

CHAPTER FOUR

The Challenge of Ethnic Diversity

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As the census data in the introduction revealed, the state of Connecticut will experience a sizeable increase in the percentage of Blacks and Hispanics by the year 2025. Although the socio-economic status of Blacks and Hispanics has improved over the years, the economic and buying power of such groups will still lag behind that of whites in the foreseeable future. In 2001, the median household incomes of whites was \$44,517 while the median household incomes for Blacks and Hispanics was recorded at \$29,470 and \$33,565 respectively. Within the Northeast region, the median family income for whites was \$48,118, \$29,268 for Blacks, and \$30,731 for Hispanics.¹ Moreover, the rapidly rising cost of homes in Connecticut's suburbs will inherently prohibit the movement of many Blacks and Hispanic families from the cities to the white suburbs.² Thus, the projected growth of the two population groups suggest that Connecticut's cities will be even more densely populated by nonwhites by 2025.

Political Party Implications

The projected increase of Blacks and Hispanics in Connecticut will most certainly have political and public policy ramifications in the years ahead. Since the days of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, Blacks have had a very close relationship with the Democratic Party. The Party's commitment

to government-sponsored social assistance programs, civil rights legislation, the rights of labor unions, and more generally the economic needs of the working class and poor have contributed to a close interlocking relationship between Democratic candidates at all levels of the polity and Black voters. The symbiotic political relationship between Blacks and the Democratic Party has continued unabated for more than fifty years. On the national scene, in what some refer to as "post-9/11 America," 64% of Blacks eighteen years of age and older identify themselves as members of the Democratic Party, while only 7% identify themselves as Republicans. Moreover, Blacks identify with the Democratic Party remains firm despite variation in income. Sixty-three percent of Blacks who make less than \$20,000, 66% who make between \$50-75,000, and 61% with incomes of \$100,000 or more identify themselves as Democrats. In the three income brackets, only 8%, 6%, and 10% respectively are aligned with the Republican Party.³ In the presidential election of 2000, 90% of Black voters voted for Al Gore, while only 8% voted for George W. Bush.⁴ Within the ranks of the Democratic Party, Blacks currently account for approximately one-fifth of the Party's registered membership.⁵

Common sense suggests that a sizeable increase of the Black population in Connecticut during the next twenty years will affect in various ways the internal dynamics of the state's Democratic Party. The Black presence within the Democratic Party will be more pronounced in years ahead and the policy concerns of this important Democratic voting bloc will be quite discernible. Democratic State Senator Ernest E. Newton II, an African-American who represents the twenty-third senatorial district in the city of Bridgeport, agrees with this assessment, and suggests that Blacks will be an even more decisive voting bloc within the Democratic Party in years to come: "African-Americans can hold the Democratic Party accountable, and the Party is beginning to recognize this. If African-Americans turn their back on the Democrats, then the Party is finished. As the numbers increase, the Democrats will automatically get the message."⁶ At the same time, Senator Newton, who also serves as the deputy president pro tempore, suggests that in addition to managing racial diversity within the Democratic Party, an even greater challenge that awaits

Democrats is the political mobilization of young Black voters: "Many young African-Americans are detached from the political process and don't see any reason to vote. The younger generation has never experienced what older African-Americans have, and they don't realize that many died fighting for civil rights."⁷

Democratic State Senator Toni Nathaniel Harp, an African-American who represents the tenth senatorial district in New Haven and West Haven, similarly stresses the potential political power of the Black community and noted that efforts are underway by the Democratic Party to reach out to the Black as well as the Hispanic population. Senator Harp, who serves as the chairperson of the Senate Appropriations Committee, states that the "outreach effort would have happened even if there were no projected increase in populations."⁸ In her view, it is essential for the Democratic Party to include both population groups within the Party's leadership structure as well as the agenda-setting process.

