

In which state do you currently reside? Choose from the drop-down list

Which category best describes your view on financial and social issues?

	Very Conservative	Conservative	Slightly Conservative	Middle of the Road	Slightly Liberal	Liberal	Very Liberal
FINANCIAL	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SOCIAL	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Generally speaking, would you call yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?

	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Something else
I am a...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How old are you?

- 28-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66-75
- Over 75

Are you...

- Male
- Female

Please indicate your race or ethnicity. You may choose as many categories as necessary to describe yourself.

- Black / African American
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- White / Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Other

Please describe what you mean by other race in the space below.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Which answer best describes your marital history?

- Single, never married
- Single now, previously divorced or widowed
- Married to first spouse
- Married, previously divorced or widowed
- In a civil union / same-sex marriage
- "Coupled" - living with a partner but not married
- Other

How many children, adopted or biological, do you have?

- One male
- One female
- More than one male, no females
- More than one female, no males
- At least one male and one female

What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- Less than high school graduate
- High school graduate
- Some college
- College graduate
- Some post-graduate work
- Master's degree
- Professional (Law, Medicine, Dental, etc.)
- Ph.D.
- Multiple doctorate / professional

Are you a...

- Naturalized U.S. Citizen
- U.S. Citizen since birth

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Among your recent ancestors, check any who were citizens of another country at some time in their lives

- Mother
- Father
- Maternal Grandmother
- Maternal Grandfather
- Paternal Grandmother
- Paternal Grandfather

How many siblings, including step-brothers and sisters, have you had?

- None
- One
- Two
- Three
- Four or more

Where did you rank in age among your siblings?

- Oldest
- Second oldest
- Third oldest
- Fourth or more oldest, not youngest
- Youngest

To what religious faith or discipline have you adhered, now and in the past? Please check all that apply FOR PREVIOUSLY ONLY.

	Agnostic/Atheist	Roman / Eastern Rite Catholic	Other Christian	Jewish	Muslim	OTHER
Now	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Previously	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

How much do the areas of your life listed below contribute to your sense of self-worth?

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Very Important	
Politics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Role as a parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Role in my community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance in my job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relations with others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Becoming better educated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increasing my financial worth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you ever served as a full-time member of a military or law-enforcement agency?

- Yes
- No

How long did you serve in the military or law enforcement? Please check all that apply.

	One year or less	2-4 years	5-10 years	More than 10 years
US ARMY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
US NAVY	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
US MARINE CORPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
US AIR FORCE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
US FBI / CIA /	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OTHER US GOV'T	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
US LOCAL POLICE (Gov't, Private)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign Military / police / other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Please describe your current job situation. Check all that apply

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Attending school
- Volunteer work
- Unemployed, seeking work
- Homemaker
- On temporary disability
- On permanent disability
- Retired

Have you decided for whom you will vote for President on November 6th 2012

- Yes
- No

Have you ever considered voting for anyone else?

- Yes
- No

When did you decide?

- Never considered the alternative
- Prior to the Republican primary campaign
- After the Republican primary campaign

At the present time, what is your intention as to the 2012 Presidential election?

- Vote for Obama
- Vote for Romney
- Vote for another person
- Undecided, but I will vote
- Not voting

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

PERSONAL PREFERENCE. In this section, we ask that you state your preferences for personal characteristics of a President, REGARDLESS OF THE CANDIDATE'S PARTY AFFILIATION OR STANDS ON ISSUES. You may choose by clicking on the button closest to your preference. For example, if the choice was Right Handed vs. Left Handed, and you were completely in favor of Right Handed, you would select the button closest to Right Handed. If you were just slightly in favor of Right Handed, you would select the button that was two buttons away from Right Handed, and thus three buttons away from Left Handed. Notice that there is no "No preference" - if you can't say you have any preference, just leave that item unchecked.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Older:Younger	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Highly educated:Less Educated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Born poor:Born to wealth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Served in military:Never served	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Male:Female	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deeply religious:Irreligious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Truthful:Untruthful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Changeable:Rigid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Single:Married	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nonwhite:White	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homosexual:Heterosexual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playful:Serious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good looking:Average or less in appearance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aloof:Engaging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pessimistic:Optimistic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Held elective office:Newcomer to politics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tall:Short	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planful:Impulsive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

If you have decided to vote for either Obama or Romney, how likely are you to change your mind and vote for the other?

- I will NOT change my mind
- Very unlikely - about 20:1
- Unlikely - at least 3:1 against
- Could go either way

This item refers to your information sources and how much each source influenced your decision to vote for the candidate you have chosen to support. If you access a source online (e.g. The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Peggy Noonan, Paul Krugman) that refers to a print news source or columnist, please enter that as the original source, not the internet.

	How frequently do you access this source?			How influential was this source?		
	Rarely/Never	Occasionally	Regularly	Not	Minor	Major
Internet columnists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet news sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet political information sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talk radio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cable TV political shows	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cable TV news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Newspaper columnists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Newspaper news items	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazine columnists	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazine news items	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political discussions with personal acquaintances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Presently, each state prepares its own ballot and voting procedure, and counts the votes, with the secretary of each state certifying the vote. If you would approve a change in which the federal government ran a separate election, just for the office of President, either as currently conducted via the electoral college or by some form of popular vote election, which of the alternatives below would you support?

- NO CHANGE
- Federal election via common paper ballot, election over a one-week period at separate locations. Absentee ballots available on request.
- As above, with the option to vote via the internet.
- As above, but Internet voting only.

We elect a President on the basis of state-by-state results in the apportionment of the electoral college votes. As a result, we have elected Presidents who have lost the popular vote and/or who failed to get at least 50% of the vote. Which of the plans listed below would be the best change to make?

- NONE - Leave the system as it is
- Elect the person who gets the greatest number of votes
- Elect the person who gets at least 50% of the votes. If no candidate achieves that, have a runoff between the top two votegetters
- Elect the person who gets at least 50% of the votes. If no candidate achieves that, have the states choose from the top two candidates, one vote for each state and the District of Columbia, determined by a vote of the legislature of the state. If any state cannot agree, that state's vote goes to the candidate with the highest vote total
- If no candidate gets at least 50% of the vote, keep the incumbent in office until the following November and hold a second election. No candidate who ran in the previous election may be nominated again.

APPENDIX B My blog posts on IPPSR INSIGHTS

[A picture is worth not a thousand words, but a look at least](#)

Posted on [May 18, 2012](#)



Today's update, Friday 18 May, has Nebraska moved from an unpolled state to a win for Romney. The chart above shows the my best guess as to what would be the outcome if the election was held today. And it looks like the race is over.

But the national polls that people are told about tell a different story.

Neither Obama nor Romney has gotten more than 50% of the vote, and the percent of voters who won't endorse either one is trending ever upward.

THE NATIONAL ELECTION CHART is the reason I put my faith in the latest state polls. It says that right now, about 10% of the people say they haven't made up their mind, and I believe that to be true of people in every state. Texans are not more or less resolute than Californians. 90% of the people in each state have made up their minds, and won't change them on election day.

More tomorrow. I'll break down the state-by-state Electoral College count by the percent lead for each candidate.

Support – presumptive, strong, moderate, weak, tossup. A rundown.

Posted on [May 19, 2012](#)



How the electoral college vote count stands as of Saturday, May 19.

25 states have had pollsters come in and take the pulse of the electorate. I'm calling a margin of over 10% between Obama and Romney "Strong", 6-10% "Moderate", 3-5% "Weak" support and anything under 3% a tossup – the lead is there, but very uncertain.

Obama leads in all categories of support for a total of 238-83.

80-21 Strong

81-52 Moderate

23-10 Weak and

54-0 in Tossups

A hopeful Republican could argue that Romney could turn around all 54 tossups, which would then make the race closer 184-137. The counter to that is the 105 votes in the states that Obama is virtually certain to win, and have not yet had a state poll – California, Connecticut, Delaware, DC, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland and Vermont – raises his total to 289.

And the magic number is 270.

Made up your mind yet? Understanding Cognitive Dissonance

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#)



Q1. Did you know that this coming November, there will be an election for President?

Q2. Did you know that the candidates are Barack Obama (D) and Mitt Romney (R) YES

Q3. Have you decided which candidate you will choose? YES

Q4. How likely are you to change your mind? NOT BLOODY LIKELY

Q5. What could anyone tell you that would change your mind? NOTHING

Those are the answers that 90% of the people who will vote will give in November. The term “Cognitive Dissonance” is widely misunderstood by the general public. It means that once a person has made a choice he or she will resist any attempt to convince them to switch. Thus, the labeling of one candidate as a radical Alinskyite socialist bent on destroying America sounds as ridiculous to Obama supporters as labeling the other as an out-of-touch elitist narcissist who has no core political beliefs and will say anything to get elected sounds to Romney’s.

Has Obama done a good job? His supporters think so, Romney’s don’t. Each group has “rational” arguments – on job growth, the stock market, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – to reaffirm their choice. And as of this morning, based on 16 state by state polls and 8 presumptive wins, Obama’s electoral vote count is 289 to Romney’s 160. In those 24 states, there would have to be a lot of people who would have to say to themselves, maybe those Republicans are right, and Romney would be a better choice.

How likely is that? See Q4, above, and answer it for yourself.

More on cognitive dissonance

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#)



Suppose you were considering the purchase of two similarly priced and equipped automobiles: a Ford or a Chevy, or if you're in a higher tax bracket, a Cadillac or Lincoln. After taking test drives and negotiating with the salesman, you get a \$750 better deal on your trade-in, and you choose the Ford.

Before you made your choice, you couldn't really decide between the two vehicles on the basis of how they looked, or performed. Now that you made your choice, you believe that the Ford is really a better car than the Chevy. It doesn't matter that you decided on the basis of trading in your old car – you really have to convince yourself that you prefer the Ford. That's cognitive dissonance. It really matters most where the original choice was between two very similar alternatives.

