

Republicans trust voter modelling - why not climate modelling?

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After defeat in the 2012 election, it is back to the drawing board for the Republican Party. But will they address the true concerns of the electorate? EPA/STEPHAN SAVOIA/POOL

Author



Gary W. Yohe

Huffington Foundation Professor of
Economics and Environmental Studies,
Wesleyan University

Tuesday, November 6 was a game changer. The Republican Party in the United States has come to understand that the political environment has been altered. White males can no longer dictate the results of an election. The dynamics of the voting electorate have changed dramatically, and they will only continue to do so.

It is safe to assume that conservatives who drive the agenda of the Republican Party “get it”. They are not stupid; indeed, they are quite sophisticated. They understand politics and they will respond to a changing environment.

So why are they so resistant to the idea of a changing climate? This may be an odd question at this point. Ignoring the evidence about a changing climate that puts increasing numbers of people in risk is folly – just as ignoring the changing demographic in critical states has already proven to be.

I can only hope that the Republican Party has learnt something and that those lessons will inform their opinions of how to cope, and not just with a dynamic electorate. My question is: why not apply the same lessons to respond to the dynamic components of the global environment?

Let me be specific.

A new wave of pollsters informed by some very sophisticated understanding of social science, worked on their models over the past year or so. They understood that the political environment was dynamic, they deciphered why and they then incorporated those insights into their projections of the future.

They took quite a bit of heat about being biased in their projections, but they turned out to be right! And that is the standard to be applied. Their advantage was that they had a definitive date when reality could be compared with model projections, and they did very well.

Climate scientists have also been working on their own models of the climate - the physical rather than the political. They have come to understand that the portrait of a warming planet is displayed most graphically in the distribution of extreme weather events. Not just hurricanes like Sandy but also droughts, wildfires and extreme precipitation events like the four and a half inches that fell on my deck in the summer of 2011 in 35 minutes.

They too have been criticised, but they do not have the benefit of a date certain in the foreseeable future when all will be revealed. That is to say, they do not have an “election day”.

Even so, why don't Republicans recognise the parallel of changing environments – political on the one hand and climatic on the other? Republicans are beginning to reorganise their party on the basis of election results that can be attributed to demographic changes.

So why not also begin to reorganise their approach on the basis of observed changes in the frequency of extreme weather events, that can be attributed to climate change? There are “confounding factors” in both correlations, but why do they believe one conclusion more than another? Probably because the consequences to the Party are larger in the political case than they are in the climate case, at least in the short run. But... t Why can they not recognise that the climate system is just as dynamic as the political environment, and that the “old normals” are broken in both places?

That would be a first step in working toward perhaps the most significant compromise with a re-elected President, who included in his acceptance speech the statement, “We want our children to live in an America that isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet.”



Climate change scepticism

Climate modelling

Republican Party

Polling methodology

USA2012