

The 2012 Election Aiken County Exit Poll: A Descriptive Analysis

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Dr. Botsch's classes have been performing exit polls since the early 1980s. This year the student interviewers were Allison Bouchillon, Jamie Clifton, Carol Coakley, Shannon Dwyer, William Daniel, Dean Edgeworth, Crystal Edwards, Will Gibbs, Alexandra Harris, Adora Hawkins, Marilyn Lott, Krystal Mims, Joe O'Connor, James Oliphant, Jackson Redd, Jack Reynolds, Mone't Richburg, Katie Scott, Oshwand Scott, Emily Scotten, Courtney Templeton, Bryn Whitley, and Travis York. Following the survey, students tested hypotheses and wrote research papers on their findings.

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Questions about this report should be directed to Robert E. Botsch, who can be reached at bobb@usca.edu. This report and reports from previous surveys may be seen on-line at: <http://www.usca.edu/polisci/SSBRLab/>.

**All conclusions in this report are solely those of the author
and do not represent any position or opinion of the University of South
Carolina Aiken.**

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Executive Summary

The 2012 Aiken County exit poll performed by USC Aiken political science students produced a statistically accurate sample of voters across the county. In this report we examine a variety of factors to explain voting choice in the presidential election between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican Mitt Romney as well as analyze a range of other questions we asked of the 753 voters interviewed on November 6.

- **Some room for compromise on the “fiscal cliff.”** While Democrats and Republicans have opposing majorities on whether to run or cut deficits, all partisan groups strongly prefer leaders who are willing to compromise, though stronger Republicans are relatively less supportive of leaders who compromise. Although the division is fairly close, a small majority of all voters are willing to accept ending tax cuts if we combine those supporting ending the cuts on higher income (36%) with those supporting ending them for all citizens (17%).
- **Heavily partisan vote favoring Republicans.** While a variety of factors explained voting choice, partisanship was a powerful factor. Romney won nearly all (98%) of the 52% of the voters who identified as Republicans. Obama did almost as well (94%) among the smaller proportion of voters who identified as Democrats (32%). Romney won the independent vote 51% to 40%.
- **Young voters modestly Republican.** While the Republican majority looks very solid, some important groups are trending in the direction of Democrats. Among voters under 30 (16% of all voters), the Democrats were competitive at 40% to 45%.
- **Single voters strongly Democrat.** Among single voters, who comprised a little under a fourth of all voters and are a growing portion of the population, Democrats had a majority relative to Republicans at 54% to 29%.
- **Non-southerners relatively Democrat.** Those voters who self-identify as “non-Southern,” and who comprised 16% of all voters, also split in the direction of the Democrats over Republicans at 41% to 34%.
- **Social and ethnic issues explain Democratic leanings.** A major explanation for groups trending toward Democrats is that they were relatively much more moderate on a range of ethnic and social issues, including whether Obama was Muslim, gay marriage, feeling that blacks, Hispanics, atheists, or gays have too much political power, whether to remove the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds, and abortion.

- **Tea Party decline.** Support for the Tea Party movement dropped off from 2010 when 43% of all voters expressed support compared to 30% among 2012 voters.
- **Tea Party supporter characteristics.** Tea Party supporters were overwhelmingly white, conservative, and Republican. They tended to be older, wealthier, more likely to be married, and more likely to self-identify as religious fundamentalists.
- **Tea Party supporters mostly ultra-conservative compared to other partisan groups.** On a wide range of ethnic, social, political, and economic issues Tea Party Republicans were far more conservative than any other partisan grouping, often distinctly more conservative than non-Tea Party Republicans.
 - Tea Party Republicans were the only group in which a majority blamed Obama more than Bush for current economic conditions and the only group in which a majority believed that Obama is Muslim.
 - On a few issues, such as taking a free market approach to health care, non-Tea Party Republicans were relatively closer to independents than to Tea Party Republicans. On opposing extending Bush era tax cuts on income over \$250,000, non-Tea Party Republicans were closer to both independents and Democrats than to Tea Party Republicans.
- **Ethnic differences drive white independents away from Obama.** White independent voters have been trending away from Democrats since 2004, when they voted in the same proportion as other independents for Democrat John Kerry. In 2008 white independents were less likely to vote for Obama than other independents. In 2012 the split widened. The explanation for this movement lay in attitudes of ethnic antipathy that depressed white independent support for Obama. Increasingly they are more likely to see Obama as Muslim and feel that blacks have too much power.
- **GOP voters more likely to see many people as lazy.** Relative to Democrats, many Republican voters seemed to agree with Romney in his secretly recorded statements that too many Americans are lazy and want to live on government handout. These views were strongly connected to voting choice.
- **Mormon background played little role in vote.** White self-identified religious fundamentalists were more likely to view Mormons unfavorably than white non-fundamentalists. But they were also more likely to view Obama as Muslim, and that belief along with their mostly Republican

identification trumped any unfavorable views of Mormons. Democrats were more likely than Republicans to view Mormons unfavorably, which reinforced partisan inclinations in voting choice.

- **Growing Ethnic Polarization.** Ethnic antipathy that separates whites and blacks seems to be growing. In an earlier survey we found that a majority of blacks felt whites had too much power. In 2008 and again in 2012 ethnic antipathy among whites was a powerful explanatory variable for white voting choice, successfully predicting how whites voted almost as accurately as party identification. Comparing ethnic antipathy scores of white voters in 2012 to 2008, we found a dramatic increase.
- **No significant gender gap, but big marriage gap.** The much discussed gender gap did not exist to any significant degree in Aiken County. Men and women voted pretty much the same as each other in Aiken County. We did see a significant marriage gap that favored Romney. While singles in Aiken County favored Obama by about the same margin as singles nationally, married voters gave Romney an even larger margin.

Introduction

Students in Dr. Robert E. Botsch's Political Science Research Methods class performed an exit poll of Aiken County voters in the November 6, 2012 general election. The survey exercise is a central part of their course experience. The purpose of this report is to present an overview and some analysis of selected findings as part of USC Aiken's ongoing mission of public service. Our goal is to inform citizens and public officials about what voters were thinking when they cast their votes.

