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Maciej Turek
Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora
Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland

2012 Presidential and Congressional Elections: A Dance of Electoral Context, Campaign Skills, and Structural Factors[1]

After significant gains in the 2010 midterm congressional elections, along with succeeding in winning many state and local races, the Republican establishment was waiting for the 2012 presidential and congressional elections with high and justified hopes. As the U.S. economic situation had not recovered the way President Obama had expected, which translated into his rather moderate job approval ratings, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney was expected to make Barack Obama a one-term president. However, as in contemporary presidential campaigns, electoral context alone seems not to be enough to claim the presidency, and other factors intervened which ensured the re-election of the 44th president of the United States. At the same time, while the same electoral context gave Democrats more votes in congressional elections, somehow it did not give them the majority in the House of Representatives, guaranteeing the status quo from the 2010 cycle. In this paper, the author identifies the main forces behind the results of both presidential and congressional 2012 elections, arguing that while context was vital for the conducting of the campaign, other factors contributed to the contemporary, post-2012 American political scene. What is important is that the so-called structural factors in the presidential and congressional election seem likely to make this scene stagnate for many years to come.

As every presidential election cycle has its own rituals, we first observe hopefuls 'exploring the ideas of running,' forming their campaign organizations, and appealing to voters in Iowa, New Hampshire, and subsequent nomination phase states. Once it is concluded, another set of rituals follows, with the choice of a running mate, national party conventions, and debates, among other things. During all

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of the stages that constitute the presidential campaign, analysts, pollsters and scholars attempt to predict the election results based on existing forecasting models, and various demographic and economic data. This is always a hard game, particularly if one wishes to forecast both presidential and congressional elections. So many factors are interconnected, such as the context of a particular race, institutional constraints, or unforeseen developments, that the only constant seems to be the fact that we do not know who is going to win, or how.

During the 2012 cycle, quite sensational forecasts were those in which neither Barack Obama nor Mitt Romney would receive 270 electoral votes, the required amount to win the presidency ("Paths to the White House. Scenarios"). As the forecasts were extended to the vice presidential post, as well, the election would have to be decided by Congress. Had it been so, quite an extraordinary situation would have occurred in the Senate. According to one simulation, in the Senate, where Senators would have voted as state units, the votes would have been split evenly. In that case, the decisive vote would have to be cast by the vice president, and the answer to the question whether Joe Biden would have voted for himself or Paul Ryan seems obvious. Had it happened, we would have experienced a return to the Adams-Jefferson administration, with the president from one party and the vice president from the other. The U.S. House of Representatives, voting also as state units, would have elected Mitt Romney, since at the time of the forecast the Republican Party could count on a majority in 34 state delegations, while Democrats controlled only 14 delegations. In this last respect, the composition did not change much after the election: on January 6th, when the 113th Congress was inaugurated, the Republicans were still the majority party, controlling 30 state delegations after winning 234 House seats. The Democrats, possessing 200 seats, controlled as much as 17 state delegations (Haas 1-67).

The new House seat allocation is confusing from the perspective of the 2012 election results, both presidential and congressional. On the Electoral College level, President Obama's victory seemed rather solid, as he received 332 votes to Mitt Romney's 206. Gaining over 65.7 million popular votes, Obama carried 26 states and the District of Columbia, while Romney won in 24 states, after collecting more than 60.6 million votes (Haas 69-70). Yet these numbers somehow did not translate into a comparable congressional victory: while the Democrats kept, and even increased, their majority in the Senate, they are still the minority party in the House. Even though, in comparison with the 2010 midterm elections, they gained 7 seats, they were unable to seize control of the lower House. How is it possible, considering that in the 2012 House elections the Democratic Party candidates received more popular votes than their GOP counterparts – 59.2 million to 57.6 million (Haas 72--73)? While trying to explain this phenomenon, this paper also aims to identify the most important factors that shaped the 2012 election, both for the White House and Congress. I will argue that while the division between Democrats and Republicans is deep, and constantly growing, it is somehow surprising that electoral politics in the United States seems to be tending toward stability, i.e. the point where, controlling other factors, the structural ones might lead to the permanent majority of one party in presidential elections, and the other party in congressional, particularly in the race for the U.S. House of Representatives. It actually happens to already be the case, as the national mood seemed to be unimportant in the November 2012 races across the 435 congressional districts.

