**ANALYSIS: Vote trend among whites like tribal Ulster**

**By Ben Lowry**

**News Letter**

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THE Republican Party is to growing numbers of white Americans what unionist parties in Northern Ireland have been to Protestants.

The Republicans have the support of a growing chunk of whites in the US, currently around 60 per cent of them.

White males are Republican two to one.

This percentage may keep growing, as the United States continues to undergo rapid racial change.

The Republican Party, which was part founded by anti-slavery activists, is now seen by many non-Hispanic white Americans as the defender of traditional values of the country.

When Mitt Romney said in his concession speech that he was concerned about America, he was touching on this anxiety.

“I believe that the principles upon which this nation was founded are the only sure guide to a resurgent economy and to renewed greatness.”

At times, particularly in the Deep South, traditional values is code for racism, but more often it is a genuine worry that the old America, what its defenders consider to be the greatest nation there has ever been, is slipping away.

That fear is linked to a sense that other ethnic groups, particularly Hispanic arrivals who only speak Spanish, don’t share those core values.

On these pages this week, Billy Kennedy recounted how in Tennessee a Texan woman had told him that President Obama was Muslim. Four years ago, when I carried out a straw poll in New Hampshire, a well-dressed man spat out in contempt his belief that Obama was Islamic.

This is a fringe view, but mainstream conservatives criticise Obama as a socialist.

There is a fear that Obama has no strong loyalty to the established America, and that his healthcare reform is the part of an attempt to turn a nation of dynamic capitalism into a high tax European-style welfare state.

Whites are already a minority among children born in the United States and within a few decades they will be a minority of the overall population. There will be a further time lag before they are a minority of those eligible to vote.

Whites are currently 72 per cent of the electorate, down from 74 per cent four years ago, and 77 per cent four years before that.

Despite this dominance, they are they losing nationwide elections because blacks are Democrat almost to a person, and Hispanics, while a little less uniform, are still more overwhelmingly Democrat than whites are Republican.

Added to the minority of whites who are Democrat, this forms a majority.

To overturn that, Republicans will either need to reach out to these minorities, or else achieve an ever growing share of the white vote.

Yet reaching out to Hispanics, which prominent Republicans such as George W Bush and John McCain have done by backing initiatives to make illegal immigrants citizens, is far from straightforward, given that so many Republicans fear that such immigration is helping destroy the country.

This contradiction, between a key Republican belief and the alienation it causes to a group they need to woo, may prove unbreachable for the Republicans.

In most of Northern Ireland’s history, Protestants feared an existential threat to their nationality and values, and voted as a bloc.

Growing numbers of American whites may feel a similar, although non-violent, threat.

At present, a smaller percentage of whites vote Republican than Protestants in Ulster who vote unionist (more than 90 per cent through much of the history of Northern Ireland).

The white divide is more akin to somewhere such as North Down, where 65 per cent of Protestants typically voted for a traditional unionist party, and the remainder supported other parties such as Alliance.

But even if whites keep moving Republican, it will represent a growing share of a declining sized cake, and will be insufficient to get them elected to the presidency unless the growth in share of white voters outpaces the decline in white population share.

In Ulster, the tribal response of Protestants to their situation means that even modern unionists such as Mike Nesbitt have almost completely failed to attract Catholic support. The historical associations of unionism are so toxic.

There is one key hope for those Republicans who want to be multi-racial.

Yesterday’s election exposed a generation gap over culture, with some states passing measures in support of gay marriage and legalising cannabis outright, which would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

It may be that the Republicans coalesce around opposition to these and other social issues such as abortion, enabling the party to appeal to African Americans and Hispanics who have traditional views on these matters.

This too has echoes in Northern Ireland, where Catholics and Protestants take the same stance on such questions, although in the past it was not enough to bridge the sectarian divide.