

Donald Trump's Great White Hope

THE REPUBLICAN PATH TO THE WHITE HOUSE MAINLY RELIES ON TURNING OUT MORE CAUCASIAN VOTERS

By SHAWN ZELLER

If logic governed Republican politics, the Congress long ago would have passed immigration legislation providing a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants in order to broaden the party's appeal among Hispanics.

Party leaders wouldn't be talking about same-sex marriage or the right of religious groups to discriminate against gays and lesbians. That turns off younger voters.

To appeal to women and minorities, Republican Govs. Nikki R. Haley of South Carolina and Susana Martinez of New Mexico — an Indian American and a Hispanic — would be national figures, regularly representing the party on television and at high profile events.

That's the prevailing theory anyway, since those were recommendations that a panel of GOP eminences made in a 2013 report commissioned by the Republican National Committee that aimed to turn the party around after Mitt Romney lost the 2012 presidential election.

The cognoscenti of the right continue to wrack their brains about why the party, including most prominently its presumptive presidential nominee, Donald Trump, has moved not at all toward these goals.

In fact, Trump has gone in the opposite direction, proposing to deport the 11 mil-

lion unauthorized immigrants now in the country. He's promised to put conservative judges on the Supreme Court who would allow the states to decide whether to keep same-sex marriage legal. And he attacked both Haley and Martinez after they failed to endorse him in the primary campaign.

There could be a reason, and it's actually quite logical. Republicans' great strength is their appeal to white voters, who are still far and away the nation's largest demographic group. It's served them quite well in congressional elections, where they now have their largest House majority since 1929 and control of the Senate, and at the state level, where they now control 31 governorships and 30 legislatures. And they'd be winning at the presidential level, too, if they could just increase their level of support among whites by a tantalizingly small amount.

Indeed, if Trump is able to increase the GOP share of the white vote by 5 percentage points more than Romney won in 2012, even while holding the strong minority vote for Obama that year steady, the mogul would win handily.

"It wouldn't take much of a bump," says William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, a centrist think tank. "If older baby boomers got really excited, it could counter the minority vote."

Offending Latinos might even be a good

electoral strategy, Frey says: "The older white population has a hard time dealing with changing demography, and wedge issues like immigration play well."

Earlier this year, Frey and Ruy Teixeira, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, ran the numbers and found that a 5-point swing in the white vote, while holding the minority vote from 2012 steady, would result in a 325-213 Electoral College win for Trump. Key to the victory: Wisconsin and Pennsylvania would go Republican for the first time since the 1980s, while Minnesota would turn red for the first time since 1972. Trump would also hold onto swing states that were crucial to both of George W. Bush's victories — Colorado, Florida, Ohio and Virginia. And he'd win New Hampshire, which last went Republican in Bush's 2000 win, and Iowa, which went for Bush in 2004.

That's because Obama's solid Electoral College win in 2012 was predicated on some narrow state wins. His margins were extremely tight in Virginia (115,910 votes), Colorado (113,099), Ohio (103,481) and New Hampshire (40,659) and the crucial state of Florida went his way by only 73,189 votes out of more than 8 million cast.

Turning that around with a flurry of white votes is not far-fetched. It would



Trump supporters in North Carolina and, below, some of his critics in Washington, D.C.

But Bannon admits he's a bit worried too, given the unpopularity of both Trump and Clinton. Opinion polls have shown consistently that most voters view both of them unfavorably. "I just think that when voters don't like either candidate, nothing good comes of that." When voters aren't inspired, they don't turn out and low turnout elections tend to go Republicans' way. Look no further than the GOP's resounding midterm wins in 2010 and 2014.

There's another way that Trump could get to 270 electoral votes that wouldn't take a groundswell of white voters. The minority vote could drop.

There's good reason to think it will. It would be hard for Clinton to get two-thirds of black voters to come out for her like they did for Obama, the first African-American major party candidate for president, surpassing the white turnout rate for the first time in American history. If the black turnout rate returns to its historic norm of about 6 in 10, it could cancel out any increase in the Latino vote.

There's some anecdotal evidence that Latinos will come out in stronger numbers



this year — more immigrants are seeking to become citizens and more of the recently naturalized are registering to vote — but there are also years of evidence that Latinos don't vote like other demographic groups do. Only 48 percent of Latinos cast ballots in 2012, down from 49.8 percent in 2008.

The electorate in 2016 figures to be the most diverse in the country's history. The Pew Research Center projects that whites will, for the first time, make up less than 70 percent of voters, while Hispanics will make up 12 percent, up from 7 percent in 2000. Blacks are expected to hold steady at 12 percent.

