



Spring does not reveal the autumn



Farmers, baseball players and politicians in the US are among the groups that understand very well that what is happening in the spring does not reveal what will be the outcome in the autumn. So much can happen over the summer, and that includes surprises. Farmers are usually well prepared to be disappointed, and so are baseball players. Politicians too, though the analysts and media tend to follow old rules and current tendencies to project likely victors where the reality is more complicated and tight horse races where an election is not all that competitive.

If you had to bet the family farm, it would nonetheless be wise to go with the old rule of off-year Congressional elections and current polling tendencies that favor the Republicans to pick up new House and even Senate seats – though the likelihood of winning a majority in the House is not at all clear. However, old rules get broken or bent from time to time. The elections are at the district and state level, and the Democrats seem to have most of their 2008 coalition segments in place. Nonetheless, it may boil down to the obvious: how the major accomplishments to date for the administration are seen, and how two key social segments of 2008 respond in 2010.

On the issues, *the health care reform* is an ambiguous motivator. Along with the economy and job growth, health care is the important litmus. Voters over 65 are not convinced on the health care reform issue, and may go 48% to 33% for the Republicans¹, but that may not end up being so different from 2008. (The 65 and over group voted 50-45 for McCain over Obama in 2008, but showed much bigger margins for McCain in the run-up to the election itself).

For at least two important segments, “healthcare” appears to have positive resonance already. Throughout the long health care reform period, Hispanic voters were much more supportive and less ambiguous than others. Now, with the Republicans having overplayed their hand in Arizona on control of the border and Mexican immigration, this segment is likely to show a very high turnout, with or without Immigration Reform moving forward this summer.

For *young people* in college or about to enter college (part of the key segment for 2008, as noted in detail below) the health care reform bill contained a public option – not the public option on health care, but a remarkable public option on student loans. The banks and loan companies specializing in student loans, who have made the lives of many graduating students a living hell, are out of the business and the Federal Government with a proven track record on managing student loans is back in. The actual impact will take a while, but the symbol is in place – to be turned perhaps into an unambiguous motivator.

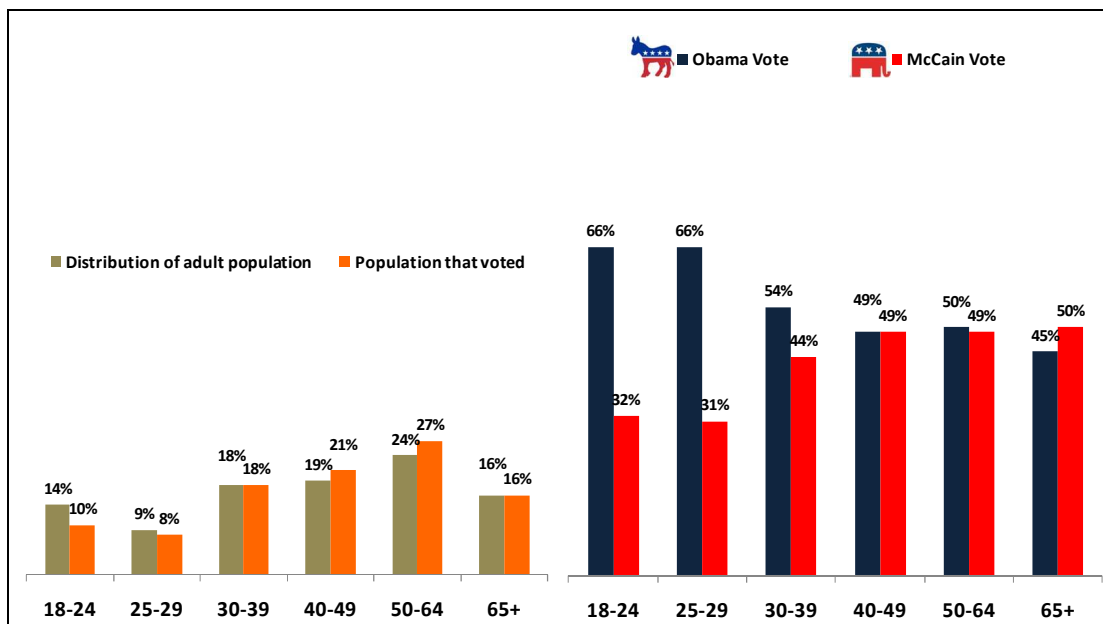
¹ George Washington University Battleground Poll, shows older voters turning to Republicans; 4/29/10. Democracy Corps Poll shows older voters holding, but Independents slipping to the Republicans; 4/29/10.