This report and reports from selected previous surveys can be viewed at: <http://www.usca.edu/polisci/SSBRLab/>. Together these reports provide a history of the opinions of voters and the general population on a wide variety of subjects in Aiken County.

Methodology and Participants

The exit poll combined several sampling techniques, including stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and systematic sampling. Together these techniques produced a sample that was representative of voters in Aiken County who voted on November 6. Comparing the presidential voting preferences of the sample of 753 voters to actual countywide election results showed that the sample was a statistically accurate representation of the county's voters, including absentee voters who split their presidential votes almost identically to those who voted on Election Day.

Students interviewed 753 voters chosen systematically from ten precincts that represented all areas of the county (the cities of Aiken, North Augusta, the Midland Valley area, and rural areas) and that had in the past reflected the countywide vote. Voters were sampled during two time periods or clusters, first starting at 7:30 am and then again at 11:30. Interviewers handed each selected voter a two-sided questionnaire on a clipboard as she or he left the polling station. Voters completed the 39 item questionnaire themselves and then folded and placed it in a "ballot box" to help insure anonymity. An equal number of clipboards were designated as "male" and "female" clipboards so that both genders were equally sampled. After each interview was completed, students approached the next available male or female leaving the polls for subsequent interviews. The response rate was 70%, meaning that seven of every ten voters approached by students completed the survey. The sampling error for questions answered by all respondents is a little less than + or - 4%. The actual percentage of votes for Mitt Romney and Barack Obama were 62.6% and 36.0%. Our sample had Romney at 59.8% and Obama at 36.9%, well within the expected sampling error.

The Fiscal Cliff

As this report was being written, the number one political topic in the news was the upcoming “fiscal cliff.” Newly re-elected President Obama and Republicans in the House and Senate were debating the balance between spending cuts and revenue increases to avert the automatic cuts and tax increases scheduled to go into effect on January 1 if no deal was reached. We asked several questions in the exit survey relevant to this issue.

First we asked voters if they preferred elected leaders who were willing to “compromise with members of the other party” or who stick “by their party principles and refuse to compromise.” The overwhelming majority of voters who had an opinion chose compromise (84%) over party principles (16%). However, we did see some partisan differences here in that moderate and strong Republicans were about twice as likely to prefer party principles over compromise (21%) relative to moderate and strong Democrats (11%).

We also asked voters to choose between the desire to cut deficits and the alternative desire to stimulate the economy and avoid major cuts in public services. Here the voters came down on the deficit cutting side over the stimulation side by a ratio of about three to two (56% and 44% respectively). The two positions were strongly influenced by partisan self-identity with stronger Democrats and Republicans having larger majorities taking opposing positions. Strong to moderate Democrats chose stimulation and avoiding cuts to services over deficit cutting by 86% to 14%. Strong to moderate Republicans chose deficit cutting over stimulation and avoiding cuts in public services by 77% to 23%.

Finally we asked about the tax increases that could take place in ending the Bush era tax cuts. We gave voters three choices and asked which they would prefer if forced to choose. They were as follows:

- 1) “Extend existing tax cuts for everyone.” This was the proposal preferred by congressional Republicans and by Romney in the campaign.
- 2) “Extend the tax cut on the first \$250,000 of everyone’s income, but not for income over that.” This was the proposal that President Obama supported and campaigned on.
- 3) “Let the tax cuts end for everyone.” This is what would happen if we came to no agreement and the automatic measures went into effect. Only a few members of congress have embraced this option. Most members and most economists felt that this would lead to a second recession because of the great and immediate impact it would have on consumer demand, which drives about 70% of our economy.

Aiken County voters were strongly divided on these choices as were the presidential candidates and members of congress. No choice had a clear majority, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. No consensus on what to do about the Bush era tax cuts

Preference	St Dem	Md Dm	Ln Dem	ind/othr	Ln Rep	Md Rp	Str Rep
Extend all cuts (46%)	32%	26%	18%	42%	53%	46%	68%
Extend only on >\$250k (36%)	48%	59%	37%	36%	33%	39%	21%
End all tax cuts (17%)	20%	15%	46%	22%	15%	16%	12%

Extending the cuts for everyone won plurality support (46%) of those who had an opinion. But ending tax cuts for either everyone (17%) or for only on income over \$250,000 (36%) did show that a majority supported some kind of additional taxes. This division gives each side some support. Obama supporters can say that most people supported ending tax cuts on higher income or all income. On the other side Romney supporters and those favoring the congressional Republican position can say that the largest group of voters chose the “extend all the cuts” proposal.

Interestingly, the only party subgroup that showed a strong majority favoring extending all tax cuts were those self-identifying as “strong Republicans” (68%). Leaning Republicans showed a weak majority favoring extending all tax cuts (52%), but moderate Republicans were more likely to want to end the cuts for all (16%) or for just on income over \$250,000 (39%) than to extend the cuts for all (46%).

Democrats were just about as divided on this. While no group of Democrats showed a plurality wanting to extend the cuts for all, only one group, self-identified moderate Democrats, had a majority (59%), choosing the Obama position of ending the cuts on only income over \$250,000.

All this suggests that while compromise will be difficult, most voters, even in heavily Republican Aiken County, do want some kind of compromise. And most, with the exception of strong Republicans, will be willing to support some tax increase.

Voter Choice, Partisanship, and Polarization

Aiken County has long been reliably Republican, and it continued to be so in 2012. Slightly over half of all voters (51%) identified with the Republican Party, almost exactly the same as in the 2008 election. Democrats comprised just under a third of all voters (32%).

Mitt Romney won 63% of the county vote, two points better than John McCain in 2008, but three points short of George W. Bush in 2004. Barack Obama fell one percentage point from his 2008 Aiken County tally of 37% to 36% in 2012. This slight decline roughly tracked his national campaign performance, which we can see as a slightly weaker version of his 2008 campaign in that he dropped a couple of points with many demographic groups across the board. Hispanics were about the only group in which Obama improved in 2012. Increased Hispanic support had no significant impact in Aiken County because of the county's very small Hispanic population.

