

# Swept Away

Peter Brimelow and Edwin Rubenstein

Unfettered immigration is rapidly shifting the ethnic and political balance of the United States. Republicans beware.

“Demography is destiny in American politics.” That was the stark opening of our controversial *National Review* cover story “Electing a New People” (June 16, 1997). We pointed out that voting patterns in the United States correlate very closely with ethnicity, altering very slowly if at all. But the U.S. ethnic balance is shifting rapidly because of immigration. Therefore, a concomitant movement of the U.S. political balance is simply a matter of time. And since immigration is a matter of public policy, it is literally true that the federal government is dissolving the people and electing a new one, to paraphrase Bertolt Brecht’s famous advice to the Communist rulers of East Germany.

In the present article, we review our back-of-the-envelope projection of immigration’s impact on the political balance, then make a new projection based on the results of the 2000 presidential election. We conclude by analyzing the choices confronting the Republicans, the party that seems most likely to be the first victim of the changes.

Our view that demography is destiny was completely borne out by the 2000 presidential election. The Republican nominee, George W. Bush, was chosen partly because of his alleged appeal to Hispanics. The GOP made desperate efforts, notably at its much-ridiculed convention in Philadelphia, to present a multi-cultural face. But the result was ignominious failure—the ethnic patterns remained unbroken. In fact, in significant respects they grew even more ominous for the GOP. Only because Ralph Nader’s Green Party siphoned off some Democratic votes did George W. Bush squeak into the White House, with a mere 48.4 percent of the popular vote.

For our original projection of immigration’s impact on the political balance, we analyzed the 1988 presidential race, which the GOP won with 53 percent of the vote. This figure also happened to be the average vote received by the Republicans in presidential elections since 1968—the largest edge achieved by any party over any six elections in American history. And it was the vote received by Republicans in 1994, when they took control of the Senate and House. It can reasonably be regarded as the Republicans’ high-water mark.

Then we lowered this high-water mark by adjusting for the shifting ethnic balance that the Census Bureau estimated would result from immigration, assuming that the various ethnic groups continued to vote as they did in 1988. It is important to note that these voting patterns were established before the United States began any seri-

ous public debate over immigration—so Republican stands on the issue cannot be blamed for the party’s poor performance with these ethnic groups, as is commonly and carelessly alleged.

### Declining Support

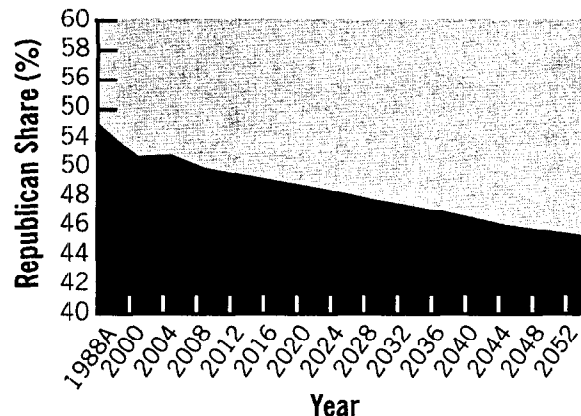
The results were startling, as the figure shows. Even if the Republicans could have won their 1988 level of support again—which they miserably failed to do against Bill Clinton—they would have had at most two presidential cycles left. Then they would have fallen inexorably into minority status, beginning in 2008.

But that was better than the prospect confronting them after the 2000 election. George W. Bush came nowhere close to replicating the 1968–1988 Republican performance. As we have seen, he did not even get a majority of the popular vote.

A closer look reveals how poor Bush’s performance was. He actually did worse among African Americans than Bob Dole did in 1996, obtaining only 8 percent of African Americans’ votes, as opposed to Dole’s 12 percent. He also did worse among Asians than we allowed for in our original projections (41 percent vs. 47 percent),

### Projected Republican Vote (%) in Presidential Election Years

(Extrapolations assume that the Republican share for each ethnic group will remain at 1988 levels. Thus the vote is diminished solely by the shifting ethnic balance.)



Source: Based on 1997 Census Bureau projections of voting age populations.

which suggests that this group may not be the natural Republican constituency that the party's strategists so wishfully think it to be.

Of course, Bush did pull a higher share of the Hispanic vote than Dole did—31 percent versus 21 percent. And this has caused a certain amount of innumerate glee among those who fixate on the proportionate increase (50 percent) while ignoring the pitifully small base. But the brute reality is that Bush still lost among Hispanics in a landslide. And his performance was squarely in the range of earlier GOP presidential experiences, which run the gamut from awful (35 percent in 1972) to catastrophic (24 percent in 1976). In no sense could it be considered a breakthrough.