A high Hispanic and a high young adult turnout may bend the old rule on off-year elections and push the current polling numbers in new directions. Nonetheless, without a high young adult turnout, the Democrats are in trouble. A review of the 2008 results will make this clear.

The vote in formal democracies is anonymous and secret. We can't know the vote of a particular person, without the voter declaring it publicly. There is no record of the demographic data of the voter at the moment the vote is cast. However, we press mightily for vote demographics: what percentage of women voted for a particular candidate? What percentage of young people voted and for whom? These questions require a special method.

There is no direct and final way of accurately knowing the participation of demographic groups and sub-groups in the voting. The participation by demographic is a statistical construct of field research. We use exit polls as the point of contact with voters. Typically we can't use just one exit poll to do much more than anticipate the results.

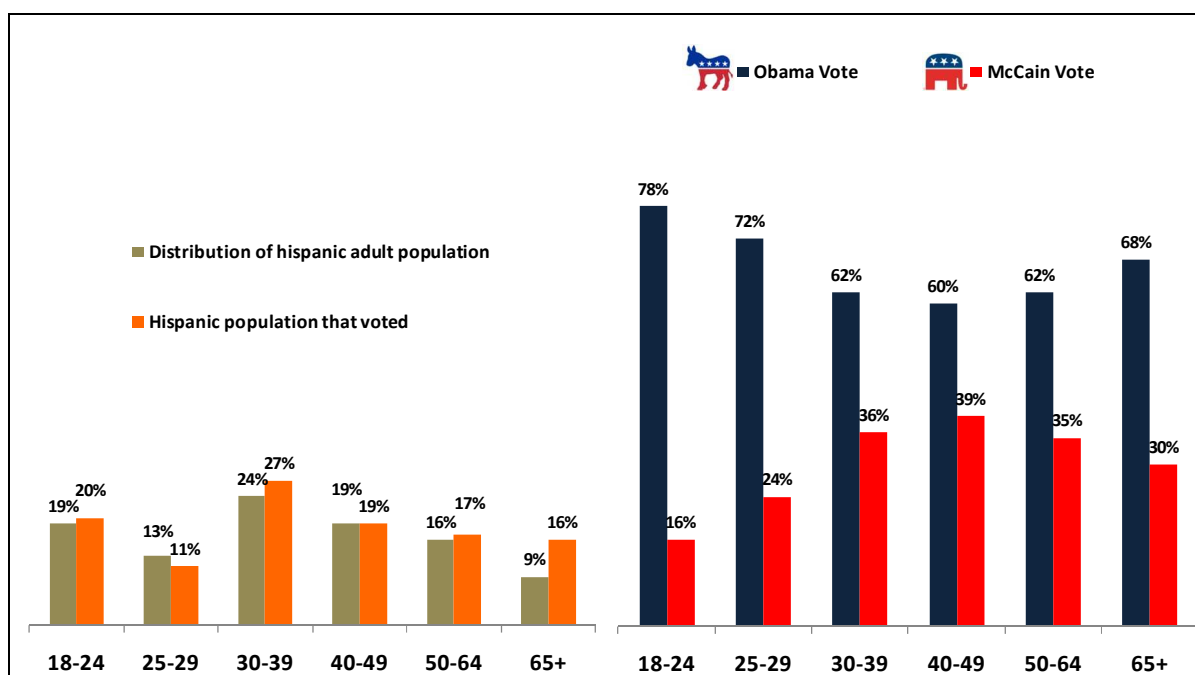


The source for the percentage of the adult population in the United States is the *US Census, Current Population Summary, Annual Social Supplement, 2008*. Not all adults can or do register to vote, but the percentage indicates the general universe of potential voters. The source for the percentage of voters in each age category is the ABC News Report on the complete results of the ensemble of exit polls in the electronic media: www.abcnews.go.com/Pollunit/ExitPolls2008.