One might claim that, on the one hand, the presidential election has always been decided on national issues. On the other hand, in accordance with Tip O'Neill's famous saying, all politics is local, so the congressional elections were decided on what was the focal point of the local community at a particular point of time. As Republican Representatives were thought of as doing a good job for their districts, why not keep them in office, even if the vote on the presidential ballot was cast for the Democratic president? The issue of split voting in American elections is not new: after all, the Democratic Party held the majority in the U.S. House between 1955 and 1995, even if during this period Americans elected Republican presidents in 6 out of 10 presidential races. At the same time, however, we must remember that in the last several cycles, congressional elections have also been rather nationalized, and this strategy served Republicans well in 1994 and 2010, and Democrats in 2006. Yet all of these were midterm elections, which the presidential party almost always loses, due to a lack of presidential coat-tails, a lower turnout, off-elections serving as a referendum on the presidential incumbent, and willingness to penalize the party that holds the White House (Busch 1-7). In this, as in many other aspects, presidential cycles vary substantially, and such was also the case in 2012.

2012 Presidential Context and Election

Even if President Obama's victory was not a big surprise judging from the campaign developments, its proportions might be so, considering the electoral context the 2012 presidential cycle was conducted in. As usual in an election when the incumbent president aims to be reelected, the main issue is how their achievements or lack of them, or their first term record, to speak in general terms, are perceived by the public. Ever since the presidency of FDR, American presidents are judged by their performance during the first one hundred days, but are also the subject of so-called "textbook presidency" (Cronin). This notion not only makes the White House occupant the central figure in relation to the other branches of power, but also makes it so that if the presidency is the leading office in the U.S. political system, the job comes with some additional performance requirements. American citizens see their presidents not only as the symbol of their country but also as the person they might and should rely on in their everyday life. Not only is it true that "everybody now expects the man inside the White House to do something about everything" (Neustadt 7), but also, as Barbara Kellerman has noted, modern presidents must demonstrate expertise "on everything from clean air to neutron bomb; they must be skilled as a backslapper and military tactician; they must have moral fiber, vision, ambition, energy, brains, craftiness, and decency" (Kellerman 13). As it is hardly possible to fill all of these roles and meet these extraordinary expectations (Cronin, Genovese), it has led to the development of the notion of *the postmodern presidency*, according to which it is no longer possible for the chief executive to deliver all of what the citizens might want (Rose). At the same time, however, when economic well-being seems to be a major concern for citizens, presidents are required to create circumstances to make it happen. Thus, the function of the Manager of Prosperity that Clinton Rossiter wrote about (Rossiter 36-39) is the most important one, being also the main challenge upon assuming the presidential office.

This was also the main challenge for the new president, Barack Obama. It was even more significant if we consider the circumstances of the beginning of his first term, in January 2009. The president inherited the country in the middle of an economic downturn, a weakened economy, an increasing national debt and unemployment rate, and decreasing GDP growth. However, the way Obama managed his 2008 presidential campaign led people to wonder aloud what other miracles he was capable of. The legendary *Washington Post* reporter David Broder called the 2008 cycle "the best he'd ever covered" (Broder), and one author even wondered whether Obama had the ability to unite the divided nation and become "Lincoln 2.0" (Turek 2010: 34).