Romney built his 63% by winning 98% of the Republican vote and 51% of the independent vote. He also managed to win 5% of those identifying as Democrats. Obama did win 94% of the Democrats, 40% of the independent vote, but only 1% of those identifying as Republicans. Third party candidates won about 10% of the independents and 1% from each group of partisan identifiers.

Which voters were most likely to vote for Romney? White voters split 77% to 19% for Romney over Obama, compared to a 72% to 25% McCain/Obama split in 2008. This reflects a growing racial divide between the parties.

Other explanatory variables reflect broader ethnic and cultural divisions that suggest many voters in Aiken County still see the candidates and parties in terms of what many observers called the "culture wars" back in the 1980s.

- Those who felt that Obama is a Muslim (32% of all voters, up from 19% in 2008 and 28% in 2010) split 95% to 2% for Romney.
- Those who wanted to keep flying the Confederate Flag on the capitol grounds (50% of all voters, up from 45% in 2008) split 88% to 8% for Romney over Obama.
- Those who felt that "blacks have too much power" (28% of all voters, up from 13% in 2008) split 85% to 11% for Romney over Obama.
- Those who felt that "Hispanics have too much power" (21% of all voters) split 79% to 18% for Romney over Obama.
- Those who felt that "Gays have too much power" (31% of all voters) split 80% to 18% for Romney over Obama.
- Those opposed to gay marriage (49% of all voters) supported Romney over Obama by 82% to 16%.

- Those who felt that “Atheists have too much power” (29% of all voters) split 79% to 20% for Romney over Obama.

Changes in Partisanship

While the GOP looks very strong for the immediate future in Aiken County, a few long term warning signs are on the horizon. We have seen the signs in earlier surveys of the county. Among voters in the under 30 age range, Democrats are competitive with Republicans at 40% and 45% respectively. Independents hold the balance of power with this age group. But among voters over 50, Republicans command 55% of the vote with Democrats at only 25%. Republicans can win the county among older voters no matter which way the independents go.

We saw an even stronger generational difference back in 2008 when younger voters gave Democrats a five to three advantage over Republicans. In 2004 the age pattern was similar to 2012, when Democrats were competitive with Republicans among the young at 41% and 47% respectively. So for three elections now the party identifications of the youngest group of voters have trended in the direction of being more competitive. These trends reflect a widely observed national trend in which younger voters are trending even more strongly toward Democrats (60% for Obama to 37% Romney in 2012).

Once a person reaches the age of 30, her or his party identification is highly stable for life. So if this trend among younger voters continues, we will have the potential for more competitive elections in Aiken County as these younger voters grow older and replace their far more Republican elders.

As we saw back in the 1970s and 80s when Republicans became competitive and then dominant in what had been the one-party Democratic South, this transition requires a second step. High quality political candidates must decide that they can win under the banner of what had been the minority party and choose to build their political careers under that party.

One of the fastest growing demographic groups in the nation is single member households. Nationally, singles comprise a little under four in ten households. This growing group of adult singles has trended in the direction of Democrats. Although singles comprise only a little over one in five Aiken County voters, they are far more likely to identify with Democrats than Republicans. While 59% of the married voters identify with Republicans, 54% of the singles identify with Democrats.

Finally, those voters who self-identify as “non-southern” (as opposed to “converted southern” or native southern) trend in the Democratic direction even more strongly. Among this growing group (16% of all voters in 2012, up from

12% in 2008), relatively more identify as Democrats than Republicans (41% to 34% respectively).

Differences in these three groups in party identification may be explained by the ethnic and cultural differences we just examined. For example, younger voters (18-30) are less likely to see Obama as a Muslim, to want to keep the Confederate Battle Flag flying, to see blacks, Hispanics, gays, or atheists as having “too much power,” and are more likely to support than oppose gay marriage (34% to 32%). For younger voters the cultural wars of previous decades are mostly over. Much the same can be said for singles, who of course are also more likely to be young, and for non-Southerners, many of who came from areas of the nation where the “culture wars” were not as important as in the South.

These differences in generation, marital status, and regional identification are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Groups of Voters Trending Toward Democrats and How They Are Different

Group	All Voters	Young (<30)	Single	Non-South
% Democratic	32%	40%	54%	41%
% Republican	51%	45%	29%	34%
Obama is Muslim	32%	27%	21%	16%
Confederate Flag Keep	50%	39%	29%	18%
Blacks too powerful	28%	20%	20%	14%
Hispanics too powerful	21%	13%	13%	12%
Gays too powerful	31%	18%	18%	24%
Atheists too powerful	29%	18%	19%	19%
Oppose Gay marriage	49%	32%	28%	36%
Pro Choice on abortion	48%	49%	57%	60%

The Tea Party

The most important popular political movement of the last several years was the rise of the Tea Party, based on opposition to taxes (Taxed Enough Already) and opposition to President Obama's health care reform initiative. The Tea Party has been particularly important within the Republican Party in Aiken County, where it combines libertarian free market views of the economy with social conservatism.

In 2010 (based on our 2010 exit poll of Aiken County voters), 43% of all voters and an overwhelming 65% of Republican voters considered themselves to be "supporters of the Tea Party." With this level of strength within the Republican Party, winning a Republican primary election without Tea Party support was nearly "mission impossible."

In the 2012 election, support for the Tea Party seems to have receded from its high tide in 2010. Support for the Tea Party among all voters fell to 30%, a thirteen percentage point drop from 43% in 2010. Among Republican voters, Tea Party support was still quite strong at 48%, but they had suffered a fall of seventeen percentage points from 65% in 2010.

Given that most all Tea Party "supporters" were Republicans (81% compared to 16% who were independents, and the remaining 3% were Democrats), we next turn to demographic factors and opinions that distinguish Tea Party supporters from other voters who did not support the Tea Party movement, other than their mostly GOP identification.