This November, the election will be contested by two very different people: the differences are

1. Party affiliation – Republican vs. Democratic
2. Age -65 vs. 51
3. Race – white vs. nonwhite
4. Background – privileged vs. marginal
5. Religion – Mormon vs. Protestant
6. Fiscal and social ideology – Conservative vs. Liberal

These are NOT CLOSELY MATCHED CHOICES. Once a voter has decided to choose a candidate, she has used multiple criteria to support her choice, and that fact makes it virtually impossible for anyone to re-decide. Not totally impossible: one thing has made a difference in several previous elections – 1960, 1980, 1984, 1992 and 2000.

That will be the topic of tomorrow's blog.

Distributing the odds and the ECV [Electoral College Votes]

Posted on [May 22, 2012](#)

1



Obama now leads in 16 states by at least 4% that have been polled. In nine of those states, his lead ranges from 10% to 21%. Those nine account for 100 ECV. The other seven states show leads from 4% to 9%, and account for an additional 84 ECV.

The worst case scenario would be to see a reversal in any of these states. There are three where the lead is only 4%, and there might be 4% of the people polled who could be swayed to switch from their preference.

Any poll contains a certain amount of error, in that respondents might misrepresent themselves, or the distribution of respondents – people who choose to respond to the poll – is different from the distribution of people who will turn out to vote. Looking at it from a statistical standpoint, where we assume random fluctuation, each of the influenced voters would be equally likely to switch from Romney to Obama or from Obama to Romney. Put another way, random error is equally likely to show an increase or a decrease in the lead. Unlike measuring a physical quality, such as weight, by using several scales and taking the average as an estimate of the true weight of the object, election polls use surveys to estimate the true apportionment of electoral college votes. And that true apportionment will become reality on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

So, we have several possible sources of random error: respondents can misrepresent the results, pollsters can weight the results to promote their view, the distribution of voters may be a misrepresentation of reality and, most importantly **THE RESULT OF THE ELECTION IS IN THE FUTURE.**

And yet, this statistician would have to predict that the odds of a Romney victory are less than one in twenty, or about 5%.

Latest state polls – Obama’s total exceeds 270

Posted on [May 25, 2012](#)

[2](#)



For the first time, thanks to the first poll in California, Obama now has a lead in 20 states with a total of 281 votes. Romney leads in 8 states with an ECV of 109, 172 behind Obama. At a similar point four years ago, Obama’s margin over McCain in the latest polls 18 votes. If the presumptive states were factored in, Obama’s margin was increased to 44 votes.

Meanwhile, the attention of the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and virtually all of the mainstream print and television pundits remains squarely focused on the “close” race in the popular vote. My only guess is that people in the business of selling news are unwilling to look at the patient’s flatlined vital signs. They will keep the election on life support, hoping for a miracle.

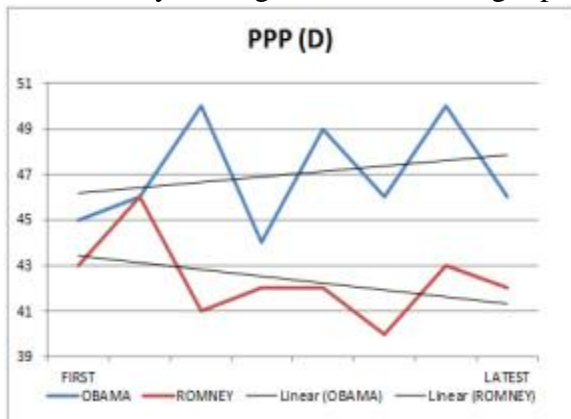
A Deeper Look: Battleground Ohio

Posted on [May 29, 2012](#)



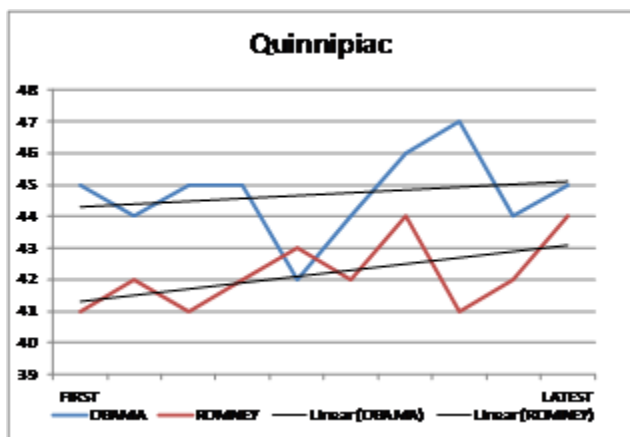
Over the next few days, I'll be sharing data on the polls in closely contested "battleground" or "swing" states as they have appeared over time. Let's look today at Ohio, which has 18 Electoral College Votes. Six different pollsters have conducted 26 polls going back to last year. Only two have conducted more than three polls.

Public Policy Polling has conducted eight polls, starting i



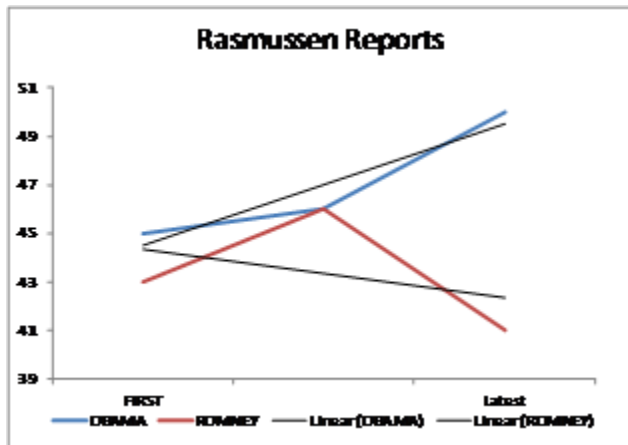
n August 2011 with the latest in May 2012. The

trendlines for Obama and Romney appear to be diverging, i.e. Obama's lead is increasing roughly from 2.5 to 7 percentage points. PPP is designated D (Democratic) by Real Clear Politics



Quinnipiac – cited as the most accurate by New York Times political blogger Nate Silver – has conducted 10 polls starting in July 2011 and most recently this month. Their trendline show a closer race, with the gap narrowing from roughly 3.0 to about 2.0 points.

Only one other polling organization – Rasmussen Reports, cited as heavily biased toward Republicans – has done more than two. In their results, collected in February, March and April of this year, the trendlines show Obama’s lead increasing from a virtual tie to a 6 point margin



Summarizing the results from other sources:

- Fox News reported a Romney 6-point edge in February – the only poll outside of Rasmussen to find Romney ahead – but then reversed itself to a 6-point lead for Obama in April. Fox (or Faux) News is clearly sympathetic to Republicans
- NBC News/Marist recorded Obama’s edge dropping from 12 to 6 percentage points between Late February and early March
- Purple strategies conducted one poll, last month, with Obama leading by five points

Ohio, then, while being designated as a battleground, is not at the moment a level one, but rather one in which Obama occupies the high ground with Romney needing to maneuver voters to change their minds.

Nat Ehrlich

Battleground: Florida

Posted on [May 30, 2012](#)



Yesterday we took a look at the history and current standings of polls conducted in the state of Ohio – and concluded that no matter which company was doing the polling, Obama was leading in the overwhelming majority of polls, and the historical trendlines showed his lead either staying around 5% over Romney or increasing.

Not so in Florida.

Romney leads in 18 of the 36 polls conducted since mid-2011, Obama leads in 15, with 3 tied. The average Romney percentage is 44.8% vs. Obama's 44.4%. So, overall, this is a race that is too close to call, one that bookmakers would say 3:2 against either.

But what about trends?

PPP shows Obama building a lead from 2% to 5% over eight months.

On the other hand, Quinnipiac shows Romney building from a virtual tie to a 2% point lead over 10 polls conducted over the past 11 months

Rasmussen, the pollster who consistently shows results favoring Republicans, has conducted four polls in the past four months, and the Obama trendline has gone up 2.5% points, while Romney's has dropped slightly.

NBC News/Marist, like Quinnipiac, is seen as a fairly impartial source. Their chart shows both candidates advancing, but Obama rising at a faster rate, doubling an initial 2.5% edge to 5%

Finally, a bit of local color. Suffolk7/News of Massachusetts has also conducted polls over the past four months. Like all but the others, they show Obama making up ground on Romney but in this case the mathematically generated trendlines move from a 2.5% point Romney lead to a tie.

In summary, unlike a very consistent Ohio, the times they are a 'changin' in Florida! The next blog will isolate only the results from Ohio and Florida, and North Carolina, since Romney became the presumptive winner in February.

Nat Ehrlich

Messenger = Message

Posted on [June 1, 2012](#)



Yesterday, I heard a radio broadcast that talked about how the tide was turning in favor of Romney in Ohio. Rasmussen Reports had sampled 500 Likely Voters conducted by recorded questions and determined that Romney had support from 46% of contacted respondents vs. 44% for Obama. A narrow lead of 2%, which in itself is one-fifth of the 10% of respondents who wouldn't say they supported either candidate. We don't know what script Rasmussen used, but that's not the issue. Rasmussen Reports itself is interesting.

SOURCE	OBAMA	ROMNEY	Obama Lead
NBC News/Marist	49.0%	40.0%	9.0%
Purple Strategies	49.0%	42.0%	7.0%
PPP (D)	47.0%	41.4%	5.6%
FOX News	41.5%	38.5%	3.0%
Quinnipiac	44.7%	42.7%	2.0%
Rasmussen Reports	45.8%	45.0%	0.8%

Real Clear Politics reports 27 polls taken in Ohio pitting Obama vs. Romney. These polls have been conducted by six different companies. The average lead for Obama is 4.6%, with the high at 9% by NBC News/Marist. Rasmussen's average is 0.8%. It's interesting to note that Rasmussen's average vote count for Obama is right on the average of 46%, but he reports Romney's support in Ohio as 45%, compared to the other five sources which range from 38.5% to 42.7%.