Innumeracy blinds some commentators to the full horror of the Republican predicament. When an ethnic bloc is growing rapidly, as the Hispanics are because of immigration, it is possible to increase your relative share of their vote and still be no better off in terms of their absolute contribution to your total vote. This is what happened to Bush. He increased the Republican share of the Hispanic vote by ten percentage points, but because the overall number of Hispanic voters increased

so much, the net effect was that he lost the Hispanic vote by essentially the same absolute number as Dole did (2.8 million vs. 2.9 million).

In other words, the Hispanics left him just as deep in the hole. He needed help from the rest of the American electorate to climb out.

And he didn't get it. In perhaps the most important and underreported development of the election, Bush did relatively poorly among whites, getting only 54 percent of their votes. By contrast, his father received 59 percent in 1988, and Reagan pulled 64 percent in 1984. Moreover, white turnout has been falling. In 1992, some 61.3 percent of whites over 18 voted; in 2000, turnout was down to 56 percent. These trends hurt Bush greatly because the Republican Party is fundamentally a white party. Virtually all of its votes—91 percent in 2000—come from whites. The evidence is very clear that the Republicans are failing to motivate their base.

#### No Laurels

So what happens now? Obviously, the GOP cannot rest on its laurels. It has none to rest on. To make our new projection based on the 2000 election, we redistributed the third-party votes of Ralph Nader (2.7 per-

cent) and Patrick J. Buchanan (0.4 percent) equally to the major parties. This is an extremely favorable assumption for the Republicans and has the happy result of bringing the party's 2000 share to 50 percent.

But after that, it's downhill all the way—as the table makes clear. Under these assumptions and taking demographic changes into account, the GOP loses narrowly in 2004 (49.7 percent) and by a slightly wider, though still small, gap in 2008 (49.4 percent). Then, it sinks steadily as immigration shifts the political balance against it. In fact, Bush's poor performance, if replicated, will have the effect of hastening the estimated date of the GOP's demise by two presidential election cycles.

However, things may not work out even this well for the Republicans. Although we redistributed the third-party votes equally for the sake of clarity, we by no means predict that this redistribution will actually happen. In our 1997 *National Review* story, we cited countries as far apart as Australia and France to demonstrate that immigration is preeminently an issue that, when ignored by establishment parties, provokes insurrection. Pat Buchanan duly broke with the Republicans and ran as the Reform party nominee in

### Even on the most favorable assumptions, the GOP is bound for minority status— unless immigration is cut off.

	Projected Republican Share	Republican Share with Half of Nader and Buchanan Voters	Projected Ethnic Balance of Voting Age Population:			
			White(a)	Black(a)	Hispanic	Asian(a)
2000–Nov. 7	48.4%	50.0%	73.8%	11.4%	10.3%	4.4%
2004	48.1%	49.7%	72.4%	11.6%	11.3%	4.8%
2008	47.8%	49.4%	70.8%	11.8%	12.2%	5.2%
2012	47.0%	48.6%	69.3%	12.1%	12.4%	6.2%
2016	47.2%	48.8%	67.8%	12.2%	14.0%	5.9%
2020	47.3%	48.9%	66.3%	12.4%	15.0%	6.3%
2040	45.2%	46.8%	58.6%	13.0%	19.9%	8.5%
2060	43.7%	45.3%	51.4%	13.3%	24.8%	10.5%
2080	42.6%	44.2%	45.9%	13.3%	28.8%	12.1%
2100	41.8%	43.4%	41.6%	13.1%	32.0%	13.3%

a. Non-Hispanic.

Note: Republican share held at 2000 level for each group: White, 54%; Black 8%; Hispanic 31%; Asian 41%. Voter participation rates: White 56%; Black 45%; Hispanic 35%; Asian and other, 43%.

Source: Based on Census Bureau projections of voting age population released in 2000.

2000, with immigration reform as part of his platform. His weak showing (not that the GOP can afford to ignore any votes at all) will comfort only those who do not remember John Ashbrook's equally weak primary challenge to Richard Nixon in 1972, after which the conservative movement was widely written off—four years before Reagan's similar primary challenge to Gerald Ford helped scuttle Ford's reelection prospects and put the Gipper on the road to the White House. Buchanan may not have been the Messiah, nor even a John the Baptist. But he could still be an Isaiah, prophesying the Republicans' demise.

In our previous story, we also mentioned the anti-immigration forces then mobilizing against immigration enthusiast Senator Spencer Abraham in Michigan. They duly played a role in his very narrow defeat. We also noted the rise of the Green Party, pointing out that it was the Green Party's vote-splitting role that had caused the Republicans to win a recent congressional special election in New Mexico, rather than the mass conversion of Hispanics that was being proclaimed by the usual Republican Pollyannas. The New Mexico Greens appeared to be Anglo Leftists alienated from the worldly Hispanic machine that controlled the state's Democratic Party. We suggested that without Green intervention the Republicans would lose the seat in the general election, which they did.

