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The Movement and the Manager

Mitt Romney could end up being the most hapless presidential nominee since Hubert Humphrey in 1968. Romney aims to lead a party whose base is in revolt—against him. Just like liberals were in revolt against Humphrey in 1968.

Antiwar liberals rioted in the streets of Chicago at the 1968 Democratic convention. It's hard to imagine conservatives rioting in the streets of Tampa at this year's Republican convention. Street riots are not their style. But Tea Party activists are pretty good at making their feelings known. And their feelings about Romney are not enthusiastic.

Conservatives are a movement, like the antiwar movement in the Sixties. And they are taking over the Republican Party, just like the antiwar movement took over the Democratic Party. As Rick Santorum proclaimed to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) on Friday, "Conservatives and Tea Party folk—we are not just wings of the Republican Party. We are the Republican Party."

Mitt Romney is not a movement politician. He's a manager. He's running on his management credentials—claiming that he can manage the economy better than President Obama. Romney did his best to rise above the manager image by telling CPAC delegates—the party's hard-core conservative base—that the changes needed in Washington "are not managerial issues...these are moral choices."

Romney even called himself "a severely con-

servative Republican governor." (He added the adverb to his prepared text.) That's trying too hard. Like when Jimmy Carter told a reporter in 1976 that he "lusted in his heart after women." Message to candidates: don't deal with your weaknesses by calling attention to them. Is a "severe conservative" the opposite of a "compassionate conservative" like George W. Bush? Actually, we know what a severe conservative is. It's Dick Cheney. Mitt Romney is no Dick Cheney.

Romney can't quite close the deal with the party's conservative base. He doesn't have the passion, or the anger, to lead a movement. His real cause is electability. In all the primaries so far, Romney voters cite electability as the main reason they're voting for him: he has the best chance to beat Obama. If there is any passion in his campaign, it's a passionate desire to put an end to the Obama presidency.

The Colorado caucuses on February 7th were a big shock. Four years ago, Romney carried Colorado with 60% of the vote. Things were different that year. Romney won the conservative base in 2008 because he was the alternative to John McCain, whom conservatives didn't trust. But so was Mike Huckabee. Romney and Huckabee split the conservative vote—northern conservatives for Romney, southern conservatives for Huckabee. That enabled McCain to win the Republican nomination.

This year, Colorado conservatives abandoned Romney. He got just 35% of the vote. Santorum beat him with 40%. But the voters were not

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making a statement about Santorum. They were making a statement about the moment. The Colorado caucuses came a few days after Romney won Florida and Nevada. The press and the party establishment were talking about Romney as the “inevitable” nominee. Conservative voters heard that and said at their first opportunity (Feb. 7 in Colorado, Minnesota and Missouri), “We are not going to have Mitt Romney shoved down our throats.” Santorum gave his answer to Romney’s claim of electability at CPAC: “Why would an undecided voter vote for the candidate that the party’s not excited about?”

Romney is still likely to get the nomination for the same reason McCain won in 2008: happiness in politics is a divided opposition. As long as Santorum and Newt Gingrich split the anti-Romney vote, Romney will be O.K. Santorum and Gingrich have regional appeal. Gingrich does well in the South (South Carolina, the Florida Panhandle). Santorum does well in the Midwest (Iowa, Missouri, and Minnesota).

Moreover, the requirement that delegates be awarded in proportion to the primary vote means that Santorum and Gingrich (and Ron Paul) can continue winning delegates even if they don’t win states. All they have to do is win enough delegates to deny Romney a majority at the convention. Then, Romney will be forced to bargain with conservatives for their support. They can exact a price, such as a say over his running mate. They might even get the convention to nominate a “true conservative” instead of Romney. Maybe even one who didn’t run this year (Chris Christie? Jeb Bush?).

National polls of Republicans already show Romney slipping to second place behind Santorum. It’s as if Republicans are eager to support any conservative who’s not Mitt Romney.

Watch what happens in the Michigan primary on February 28th. Michigan is Romney’s home state. His father was governor in the 1960s. It’s a state full of angry voters who were deeply hurt by the recession. Romney opposed President Obama’s auto industry bailout. If Romney loses

Michigan, he’s in serious trouble.

A long primary race in 2008 actually helped the Democrats. Barack Obama looked stronger after he beat the Clinton machine. But this year’s primaries are not doing Republicans much good. Republican voters are not showing much enthusiasm for the contenders. Turnout in most states is down. And the candidates are losing public support.

Mitt Romney’s favorable ratings dropped from 39% to 31% in January, according to the *Washington Post*-ABC News poll. A majority of the public (52%) said the more they hear about Romney, the less they like him. What do they hear about him? That he’s a rich guy who’s not concerned about the very poor. That he likes to fire people who don’t provide good service. That he believes corporations are people. And that he’s ready to bet \$10,000 on a whim. In other words, he’s out of touch. Romney’s problems are not just with an unenthusiastic conservative base. He’s acquiring a bad rep in the broader electorate as well. The *Washington Post*-ABC poll shows Romney losing to President Obama by six points.