- Tea Party supporters were almost all white (95%) and conservative (88%).
- They were relatively more likely to be native Southerners than non-Southern (46% and 30% respectively).
- They were far more likely to see themselves as being worse off than they were four years ago compared to non-supporters (73% and 26% respectively).
- They blamed President Obama for current economic problems (63%) while a majority of non-supporters blamed President Bush (54%).
- They were highly likely to think President Obama is a Muslim as opposed to non-supporters (54% versus 12%).
- They were nearly twice as likely as non-supporters to say that people would prefer government handouts over working (38% versus 20%).
- They were twice as likely to prefer leaders who are strong, disciplined and self-reliant over leaders who are understanding and helpful (66% to 33%). Non-Tea Party supporters were exactly the opposite, preferring understanding and helpful leaders by the same ratio (66% to 33%).
- They were far less likely to be pro-choice on abortion compared to those who did not support the Tea Party (28% and 66% respectively).

- By more than two to one, Tea Party supporters (80% as opposed to 34% of the non-supporters) chose the policy of cutting the budget and major programs in order to reduce the deficit over a policy of running deficits to try to save jobs and stimulate the economy (supported by only 16% of the Tea Party supporters and 56% of the non-supporters).
- Tea Party supporters were far more likely than non-supporters to prefer a free market approach to health care (60% versus 18%) than have the government responsible for making sure all people had “access to good health care” (11% versus 59%).
- On health insurance, a majority of Tea Party supporters (65%) thought that insurance providers should not be required to cover birth control for women while a majority of non-supporters felt this should be required (59%).
- On the policy question of extending the Bush era tax cuts, Tea Party supporters and non-supporters held opposing views by margins of two to one. Most Tea Party supporters (62%) wanted to extend tax cuts for everyone while non-supporters wanted cuts only extended for incomes under \$250,000 a year or for no one (59%).
- They were almost twice as likely to feel that “unions have too much power” as non-supporters (75% versus 41%).
- The one policy area where Tea Party supporters and non-supporters had clear majorities on the same side was on making minimal changes on Social Security to make it financially sound (preferred by 79% and 87% of each group respectively) rather than phasing it out and replacing it with voluntary savings (preferred by 19% and 7% respectively). But even here Tea Party supporters are relatively more likely to prefer a free market approach, although that preference is held only by about one in five supporters.

Not only are Tea Party supporters clearly different than non-supporters, they are also different in matters of degree than their fellow Republicans who do not share their affinity for the Tea Party movement. Simply put, Tea Party supporters are relatively further to the right than fellow Republicans. They are far more conservative and less moderate in ideological identity, more conservative on both economic and social issues, have a more negative view of their fellow citizens, and express relatively greater distrust of those who do not share their cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Table 3 below details these differences. For the sake of comparison, we also show Democrats and independents, who are often far closer to each other than to either the Tea Party or non-Tea Party Republicans. We should note that in this table independents are “pure” independents. Those “leaning” Republican or Democrat are included with Democrats and Republicans because they are highly likely to vote for the candidate of the party to which they lean. And we also note

that in this table Tea Party Republicans includes only Tea Party supporters who were also Republicans (4 in 5 of all Tea Party supporters).

Table 3. Tea Party Republicans Generally to the Far Right

Area/Issue	Democrats	Independents	Non TP Rep's	TP Rep's
white	37%	74%	95%	98%
conservative	9%	35%	80%	92%
moderate	21%	38%	15%	4%
Mean age	46 yrs	49 yrs	48 yrs	53 yrs
Family Income	app \$36,000	app \$46,000	app \$57,000	app \$65,000
Married	47%	62%	67%	81%
Worse off 4 years ago	8%	34%	64%	73%
Obama to blame	4%	14%	49%	66%
Obama Muslim	4%	13%	47%	58%
People prefer handouts	16%	18%	37%	36%
Strong over Helpful leaders	16%	37%	54%	69%
Want leadrs to comprms w/other party	79%	92%	77%	73%
Abortion: Pro-choice	69%	61%	40%	23%
Abortion: Pro-life	8%	9%	16%	19%
Cut programs to reduc defct	14%	43%	62%	80%
Health care by free mkt	4%	27%	33%	62%
Insurance cover birth control	70%	54%	36%	25%
Ext ALL tax cuts	21%	28%	34%	64%
Preserve Soc Security	85%	88%	86%	80%
Keep Confed Flag flying	10%	33%	54%	66%

Oppose Gay Marriage	22%	28%	66%	75%
Gays too powerful	17%	15%	43%	42%
Atheists too powerful	18%	12%	34%	41%
Blacks too powerful	9%	19%	39%	40%
Hispanics too powerful	11%	13%	25%	26%
Unions too powerful	32%	38%	63%	75%
Corporations too powerful	75%	71%	61%	45%
Banks too powerful	73%	62%	54%	59%
Religious Fundamentalist	28%	14%	33%	39%
Rel extremely important in vote choice	21%	11%	29%	38%
Native South self-identity	60%	59%	73%	70%

Reviewing these differences, we see that a rather consistent ordering of these four groups from left to right demographically, ideologically, and in opinion. Compared to non-Tea Party Republicans, Tea Party Republicans are: significantly more conservative and less moderate, older, wealthier, the most married, the most likely to feel worse off than they were four years earlier, the most likely to blame Obama than Bush for current economic problems, the most likely to believe that Obama is a Muslim, the most likely to prefer strong and independent leaders over helpful and caring leaders, the least likely to be pro-choice on abortion, the most likely to want to cut spending on even major programs to reduce the deficit, the most likely to want to take a free market approach to health care, the most opposed to requiring insurance companies to cover contraceptives, the most likely to want to extend all Bush era tax cuts, the least likely to want to preserve Social Security (though all groups had strong majorities that supported making minimal financial changes to preserve the system), the most likely to want to keep the Confederate Battle Flag flying on state house grounds, the most opposed to gay marriage, the most likely to feel that atheists are too powerful, the most likely to feel that unions are too powerful, the most protective of corporations in being the only group with a majority rejecting the idea that corporations are too powerful, but the most likely to feel that banks are too powerful, the most likely to self-identify as religious

fundamentalists and to feel that religion is extremely important in making voting decisions.