The Hispanic population also comprises a very important voting bloc within the Democratic Party, but not to the same extent as Black voters. Nevertheless, many Hispanics affiliate with the Democratic party for essentially the same reason as Blacks. The public policies supported by the Democratic Party are perceived by Hispanics as more consistent with their economic and social needs compared to the more conservative economic and social policies advocated by the Republicans. Currently, 36% of Hispanics age eighteen years of age and older identify themselves as members of the Democratic Party, while 22% affiliate with the Republican Party.⁹ Although post-9/11 polling has discovered discernible movement among Hispanics towards the Republican column, most notably in the states of the South and the West, the Hispanic population of the U.S. is still regarded as a Democratic constituency. This is especially true in the Northeast, where Hispanics remain very loyal to the Democratic Party. Prior to 9/11, 42% of northeastern Hispanics identified themselves as Democrats, while 16% expressed allegiance to the Republican Party. In the post-9/11 period, 41% of Hispanics in the Northeast regarded themselves as Democrats with only 14% affiliating with the Republicans, suggesting no movement whatsoever towards the GOP.¹⁰ In the 2000 presidential contest, 67% of Hispanic voters

supported the Democratic Party's presidential candidate, Al Gore, while 31% voted for Republican George W. Bush.¹¹ The projected increase of the Hispanic population in Connecticut from 7.5% in 1995 to 15.3% in 2025 suggests in no uncertain terms that Hispanics can potentially become an extremely powerful voting bloc within the state's Democratic Party, and it is likely that the policy concerns that reflect Hispanic interests will become more prominent within the Party's legislative agenda at the state capitol.

State Representative Felipe Reinoso, a Hispanic lawmaker who represents the 130th Assembly District in Bridgeport, believes that the growth of the Hispanic population in Connecticut, as well as in other states, will pose "enormous challenges" in the years ahead. Reinoso, who was born in Peru, suggests that the growing Hispanic population creates a definite need to elect "more Hispanics and Latinos to the Connecticut state legislature, and more should be appointed to state Boards and Commissions as well."¹² According to Reinoso, there are many economic and social issues that directly affect the Hispanic population and require Hispanic political leadership. He identified education as the issue that is first and foremost in the minds of many Hispanics, followed by economic development, employment, and the complex problem involving undocumented immigrants. According to Reinoso, Salvadorans, Peruvians, and Brazilians are particularly affected by current immigration laws, and such laws need to be immediately addressed.¹³

It is important to note that the Hispanic population in Connecticut is of the ethnic variety that normally affiliates with the Democratic rather than the Republican Party. The 2000 federal census discovered that Puerto Ricans comprised 5.7% of the state's population, 0.7% were of Mexican origin, and 0.2% were of Cuban extraction. The remaining 2.8% of the state's population were classified as members of "other" Hispanic groups.¹⁴ Carmen Rodriguez, the former Executive Director of La Casa de Puerto Rico, Inc., a non-profit organization located in Hartford, believes that the Puerto Rican community will remain affiliated with the Democratic Party, but cautions that Democrats should not take the Puerto Rican vote for granted. According to Rodriguez, the Puerto Rican community will increasingly vote on

the basis of issues that are perceived as directly affecting Puerto Rican interests. Such issues, in Rodriguez' view, include "education, health care, and access to resources."¹⁵ As she put it: "If the traditional system does not work for us, and does not educate us, then that is a problem that will affect the way we vote."¹⁶

Although voting behavior among ethnic groups can never be predicted with perfect accuracy, it seems reasonable to assume that Blacks and Hispanics in Connecticut will constitute a sizeable segment of voters, or at least potential voters, within the Democratic Party's electoral coalition. Although the two voting blocs are not by any means monolithic in their political behavior and political values, they do have similar socio-economic and political concerns. Thus, one can confidently hypothesize that as the Black and Hispanic populations increase in Connecticut, so too will their impact within the ranks of the Democratic Party. One can also surmise that more Black and Hispanic candidates from urban legislative districts will appear on election ballots, and it is probable that more candidates of African-American and Hispanic descent will be elected to major leadership posts in cities such as Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury and Hartford. The election in 2001 and reelection in 2003 of Eddie Perez to the office of mayor in Hartford could mark the beginning of this trend.