Part of that is slowly rising optimism about the economy. The Gallup poll shows economic confidence in January up to its highest level in eight months. Romney is running as a turnaround artist—an experienced manager who knows how to turn the economy around. But if voters feel the economy is already turning around, what do they need him for? ■



The Base Holds Tight

Republicans are attempting to portray President Obama as another Jimmy Carter on foreign policy—"weak," "practices appeasement," "leads from behind," "always apologizing for the U.S." But President Obama actually gets his highest marks on national security. Why? Osama bin Laden is dead. Muammar Qaddafi is dead. Anwar al-Awlaki is dead. Iraq is over. Afghanistan is nearly over.

The big surprise is that President Obama is not getting much criticism from the left, even though he has not fulfilled his campaign promise to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay and his use of unmanned drones raises legal and moral issues. The Washington Post-ABC News poll shows solid majorities of the public supporting the President on those policies. Most self-described liberal Democrats also approve.

There has been no movement on the left to break with President Obama or to oppose him in the Democratic primaries. One reason: liberals are aghast at what's happening in the Republican Party. They don't want to break ranks when the opposition poses a mortal threat. Another reason: President Obama is African-American. Any Democrat who challenged Obama's re-nomination would instantly antagonize African-American voters. That is no way to score points in the Democratic Party.

Keeping the prison at Guantanamo Bay open for terrorist suspects?

Approve

Liberal Dems	53%
Moderate Dems	67%
Public	70%

The use of unmanned, "drone" aircraft against terrorist suspects overseas?

Approve

Liberal Dems	77%
Moderate Dems	82%
Public	83%

Washington Post-ABC News Poll, Feb. 1-4

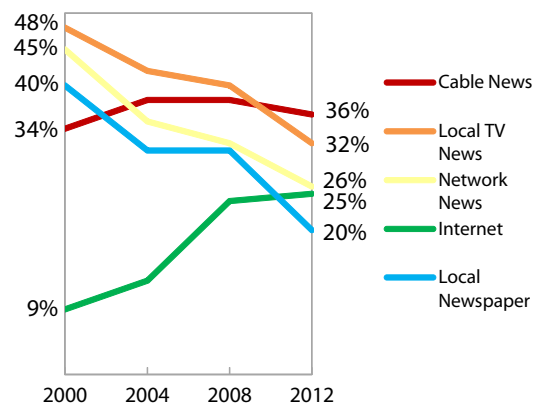
Internet Empowerment

Fewer people are following the 2012 campaign compared with 2008 when both parties had competitive contests. Cable news is now the top source—all those Republican debates! But the numbers of people following the campaign on cable, network and local TV are all down. And if you want evidence of the collapse of local newspapers, it's right there. Newspapers are now the least followed source of campaign news, having fallen from 40% in 2000 to 20% this year.

Only one news medium has resisted the decline—the Internet. The Internet is used most often by young people. We can expect Internet usage to grow, not just because older Americans will be dying off, but also because people become more involved in politics as they grow older. Young people who rely on the Internet now are likely to continue relying on it as they get older and pay more attention.

We've also seen several cases recently where the Internet has literally empowered people. In October, an online petition protesting a proposed debit card fee forced a major corporation, the Bank of America, to back down. Last month, online protests led by technology companies overwhelmed high-powered Washington lobbies and got Congress to back down from Internet regulation measures. And this month, a firestorm of online protests forced the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation to back down from its plan to de-fund Planned Parenthood.

The Internet is not just a new news medium. It's also a new source of power.

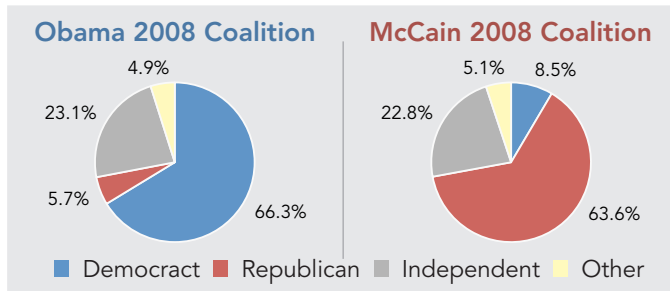


Pew Research Center. Jan. 4-8, 2012.

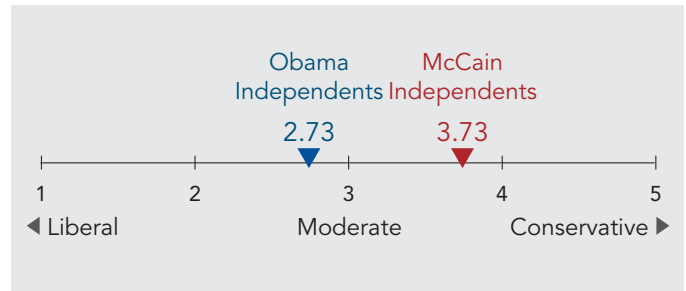
WHO ARE THE OBAMA INDEPENDENTS?