This is not to say that Rasmussen's methodology is flawed, or biased, in any way, but it does produce results which are at variance with just about all of the other pollsters.

Every election we hear the same sad song...

Posted on [June 2, 2012](#)

“THE POLLS MUST BE BIASED!”



Democratic Party spokespeople make this protest. Republicans, too...whenever their candidate appears to be behind. And the issue is raised again and again. There is an answer.

No. There is no way to prove, definitively, that any particular poll distorts results to favor one party, or one candidate. But there are several facts – not factors – that limit how well polls can predict outcomes. In order of importance, they are as follows:

#1. **TIMING.** In every election in every states, by the time election rolls around, the majority of potential voters have a pretty good idea how much their vote counts. Texans know NOW that a vote for Obama is a waste of time, so they are less likely to go to the polls than Obama supporters in a more closely contested state. But right now, 157 days before the election, the underdogs in states that are not presumptive have something they won't have on election day: HOPE. And most of us, Democrats and Republicans, keep on hoping that our choice will win, even when the signs are unmistakable that it ain't gonna happen. So, when people answer a pollster's call, the underdog's supporters are more likely to cooperate with the survey. It's what psychologists label “Parataxic Logic” – the idea that what one thinks or hopes for has a causative effect on a real-world outcome.

#2. **SAMPLING.** Polls conducted over the telephone differ in many ways. Many call only landlines, thereby cutting off a sizable segment of the population – CBS news reported that “A new federal study says more than a quarter of homes in the United States now have only a wireless phone, and no ‘landline.’” The same study pointed out that 44% – almost half – of people 18-30 years old – are cell only. In general, cell-only people are less affluent, and more mobile – 47% of renters are cell-onlies. Minorities, too, are more likely to be cell-only. So, older, richer, a racial minority, more settled – does that sound like the stereotypical Democrat? I think not.

But wait, there's more sampling bias. Younger people are far less likely to be at home when the phone rings. A scientific polling method would first enumerate the persons living in the dwelling, then use a random strategy (like, “I'd like to speak to the person who's next going to have a birthday”) to select a respondent. But most pollsters don't do that. Nor do they retry a random-digit-dial number when they get a no-answer, busy signal [remember those??], answering machine, voice-mail, or a refusal. Nope. They talk to whoever is willing to talk to them.

#3. **RESPONDENT REACTION.** Who really wants to spend ten minutes on the phone being one of 500-1,000 people who will comprise a June 15th poll about the November election? People

who think that by doing so, THEIR VIEWS on matters of national importance MUST BE HEARD. Probably better educated. Not a representative sample of the people who will actually vote...which, by the way, will never exactly reflect party registration in a given state.

#4-99...do you need even more to be convinced that POLLS ARE ESTIMATES, NOT MEASURES, OF REALITY. And that's reality as it is now. Prediction, Confucius reminds us, is difficult, especially regarding the future.

Reviews and an interesting study

Posted on [June 11, 2012](#)



It has now been almost one month since my first post. At this point, in-state polls have been conducted in 28 states, and Obama leads Romney in the Electoral College vote count by 105, 248 to 143. Add the 40 likely votes of D.C., Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois and Maryland, where polls have not been conducted, and Obama is over the top by 18 votes already.

Things could change, of course, and the Las Vegas bookmakers have lowered the odds on Romney winning from 4:1 against to 3:1 against.

Yesterday, the New York Times published an interesting study,

<http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/09/how-racist-are-we-ask-google/?ref=opinion>

which posits the notion that racism was a bigger factor than was believed in 2008, and promises to be even more of a factor acting against Obama in 2012. The methodology is innovative, and the conclusion is not overly strong, but it does pique my interest.


Finally, a quote for the day:

“it was fun to see a community revitalized. The jobs that were created here by this project, the support that Jeff and the...Corporation gave to it and the support of the communities...were tremendous. Everybody pulled together. That's what we need in this country, everybody pulling together to get something done.”

The author of this quote will appear in the next blog. Guesses are welcome!

North Dakota is polled! And the quote author revealed.


Posted on [June 12, 2012](#)

North Dakota has been polled, and is thus removed from the list of  states that are presumed to go to Romney. The presumption was correct – Romney will get those three Electoral College votes by a comfortable margin. And New York has been polled again, with no change in outcome. As if...

The quote from yesterday about needing to work together to get things done was from noted golf course architect and former playing professional Jack Nicklaus.

Wisconsin Shift?

Posted on [June 14, 2012](#)

According to the latest Rasmussen poll,  Wisconsin is now in the Romney column. The poll was conducted on Tuesday, a week after the Republican governor of Wisconsin won a clear victory against a recall effort. This adds 10 ECV to the Romney column, which changes the best guess based on latest polls and presumptive states to 233 for Romney vs. 281 for Obama. Indiana, Rhode Island and South Carolina have not been polled so their 24 ECV have not been assigned. If Romney were to take them all, and keep all the states where he leads, that would push his total to 257.

Now and long ago.

Posted on [June 15, 2012](#)



Just a few days ago, Rasmussen Reports polled Michigan and found Romney leading. Yesterday, Baydoun/Foster found Obama back in the lead. With 29 states polled, Obama has 254 “Latest results” ECV to Romney’s 140, and another 40 “Presumptive” ECV to bring his total to 294. This just goes to show, once again, the limits of survey methodology in close races.

And now for something completely different. I still remember reading, when I was eight years old, an October Life magazine picture profile of the coming Dewey cabinet. Like Romney, Dewey had unsuccessfully campaigned for the Republican presidential nomination (1940) and had won that nomination in 1944, losing to Roosevelt’s fourth term.

Dewey had been governor of a northeastern state – NY – and had been known as a liberal Republican, in contrast to his Republican rival, Robert Taft of Ohio. Romney as governor of Massachusetts and contrasted with Gingrich and Santorum is somewhat like that. Also, both Dewey and Romney grew up with well-to-do roots in Michigan.

However, there are great contrasts. Romney in 2012 is 65; Dewey in 1948 was 46. Dewey had begun his professional life as an attorney – a prosecutor and attorney general. He was generally accepting of Roosevelt’s New Deal policies, supported the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, the recognition of Israel and the Berlin Airlift, and openly opposed the conservative wing of his party.

Even though Life magazine and most of the pundits of the day saw him waltzing easily into the White House, Truman won 303 ECV from 28 of the 48 states. History, a la Wikipedia, tells us that Dewey lost the race because of his lackluster campaign (“Our future is ahead of us” was his signature statement), but also because Truman tied him to the “do-nothing Congress” which had admittedly opposed most of Truman’s Fair Deal measures while passing pro-business legislation.

No, Romney is not Dewey, nor is Obama another Truman. But there is this: Obama and Truman rose from modest backgrounds, and as the income gap grows, more and more voters are below the top income level, and they tend to agree with candidates who share their modest background.

What's up with Michigan?

Posted on [June 18, 2012](#)



That's the question asked by pollster Mark Blumenthal on the Huffington Post website. He poses the issue of why some polls in our state see Obama comfortably ahead of Romney while others show a close race, or have Romney slightly ahead.

You can read his answer in detail [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/15/michigan-polls_n_1601368.html?utm_hp_ref=@pollster] but the essence is that certain pollsters are using two techniques that will favor the Republican candidate. I've mentioned this in previous posts, but the methods cited by Blumenthal are as follows:

1. Ignore obvious problems with age distribution. One of the polls reported getting almost 50% of their responses from people 65 and older, and about 4% from the youngest cohort (18-29 years old). Most of the other polls get about 20% from the over-64 group and about 15% from the youngest...and they then weight them to match either the state's actual age distribution or the age distribution of voters in the most recent presidential election. But the company that got the 46% and 4% from the geezers [full disclosure - I'm way over 65] and the young'uns didn't weight at all. Romney does better with older voters, Obama with younger voters...
2. Lead the respondent. Another pollster revealed that his company asks questions that probe the respondent's attitude about the Michigan economy, giving three choices about the local economy hitting bottom, having hit bottom and recovering, or not bottomed out yet. After repeating the words 'economy' and 'bottom' three times, the next question is 'who would you vote for?' Imagine the outcry if they led into the choice question by asking about Mormonism, plural wives, magic underwear...

Bottom line: if a polling company consistently produces results which favor one party's candidate to a much greater degree than the majority, you can suspect some not-so-subtle massaging of the technique of gathering data. The most believable results come from pollsters that reveal everything: the raw numbers vs. the weighted responses, the true response rate, the questions and the order in which they were asked. Some pollsters simply refuse to disclose much of their methodology, but those who issue statements like "[our company] determines its partisan weighting targets through a dynamic weighting system that takes into account the state's voting history, national trends, and recent polling in a particular state or geographic area" is saying nothing more than "we will weight the data the way we want to – just trust us".

But for readers of this blog, who don't have the time or interest to delve into the details, consider the source and remember, it's a survey, not an election.

More of the same

Posted on [June 19, 2012](#)



New polls, old results. Pollsters have gone into Colorado and Maine – again – and found Obama still leading in both venues. Taking a look at the national figures, Romney leads Obama by about 4%, 48% to 44%. Overall, there’s been only one day when either candidate has achieved 50%. But as I have been saying all along, the popular vote is not that important – just ask President Gore.

Spotting Trends

Posted on [June 28, 2012](#)



We all like to think we can predict the future, and we all can make predictions. Making *accurate* predictions is another story.