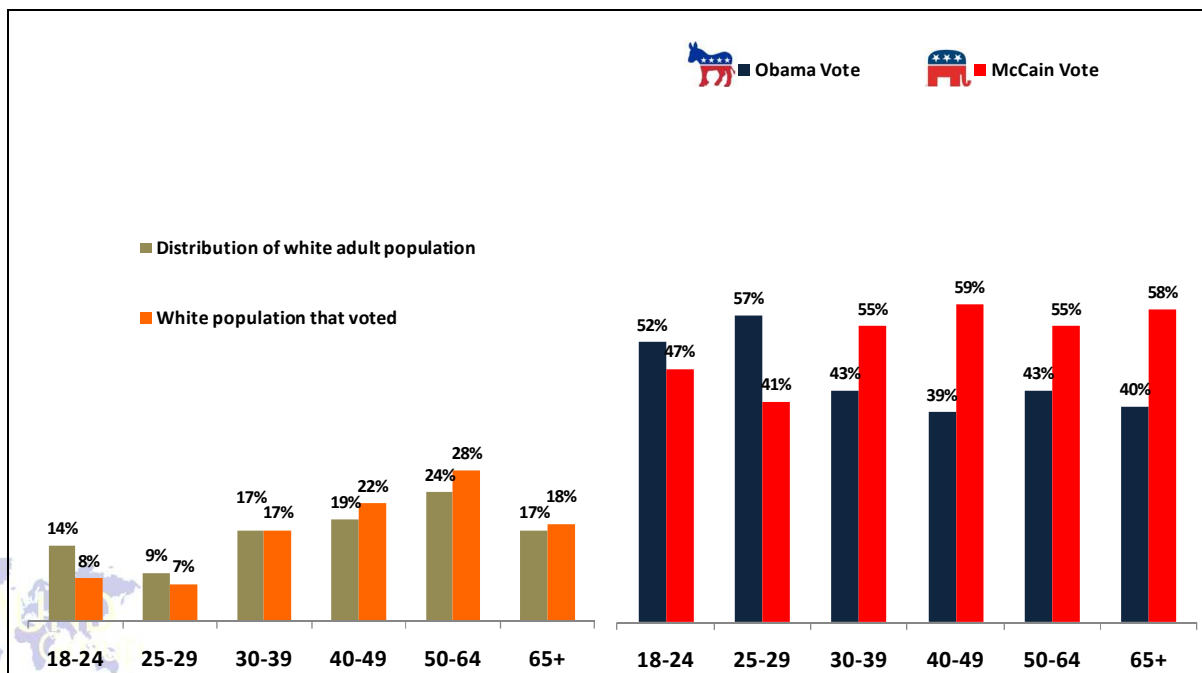
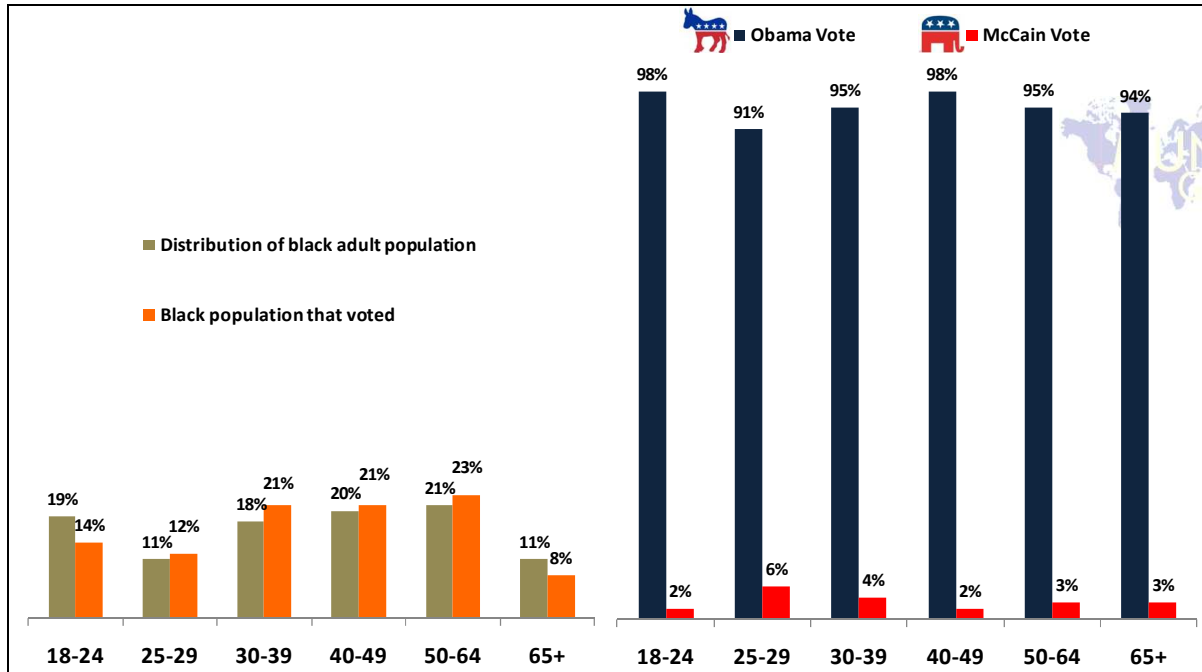
The final vote in overall terms was of 53% for Barack Obama, the Democrat candidate and 46% for John McCain, the Republican candidate. We will illustrate how the key margins came from young voters. Amongst voters 18 to 29 years old, with 18% of the total votes in 2008, the margins for Obama were two to one. In the middle group of 30 to 39 years old with another 18% of the vote, the margin was a little larger than the final average, viz. 54% to 44%. In the next two groups of between 40 to 64 years old, with 48% of the voters, it was a tie. Only with elderly voters, 65 years and older, 16% of the voters, did the Republican John McCain have an advantage of 50% to 45%.