Gary Reardon, the chairman of the Democratic Party in Waterbury, one of Connecticut's largest and most multiracial cities, confirms this perspective. According to Reardon, although the Republican Party has been courting the Hispanic vote, the issues that the Democratic Party stands for, such as job creation, urban development, and quality public education, will continue to attract the support of Black and Hispanic voters. The Democratic Party's inclusiveness can be observed in the increasing number of minority candidates who run for public office under the Democratic Party label. Reardon notes that candidacies for the Board of Alderman in Waterbury tend to reflect this development.¹⁷ At the state level, there also appears to be a concerted effort on the part of the Democratic State Central Committee to include Hispanics and Blacks in the decision-making structure. Democratic State Chairman George Jepsen describes the Party's attempt to connect the two "base constituencies" to the internal affairs of Democratic Party organization:

When writing our Delegate Selection Plan for the 2004 Democratic National Convention, we doubled our Affirmative Action requirements to ensure that African-American and Latino leaders have a substantial role at the national convention. Also, over the last year, we created a Democratic Latino Leaders Outreach Committee, and through that have produced a Latino Democratic video, which we're broadcasting on local cable access networks throughout the state.¹⁸

Jepsen also calls attention to a very innovative Democratic Party plan of action designed to accommodate the policy concerns of Black and Hispanic voters, most of whom reside in Connecticut's cities. The Party's urban outreach program now includes an Urban Issues Forum that serves as the foundation for the "Urban Contract for the Connecticut Democratic Party."¹⁹ The Democratic Party's "Urban Contract" is reminiscent of the Republican Party's "Contract With America," that contributed to the Republican Party gaining a majority of seats in the House of Representatives in the congressional election of 1994, an election often described by pundits as a "political earthquake."

Looking toward the future, as the Black and Hispanic population in Connecticut increases in size, it is inevitable that the policy concerns of both ethnic groups will become more pronounced, not only within the ranks of the Democratic Party but also in the committee rooms and legislative chambers of the state capitol. Turning a deaf ear to the important economic, social, and educational needs of Connecticut's two largest minority groups will not be an option for state legislators, irrespective of party affiliation.

Public Policy Implications

The increase of nonwhite population groups in Connecticut will undoubtedly elevate the salience of public policy issues at the state capitol that have relevance to the economic and social needs of racial minority groups. While some might be under the naïve impression that perceptions toward policy issues are unaffected by

ethnic identity and the socio-economic environment in which one lives, the empirical evidence suggests otherwise. With respect to several public policy areas, Blacks and Hispanics express policy views that are markedly different from those of whites. Indeed, with respect to some policy issues, the differences are in sharp contrast with one another. Although the survey data that follow are based on national samples, one can confidently extrapolate the findings to policy attitudes among whites and nonwhites in Connecticut. The unfortunate paucity of Connecticut-based survey data that cross-tabulates political and policy attitudes on the basis of ethnicity necessitates extrapolation.

Public Education: White and Nonwhite Perspectives

We begin our exploration of policy perspectives among whites and nonwhites with a focused survey regarding attitudes toward public education. The first question was posed as follows: "In your opinion do Black children and other minorities in this community have the same educational opportunities as white children?" In response to this simple and straightforward question, 79% of all persons surveyed replied "Yes, the same." Such a high percentage, however, masks the serious differences between white and nonwhite respondents. The data, when cross-tabulated by race, revealed that 83% of whites but only 57% of nonwhites responded "Yes, the same."²⁰ A 26% gap between white and nonwhite attitudes towards educational opportunities suggests in no uncertain terms that the two groups of respondents view educational conditions in very different ways. At the same time, it should be noted that the gap is not as large as the 38 point gap between whites and nonwhites that was discovered in 1978 by the same research organization. The difference between white and nonwhite perceptions toward educational conditions appear to have narrowed somewhat.²¹

Given the serious differences in perceptions towards education, one cannot help but wonder if Connecticut's lawmakers truly understand the unique needs of Black and Hispanic school children in the public school systems of Hartford, Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, and New London. Despite the landmark

state Supreme Court rulings of *Horton v. Meskill*, 172 Conn. 615 (1977), and *Sheff v. O'Neill*, 238 Conn. 1 (1996), discussed in the Introduction to this volume, it is still relevant to ask if Connecticut lawmakers are in fact sensitive to the disparity between urban and suburban school districts.