The secret of making accurate predictions is to wait until the last minute. But we have months to go before the election, and we’re not making predictions. Rather, our aim is to describe, as accurately as possible, *what the present looks like*.

Right now, the present looks like a substantial win for President Obama. There are three things that could alter the electoral college picture:

1. Romney could say or do something so dramatic that the people who now intend to vote for Obama will change their minds.
2. Obama could do the same, but in a negative way
3. World events – wars, natural disasters, Supreme Court decisions, deaths – could occur that aid Romney and harm Obama

Romney’s current strategy of avoiding making dramatic statements – and thus errors – can’t help him. The most likely place for either point 1 or 2 to occur is in the debates. In 1980, Reagan was trailing Carter until he delivered his memorable quote, “There you go again” in their debate. That turned the tide, not just because it was a well-delivered putdown by Reagan but also because of the way Carter responded.

Weakly.

And world events? Obama has the job of responding to them, and will be credited or blamed for his actions. Romney has no responsibility, but he can comment...and in my opinion, that is his best chance.

Supreme Surprise

Posted on [June 29, 2012](#)

1



Not long ago, House Speaker Boehner warned his Republican colleagues not to “spike the football” when the Supreme Court decision came out. No worries, Mr. Speaker.

Romney reiterated his pledge to repeal Obamacare on Day One of his Presidency. He has chosen to make the Affordable Healthcare Act the new centerpiece of his campaign. In my opinion, this is a mistake, because although the decision is a lengthy document in dense legal language, it is clearly a win for Obama.

Which brings us to the “Bandwagon Effect.” To the public, Obama has come out a winner when the opposition was worried about looking too happy about beating him. Romney had the opportunity to defuse the issue, be less strident, and go back to talking about the economy. That would have lost him zero Tea Party votes, traditional Republican votes, conservative votes.

Instead, he is now seen as a sore loser, one who claims the umpire made the wrong call [Roberts, in his confirmation hearing, denied being an activist jurist, saying instead that judges are not ballplayers, they are umpires]. History tells us that when voters see a likely winner become a loser, they are less likely to vote for him. Voters like to feel like winners themselves, and while none of the Tea Party, traditional Republicans and conservatives are likely to endorse Obama, they are less likely to work hard and turn out to vote in a losing cause.

And that’s what makes the difference in those closely-contested “Battleground” states.

The messenger IS the message

Posted on [July 9, 2012](#)



The political professionals are always eager to talk about issues: the economy, foreign policy, jobs, Obamacare, Afghanistan...and every issue has two possible interpretations, voiced by one of the candidates. And just as it matters whether it's Lawrence Olivier or Mel Gibson playing the role of Hamlet, the voice, and gestures, and intonation matters when a candidate makes a statement.

Our most practiced and polished Presidential voice was, of course, Ronald Reagan. Reagan embodied the theatrical truism that sincerity is the heart of acting – if you can fake sincerity, you can act. In 2012, Mitt Romney is having a hard time convincing his fellow Republicans that his statements are sincere. It's not that he denies what he once affirmed – a good actor can get away with that, as did Reagan, who morphed from liberal Democrat to conservative Republican as convincingly as he moved from the affable hero of “Bedtime for Bonzo” to the criminal mastermind of “The Killers”, his next-to-last starring role, before he became “The Politician”. Yet as his candidacy ages, more and more of his base is expressing disbelief in his stated beliefs.

Barack Obama, on the other hand, can declare that the individual mandate of the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, is not a tax, and then acknowledge that, by golly, I guess it is, if John Roberts says it is. Or he can change his mind on gay marriage Why? Because he has the skill to project a sense of sincerity. Or he is sincere.

I do not know whether or not any other person, besides myself, truly believes what he is saying when he says it. But like every voter in every election, I can hazard a guess based on my perception. I have a certificate as an expert in assessing the meaning of microexpressions from Humintell that bolsters my confidence in spotting emotional expressions of fear, disgust, happiness, anger, sadness, surprise and contempt. These microexpressions appear, typically for about 250-500 milliseconds, when there is an internal conflict about what the person is saying. It's not so much about lie-detection as it is about sincerity.

We are all put in situations where we think that it is advantageous to misrepresent oneself. Good actors can do that. Good people don't try.

Let's watch Wimbledon...again

Posted on [July 9, 2012](#)



Sunday afternoon I sat down to watch an ‘encore presentation’ of the men’s tennis final. I took care not to find out who had won the match, hours before the broadcast began. I watched right through to the end, then skipped the acceptance speech and deleted the recording. So, in effect, I had seen the match third hand. The match was over before the broadcast began, and I watched a recording of the match, starting 40 minutes after the broadcast began, and was thus able to skip all of the interviews and commercials. And I was in suspense until the final point.

This morning, driving to work, I listened as Cokey Roberts talked about the tight, tight, TIGHT election. And I understood why our news media stays with the popular vote. Because the popular vote is close. The economic indicators can be interpreted in different ways – and are, as bad by the Republicans and not so bad by the Democrats. And so the public, generally, stays tuned in, and the broadcast and cable networks turn a profit.

But if you remember that the election is a contest where the popular vote means nothing, and the electoral college means everything, then right now, keeping an eye on the election is like predicting what will happen in the men’s final, knowing that Roger Federer is up two sets to one and a break of serve late in the fourth set...yes, Murray can make a comeback. It’s been done before. Just last year, Federer had two match points against Djokovic, and managed to lose...it’s just not good TV.

And that’s why the news coverage of the election keeps on portraying the race as TIGHT.

Money talks

Posted on [July 12, 2012](#)

By now the word has gotten around that although the Obama campaign has raised a record amount of money, the Romney campaign has broken that record and will likely outspend the Obama campaign over the next one hundred or so days.

In order to win, a candidate must get more than 269 electoral college votes. In states where polls have been conducted, Obama would have, if the election were held yesterday, 317 to Romney's 158. In addition, Obama can count on another 10 votes from states where no polls have been conducted since Romney became the de facto nominee, and Romney is likely to win another 53 votes from states not recently polled.

The question...how much money will it take to convince the people who say they might switch from Obama to Romney to do so? The Pew Research poll asks supporters to say if they might switch, and fewer than 10% say yes. Currently, Obama has 97 electoral college votes in states that RealClearPolitics.com designates as tossups. The Romney campaign must take away at least 48 of those votes, while retaining the 39 that he has in the tossup states.

It is interesting to speculate if the equation of votes as a derivative of money can put Romney into office.

Indicators and history...when do they apply?

Posted on [July 23, 2012](#)



Quite a bit has been written about 'indicators' such as how survey respondents feel about a candidate personally, whether the President is on the right or wrong track, and what certain economic statistics are – unemployment percentage, Dow Jones average, amount of surplus or deficit, and what has happened in Presidential elections where such statistics have been compiled. Often, political analysts attribute causation where there is correlation, and pick and choose which statistics are applicable. Very confusing, and methodologically unsound.

I prefer a more straightforward look at elections as historical events. Since 1950, there have been fifteen Presidential elections. Of those fifteen, seven have been contested between a sitting, elected President and a challenger. All but two have resulted in a win for the sitting President.

The winners: Eisenhower in 1956, Nixon in 1972, Reagan in 1984, Clinton in 1996, and Bush in 2004.

The losers: Carter in 1980 and Bush in 1992.

In 1980, Carter faced strong competition for the nomination from Edward M. Kennedy, who campaigned vigorously throughout the primaries and carried his fight to the Democratic Party convention. In 1992, Bush got serious competition for nomination from within his party from Patrick J. Buchanan, and from Reform Party candidate H. Ross Perot in the election, where he got 19% of the popular vote, but no Electoral College votes.

The five winners had no opposition from within at all. No primary challenges.

The only other sitting (though unelected) President to lose was Gerald Ford in 1976. He too had a serious challenge from within from Ronald W. Reagan, then Governor of California.

Lastly, there was one other sitting, unelected President, Lyndon Johnson, who had no trouble from within and won handily in 1964.

Thus, I would conclude that history shows that no sitting President who faces no opposition from within his own Party has lost an election since Herbert Hoover in 1932.

The Maybe States

Posted on [August 2, 2012](#)

RealClearPolitics has published the odds of one of the two candidates winning each state. I thought it might be helpful to look for trends in the states where the odds are less than 2:1, in RCP's figuring. Those states are New Hampshire, Iowa, Colorado, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio and Florida. Obama is favored to win all but Florida, and his odds there are almost even (probability of a win is 47%).

Florida has 29 Electoral College votes, Ohio has 18, and Virginia 13. All the rest have less than 10, and in those states, very few polls have been conducted before June, so there are no trends. But since early March there have been 21 polls conducted in Florida and 17 in both Ohio and Virginia.

Long story short: I plotted a polynomial curve which shows the best statistical estimate in a changing, up and down situation. The pattern was identical in each of the three states. Obama led Romney by a considerable margin in April, the gap narrowed until June, and now is widening again. In short, it appears that Romney began as an relatively unknown quantity and as voters became more familiar with him, and he ran many ads attacking Obama, his popularity gained. In late May, Obama began his anti-Romney ads, and the trend was reversed.

Can it be reversed again? There are five more scheduled events, the two conventions and three debates. The Republican convention is the last week in August, to be followed by the Democratic convention. So far, counterpunching seems to be working for Obama. But there's a lot of time left...

Really, Mitt?

Posted on [August 27, 2012](#)

In an interview with Politico, Romney asserted his ability to appeal to people based on his election as President of his fraternity at Brigham Young University.

Does he really not understand that the group who elected him was an all male, most likely all Mormon collection of 18-22 year old whites? No blacks, no Jews, Muslims, women, atheists... Is he really that obtuse? A BYU frat does not come anywhere near the electorate.