Thus, the first term domestic agenda was quickly defined as an attempt to level off the consequences of the economic downturn. In one of the last episodes of his administration, President George W. Bush introduced *The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008*, which was the basis for the solution known as *The Troubled Asset Relief Program* (TARP), for the subprime mortgage crisis. The Obama administration followed with its own legislation. Shortly after the inauguration, President Barack Obama submitted to Congress (through David Obey and nine other Democrats) legislation of a stimulus package to revive the American economy. When the bill was signed in early February of 2009, the president decided to go ahead with health care reform. The promise of introducing a universal, governmental health care system was one of his main campaign programs. The idea is not new, as several presidents have tried to formulate and enact it, starting with Harry Truman. The last attempt was made by Bill Clinton in the spring and fall of 1993 (Skocpol), yet when it failed, it put his entire presidency in jeopardy. Clinton's declining popularity matched with the nationalization of the 1994 midterm congressional election and uniting of the Republican Party around the ambitious legislative program, *Contract with America*, resulted in GOP retaking the House of Representatives and the Senate for the first time since the 83rd Congress (1953-1955). With a newly elected House Speaker, the charismatic Newt Gingrich, Republicans passed *Contract*'s legislation within 100 days, and the Speakership under Gingrich was thought to be emerging as the new power in American politics. President Clinton, in the meantime, was not only on the defensive, but also gained the reputation of a certain loser for 1996, as his net loss in 1994 was 54 seats in the House and 8 in the Senate. The analogies between the Clinton and Obama presidencies, their first term in particular, are not exaggerated: both are progressive Democrats, both became presidents before they turned 50, and, upon entering the Oval Office, they both possessed strong desires to become leaders of bipartisanship politics and policy. Early in their administrations, both got involved in long and exhaustive legislative battles over health care. Yet, while Clinton eventually abandoned the issue, Barack Obama demonstrated much more determination than his Democratic predecessor. However, he paid an even higher price than Bill Clinton had had to, and the symptoms of this possibility became visible as early as during the congressional recess in the summer of 2009. Influenced by grassroots movements and citizens writing petitions and expressing their anger during occasional political rallies, Republican legislators decided not to cooperate with the administration on health care, in any way whatsoever. This meant that even if the bill or a set of bills were going to be passed by Congress, it was to be concluded by a partisan rather than a bipartisan vote.

Yet new developments occurred soon: very efficient, outside-group TV-ad spending led to the nationalization of the issue, just as GOP nationalized *Contract with America* in 1994. This strategy soon proved fruitful, when the special U.S. Senate election in Massachusetts, conducted to fill the seat of deceased Ted Kennedy, was won by Scott Brown, a Republican. Not only did it send a powerful message nationally – that if GOP can beat the Democrats on health care in *The Bay State*, they can do it anywhere – it also had serious political implications. With Brown filling the Kennedy seat, Democrats now had 59 Senate seats, one short of the filibuster-proof majority, and might have had harder times moving their domestic agenda through Congress. Even though the administration was somehow able to pass *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* in March 2010, the bill was not supported by a single Republican (Jacobs, Skocpol), setting the stage for the 2010 midterm. In the House election, the Republican Party success was even greater than in 1994, as they gained 63 seats and reclaimed the majority in the chamber, which they lost after the 2006 midterm. With a divided government, it was all politics as usual again: the president was unable to achieve anything that was on his agenda, while for the Republicans, even if their legislation was passed in the House, it was hardly possible to get it through the Senate or the Conference Committee, not to mention reaching agreements with the White House, particularly if the legislation included traditional Republican proposals.

The politics of a divided government and its negative consequences can be best exemplified by the negotiations to raise the national debt limit that occurred in the spring and summer of 2011. What had been the standard procedure in the previous 74 instances since 1962 (Sorkin) became a three-month political battle with no winners, only losers. The debt limit was eventually raised, but it left both Congress and the president falling in their approval rate. Most importantly, however, as a result of this political playing with fire, the U.S. credit rating was downgraded from AAA to AA+. This, in turn, led to the U.S. major stock indexes plummeting, and a downturn of the U.S. Dollar was visible, too.

Thus, the tactics of both sides was an illustration of what Bohdan Szklarski coined as symbolic leadership – announcing a public policy program without an incentive to negotiate it, or knowing that negotiations would fail because the position would be unacceptable for the other side (2006). Yet in a modern democracy, where everything is polled and measured, such an announcement might make one's opponent look weak. Thus, the "blame game" is a standard weapon of any politician, as the fluctuations in their professional reputation and public prestige, to use Richard Neustadt's famous notion (1990), might make one side or the other be more inclined to reconsider their attitude towards negotiations.