Tea Party Republicans are roughly similar to non-Tea party Republicans in several areas, including the following: being mostly white, sharing the feeling that more people would rather accept government handouts than find work, preferring leaders who, at least in principle, are willing to compromise with the other party (a view they share with all other groups but most likely to be found among independents), having about the same small percentage who take the extreme pro-life position of no abortions under any circumstances (including rape, incest, and the life of the mother), the proportion that feels gays, blacks, and Hispanics are too powerful, and self-identifying as native Southerners.

In a few areas non-Tea Party Republicans are closer to independents and even to Democrats than they are to Tea Party Republicans. In preferring a free market approach to providing health care, non-Tea Party Republicans are closer to independents than to their Tea Party fellow partisans. In opposing the extension of all tax cuts, even on income over \$250,000 a year, non-Tea Party Republicans are closer to both independents and Democrats than to Tea Party Republicans.

Even though all Republicans share much and are generally in the same direction compared to independents and Democrats, Tea Party Republicans have often focused on the numerous differences in degree that do exist within their party ranks. These differences are the basis for recent bitter intra-party conflicts in which Tea Party Republicans label more moderate Republicans as RINO's (Republicans In Name Only).

Objectively speaking, if one takes a historical view that goes back more than a few years, one would conclude that the far right conservatism of the Tea Party is not at all what Republicans were for most of their history, even when their supposed hero Ronald Reagan was president. Reagan was willing to raise taxes when necessary to help move toward a balanced budget and pay for popular social programs like Social Security.

Independents and Democrats

The comparisons of partisan groups in Table 2 suggest another question. Given that independents are closer to Democrats than they are to either non-Tea Party or Tea Party Republicans, why did they not give more votes to Obama? To the extent that people make voting decisions on issues, as so many claim, Obama should have done better than he did. Yet independent voters split strongly for Romney over Obama by 51% to 40% in 2012.

If we carefully examine the performance of Democratic presidential candidates in the county among independent voters over several elections, we might get some clues suggesting an explanation. Let us begin with 2004.

In 2004 Democrat John Kerry won 42% of the independent voters. In that year incumbent president George W. Bush was presiding over an economy that seemed to be recovering from the downturn following the 9-11 terrorist attacks. Independents were evenly split between feeling better off and worse off than four years previously. So the party of the incumbent was not hurt badly by economic performance. The Iraq war was a problem, but not a great problem because the major issue in Aiken County voters' minds was combatting terrorism. Bush successfully portrayed himself as a "wartime president" who was seen as strong in the "war on terrorism." Finally and most notably, white and non-white independents were equally likely to vote for Kerry.

In 2008 Obama evenly split Aiken County's independent votes with John McCain (45% to 46% respectively). This time the major issue was the failing economy, and this definitely hurt the party that held the White House. Moreover, the Iraq War was now seen as a mistake by a plurality of independents, an added burden on a presidential candidate that campaigned to continue that effort. What is surprising is not that Obama did relatively better than Kerry in 2004, but that he did not easily win a majority of independent voters. Nearly all issues seemed to point toward Obama winning the votes of independents—except one: race. Unlike 2004, white independents voted differently than other independents, who gave Obama a majority. Only 39% of Aiken County's white independents voted for Obama.

In 2012, the economy hurt the incumbent president, this time the Democrat rather than the Republican. So it is not surprising that Obama did less well than he did in 2008 among independents (5 percentage points worse, from 45% to 40%). But again, Obama trailed badly among white independents, winning only 28% of their vote.

Why? White independents had become more antipathetic toward blacks in general and Obama in particular since 2008. In 2008 15% of Aiken County white independents felt that blacks had "too much power." That rose 4 percentage points to 19% in 2012. In 2008 16% of Aiken County whites believed that Obama was Muslim. That rose 11 percentage points to 27% in 2012.

These changes are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Obama Independent Vote Depressed by White Independents

Election Year:	2004	2008	2012
All Independents: % Kerry ('04) & Obama ('08/12)	42%	45%	40%
White Independents: % Kerry ('04) & Obama ('08/12)	41%	39%	28%
White Independents: % Blacks too much power	Not asked	15%	19%
White Independents: % Obama is Muslim	Not asked	16%	27%

The changing attitudes of white independents on matters of race and their changing voting behavior when faced with a black Democratic presidential candidate suggest that race was an important explanatory factor in why Obama did not do better among independents. Increasing racial polarization seems to be a major factor in Aiken County voting behavior.

“Makers and Takers”

Mitt Romney’s infamous “47% comments to contributors” suggested a belief that Democrats represent people who do not pay much in the way of taxes and who are lazy and dependent on government for handouts. Romney’s post-election explanation to other supporters on why he lost only reinforced his earlier comments—that Obama won because he gave these same groups of people “gifts” from the government, such as health insurance and contraceptives.

Many Republicans seem to share Romney’s critical views about a large part of the population. The author of this report has frequently heard the complaint that Obama would and did win the election from people “on the dole.” This view divides citizens into “makers and takers” in which hard working responsible people are forced by government to support lazy irresponsible people who would rather get handouts than support themselves.

Of course, Democrats respond that the role of government is to provide equal opportunities to compete, not provide handouts. Democrats make the more positive assumption that the overwhelming majority of people want to work and compete—if they just had the chance.

We tried to get at these opposing beliefs by asking voters the following question:

Which do you feel has a greater effect on the economy?

- 1) People who truly want to work cannot find a job
- 2) Lazy people who prefer to live off government handouts
- 3) Both have an equal effect

Responses to this question divided along party lines, as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. “Makers and Takers” as Seen Through Partisan Lenses

Opinion	Republicans	Democrats
People want to work	31%	52%
Prefer govt handouts	37%	17%
Both play an equal role	30%	26%

Republicans split roughly into thirds, with the largest group (37%) feeling that most of the problem was due to lazy people wanting government handouts. Slightly less than a third (30%) felt that laziness played an equal role with being unable to find jobs. Almost the same proportion (also 31%) saw lack of jobs as the major problem. So right at two-thirds of all Republicans (67%) felt that laziness and the desire to live off government handouts was either the major problem or an equal problem in harming the economy.