Republican Strategy

Posted on [September 12, 2012](#)

The dawn is breaking over the heads of the Republican leadership: they are beginning to think that Romney will lose, and they might even lose House and Senate seats.

If that occurs, the question will be “How could we lose to a President who has done so little of what he promised?”

Here are a few of my guesses.

First, and most importantly, the electorate – naively – wants to believe in fair play. The stance of the Republican party so eloquently voiced by Sen. McConnell, that their job was to defeat President Obama was their number one priority – as opposed to making law – is the opposite of fair play. Strategically, that stance led to a primary season wherein each candidate tried to show how much he or she was not like Obama. That, in turn, led to the least-like-Obama being nominated. Romney is older, richer from birth, less engaging, from the world of business, not politics, with a different religion and... am I forgetting something? By relying on the assumption that all they had to do was present an anti-Obama, they wound up with a candidate who had not bothered to identify himself with anything more substantial than who he is not. He is the generic Republican.

Finally, the I’m-not-him strategy led to interpreting anything that Obama did manage to accomplish into something negative. And THAT is just unfair.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

APPENDIX C. ATTRIBUTE BY ATTRIBUTE ANALYSIS OF DESIRED PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Here is what the respondents did with the attribute of truthfulness

VOTER	CHOICE	TRUTHFUL			UNTRUTHFUL		
D	OBAMA	78%	11%	4%	5%	1%	1%
D	ROMNEY	78%	4%	4%	9%	0%	4%
I	OBAMA	73%	17%	3%	2%	4%	0%
I	ROMNEY	71%	9%	6%	7%	5%	3%
R	OBAMA	63%	32%	4%	0%	0%	2%
R	ROMNEY	85%	10%	2%	3%	0%	0%

The modal (most frequent response) for all six voter groups was to choose the response closest to the Truthful end, which is why truthfulness ranks first of all eighteen desired characteristics. However, we can get more information from the distributions. I assigned scores of +3, +2, +1, -1, -2, and -3 from Truthful to Untruthful. Then I multiplied each score for each of the six voter/choice groups by the percentages, added them up and divided by 3 to get a “Percent Truthiness”.

VOTER	CHOICE	TRUTHINESS
D	OBAMA	84%
D	ROMNEY	75%
I	OBAMA	81%
I	ROMNEY	70%
R	OBAMA	84%
R	ROMNEY	90%

This table shows that Party-line voters who will change allegiance in 2012 are less concerned with the truthfulness of their choice than those who will continue to vote as they have before. This is to be expected. Averaging truthiness across Republican and Democratic voters, Romney voters score 82.5 to Obama voters 84%. No real difference.

Looking at the Independents reveals something altogether different: Independents intending to vote for Obama rated THEIR DESIRE FOR TRUTHFULNESS at 81%, vs. 70% for the Independents who intended to vote for Romney.

Just to emphasize the point – these results show what the voters themselves value. Crossover voters are telling us that they are voting against their own pattern DESPITE their desire for a truthful candidate; Independents who chose Obama value truthfulness more than Independents who said they would vote for Romney.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Next on the list is Aloof:Engaging. By the way, the adjectives were arranged so that some of the obviously positive personal characteristics were placed on the left, some on the right, and the web instrument automatically randomized the order in which each individual respondent saw the items, to reduce any response bias towards recency or primacy.

VOTER	CHOICE	ALOOF			ENGAGING		
D	OBAMA	1%	2%	4%	21%	34%	39%
D	ROMNEY	3%	3%	34%	14%	31%	14%
I	OBAMA	3%	3%	5%	19%	34%	35%
I	ROMNEY	0%	3%	7%	23%	37%	32%
R	OBAMA	2%	2%	2%	11%	44%	40%
R	ROMNEY	0%	0%	4%	23%	37%	34%

Of the six voter types, the modal score was -2 in four of those, not quite the extreme of engaging, and the other two were -3 on aloofness, or 'extremely engaging'.

For the sake of not presenting a need for the reader to invert negatives, here's how engagingness – calculated as we did truthiness – worked out.

VOTER	CHOICE	ENGAGING
D	OBAMA	65%
D	ROMNEY	24%
I	OBAMA	57%
I	ROMNEY	59%
R	OBAMA	70%
R	ROMNEY	65%

The Democratic voters in general do not value engagingness as much as Republicans, and the Democratic crossovers are least concerned with that aspect. The Republican crossovers value engagingness more than the Republican Romney voters. And there is no difference between Independents who favored Romney and those who chose Obama.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

“Optimism is a Force Multiplier” was the motto of General Colin Powell, and it ranks third among voter characteristics. Like truthfulness and engagingness, the first three desiderata are all subjective or ‘intuited’ characteristics. There is no objective way to measure how truthful, engaging, or optimistic a person is. It’s how the person is perceived. But voters say it’s important for a President to be optimistic.

Here’s how the voter types valued optimism

VOTER	CHOICE	OPTIMISTIC
D	OBAMA	61%
D	ROMNEY	70%
I	OBAMA	67%
I	ROMNEY	63%
R	OBAMA	64%
R	ROMNEY	72%

Both sets of part-line voters – loyalists and crossovers – who chose Romney valued optimism more than those who chose Obama. But Independent voters reversed that finding, by a small margin.

The fourth-ranked attribute of a President is level of education – something that is easily measured. Obama has a degree in law from Harvard, as does Romney, who also has an MBA from that same institution, so one would think that Romney voters would value this more.

And yet...

VOTER	CHOICE	HIGHLY EDUCATED
D	OBAMA	71%
D	ROMNEY	71%
I	OBAMA	63%
I	ROMNEY	53%
R	OBAMA	74%
R	ROMNEY	64%

Here is a perfect example of image trumping reality. Democratic voters who chose either Obama or Romney value education equally, but Independents and Republicans who chose Romney said they value education less than those who chose Obama.

My conclusion here is that Romney is perceived as he portrays himself, a “businessman” as contrasted to Obama’s professorial mien. And that level of education is not really a factor in which candidate voters support.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

The next item is married. Both candidates are married, with children, so this should be a wash.

VOTER	CHOICE	MARRIED
D	OBAMA	45%
D	ROMNEY	61%
I	OBAMA	46%
I	ROMNEY	55%
R	OBAMA	75%
R	ROMNEY	59%

So Romney voters value marriage in a candidate more than Obama voters...unless they are Republicans.

I take this to mean that the voters recognize that, however much they value having a President who is married, there hasn't been an unmarried candidate in either major party since Adlai Stevenson. So it doesn't matter.

Heterosexual is next most important. It's again a perception, although neither Obama nor Romney seems to be anything but heterosexual.

The table below shows the overall distribution of responses, with modal responses highlighted and bold.

VOTER	CHOICE	HOMOSEXUAL			HETEROSEXUAL		
D	OBAMA	2%	1%	11%	41%	17%	27%
D	ROMNEY	0%	0%	0%	22%	13%	65%
I	OBAMA	3%	7%	8%	37%	15%	29%
I	ROMNEY	1%	4%	6%	27%	14%	50%
R	OBAMA	2%	4%	2%	7%	7%	79%
R	ROMNEY	1%	1%	3%	18%	13%	64%

The percentages for seeing heterosexuality as important are here:

VOTER	CHOICE	HETEROSEXUAL
D	OBAMA	45%
D	ROMNEY	81%
I	OBAMA	42%
I	ROMNEY	62%
R	OBAMA	81%
R	ROMNEY	76%

Clearly, among Democrat and Independent Obama voters, it's less of an issue than for Romney voters. For all Republicans, it's more important. But again, there's nothing to separate the two candidates.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

How about planful vs. impulsive?

VOTER	CHOICE	PLANFUL
D	OBAMA	52%
D	ROMNEY	57%
I	OBAMA	51%
I	ROMNEY	46%
R	OBAMA	15%
R	ROMNEY	68%

Not much differentiation among Democrats and Independents on the basis of their choice. Averaging out over those four voter groups, those who choose Obama and Romney each come in with a rating of 51.5% as to how they value planfulness.

But oh those Republicans: the ones who highly value planfulness will stick with the nominee; those who are almost indifferent – 15% in favor of planfulness – are choosing Obama.

Folk wisdom indicates that the taller candidate usually dominates. A quick Google check confirmed my estimate that Romney is taller, and considering his age - 65 – and the inevitable shrinkage, he has a “sizeable” advantage.

Sorry about that.

VOTER	CHOICE	TALL
D	OBAMA	23%
D	ROMNEY	9%
I	OBAMA	22%
I	ROMNEY	19%
R	OBAMA	36%
R	ROMNEY	23%

Now wait just a minute...no matter how they voted in the past, people who are disposed to favor Obama see height as more important than Romney voters. And yet they are picking the *objectively shorter* of the two.

The explanation that springs to mind is that to voters in general, Obama seems taller than Romney.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Next on the list is “Held elective office”. Romney was elected Governor of Massachusetts, after losing a Senatorial campaign to Ted Kennedy. Obama was a state senator from Illinois, a U.S. Senator from Illinois, and a President of the United States. He won five elections, lost a bid for the U.S. house to Bobby Rush.

VOTER	CHOICE	ELECTED
D	OBAMA	37%
D	ROMNEY	12%
I	OBAMA	28%
I	ROMNEY	26%
R	OBAMA	39%
R	ROMNEY	38%

The Democrats who supported Romney were least concerned with having held electoral office. For Independents and Republicans, no difference.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

And then there is race. The results are interesting. Here is the distribution.

VOTER	CHOICE	NONWHITE			WHITE		
D	OBAMA	8%	5%	43%	36%	3%	5%
D	ROMNEY	0%	0%	9%	35%	30%	26%
I	OBAMA	3%	7%	27%	46%	7%	10%
I	ROMNEY	1%	3%	15%	53%	11%	19%
R	OBAMA	2%	4%	7%	18%	2%	68%
R	ROMNEY	0%	0%	8%	61%	14%	16%

And the percentages...