In the meantime, the 2012 presidential campaign began, and by May 2011 it was in full swing, as the first debates of hopefuls for the Republican Party's presidential nomination attracted between 8 and 10 candidates. The message coming out of these gatherings, as well as from campaign rallies and speeches, was easy to predict considering the re-election context of the 2012 cycle: America was in the worst economic situation ever, and the greatest contributor to this was President Obama. Republican nomination contestants focused on the president's unwillingness to cut taxes, his creation of an unfriendly environment for running businesses, unhelpful attitude in creating new jobs, and spending too much on costly and unnecessary units or programs, such as bureaucracy and entitlements.

From this perspective, it could be expected what type of campaign rhetoric President Obama would have to deal with before the general election. The economy as the main issue was more and more predictable. First, from the Republican tier Mitt Romney quickly emerged as a frontrunner, becoming the eventual nominee. With his business experience, pro-market attitude, and record as governor of Massachusetts, Romney was a candidate emphasizing abilities to demonstrate much-needed economic leadership, describing Barack Obama as unable to deliver economic prosperity. At the same time, Romney's opponents, who emphasized more conservative values and culture war rhetoric, particularly Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich, were unable to match Romney's campaign organization and resources. More importantly, the issues they were trying to raise and build their campaigns around seemed not to resonate with the public – the polls conducted in March, when the Republican primary was still unconcluded, clearly demonstrated that citizens were more interested in the economy (Connelly), making Romney the candidate who, among Republican aspirants, had the highest chances of defeating President Obama in November (CNN and ORC International). Romney seemed to maintain the importance of the economy on the campaign trail – he spoke about his ideas broadly during campaign speeches and rallies. He also demonstrated his willingness to sign up for the more conservative economic program when he picked Paul Ryan as his running mate. Ryan, a representative from Wisconsin, has been a member of the House's two most influential committees – the Ways and Means and Budget Committee, which he chaired. He was also the main architect of the Republican fiscal policy, as he authored the budget project, proposing deep cuts in such popular programs as Medicare and Medicaid. Finally, during the first televised presidential debate, which Romney won by a surprisingly substantive margin, the challenger presented his economic program that was based on five pillars: energy independence, trade with Latin America, the necessity of teaching new skills to American workers and the unemployed, balancing the budget, and focusing on small business (Commission on Presidential Debates). The significance of the economy was further confirmed by public opinion: in a poll conducted between September 8 and 12, *The New York Times* and *CBS News* asked what the most important issue was in deciding how citizens would vote for the president. In those surveyed, the five most important issues were the economy (28%), jobs/unemployment (13%), health care (12%), politicians/government (6%), and budget deficit (4%) ("The New York Times and CBS News Poll").

Thus, if the president's first term performance was perceived as mixed at best, the economic revival was not as dynamic as he might have wanted, forcing Obama to make a strategic decision not to run on his first term record. Moreover, voters claimed it was the most important issue, and both candidates on the Republican ticket were the most pro-economy-oriented contestants in recent election history. Thus, how is it possible that Obama still won? This question will surely be asked for a long time to come, and not only by Mitt Romney. And we can easily present several explanations. The most obvious answer is that an election is not only a contest based on a context; voters still have to be appealed to and get out to the polls. Thus, "the campaign matters" (Holbrook). In addition, even if the majority of the actual voters claimed Romney was more reliable than Obama on economic issues, the context did not point towards Romney as much as he might have wanted or expected, rather

suggesting a very close election. This notion was somehow demonstrated by the scholarly world. For the third time, just as in 2004 and 2008, before the 2012 election the Editorial Board of the *PS: Political Science & Politics* assembled a team of scholars at a symposium to discuss models of election forecast and possible outcomes of the 2012 cycle. As we can read in the October 2012 issue of the journal, while five models predicted that Obama would win, five forecast a victory for Romney, while three models expected the presidential race to be very close, becoming even a toss--up ("Symposium: Forecasting the 2012 American National Elections" 614-674).

