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Denial Isn't Just a River in Egypt

They say the first step toward recovery is admitting you have a problem. Democrats did that in the 1980s after suffering three successive defeats by Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Republicans are being urged to do that now after losing the popular vote in five out of the last six presidential elections. The problem is that large numbers of Republicans refuse to believe they have a problem. They believe that if the country isn't buying what the Republican Party is selling, then the country has a problem.

Earlier this year, the Republican National Committee produced an "autopsy report" urging the party to soften its position on social issues. (Isn't an autopsy something you do after the patient is dead?) The idea is that the party is turning off women and gays and new minorities because of its harsh, intolerant positions on women's rights, same-sex marriage, and immigration. If the party won't change those positions, at least it can try to soften them. Or just stop talking about them.

Conservative critics immediately seized upon the report as a declaration of war by the Republican business elite on the Tea Party and the religious right. Ramesh Ponnuru of National Review wrote that the report embodies "elite conventional wisdom perfectly, just perfectly."

Conservatives are right about one thing:

The problem is that the populist base of the Republican Party is shrinking relative to the rest of the electorate.

social issues are what give the Republican Party a lot of its populist appeal. The GOP was a minority party from the 1930s to the 1980s because it had no populist appeal. What brought the party back to life was, first, Richard Nixon's

"southern strategy" in the 1970s that built a base of Republican support among racial backlash voters, and second, Ronald Reagan's outreach to the religious right in the 1980s. Gary Bauer, President of American Values, told Politico, "The social issues we believe in are more popular than the Republican economic agenda."

The problem is that the populist base of the Republican Party is shrinking relative to the rest of the electorate. What's growing are the groups that make up Barack Obama's New America coalition: Latinos, Asian-Americans, gays, young voters, working women, single mothers, educated professionals, and the "unchurched," along with African-Americans and Jews.

Many Republicans don't see that because of the growing political segregation of the country. Democrats and Republicans tend to live in different places. They segregate, voluntarily, by lifestyle, and since the 1960s, people's politics has come to reflect their lifestyles. It's an especially stark trend in the House of Representatives, where more and more congressional districts are dominated by one party.

Partisan redistricting makes the problem worse, but it's not the root of the problem. Nobody redistricts states, but the long-term trend has been toward fewer and fewer battleground states. California, the nation's largest state, does not have a single statewide elected Republican officeholder. Texas, the nation's second largest state, does not have a single Democrat elected statewide.

As a result, most Republicans in Congress don't have to think about appealing to voters outside their base. (Nor do most Democrats.) The problem of expanding the party's appeal exists mainly at the presidential level. It's not a matter of self-interest for most Republican officeholders. The voters they have to answer to are mostly Obama-haters.

Recently, the College Republican National Committee released a report on the challenges Republicans face in reaching young voters. Voters under 30 re-elected President Obama last year. Obama lost voters 30 and older by two million votes. The report struggles to find a message that will get through to young voters, 42% of whom are non-white.

It finds that "opposition to gay marriage is a 'deal-breaker' to one out of four young voters." It finds that, while young voters are not significantly more pro-choice than older voters, "the issue of protecting life has been conflated with issues around the definition of rape, funding for Planned Parenthood and even contraception." It finds that entitlement reform "is not top-of-mind for young voters." It finds that young voters "consistently characterized Republicans as the party that was strong on defense but did not always mean that as a positive."

Most threatening: the finding that "reducing the size of government isn't the outcome that really matters to young people." But it is the outcome that matters most to Republican partisans.

The Democratic Party appeals to out groups in America. Young people always

see themselves as an out group. They see Republicans as the party of the rich and powerful, out to protect big interests and large corporations. Mitt Romney did nothing to dispel that impression.

Many years ago, the Democratic Party became identified with a radical but declining sector of American life—rural populists and evangelicals. Democrats nominated the populist favorite, William Jennings Bryan, for President three times (1896, 1900, and 1908). Each time, Bryan did worse. It wasn't until the Republicans split in 1912 that Democrats came back to power. The message? Political parties change slowly. And only after they get their brains beaten out. ■



Gays are Good

The Pew Research Center has released what may be the first national poll of self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered Americans (LGBT). And guess what? They're doing O.K. Only seven percent report that their sexual orientation is "something negative" in their life. The poll shows overwhelming agreement (92%) that society is more accepting of gays than it was ten years ago. And that, ten years from now, society will be even more accepting (92%).

So much for the view that the AIDS crisis, which began 32 years ago and hit gay men particularly hard, would isolate gays and hinder their acceptance by other Americans. That did not happen.

By a substantial margin, LGBT Americans are more likely than other Americans to believe that the country is moving in the right direction. One reason is that most LGBT Americans identify as Democrats (56% to 8% over Republicans, while 30% call themselves Independents). But LGBT Americans are even more positive about the direction of the country than other Democrats are.

LGBT Americans have a highly favorable view of the Supreme Court (58%, compared to 52% among all Americans). That view will be tested when the court issues rulings on same-sex marriage.

An interesting finding about marriage: legally sanctioned same-sex marriage is a higher priority for lesbians (69%) than for gay men (54%). Which suggests that, when it comes to marriage, gay men are still men.