Democrats, on the other hand, were far more likely to see the lack of jobs rather than laziness as the greater problem. A majority (52%) cited the lack of jobs. Only one in six (17%) saw laziness as the greater cause, and a fourth (26%) saw both laziness and lack of jobs as equally important.

Moreover, answers to these questions were strongly related to voting choice, as shown in Table 6 below.

Table 6. “Makers and Takers” and Voting Choice

Voting Choice	Cannot Find Jobs	Equal Role	Prefer Government Handouts
Obama	52%	36%	19%
Romney	48%	64%	81%

A majority of those who felt that most people wanted to work and can't find jobs voted for Obama (52%), and an overwhelming majority of those who believe that too many people want government handouts voted for Romney (81%). A smaller majority (64%) of those who thought that laziness was equally important with people not being able to find work voted for Romney. That is, the more voters thought that laziness was a major factor, the more likely they were to vote for Romney.

These starkly opposing evaluations about the work ethic of fellow citizens are an important source of distrust between Democrats and Republicans in Aiken County and across the nation.

This view creates a problem for Republicans nationally. The national reality is that Obama won the most votes in 2012. So in order to win the next election the Republican candidate will have to win some of those votes. Winning those votes will be difficult if Republicans continue to accuse these same people of being lazy and dependent—that accusation certainly hurt them in 2012. The GOP must show respect for most all citizens. It must convince Americans that they will have a greater chance in life through private market mechanisms rather than through government programs. But doing so may undermine the emotional appeal that this insult has in places like Aiken County. Securing the base by appealing to base instincts may endanger winning the nation.

Religion—The “Muslim” Belief and Concern over Mormons

Religion was a recurring theme in 2008 and again in 2012. But in 2012 both of the major party candidates had some potential problems with voters who were Christian fundamentalists, of which there are many in areas of the nation like Aiken County. President Obama once again had to deal with the continuing belief among many voters that despite all factual evidence to the contrary, he is a Muslim. And Mitt Romney had to allay fears among many voters in the base of the Republican Party that he was a member of a “cult” rather than a Christian religion. It is noteworthy that shortly before the election the Billy Graham organization removed Mormons from its list of cults and pronounced that Mormons were in fact “Christians.” How did these two factors come into play in Aiken County?

As in 2008 and 2010, we asked voters about Obama's religion. In 2008 only 29% of the respondents correctly identified Obama as a Christian. More importantly, nearly one in five (19%) misidentified him as Muslim. Most of the rest of the voters simply said that they did not know (40%). In the 2010 election, 28% of Aiken County voters identified Obama as Muslim, and in 2012 the level misidentification rose to 32%, nearly two of every three voters. As noted earlier,

this misidentification was particularly high among Republicans, of whom a majority (52%) shared this belief.

Did this belief make any difference in voting? Among Republicans the answer is probably no, because they had many other reasons to vote against Democrat Obama, beginning with party identification. In 2004 96% of Aiken Republicans voted for their party's presidential candidate, George W. Bush, and in 2012 98% voted for Romney. So if religion played a role among Republican voters, it had at most a marginal effect.

On the other hand, religion could be critical among independent voters or ideological moderates, who are most likely to be "swing voters." Among independents in Aiken County, a little over one in five (22%) believed that Obama was Muslim. Looking at independents alone, Obama won practically no votes from those who thought he was Muslim (4%), but won two-thirds of the votes (67%) from among those who did not share that belief. He also did poorly among independents who said they were "not sure" about his religion, winning only 13% of their votes.

We see a similar pattern among self-identified ideological moderates. One in four moderates saw Obama as Muslim, and he won none of their votes. Among moderates who rejected the belief that Obama was a Muslim, 71% supported him. Among moderates who were "not sure," only one on four (27%) voted for Obama.

This suggests that these erroneous beliefs did suppress votes for Obama among both political independents and ideological moderates. Of course this made little difference in who actually carried the county given the very high proportion of voters who were loyal Republicans.

In the case of Mitt Romney, a significant number of voters expressed negative feelings toward the Mormon religion. We asked voters if they had favorable, mixed, or unfavorable opinions about the Mormon religion. Voters were about evenly divided among favorable (20%), mixed feelings (23%), and unfavorable (20%). The largest group was those who said they had no opinion, who comprised over a third of all voters (37%).

Looking only at feelings toward the Mormon religion and vote, we can see a very significant relationship in that those who viewed the religion favorably were more likely to vote for Romney (85%) than those who viewed it unfavorably (51%). Voters with mixed feelings were in the middle (72% voted for Romney).

But if we control for party identification, these relationships mostly disappear. Republicans, who were more likely to view Mormons favorably, voted for Romney regardless of their feelings toward Mormons And Democrats, who were more likely to view Mormons unfavorably, voted against Romney regardless of

their feelings toward Mormons. Independents seem to show a relationship between Mormon favorability and vote, but the numbers were too small in this subsample to be statistically significant. So we can conclude that feelings toward the Mormon religion had, at most, a small impact among political independents.

If these feelings were to have any effect, it should show up among white religious fundamentalists, an important base for the Republican Party. We found that white religious fundamentalists were less likely to feel favorable toward the Mormon religion than white non-fundamentalists (28% versus 44%). And white religious fundamentalists were more likely to feel unfavorable toward the Mormon religion than white non-fundamentalists (32% versus 23%).

However, any unfavorable feelings aimed at the Mormon religion had to be balanced against even more unfavorable feelings toward a Democrat who took many socially liberal positions on issues such as gay marriage and abortion and whom many of these fundamentalists thought was Muslim. The balance of these cross pressures clearly went in favor of Romney, who won 93% of the votes of white fundamentalists. Whites who were not religious fundamentalists and who were less likely to harbor unfavorable feelings toward the Mormon religion gave Romney 68% of their votes. So when white fundamentalists had to choose between someone they saw as a liberal Muslim and someone who was a conservative Mormon, they went overwhelmingly for the conservative Mormon.