If so, with an unclear context the advantage is on the side of the candidate who is able to build a better, well-organized campaign. In 2012, the Obama Team again was in a class of its own, correctly predicting the nine most important swing states, mastering its ground operation, and replicating its successful 2008 campaign fundraising strategy, due to which the Obama campaign was able to level off Mitt Romney's Super PAC advantage, which had previously seemed impossible. The authors of the *Politico.com* campaign mini-book series argue that the campaign was actually decided in the summer of 2012, when, even after a successful nomination campaign, Mitt Romney came out of it severely weakened. As he did not attempt to redefine himself, the Obama campaign moved to define their opponent (Thrush, Martin 17--32). And they were so efficient that even when Mitt Romney repeated the three--decade-old but still accurate slogan of Ronald Reagan, "Are you better off than you were four years ago?", the majority of voters had a very different question in mind: "Will you be better off four years from now under Mitt Romney's leadership?" (as the Obama campaign framed it) (Thrush 21). The exit polls showed that of those 59% surveyed who picked economy as the most important issue, 51% voted for Romney, while 47% voted for Barack Obama (Bolger). But the exit polls reported what the Obama campaign had been telling voters for months, and 53% believed that "Romney's policy would favor the rich" (Schultheis), as was the message in negative ads aired in the summer of 2012 by the Obama campaign. More importantly, Obama was also more well-liked on a personal level, and he also managed to "beat Romney by an astonishing 81 to 18 percent margin on the question of which candidate *cares about a person like me*" (Kranisch). Thus, as Glenn Thrush and Jonathan Martin have put it, "a 21st-century campaign can recover from a flawed, polarizing frontman," as it was in the case of Barack Obama, "but it can't bounce back from mismanagement and poor planning" (Thrush, Martin 11), as was the case with Mitt Romney.

The 2012 Congressional Election

While it is possible to navigate presidential elections to one's advantage even if the context might not be as promising as in 2008, it is a little bit tougher to influence elections in 435 congressional districts and the 33 senatorial races that occurred in 2012, even if conventional wisdom states otherwise. When it does, it simply follows the theory of presidential coattails, which, however, was first introduced from the other way around. The coattails theory is one of the explanations why the presidential party loses congressional seats in midterm years (Busch 2-3). However, a brief look at the dynamics of seat allocation in House elections indicates that an incoming president does not always gain as many seats as were lost in previous congressional

elections. And even reelected presidents rarely deal with the same congressional seat allocation they did after their first electoral victory. This is so because, as Gary Jacobson has explained, "for so many voters the congressional choice is determined by evaluations of candidates as individuals, often with little reference to national policies or personalities" (Jacobson 2004: 164).

Speaking in plain English, frequently when evaluating incumbent congressmen, voters pay little or no attention to the national perspective, being more interested in the local context. This is indicated in the notion of two Congresses, whereas Congress is a national legislature, making national policy and enacting federal bills. At the same time, Congress is also a collection of individuals, whose "electoral fortunes depend less upon what Congress produces as an institution than upon the support and goodwill of voters hundreds or thousands of miles away" (Davidson, Oleszek 4). Therefore, this often, if not always, makes legislators support the position of their local constituencies, even if it might not be rational from the standpoint of national policy, or even contradictory to their earlier position, voting record or campaign promises. Yet if legislators wish to be reelected, which is their first and foremost goal (Fenno; Mayhew 1974a) on the Hill, and in the particular timeframe their roll-call voting record is consistent with their constituents' wishes, and, additionally, they have also been able to bring federal money (jobs) or encourage private money (investments) to flow into their districts and/or state, the constituency has no incentive whatsoever to bring such a legislator down or not reelect them, at least according to the theory of retrospective voting (Fiorina). Moreover, even if Congress as an institution is viewed rather unfavorably by the American people, the individual members are popular among their constituents. In the 2012 cycle, for instance, 90 percent of those in the House and Senate running to renew their mandate won (Mahtesian) in the times when congressional job approval in the year preceding the 2012 election was no more than 17.8 per cent, with its lowest point at 11.3% (RealClearPolitics).[2]

Thus it was perfectly possible that U.S. citizens voted for a candidate of one party for president and for a candidate from the other party in the statewide (U.S. senator, governor) or U.S. House elections (Turek 2012: 28-31). Moreover, the 2012 cycle also brought some incentives on the institutional side, which might serve as an explanation for why the numbers do not add up in congressional elections, and why the Democratic Party is still the minority party in the U.S. House, even though it received more votes nationally.