The young adult margins assured victory for Obama, even though the youth voted in smaller percentages than their presence in the general population (in contrast with those 40 to 64 years old). Key to understanding the results are the large margins of preference among young black and Hispanic voters.



In absolute numbers, Obama won by a margin of 9,522,111 votes.

Among young people between 18 and 24 years old, Obama received 7.5 million (13% of this 7.5m on the part of Hispanics, 17% of blacks and a little less than 70% of young whites). Besides, a majority of Hispanics voted for Obama in every age category. The percentages for Obama in the black vote of every age group were historic.



Among whites, only the youth represented a margin for Obama, though only those between 25 and 29 years old had a greater margin than the general result (57% to 41% in contrast with 53% to 46% in the general vote).



In historical terms, the participation of young people in 2008 increased 2 percentage points from the previous election, the only age category that grew. The youth increase was more pronounced among blacks and Hispanics. It is here that we find the starting point for a deep analysis of the election of 2008.

However, the question of whether this demographic push will be repeated or not, is an open one. The youth category and all age categories are by definition the most transitory ones in demographics.

The gender category is stationary in general terms. The social class categories depend on the dynamics of social mobility in society. And, the categories of region and residence depend on geographic mobility.

In any case, age is a fundamental category in electoral political culture in the US. Consultants and political operatives in the United States focus on mobilizing 30 to 39 year olds, 40 to 49, 50 to 64 and those older than 65. But with 18 to 24 and 25 to 29 year olds there is confusion and a long history of failure, from the “Rock the Vote” efforts to elegant campaigns in new media. The youth vote in particular there has something of the quest for the Holy Grail quality for campaign operatives.

The youth vote of 2008 is a subject for study because it provided good margins for Obama and in the context of modern elections we are almost always talking about narrow margins. With the weight of a young adult vote other sectors that show attrition or weakness can be counterbalanced – by the Democrats with their weakness among older voters.

Why did the youth vote crystallize with Obama? It appears that Obama is an extraordinary symbol in terms of social and cultural mobility. Young people are by nature ambiguous about their future and somewhat disconnected from their past. They are mobile. In general they have greater geographic mobility than their parents; they are focused on social mobility, and inevitably, they are creatures of temporal mobility. They won’t be young for long. In the fall elections, we have a chance to measure them again.



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