Race and Ethnicity—Increasing Antipathy and Polarization

We have noted several times in this report that we saw increasing signs of racial and ethnic polarization. Measuring attitudes concerning race and ethnicity is one of the greatest challenges in public opinion research. Most respondents quickly spot any question that hints at interracial feelings and give a socially acceptable response regardless of actual feelings. Almost no one wants to be labeled as “prejudiced.” Therefore pollsters attempt to get at feelings toward other races and ethnic groups indirectly with questions that only partially tap feelings of mild resentment, antipathy, or negative stereotypes rather than ask about more extreme feelings of prejudice.

Our exit poll included a series of three such questions designed to tap “ethnic antipathy.” First, we asked whether a series of groups have too much power. One of the groups we asked about was blacks, (in addition to the elderly, atheists, Hispanics, banks, corporations, and unions). Second, we also asked about support for continuing to fly the Confederate Battle Flag on the statehouse grounds in Columbia. Finally, we asked whether the respondent believes, “as some do, that Barack Obama is a Muslim.”

A statistical procedure called factor analysis indicated that these three questions had an underlying common factor that each question picked up about

equally. This finding justified creating a compound variable using these three questions. We recoded each of the questions so that the answer to each that might tap some ethnic antipathy was scored as a “1” and other answers scored as “0.” Adding all answers together created a new variable with a four point scale ranging from 0 to 3. Zero corresponded to not giving any answers that suggested any ethnic antipathy. Three was the score for answering all the questions in a manner that might indicate some ethnic antipathy.

Interestingly, we also looked at potential antipathy of whites and blacks towards gays and atheists, groups that might be controversial among those with fundamentalist Christian beliefs. While relatively more blacks self-identify as religious fundamentalists, blacks were significantly less likely than whites to feel that either gays or atheists had too much power. We also compared feelings toward Hispanic power, thinking that blacks might feel some antipathy toward a group that some see as economic competitors for working class jobs that have long been held by blacks in the South. But again, blacks were significantly less likely than whites to feel that Hispanics had too much power. It is the white majority that seems to feel the most antipathy toward minority groups who are different than they are, whether they are groups defined by ethnicity, religion, or sexual preference.

Do blacks feel antipathy toward whites? While we did not ask whether whites have too much power in the 2012 exit poll, we did ask that question in 2008. That year, 57% of blacks felt that whites had too much power, suggesting a significant level of possible antipathy. We have no reason to believe that this level has changed since then. It has probably risen given the general feeling among blacks that many whites have shown disrespect for President Obama.

Black feelings about whites having too much power were much more widespread than the 17% of whites who felt that blacks had too much power in 2008 or the 34% of white voters who felt that blacks had too much power in 2012. This rise parallels another rise we noted earlier in this report, that the percentage of white voters who believe Barack Obama is Muslim rose from 19% in 2008 to 28% in 2010 to 32% in 2012.

So while a majority of blacks may feel some level of antipathy toward whites, white antipathy toward blacks is less widespread but seems to be on the rise. As shown in Table 7 below, ethnic antipathy scores among whites have dramatically risen since 2008.

Table 7. Increase in White Voter Ethnic Antipathy Scores

Eth-Antipathy Score:	0	1	2	3
2008 %	33%	40%	21%	6%
2012 %	28%	18%	23%	31%
Change (2012-2008)	-5% points	-22% points	+2% points	+25% points

The percentage of white voters with the two lowest antipathy scores went down from 2008 to 2012. And the percentage with the highest scores went up, the highest score up by 25 percentage points. In short, ethnic polarization seems to exist on both sides of the great racial divide that has plagued Southern politics since the founding of this nation, and in recent years the divide seems to be spiking upwards again.

Which groups of whites were more likely to feel higher levels of ethnic antipathy using the three question index? As education and income increased, ethnic antipathy scores decreased. Increasing age was associated with higher antipathy, though the relationship did not quite meet the conventional test of statistical significance. Those with higher scores of ethnic antipathy were more likely to self-identify as religious fundamentalists and as political conservatives. Regional identity played a strong role. We asked people whether they identified themselves as “native southerners,” “converted southerners,” or “non-southerners.” Those who were native southerners were the most likely to have the highest ethnic antipathy scores (40% versus 9% for non-southerners), and non-southerners were the most likely to have a score of zero (62% versus 16% for southerners). “Converted” southerners (those who were not born in the South but now considered themselves as Southern) were in between the other two groups on extreme scores of either high or low antipathy.

We ran a multiple regression to compare the relative importance of these factors in explaining levels of ethnic antipathy among white voters. Regional identification was by far the most important variable, followed by education, and then religious fundamentalism. Income and age did not have significant impacts on the level of ethnic antipathy.

Assuming that no new issues arise to separate whites and blacks, these relationships suggest that we might expect some reduction in antipathy in the future as the population becomes more educated and as more non-southerners move to the region.

Levels of ethnic antipathy had a profound impact on voting choice in the 2012 election. Table 8 below shows the relationship between ethnic antipathy (E-A Score) and voting choice among whites in Aiken County.

Table 8. Ethnic Antipathy Predicts Vote Among Whites

Eth-Antipathy Score (%)	0 (28%)	1 (18%)	2 (23%)	3 (31%)
Obama	73%	32%	3%	0%
Romney	27%	68%	97%	100%

Among those who scored zero (28% of all white voters) by giving no answer that might tap ethnic antipathy, Obama won by almost three to one. As ethnic antipathy scores increased, the percentage supporting Obama rapidly decreased. Even giving one answer that might suggest some ethnic antipathy (18% of white voters) turned Obama into a loser to Romney by more than a two to one ratio. Scores of two (23% of all white voters) or three (the remaining 31% of all white voters) virtually ensured that the respondent did not vote for Obama.

To try and separate out the influence of party identification, we re-examined this relationship by controlling for party identification. That is, we looked at the relationship between ethnic antipathy and vote for all the white Democrats, then for white independents, and then for white Republicans.