One of these incentives might be redistricting. Every ten years the Census Bureau counts American citizens to apportion U.S. House seats according to the population of each state. Once seats are reapportioned, the redistricting process begins, which alters voting units within the states. As of the 2010 apportionment, 18 states had changed their House seats' allocation – 8 gaining seats, and 10 states losing some proportion of its representation. As was argued elsewhere, by the sole reapportionment process, which also translates into Electoral College numbers, Mitt Romney gained 6 electoral college votes (Turek 2012). In congressional elections, the reapportionment process, followed by redistricting, seems also to be of vital importance. The process itself varies from state to state, but everywhere it might involve

[2] Respectively, the highest Congress disapproval rate between November 6, 2011, and November 6, 2012, was 84%, and the lowest 75% (RealClearPolitics).

a combination of such authorities as legislatures, governors, state or federal court, or a commission (political or independent). Thus, the results of the 2010 midterm election gain new importance here, as in addition to 63 seats picked up in the House and 6 in the Senate, the Republican Party gained 680 seats in state legislatures (in comparison to 1994, when the GOP gained 472 state legislature seats) (Jacobs). This considerable gain left the Republican Party with controlling power of "drawing of district lines for 173 seats," while the "Democratic legislators and governors redistricted 44 seats" (Iyer). The Republican Party politicians also controlled redistricting following the 2000 apportionment, which gave them an incentive to draw district boundaries to their advantage (Jacobson 2003), which might also have been the case in 2012 (Palmer, Cooper; Iyer; Jacobson 2013).

An illustration of such a statement can be found in the House election and its aftermath in Ohio, Virginia, and, most of all, Pennsylvania. While they were all considered swing states in the 2012 presidential elections (even if Pennsylvania was only considered thus in the latter phase of the race), eventually they were carried by Barack Obama. Democratic Party candidates were not so successful, however, in House races, gaining 12 seats to 33 seats won by GOP candidates in the three states combined. However, the confusion increases when we take a closer look at states' outcomes. In Ohio, the Democrats received 2,412,835 votes, or 46.91%, to the Republicans' 2,620,233 votes (50.96%). Yet they received only 25% of the seats, as the Ohio House representation in the 113th Congress will be comprised of 4 Democrats and 12 Republicans. In Virginia, the Republican Party also claimed more House seats (7 to 4 of Democratic candidates), even though they received 50.2% of votes (1,876,761 to 1,806,025). Finally, and most astonishingly, in Pennsylvania, where the statewide number of votes for Democratic Party candidates was actually higher than for GOP candidates (50.28% to 48.77%), the proportion of House members following the election will be 13 Republicans to 5 Democrats.[3] Clearly, we are not sure whether the Democratic Party would be the majority if the seats were more evenly allocated in these three states and others, where such anomalies occurred after the 2012 contest. Nevertheless, some redistricting outcomes clearly have been a factor here. On the other hand, Gary Jacobson puts these results into a more long-term perspective, arguing that it plays into the structural advantage of the Republican Party in the House Elections. Claiming that

> "it exists mainly because minority, single, young, gay, and highly educated people who routinely vote Democratic are concentrated in urban districts that produce lopsided Democratic majorities and hence many 'wasted' votes. Republican voters are spread more evenly across suburbs, smaller cities, and rural areas, so that fewer Republican votes are wasted in highly skewed districts" (Jacobson 2013: 22)