Partisan Shock

Does partisanship shape everything? Apparently, it does.

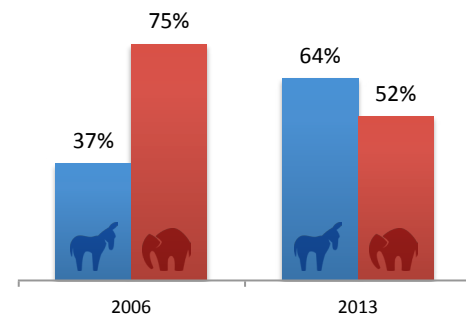
In 2006, when George W. Bush was President, Republicans were far more likely than Democrats to say that NSA surveillance programs to investigate terrorism were acceptable. With Barack Obama in the White House, the partisan tables have turned. Now Democrats are more likely to call such surveillance acceptable.

Republicans were enthusiastic supporters of the Patriot Act in 2001 and its subsequent renewal in 2011. Have they turned against it? Not entirely. But they've lost some enthusiasm. A bare majority of Republicans now support NSA surveillance programs.

What about the Justice Department obtaining the telephone records of Associated Press reporters in order to investigate potential security leaks? Republicans regard the press as a natural enemy. So are Republicans celebrating? Not so much.

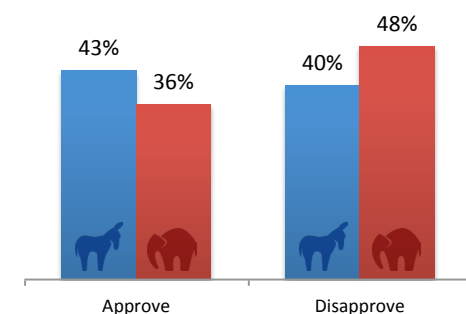
Democrats are more approving than Republicans. What about Democrats' historic championing of the press? Well, 40% of Democrats don't like what the Justice Department did. But they're slightly outnumbered by Democrats who say, it's President Obama's Justice Department so it's O.K.

Partisan Acceptance of NSA Surveillance Programs under Bush, Obama



Pew Research Center. June 6-9, 2013.

Partisan Opinion of Justice Dept. Obtaining AP Telephone Records

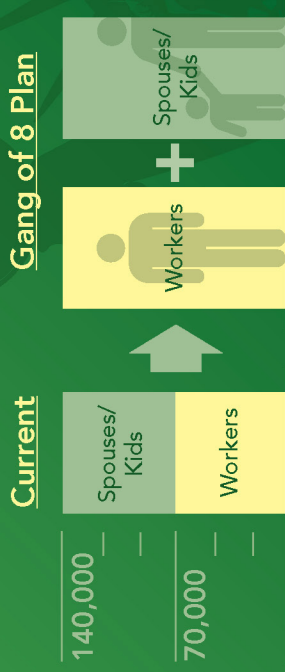


Pew Research Center. May 16-19, 2013.

TURNING GREEN CARDS INTO GROWTH

Five Ways the Gang of 8 Immigration Bill Will Make America a Magnet for Global Talent and Fuel Economic Growth

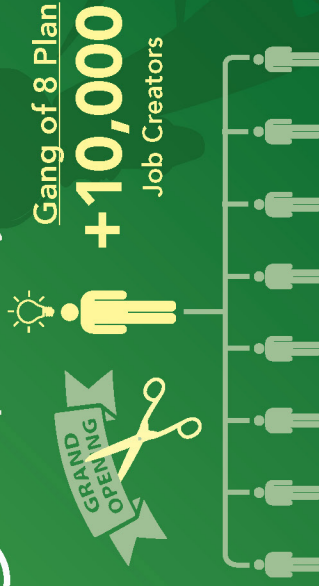
1 Doubles the number of employment-based green cards to 280,000



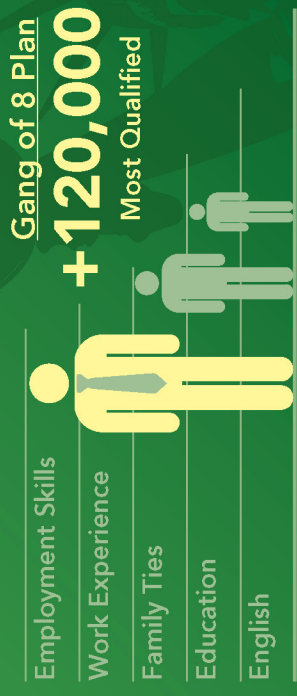
2 Offers green cards to all those with a STEM PhD



3 Grants 10,000 new green cards to entrepreneurial job creators



4 Creates merit-based green cards for the most qualified candidates



5

Boosts H-1B high-skilled temporary worker visas from 65,000 to at least 110,000



* Likely about 10,000 would be used annually, based on the rate of foreign students earning STEM PhDs in the U.S.

From the Third Way memo "The Gang of 8 Immigration Bill: Tough, Fair, and Practical," available at: <http://www.thirdway.org/publications/685>.

For more, visit www.thirdway.org. Infographic by Bill Rapp.



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