Paul Stringer, principal of Weaver High School in Hartford, believes that many state lawmakers, due to the composition of their districts and feelings among their constituents, are reluctant to address the issue of equal education for urban school children. In Stringer's view, lawmakers have thus far demonstrated little effort to promote the goals and ideals of the *Sheff* decision: "It's a difficult pill to swallow, and I don't see how it's going to happen."²²

Perceptions of whites and nonwhites also vary with respect to the educational issue known as the "achievement gap." The question was asked in this manner: "In your opinion is it the responsibility of the government to close the achievement gap between white students and Black and Hispanic students?" In response, 45% of all persons surveyed replied that it was the government's responsibility to close the gap. When crosstabulated by race, however, 65% of nonwhites viewed closing the gap as the government's responsibility.²³ The nonwhite community, more than the white community, seems to believe that the government can and should do more to rectify the disparity in academic achievement between white and nonwhite school districts. Although the respondents did not identify what level of government was most equipped for this purpose, it is clear that nonwhites view an activist government as necessary for the purpose of narrowing this disturbing and unfortunate pattern of academic performance. What exactly has the Connecticut state legislature done, along with the state Department of Education, to close the achievement gap between urban and suburban schools in Connecticut? This is a fair and important question to ask.

The racial divide over educational policy continues to surface when the subject turns to school improvement and presidential leadership, and the question asked was: "Do you believe President Bush will do a better job of school improvement than President Clinton or a worse job?"²⁴ Forty-nine percent of all persons

surveyed replied that President Bush will do a better job than President Clinton in the area of school improvement. Broken down by race, however, 54% of whites and only 24% of nonwhites expressed this view. Thus, with respect to perceptions towards presidential leadership in the area of educational policy, there is obviously a wide chasm between white and nonwhite Americans. Whether or not President Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act," which is designed to address the achievement gap, can forge more confidence in the president among nonwhites remains to be seen.

*Job Security and Racial Discrimination:
Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Perspectives*

Attitudes towards educational policy is not the only policy area where there is evidence of a racial divide. Survey data indicate that whites and nonwhites embrace different perspectives toward a variety of domestic policy issues and lifestyle concerns. In a CBS News/*New York Times* poll conducted in July of 2003, the attitudes and values of Hispanics living in the United States were explored in considerable depth. Although Hispanics expressed optimistic attitudes with regard to their economic and social opportunities, as well as their prospects of living the "American dream," the survey still uncovered important attitudinal differences between Hispanics and non-Hispanics toward several policy-related issues. For example, fear of job loss surfaced as an extremely important concern among many Hispanic respondents. Such an attitude is perfectly understandable, as a significant portion of Hispanics are employed in jobs that are among the first eliminated when companies decide to downsize, relocate their operation, or outsource assembly work to Asian or Latin American countries. Thus, not surprisingly, 72% of Hispanics expressed concern about losing their job within the next year. This is in stark contrast to the 44% of non-Hispanics who expressed this concern.²⁵ It is more than apparent that the country's fastest growing minority group perceives itself as very vulnerable within the context of the American economy and job market. Although based on national survey data, such a finding does lead one to ask whether or not Connecticut lawmakers, when

fashioning economic policy, are cognizant of the anxiety and perceived economic vulnerability that many Hispanics currently feel with regard to job security.

Perceptions of racial discrimination also reveal a significant division between Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites. Although perceived discrimination is nowhere near the 73% recorded for Black respondents, a figure cited in this study, the survey nevertheless discovered that 36% of Hispanics could recall directly experiencing some form of racial discrimination. This was in contrast to 21% of non-Hispanic whites who perceived themselves as victims of racial discrimination.²⁶

*Equality and Social Justice:
White and Black Perspectives*

Additional survey data continue to document disparate views between whites and nonwhites in regard to policies associated with the concept of social justice. More specifically, issues that reveal sharp differences between whites and Blacks include explanations associated with racial inequality, the extent to which educational and housing opportunities exist, and the highly controversial topic of affirmative action.²⁷

Concerning explanations for racial inequality in the United States, 33% of white respondents in year 2000 perceived racial discrimination against Blacks as responsible for unequal social conditions. In sharp contrast to this figure, 64% of Blacks attributed unequal social conditions to discriminatory practices based on race.²⁸ Granted, this particular survey question is quite broad and more detailed responses would be helpful for the purpose of analysis. Nevertheless, there is clearly a feeling in the Black community that a condition of racial inequality exists in the United States, and that racial discrimination is at the root of this dilemma.