Jacobson points out the uneven distribution of Democratic and Republican regular voters with a strong party identification and a tendency of not splitting their party vote. This pattern seems to be evident in Ohio, Virginia and Pennsylvania, as in some congressional districts, particularly those carried by Democrats, there is highly disproportionate voting distribution between parties. For example, in all districts won by Democrats in Ohio – the third, ninth, and tenth – Democrats received at least 201

[3] All election data in this section is from Haas.

thousand votes, while Republicans gained 88 thousand at the highest, and Marcia Fudge of the 11th district ran unopposed. Similarly, in Pennsylvania the vote in the Democratic-won districts varied from 177,740 votes (fifth district) to 318,176 votes (second district), while the highest number of GOP votes was in the fifth district (104,725 votes). Finally, the same pattern can be seen in Virginia, where in the three districts won by Democratic Party candidates (third, eighth, and eleventh), the narrowest margin was recorded in district eleven, where Gerry Connolly defeated Christopher Perkins in a landslide win, with a margin of more than 85 thousand votes (Haas).

This structural pattern also involves the consistency of the South voting, as a recent development. In a very interesting paper, Charles Bullock, Donna Hoffman and Ronald Gaddie demonstrate that the voting behavior of the Southern constituency has changed since the 1994 congressional elections. Even though prior to that cycle Southern voters elected a larger portion of Democrats to the House, this is not the case anymore (Bullock, Hoffman, Gaddie).

Thus, if we combine this recent phenomenon with the two rounds of 2000 and 2010 redistricting, the most significant seat change in the House since the 1938 midterm with polarizing partisan politics, not only does the context of the 2012 electoral cycle seem clearer, but it may also give us some elaboration of what it might mean for future elections, and, more importantly, of what it all might mean for the politics of congressional-presidential relations in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, the future looks rather gray. With the structure of divided governments, it looks like until the next presidential cycle there will not be many incentives to solve the most important issue in contemporary American politics – namely, the state of the U.S. economy. With both parties clearly unwilling to give up their positions, and the House in Republican hands, a compromise seems almost impossible. If the electoral outcomes have more to do with the structural situation in congressional districts, it is not enough to force legislators to compromise their position. With the marginal districts vanishing even more when the theory was developed almost four decades ago (Mayhew 1974b), and James E. Campbell's hypothesis of electoral stagnation (Campbell), there is little to expect until the composition of the current Congress changes. On the other hand, it is hard to predict that the Democrats will regain the House in 2015, as the presidential party almost always loses votes in midterm elections. If this is so, it will mean that of the eight years of two presidential terms, Barack Obama will have had actually a divided government, and the record of the 44th president with a Republican House is not promising, even though Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell once claimed that "a divided government is the best time – and some would argue the only time – where you can do really big stuff" (Steinhauer).

From another corner, however, there is a convincing possibility of a one-party government in the White House. If the current demographic trend in Texas is maintained, it might actually change *The Lone Star State's* preferences in the Electoral College, and turn it blue (Meyerson; Lizza; Teixeira; Cohen). And if the Democratic Party could count on the majority of voters in the presidential elections in California,

New York, and Texas, it would essentially hand the presidency over to the Democratic candidate, whoever that person will be.

But then this president would be face to face with a stagnant Republican House. So it is better that, until then, Democrats and Republicans will learn to deal with each other. Otherwise we might witness subsequent years of bitter partisan politics, which will further divide Americans. But whether this would be rather attributed to the U.S. political system or the politicians, is a question for another paper. In the present paper, I was interested in determining the forces behind the results of the 2012 election, both on the presidential and congressional level. As we have seen, many a time in past races for the presidency the context was enough to determine the winner. However, with the development of very hi-tech campaign techniques (Issenberg), along with the decreasing number of battleground states (Abramowitz; Bartels; FairVote; Hopkins, Goux; Shaw), which might serve as another structural factor in the presidential cycle – it is no longer enough. At the same time, beating the context by having better campaign skills and organization might as well be a factor in why Obama's victory was only Pyrrhic. Winning presidents could always count on either gaining a majority in Congress or legitimacy for bipartisanship, at least in the first two years of their presidency. The future will tell whether, with the current structural circumstances, this is still the case.

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