VOTER	CHOICE	WHITE
D	OBAMA	-7%
D	ROMNEY	55%
I	OBAMA	14%
I	ROMNEY	36%
R	OBAMA	69%
R	ROMNEY	43%

- Among Democrats, 56% of the Obama voters say they would prefer a nonwhite President, compared to 9% of Romney voters.
- Among Republicans, 13% say they would prefer a nonwhite President, compared to 8% of the Romney voters.
- Among Independents, 37 percent say they would prefer a nonwhite President, compared to 19% of the Romney voters.

Putting those bullets together, I was puzzled to see how 68% of Republicans for Obama – 39 out of 57 - said they had a strong preference for a white President. In other words, these voters were voting AGAINST their personal bias. Were they different in any way from Republicans voting for Romney, who had a much weaker preference for a white President (although far less enthusiastic about having a nonwhite President)?

The Republicans who were voting for Obama were, compared to Republicans for Romney,

- much younger
- better educated
- more likely to be male
- better off financially
- racially identical (93% of them were white, compared to 95% of the Republicans for Romney)

I can only conclude that their choice overcame an admitted bias.

UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

At number 11 out of 18, we have the pair playful:serious. Another subjectively measured judgment of another person's character. The overall preference is for serious over playful. The table below shows the voter-type preference.

VOTER	CHOICE	SERIOUS
D	OBAMA	13%
D	ROMNEY	35%
I	OBAMA	19%
I	ROMNEY	41%
R	OBAMA	-1%
R	ROMNEY	41%

This is the most consistent result we have observed. No matter the previous voting pattern, Romney voters value seriousness more than Obama voters.

Next we look at the preference for a male for President. This should be a wash. Both candidates have a y chromosome.

VOTER	CHOICE	MALE
D	OBAMA	12%
D	ROMNEY	22%
I	OBAMA	20%
I	ROMNEY	22%
R	OBAMA	71%
R	ROMNEY	44%

More than any variable we have looked at, preference for a male President illustrates how bias influences voting behavior. There is no difference between Independent Obama vs. Romney supporters in how strongly they value having a male as President. But the crossovers – Democrats for Romney and Republicans for Obama – value “male” significantly more than party loyalists.

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Constancy – another subjective judgment – is next in import. I suspected that Obama voters would value this attribute more than Romney voters, and Independents would value it less than party loyalists, and Republicans would value it more than Democrats.

Here are the results (pulled after I wrote the paragraph above)

VOTER	CHOICE	CONSTANT
D	OBAMA	20%
D	ROMNEY	29%
I	OBAMA	12%
I	ROMNEY	26%
R	OBAMA	43%
R	ROMNEY	43%

My Scorecard – wrong on point one (Obama voters value constancy less than Romney voters, but correct in points two and three – Independents value constancy less than loyalists, and Republicans more than Democrats. My bias is exposed here – my perception of Romney is that he is a shape-shifter who changed from Moderate Mitt to Severely Conservative Romney.

On to the factor of having been born poor vs. wealthy. This is an objective measure, and overall voters would prefer someone who was born poor to make it to the Presidency. That is voters in general. By choice and party...Obama was born poor, Romney was born rich.

And the results are...

VOTER	CHOICE	BORN POOR
D	OBAMA	31%
D	ROMNEY	16%
I	OBAMA	24%
I	ROMNEY	-6%
R	OBAMA	-2%
R	ROMNEY	-2%

The major difference is by party. Republicans seem neutral, Independents show moderate support for the notion, Democrats would prefer someone born poor.

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Neither Romney nor Obama served in the military. The general voter preference is for a President who did serve.

VOTER	CHOICE	SERVED
D	OBAMA	-1%
D	ROMNEY	16%
I	OBAMA	5%
I	ROMNEY	34%
R	OBAMA	-57%
R	ROMNEY	43%

I guess being commander-in-chief of the armed forces doesn't count. Or perhaps it was receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Another example of how perception trumps objective reality.

Number 16 on the list of 18 is deeply religious:irreligious. Romney is a Mormon, Obama is a Protestant. Each is a Christian. So, like military service, there should be little differentiation by choice.

VOTER	CHOICE	DEEPLY RELIGIOUS
D	OBAMA	0%
D	ROMNEY	13%
I	OBAMA	0%
I	ROMNEY	29%
R	OBAMA	-38%
R	ROMNEY	46%

And the pattern is very similar to military service. Clearly, Romney is favored by those who want a deeply religious person, regardless of voting record.

Number 17 is older. Romney is 65, Obama is 51. Advantage, Romney.

VOTER	CHOICE	OLDER
D	OBAMA	-7%
D	ROMNEY	17%
I	OBAMA	-10%
I	ROMNEY	12%
R	OBAMA	-44%
R	ROMNEY	21%

Hard to argue with birthdate.

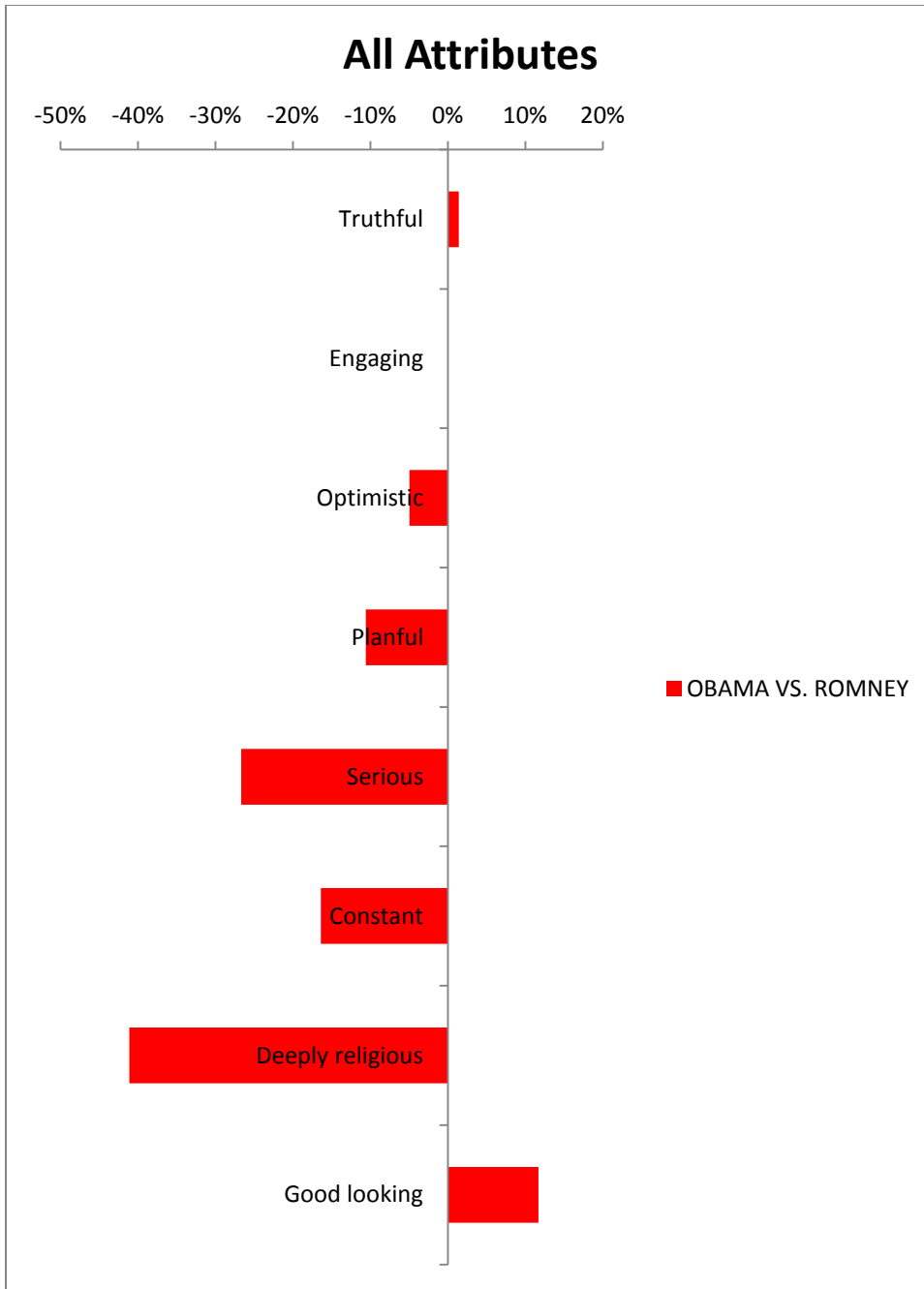
UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

Finally, we come to appearance. I didn't ask which picture you like better, either sub- or superliminally, but asked for the judgment as to whether the voter prefers a better looking candidate. My judgment is that Mitt Romney is better looking than Barack Obama.