As contrasted with "McCain Independents," Obama Independents...

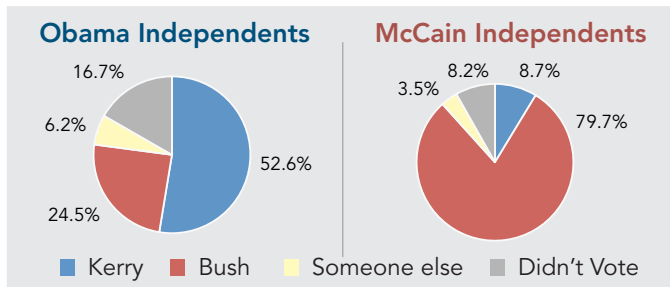
...represented 23.1% of the Obama 2008 Coalition.



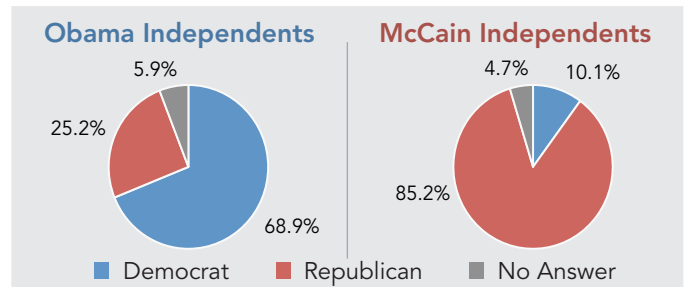
...are the most moderate segment of the electorate.



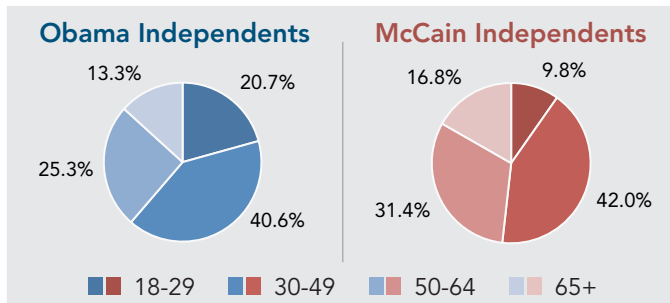
...(47.4%) were not Dem voters in 2004.



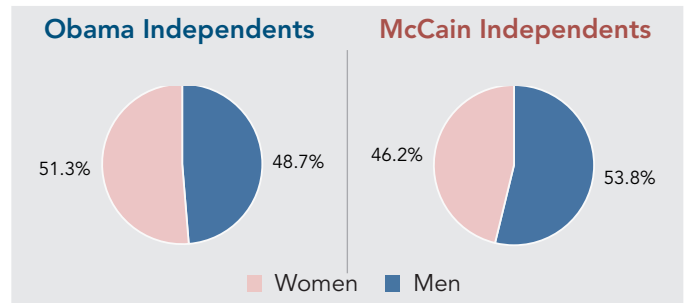
...bolted from the Dem Party in 2010.



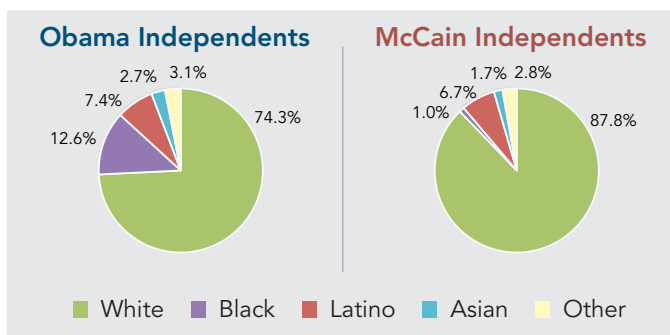
...are younger.



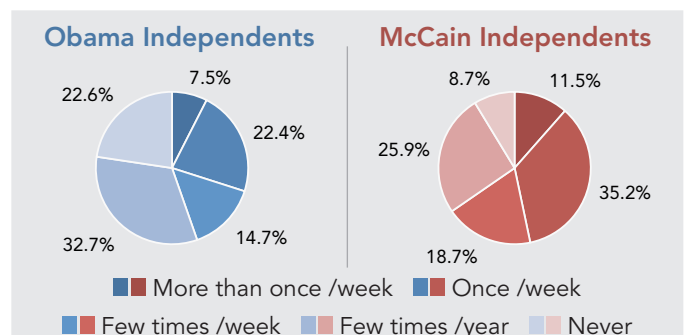
...include more women.



...are more racially diverse.



...are more secular.



From the Third Way Report "2012 Showdown: Battle for the Obama Independents" by Lanae Erickson and Michelle Diggles. Available at: <http://www.thirdway.org/publications/485>.

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