The relationship between ethnic antipathy and vote held for Democrats, though it was relatively weak. Feelings of partisan loyalty tended to trump feelings of ethnic antipathy, which created some cross-pressures for a few of the less strong Democratic partisans. The relationship for independents was stronger because independents did not feel cross-pressured by partisanship. No relationship existed between antipathy and votes for Republicans. But this was not because Republicans had low antipathy scores—in fact, they had the highest scores. White Republicans had an average antipathy score of 2.0, meaning that the average Republican gave answers that may indicate some antipathy on two of the three questions we asked. This compared to averages of 1.6 for white independents and 0.3 for white Democrats. There was no relationship among Republicans because virtually no white Republicans voted for Obama, no matter what the level of ethnic antipathy. Partisan loyalty only reinforced any existing feelings of ethnic antipathy. For those with low levels, the lack of such feelings did not interfere with their partisan inclinations on voting choice.

We did some additional analysis to separate out the relative importance of ethnic antipathy and partisanship. We used logistic regression to explain votes for Obama and Romney using partisanship and ethnic antipathy as the

explanatory variables. The model successfully predicted 94% of all votes cast. Both party identification and ethnic antipathy were about equally important in their predictive power for presidential choice in Aiken County.

The Gender/Marriage Gap

The terms “gender gap” and “marriage gap,” while intuitively simple, are quite complex and not consistently used in the popular media. Let us start with the gender gap.

Since the 1980s political observers have noted that women, especially single women, have tended to prefer Democrats. And men, and to a lesser extent, married women, have preferred Republicans. Because the Democrat’s advantage with women is usually larger than the Republican advantage with men, the Democrats are seen to have an advantage on the “gender gap.” Moreover, the gender gap is amplified because more women vote than men.

The “marriage gap” follows a similar pattern, but is more complicated. Republicans tend to have an advantage among married voters while Democrats tend to have a larger advantage among single voters.

Here is where popular terminology gets a bit messy. Usually commentators say the Republicans benefit from the marriage gap. But that only looks at marrieds. If we make a comparison similar to the comparison made in examining the gender gap, we find no clear advantage to either party. The difference among married voters that advantages Republicans tends to be smaller than the difference among single voters that advantages Democrats. In that sense Democrats could be said to have a net benefit from the marriage gap. But married voters outnumber single voters, so the net difference in votes produced for Democrats and Republicans is not that great. Added to this is the demographic fact that the proportion of singles in the electorate is growing, which helps the Democrats.

According to 2012 national exit polls, the gender gap again advantaged the Democratic candidate. Obama won 55% of the female vote and Romney 52% of the male vote. So Obama did relatively better among women than Romney did among men. Moreover, the gap was amplified by the fact that women were a larger part of the electorate (53% compared to 47% male).

The marriage gap favored Obama, who won 62% of the votes of singles, while Romney carried 56% of the votes of married voters. But because singles were only 40% of the electorate, the net Obama advantage was significantly deflated.

How do Aiken voters compare to national voters on these two kinds of gaps? Table 9 below shows the vote in the county and then the nation by both marital status and gender. The last column shows the differences for each group locally and nationally. These differences were calculated as the Obama percentage minus the Romney percentage. So a positive difference is one that favors Obama and a negative difference is one that favors Romney. We list the overall vote in the first row so that one can make an additional comparison, whether the difference for each subgroup is larger or smaller than the overall difference.

Table 9. The Gender/Marriage Gaps in Aiken County and the Nation

Group	Aik% (Nat %) Obama	Aik % (Nat %) Romney	Diff: Obama – Rmny in % points Aiken (National)
total vote over all voters	37% (51%)	60% (48%)	-23% (+3%)
males	36% (45%)	60% (52%)	-24% (-7%)
females	38% (55%)	59% (44%)	-21% (+11%)
married	28% (42%)	70% (56%)	-42% (-14%)
single	61% (62%)	33% (35%)	+28% (+27%)

For example, starting with the first row, over all voters Romney enjoyed a 23 percentage point advantage in Aiken County, while Obama enjoyed a 3 percentage point advantage nationally. Among males Romney enjoyed a 24 percentage point advantage (a negative percentage point difference) in Aiken County and a 7 percentage point advantage nationally. Romney did not do significantly better among males in Aiken County than he did overall in Aiken County (comparing his 24 point advantage among males to his overall 23 point advantage in Aiken County). But nationally Romney did quite a bit better among males than he did overall (comparing his 7 point advantage among males nationally to his 3 point disadvantage overall).

We see a similar pattern among females. Romney did much better among females in Aiken County than he did nationally, winning females by 21 percentage points rather than losing them by 11 points. But females in Aiken County were not significantly less likely to support Romney than in the overall county vote or the male vote (comparing differences of -21% to -23% to -24%).

These data reveal no significant gender gap in Aiken County. Both males and females voted about equally heavily for Romney.

Going down the table and making these kinds of comparisons suggests another conclusion. While little gender gap existed in Aiken County, a rather large marriage gap existed, one that favored Romney in this heavily Republican county.

A careful examination of the data reveals this gap. Among married voters, Romney enjoyed a 42 percentage point advantage, a significantly larger advantage than he had nationally among married voters (where his advantage was 14% points). Obama, on the other hand, had a 28 percentage point advantage among singles in Aiken County, about the same as his advantage among singles nationally (27 points). So Obama did just as well among singles in Aiken County as he did nationally. But the singles Obama advantage in the county (28 points) was smaller than the Romney married voter advantage (42 points)—net advantage Romney. Nationally Obama's singles advantage of 27 was larger than Romney's 14 point advantage among married voters—net advantage Obama. Moreover, the marriage gap in Aiken County that favored Romney was inflated by the fact that in Aiken County only 22% of all voters were single (compared to 40% nationally).

Drilling down further into the data beyond what is in the table, we can explain most of the Obama advantage among singles by racial composition. While overall blacks comprised about a fourth of all Aiken County voters, they comprised almost half of the singles and only 15% of the married voters. Racial differences overshadow even the marriage gap. Nevertheless, marital status still had some impact. If we look at just whites, Obama did about 9 percentage points better relatively better among single white voters than he did among married white voters (27% and 18% respectively).