VOTER	CHOICE	GOOD LOOKING
D	OBAMA	9%
D	ROMNEY	1%
I	OBAMA	8%
I	ROMNEY	-4%
R	OBAMA	42%
R	ROMNEY	2%

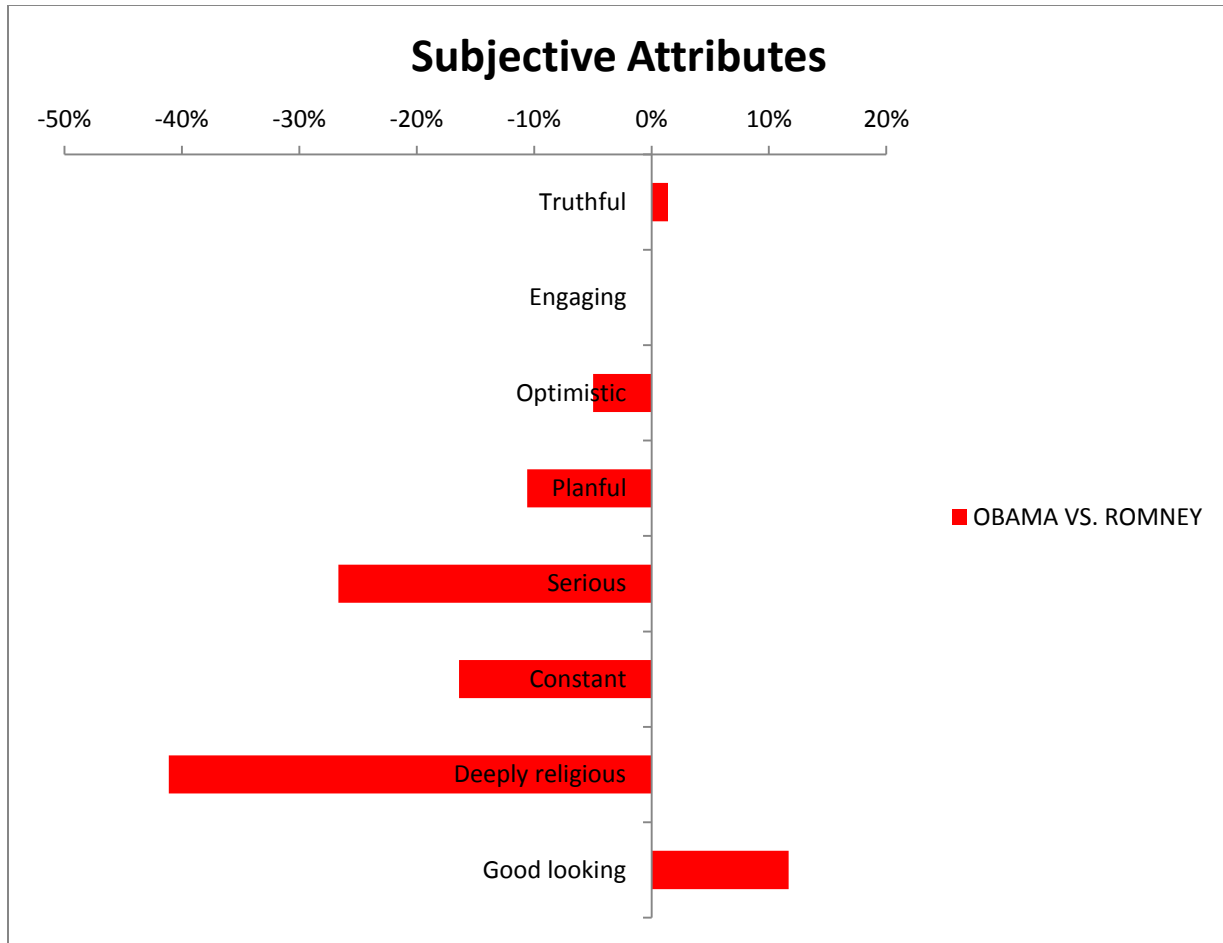
Republicans voting for Obama are the outliers here. My conclusion is that "Good looking" is a proxy for leadership, or charisma.

The graph below shows all eighteen characteristics, ordered from top to bottom as most important to least important.



The chart shows the difference between the percentage who say that an attribute is important between Romney supporters and Obama supporters. We subtracted Romney voters' percentage from the Obama voter percentage for each attribute.

We can simplify the result by eliminating the objective categories.



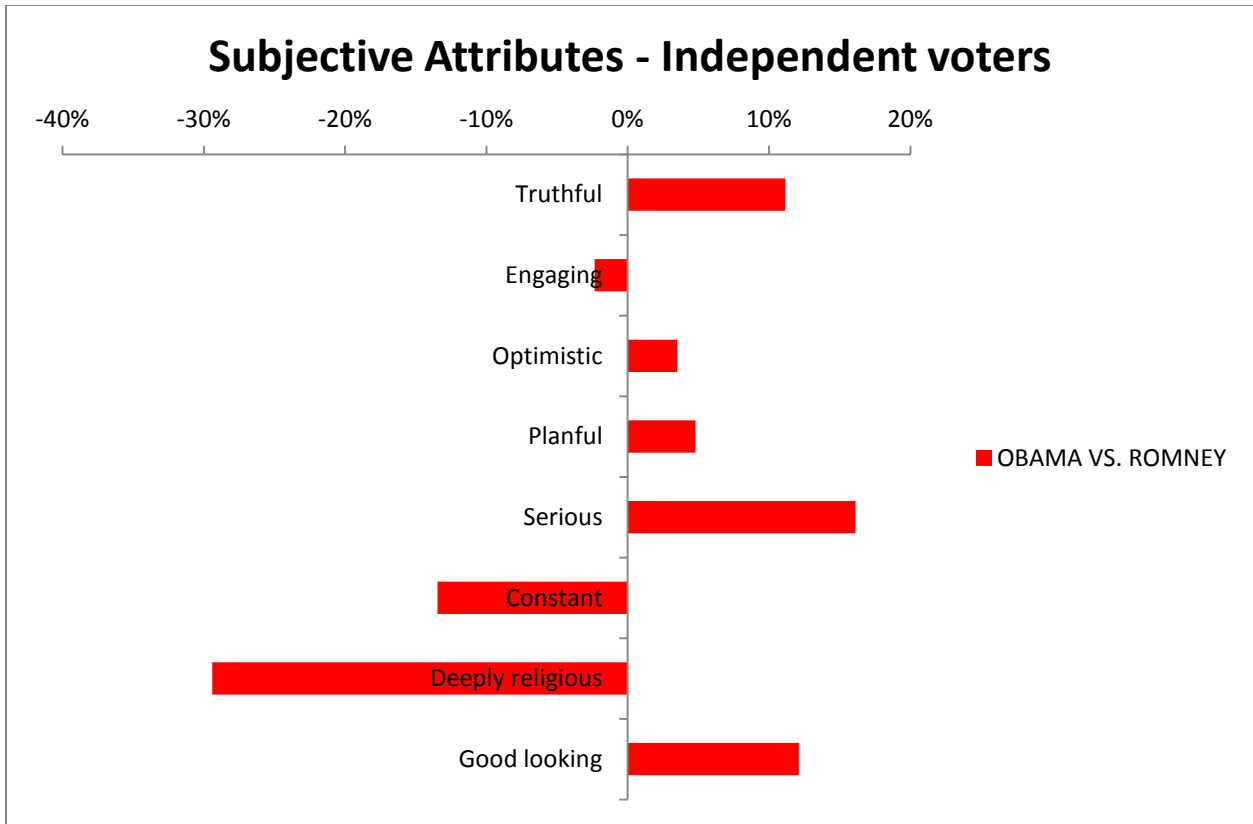
The only real advantage that Obama seems to have is with voters who value appearance.

And that is quite enough. Let me selectively reiterate an earlier summary.

A study entitled “Elected in 100 milliseconds” reviewed well over 100 studies that found that, when subjects were shown a pair of **FACES** of people who were not well-known (for example, European political candidates for minor office shown to American subjects) **at near-subliminal speeds**, viewers were quite consistent in stating a preference for one or another. Over all, **subjects favored the candidate who won the election by some amount between 67% and 76% - roughly 2:1 to 3:1**. This without any knowledge of political party, ideological stance, personal history...and even five-year-old children showed clear preferences for candidates who had won election.

Political scientists will no doubt object, and this is written on October 19, 2012, but in my opinion, the overall impression people have of Barack Obama is that he is more likeable than Mitt Romney and that will be critical to his re-election. Party Loyalists and ideological purists will back a candidate on the basis of his statements and his record, and especially on his party affiliation. That is a given.

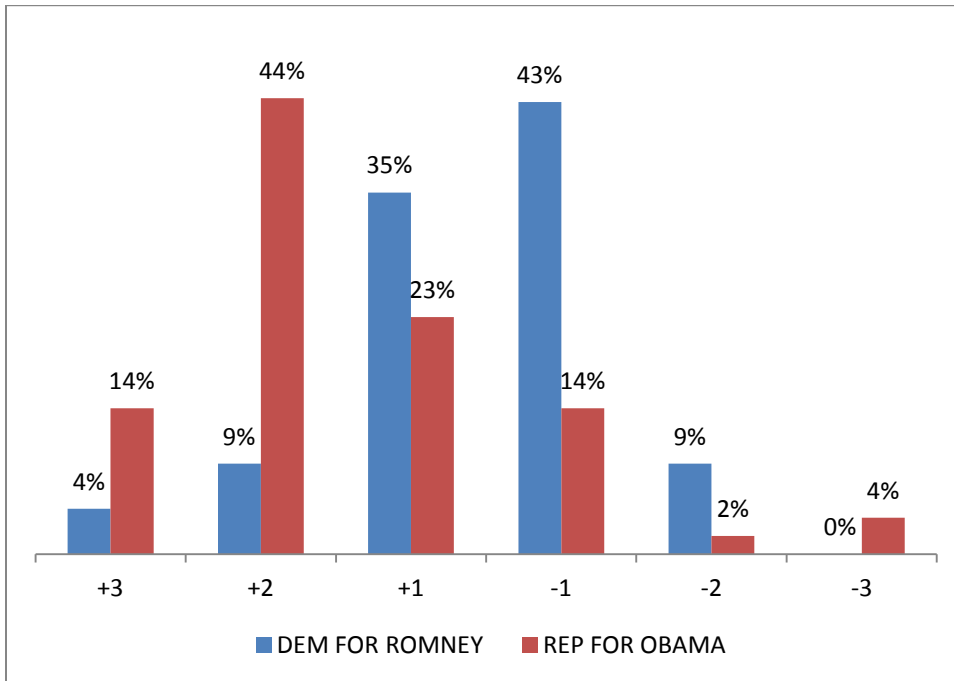
Independents are a different story.