Concerning educational opportunities in the United States, 45% of whites believed that Blacks have less chance for an equal educational experience, while 57% of Blacks thought this to be the case. When asked if personal motivation was a contributing factor to racial inequality, 51% of whites replied in the affirmative, compared to 40% of Blacks.²⁹ Such data strongly suggest that

whites and Blacks have different perspectives regarding the reasons behind racial discrimination. Blacks, to a much greater extent than whites, believe that racial inequality is rooted in societal discrimination and that fewer educational opportunities exist. Blacks appear to view racial discrimination as a function of systemic conditions, while whites are inclined to view discrimination as the end result of personal behavior. The evidence further underscores the thrust of this chapter: there is a serious racial divide in the United States, and by way of extrapolation, one can infer that the divide is present within the state of Connecticut. How long the racial divide will persist, and how deep this divide is are questions that no social scientist can fully answer. However, what is particularly distressing about the survey data is that an entrenched racial divide appears to continue well into the twenty-first century, with little sign of improvement. This is especially troubling in a country and state where the concept of equality is embraced and cherished.

The views of whites and Blacks also diverge when the subject of housing opportunities are probed. Eighty-six percent of whites in year 2001 believed that Blacks have "as good a chance as white people to get any housing they can afford," while 49% of Blacks expressed this perspective. Only 14% of whites responded that Blacks did not have the same chance as whites to secure housing, while 51% of Blacks viewed the housing situation in such terms.³⁰ Precisely why Blacks do not perceive housing opportunities as equivalent to those of white home buyers, particularly if the house they wish to buy is affordable, is difficult to pinpoint. For many years, there have been claims from civil rights organizations that housing policies and real estate practices in the United States, and within the state of Connecticut, are racially biased against Blacks. Zoning laws in suburban communities that require the construction of only large and costly homes, banking practices that present obstacles for persons seeking home loans, and attempts on the part of real estate agents to "steer" Blacks into certain towns and neighborhoods are among the several complaints and charges leveled by the NAACP against the various institutions involved in housing policy. Indeed, it has been argued that housing policies in the United States are inherently racist and responsible for perpetuating

segregation. Although analyzing the extent to which racism is inherent in housing policy is far beyond the scope of this study, the attitudes of Blacks regarding this important issue clearly suggest a policy challenge for state lawmakers in Connecticut and elsewhere.

Affirmative action policies have for many years been a source of tension between whites and nonwhites, and recent survey data suggest that such tension will persist in years ahead. When asked to express a point of view towards special government expenditures for Blacks, 30% of white respondents in year 2000 agreed with the position that government spending was "too little," 51% responded "about right," while 19% viewed such spending as "too much." Black respondents, however, viewed special government expenditures in different terms. Seventy-eight percent of Blacks responded that such expenditures were "too little," 18% chose "about right," while only 4% viewed government expenditures as "too much."³¹

In addition to perceptions towards government spending, whites and Blacks disagree over the issue of whether or not preferential treatment should be given to Blacks within the work force. Five percent of whites surveyed in year 2000 strongly favored preferential hiring and preferential promotion practices for racial minorities, while 70% strongly opposed such employment practices. Twenty-five percent of white respondents expressed views somewhere in between the two ends of the spectrum. It is clear that whites do not favor preferential employment practices for Blacks. In contrast, 53% of Blacks were strongly in favor of preferences in the work force, while 25% strongly opposed preferential considerations. Twenty-two percent of Black respondents were located in between the two positions.³² As we embark upon the twenty-first century it is apparent that whites and Blacks are at odds with one another with respect to this emotionally charged and controversial issue.