In 2000, the Greens repeated this spoiling feat at the federal level. And once again, the Greens are, in demographic terms, strikingly different from the national Democratic Party. Exit polls showed the Green vote to be much less African American (3.5 percent of Greens compared with 18.4 percent of Democrats) and Catholic (19 percent vs. 27 percent), much more white (88 percent vs. 69 percent) and strikingly more inclined to profess no religion (23 percent vs. 11.4 percent—probably including many ex-Protestants, with current Protestants weighing in at 35 percent vs. 32 percent). Most remarkably for a movement of the American Left, the Green vote included very few Jews (1.5 percent of the total vs. 6.6 percent for the Democrats).

It is not fanciful to suggest that what we are seeing here are the first, indirect effects of the current great immigration wave. The modern Democratic Party has become preoccupied with the ethnic and patronage agendas of the blocs that increasingly make up its base. White Leftists, more ideological and perhaps idealistic, no longer feel at home in that party, and they are leaving, although no doubt failing to acknowledge the real reason, even to themselves.

### Ostrich Party

Thus the vast complication of ethnic politics brought about by current immigration policy may, in the end, confound both parties. This has happened before in American politics. Immigration, and the rise of the nativist American Party, destroyed the Whigs and ended the Second Party System on the eve of the Civil War.

But it's clear that the Republicans are being confounded first. Their options are few. First, they could continue their clumsy, "me-too" multicultural "outreach" as exemplified by the Philadelphia convention. This should guarantee the party irretrievable minority status in two or three presidential election cycles.

Second, the Republicans could try "inreach"—appealing to their white base. This would, in fact, be amazingly easy. A brilliant article by Steve Sailer, posted on the webzine *vdare.com*, has demonstrated that if George W. Bush had increased his share of the white vote by just three percentage points, to 57 percent—and remember, his father received 59 percent in 1988—he would have won an electoral-college landslide of 367 to 171. There is no reason why achieving this increase should have to alienate the Republicans' few minority supporters, but that wouldn't matter even if it did happen. Under this scenario, Bush would still have achieved a tie in the electoral college if *not one single nonwhite American had voted Republican*.

A cool reading of the Republican situation reveals that it is serious but by no means desperate. The demographic balance of many southern states that the GOP now wins handily is in fact far more lopsided than that

of California today—or of the United States tomorrow. African Americans, solid Democratic voters, constitute 35 to 40 percent of the electorate in those states, but the GOP wins handily because it mobilizes its white base. In 2000, it achieved 81 percent of the white vote in Mississippi, 73 percent in Texas, and 72 percent in Alabama. Overall, some 66 percent of white Southerners voted for George W. Bush last November. We calculate that if the Republicans could achieve 66 percent of the white vote nationwide, they would remain the majority party, regardless of immigration, until 2080.

Third, the Republicans could simply stop the ongoing election of a new, non-Republican American people. They could repeal the disastrous 1965 Immigration Act, which accidentally triggered the current wave of immigrants after a forty-year lull in which there was virtually no immigration at all. That lull was vital to the assimilation of the first, 1890–1920, Great Wave of immigration. There is a strong case for resuming such a moratorium. But at the least, Republicans could insist that immigration policy favor applicants—skilled, English-speaking, quite possibly European—who are more likely to vote for them. After all, no state would be admitted to the Union without the most precise calculation of its partisan consequences. And immigration is currently adding the equivalent of a North Dakota plus some 30,000 more people every year.

The inability of Republican strategists to understand all this is fascinating. Some are marketing professionals from the corporate world, people who never saw a market they didn't want to penetrate and have no experience with the zero-sum aspects of political struggle. Some Republican strategists obviously just can't count. Republican consultant Ralph Reed, for example, told the *Washington Post* that the party could no longer try "to drive its percentage of the white vote over 70 percent to win an election." (See "Bush Abandons 'Southern Strategy'; Campaign Avoids Use of Polarizing Issues Employed by GOP Since Nixon's Time," August 6, 2000.) Reed was apparently unaware that Bob Dole,

the candidate he supported in 1996, had not even won the white vote, receiving only 49 percent.

Overall, though, the Republican paralysis has to be judged a classic case of one competitor achieving moral hegemony over another. The Republicans, it is clear, have actually come to believe the Democrats' propaganda. They now believe that appeals to their own political base

are immoral, even though the Democrats play that very game themselves. That is a formula for political destruction. And as immigration-driven demographic change transforms American politics, it will change the society as well, through the political process and in countless other ways.

A great demographic storm is breaking over America. The Repub-

lican Party may prove to be the least that it sweeps away.

**Peter Brimelow** is the author of *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster* (1996) and an editor of *vdare.com*.

**Edwin Rubenstein** is director of research at the Hudson Institute.