Comparing the results of what Independent voters care about, there are several important differences. The importance of truthfulness, a small advantage to Obama, has been multiplied ten times. Optimism, planfulness and seriousness all shift increasingly from Romney’s side to Obama’s. Constancy and religious fervor remain where they were...as does the all important aspect of appearance.

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Finally, the crossovers. The people who have never voted for a Democrat but now say they will vote for Obama value attractiveness at 42%. Democrats who favor Romney place that value at 1%. The chart below shows the detail.



UNDERSTANDING VOTERS AND VOTING

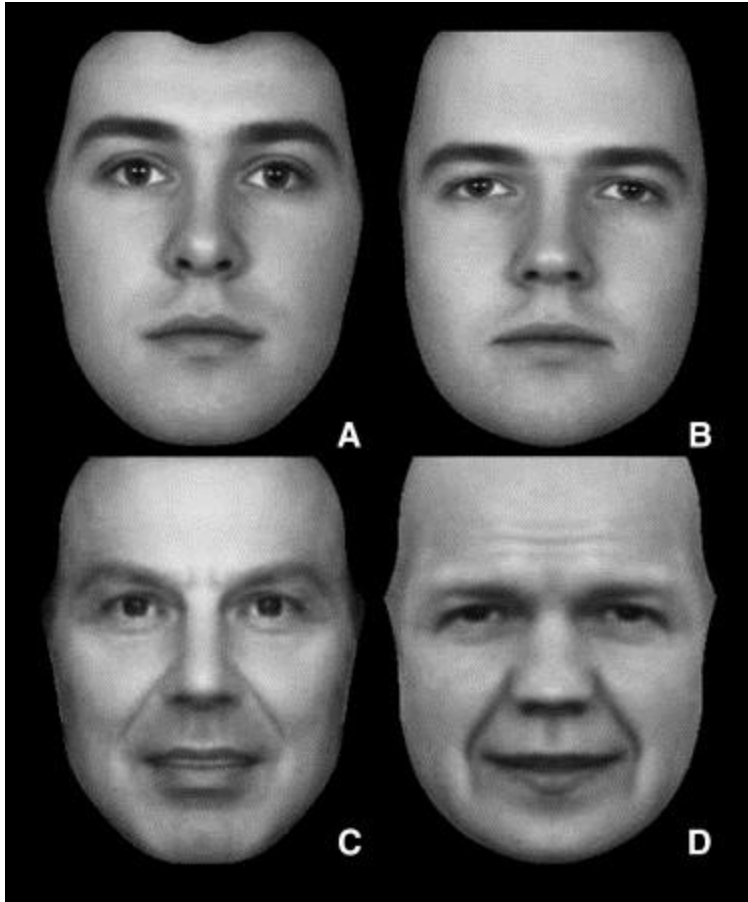
APPENDIX D. The part of choosing a candidate that has nothing to do with issues or party.

A study entitled “Elected in 100 milliseconds” appeared in the Journal of Nonverbal Behavior. The researchers reviewed a rather copious compilation of experiments – well over 100 studies – that found that, when subjects were shown a pair of faces of people who were not well-known (for example, European political candidates for minor office shown to American subjects) at near-subliminal speeds, viewers were quite consistent in stating a preference for one or another. Over all, subjects favored the candidate who won the election by some amount between 67% and 76% - roughly 2:1 to 3:1. This without any knowledge of political party, ideological stance, personal history...and even five-year-old children showed clear preferences for candidates who had won election.

It is well documented that people who watched the Kennedy vs. Nixon debate on television thought that Kennedy won, while those who heard it on the radio thought that Nixon won. Another study, “Facial appearance affects voting decisions” cited in Evolution and Human Behavior, used a newly-developed methodology:

As a base face, a composite of one male face (10 images, taken under standardized lighting and with a neutral expression) was transformed in shape using only the shape difference between a composite of each winner and a composite of each loser (four images each, Fig. 1 for examples; the same procedure was used with a female composite for the New Zealand 1999 election). Images were selected on the basis of quality and size based on a search of freely available internet sources. Composite images were used to ensure images were representative of the individual's average appearance. The use of a single base face meant that the individual transforms based on the difference between each winner and loser all had the same shape before transformation and identical facial coloration after transformation. Composites were made by marking a number of landmark features, calculating an average shape for each, and warping each constituent image to the average before blending the images together into a single image. All images were made symmetric prior to transform.

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In the picture above, C and D are the composite pictures of Tony Blair (Winner) and William Hague, respectively, and A and B are the transformed image that presented both faces without evidence of age or condition, merely proportions and shapes.

The authors found that by asking people to choose “which face would you vote for to run your country?” the results of an upcoming election or one already conducted could be accurately predicted.

Finally,

“research shows that

- people agree in their social judgments from faces, indicating that faces provide information that is interpreted consistently across perceivers.
- Second, research shows that social judgments from faces are made rapidly without much mental effort. For example, as little as 33 milliseconds exposure to a face is sufficient for people to decide whether the face looks trustworthy or not.
- Third, regions in the brain seem to track the valence of novel faces even when participants are not engaged in explicit evaluation of the faces. Thus, it appears that our brains are automatically categorizing faces.

- **Finally, research shows that social judgments from faces predict important social outcomes ranging from sentencing decisions to electoral success**

And one more...

Contrary to the notion that people use deliberate, rational strategies when deciding whom to vote for in major political elections, research indicates that people use shallow decision heuristics, such as impressions of competence made solely from facial appearance when deciding whom to vote for. For instance, recent evidence has shown that people's impressions of the competence of a political candidate based solely on their facial appearance predict the outcomes of recent U.S. congressional elections. Another recent study showed that differences in facial shape alone between candidates are predictive of who will win or lose an election. Despite the considerable emphasis placed in political elections on educating voters about policy stances that distinguish political candidates and their political parties, voters are as likely to rely on what a candidate looks like as what a candidate stands for when deciding how to cast their votes.

I've provided just four references to what has been recognized as irrefutable evidence that human beings react in consistent, predictable fashion to the facial appearance of other human beings. The reaction we have is visceral – we are genetically programmed to interpret the characteristics of the face we observe.

It is imperative that the reader recognize that the studies have **absolutely nothing to do with facial expression**. While we can – if trained – recognize expressions of anger, fear, disgust, surprise, happiness, sadness and contempt, some of which appear for only ¼ second or less, such expressions can be expressed by any person of any facial structure. What the research tells us is that we react and make judgments on the basis of our overall impression of FACIAL STRUCTURE, an attribute that does not change.¹³ An individual can learn to control his expressions –the craft of acting includes this skill – but facial structure is immutable.

Note that of the 18 characteristics, nine are inferences that must be made intuitively – Truthful, Engaging, Optimistic, Heterosexual, Planful, Serious, Constant, and Deeply Religious, and two others can be directly observed (Tall, White). One can find evidence of age, military service, wealth at birth, holding previous elective office, educated and married. That leaves only “Good looking” as a judgment.

Remember, 35% of the votes cast will be by people who are not motivated by issues covered on a party platform nor a deep-seated party affiliation, but find themselves in a position of cognitive dissonance.

And cognitive dissonance is perhaps the least understood and most misrepresented term. It does NOT refer to people who can't make up their mind, or are considering wildly different choices. Suppose you are considering the purchase of an automobile, and you have narrowed your choice to one of two

¹³ When the producers of the motion picture, “The Graduate” were searching for an actor to play the main role, they approached Robert Redford. He turned the role down, pointing to his face and asking, “can you see me as a 21-year-old virgin?” The role went to Dustin Hoffman.

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vehicles on the dealer's lot. They are about the same in price, size, and features. They are both new cars from the same manufacturer. One has option set A – a sunroof and a satellite radio, while the other has option set B, a built-in GPS and leather seats. You decide, after considerable debate, because the two options are about as attractive as each other, on one of the options, and you go ahead and purchase the car.

After you make the decision, you do not want to feel that you've made the incorrect choice, so you believe that the difference was actually greater and more meaningful than it seemed at the time. You congratulate yourself on having chosen the 'better' option set. In fact, the choice could have been as trivial as the color of the car. Personally, I prefer silver metallic paint on a car – any car. But give me a choice of maroon or dark blue, and my response is...oh, let me flip a coin.

However, once the coin is flipped, I will find reasons that maroon is better than blue, if that's what I bought.

My point is this: those people who have a difficult time making a decision on substantive issues will nonetheless make a decision, and that decision – that intuition, really – is quite likely based on his perception of character based on what the candidate's face looks like. THEN the voter will see the candidate that he has chosen as more truthful, engaging, optimistic, etc. In other words, the least valued quality – how 'good looking' the candidate is - is the most likely determining factor for a significant proportion of voters.

The analysis that follows presents the preferences of Democrats, Independents and Republicans who said they had already decided they would vote for Obama, and the same three groups who said they would be voting for Romney. The table below summarizes the results of those who had decided to vote for one of the two major party candidates.¹⁴

	OBAMA	ROMNEY
D	397	23
I	241	200
R	57	291

I never intended the survey to be an accurate prediction of the election outcome. I used a sample of voters who had voted in at least two prior elections, thereby excluding every likely voter younger than twenty-six years old, and the sample was not representative in several other ways of the people who actually went to the polls. As this is being written, the date is October 17, 2012, and I am quite certain that Obama will be re-elected. But not because of this research.

Our sample was taken immediately after the Democratic convention. Obama got 57% of the vote. As far as voting by party, 95% of the Democrats said they would vote for Obama vs. 84% of Republicans who would vote for Obama.

¹⁴ The other respondents either had not decided, or decided to vote for someone else, or not vote at all.