The Challenge: Bridging the Divide

The evidence presented above regarding party allegiance, voting behavior, and attitudes towards a variety of policy issues directly indicates that party leaders and state lawmakers in

Connecticut will in years ahead be confronted with the complex task of bridging the racial divide. Factionalism within the Democratic Party will more than likely be exacerbated as Black and Hispanic voters comprise a larger and growing percentage of the Democratic Party's leadership and rank-and-file. As the Democratic Party in Connecticut increases in ethnic heterogeneity, one should anticipate a proliferation of policy disputes between the Party's white suburban base and nonwhite Democrats from urban areas. Whether or not Democratic Party leaders and lawmakers can successfully unite the different ethnic factions within the Party behind a common and mutually agreed upon legislative agenda will be one of the most vexing political challenges in the foreseeable future. In Connecticut politics, Democratic Party nominations to the various constitutional offices, such as state treasurer, state comptroller, and secretary of state, have been one way in which the Party has demonstrated a commitment to the inclusion of ethnic minorities into political offices. Although such nominations certainly have symbolic importance for ethnic constituencies, it is unlikely that in future years such nominations alone will be sufficient to accommodate the political demands and needs of Connecticut's nonwhite population.

The smaller, suburban, and more ethnically homogeneous Republican Party in Connecticut will be less likely to experience the challenge of internal ethnic politics. However, while this can be interpreted as advantageous to the Republicans with respect to intra-party management and legislative unity, it is still important from both an electoral and governing perspective for the Republican Party to consciously expand its appeal and political base to emerging and multi-racial voting blocs. Indeed, demographic trends in Connecticut pose distinct challenges for both political parties. Thus, the ability to understand the policy needs of Connecticut's increasingly diverse population, a keen understanding of how policy needs translate into political behavior, and a grasp of the causes and consequences of the racial divide will be required among those who seek public office in the state of Connecticut.

Notes

1. U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov/hhcs/income01/inctab1.html.
2. The median sale price of homes in the forty-town Hartford area in 2003 was \$206,5000. In 2002, the median sale price was \$185,000. Thus, sale prices rose \$21,500, or 11.6%, within the space of one year. Source: Greater Hartford Association of Realtors. Figures cited in *Hartford Courant*, January 15, 2004, p. E1.
3. "Party Affiliation: The 2004 Political Landscape." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, people-press.org/reports/display.php3/PageID=750.
4. Voter News Service Exit Poll; November 7, 2000. Cited in John Kenneth White, *The Values Divide* (New York: Chatham House, 2003), p. 165.
5. "Party Affiliation: The 2004 Political Landscape."
6. Telephone interview with State Senator Earnest E. Newton II. February 21, 2004.
7. Newton II, interview.
8. E-mail interview with State Senator Toni Nathaniel Harp, February 27, 2004.
9. "Party Affiliation: The 2004 Political Landscape."
10. "Party Affiliation: The 2004 Political Landscape."
11. White, *The Values Divide*, p. 165.
12. Telephone interview with State Representative, Felipe Reinoso, March 4, 2004.
13. Reinoso interview.
14. U.S. Census Bureau. CBSNews.com www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/census2000/framesource.
15. Telephone interview with Carmen Rodriguez, former Executive Director, La Casa de Puerto Rico, Inc. February 27, 2004.
16. Rodriguez interview.
17. Telephone interview with Gary Reardon, chairman of the Waterbury Democratic Town Committee, March 10, 2004.
18. E-mail interview with Democratic State Party Chairman George Jepsen, March 24, 2004.
19. Jepsen interview.
20. Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, Thirty-third Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. Poll conducted May 23-June 6, 2001. www.pdkintl.org/kappan/ko109gal.htm.

21. Rose and Gallup Poll.
22. Telephone interview with Paul Stringer, principal of Weaver High School, Hartford, Connecticut, March 5, 2004.
23. Rose and Gallup Poll.
24. Rose and Gallup Poll.
25. CBS News/*New York Times* Poll, July 2003. CBSNews.com, August 7, 2003. www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/08/05/opinion/polls/mail566813.shtml.
26. CBS News/*New York Times* Poll.
27. Maria Krysan, "Data Update to *Racial Attitudes in America, 2002*," update and website to complement Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*, revised edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). Data cited are based on several polls including the General Social Survey, National Election Studies, and Gallup Poll. www.tigger.vic.edu/~Krysan/racialattitudes.htm.
28. Krysan, "Data Update."
29. Krysan, "Data Update."
30. Krysan, "Data Update."
31. Krysan, "Data Update."
32. Krysan, "Data Update."