But even factoring in the increased size of the Latino community, and a diminished proportion of the population that is white, Trump could win if turnout rates return to their 2004 levels, according to the study by Frey and Teixeira.

The Electoral College win would be even narrower than George W. Bush's was that year — and Trump would narrowly lose the popular vote — but a win's a win.

Of course, Bush that year did unusually well — for a Republican presidential candidate — with Latino voters, when 40 percent of them voted for him. And Bush won 11 percent of the black voters who turned out, compared to 6 percent for Romney in 2012.

Fewer minorities voted in 2004 overall. The black turnout rate was 60 percent and only 47 percent of Hispanics went to the polls, while the white turnout rate of 67 percent was a bit higher than it was in 2008 or 2012.

It's hard to imagine Trump doing anywhere near as well as Bush did with minorities, of course. Most likely he will do much worse, making the white vote all the

more crucial to him.

But for a Republican candidate, what's more doable? Winning a higher percentage of white voters, or convincing Hispanics to vote for you, knowing that overtures to them will turn off many whites? Of course, any Republican candidate for president knows that trying to win over blacks is a lost cause.

Republican politicians have revealed the answer with their actions. Trump isn't the first to run on a nativist platform. Romney famously said his tough policies would lead unauthorized immigrants to "self-deport" while the 2008 GOP nominee, Arizona Sen. John McCain — who had teamed with Democrat Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts on 2005 legislation to make it easier for immigrants to win citizenship — disavowed his own efforts while facing off with Obama.

Still, neither McCain nor Romney managed to follow through with a win. And GOP insiders are skeptical that Trump can either. Nearly 70 percent of Republicans who responded to CQ Roll Call's June poll of congressional staffers said they expected Clinton would beat Trump. More than 43 percent said Clinton would win in a landslide.

Rory Cooper, a former spokesman for Eric Cantor of Virginia when Cantor was the Republican House majority leader, says Trump's argument that he can expand the Republican presidential playing field into Democratic strongholds is hard to believe.

"He is underwater with women, young people, Hispanics and with African-Americans. To make inroads in blue states, you have to make inroads into those communities," says Cooper, who is now a managing director at Purple Strategies, a political consulting firm.

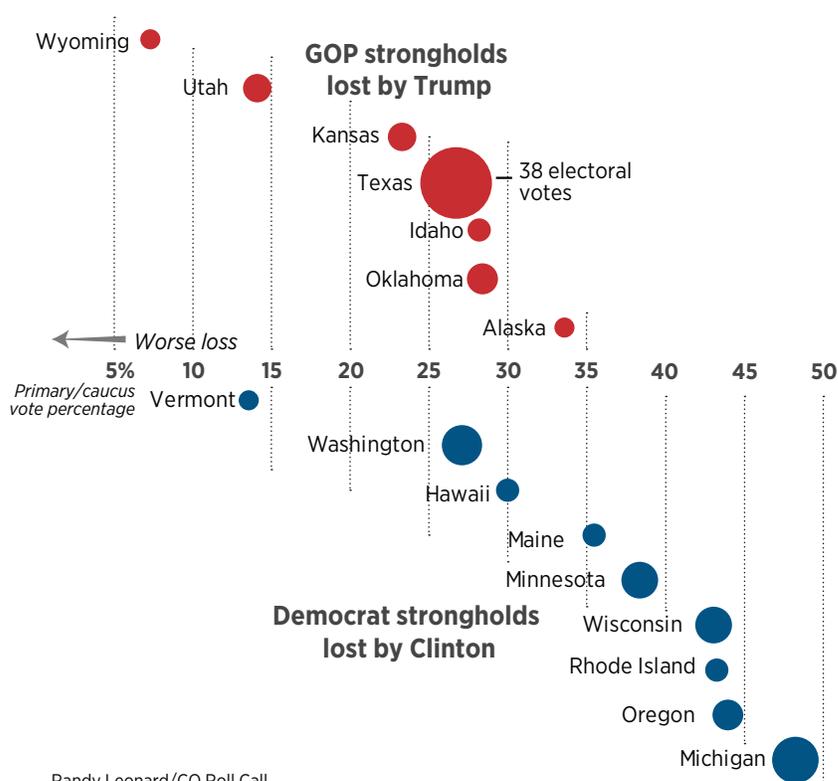
Or he could just win even more whites. ■



Trump speaks at a March rally in Wichita, Kan.

Theirs to Lose

The leading presidential hopefuls lost 2016 primary battles in more than a dozen strongholds that their respective parties have clinched in the general election since at least 1996.



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