May 2012

TO: Interested Parties

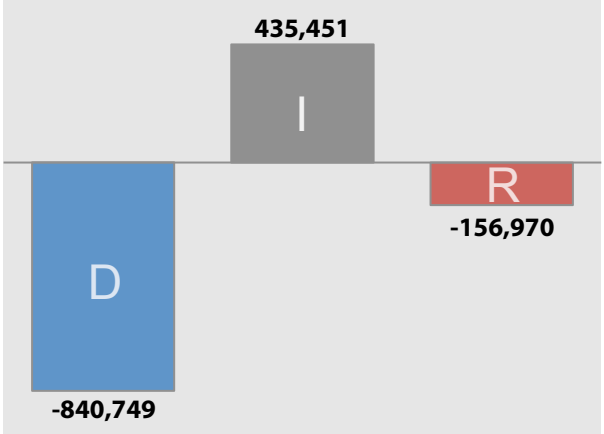
FROM: Michelle Diggles, Senior Policy Advisor

RE: Flight to the Center: Voter Registration 6 Months Out

The general election is in 6 months. And if voter registration data is any indicator, the American public isn't sold on either party. Since 2008, Democratic registration has declined substantially. The GOP primary has slowed Republican losses. But the real story is with Independents, whose ranks have swelled by nearly half a million voters in the 8 presidential battleground states for which party registration data is available.*

Since 2008, Independent registration in these 8 battlegrounds has increased by 435,451, while Democratic registration has decreased by 840,749, and Republican registration has decreased by 156,970.† Independents gained ground in absolute numbers in 5 states and gained relative to Democrats in all 8 states.

Change in Voter Registration in 8 Battleground States Since 2008



In this memo, we find that:

1) Independent registration outstrips both parties in the presidential battleground states;
2) Voters are identifying as Independents at record levels; and,
3) Independent voting patterns are more volatile in recent elections.

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* The 8 presidential battleground states with partisan registration are Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania. The other 4 presidential battlegrounds—Michigan, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin—do not keep registration statistics by party identification.

† See Appendix A for all registration data sources.

Independent Registration Outstrips Parties in Battlegrounds

Of the 12 presidential battleground states that will likely determine the November election, 8 keep voter registration statistics by party. Since 2008 in the 8 presidential battleground states with partisan voter registration—Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania—Independent voter registration has increased while partisan registration is down.

In these 8 battlegrounds since 2008:

- The number of Democrats has ***decreased* by 840,749, or 5.5%**, and now stands at 14,523,908;
- The number of Republicans has ***decreased* by 156,970, or 1.3%**, and now stands at 12,005,417; and,
- The number of Independents has ***increased* by 435,451, or 5.8%**, and now stands at 7,944,411.

Democratic registration has fared worse than Republican registration in all 8 states. Independent registration since 2008 has increased in absolute terms (not relative to the parties) in 5 states. And Independents are a plurality of voters in 3 states—Colorado, Iowa, and New Hampshire.

Percent Changes in Partisan Voter Registration in 8 Battleground States, 2008 to 2012

	% Change Democrat	% Change Republican	% Change Independent
Colorado	+1.3	+3.5	+12.2
Florida	-5.5	-0.4	+5.6
Iowa	-9.7	+4.3	-2.4
Nevada	-3.6	-2.2	+6.5
New Hampshire	-13.8	-3	-8.3
New Mexico	-3.3	+1	+11.2
North Carolina	-3.3	-0.6	+13.9
Pennsylvania	-7.7	-5.6	-1.5
8 State Total	**-5.5**	**-1.3**	**+5.8**

Actual Changes in Partisan Voter Registration in 8 Battleground States, 2008 to 2012

	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Colorado	+13,497	+36,896	+130,276
Florida	-265,903	-15,121	+140,616
Iowa	-72,389	+27,314	-18,665
Nevada	-21,422	-10,534	+13,897
New Hampshire	-36,497	-8,140	-27,656
New Mexico	-19,481	+3,918	+20,426
North Carolina	-92,295	-10,829	+191,983
Pennsylvania	-346,259	-180,474	-15,426
8 State Total	**-840,749**	**-156,970**	**+435,431**

Independents Reach Record Levels

According to Gallup, a record high 40% of Americans now identify as an Independent, surpassing both the Democratic and Republican parties in voter identification nationally.[‡] In the 8 presidential battleground states, Independent registration has increased substantially since 1996, by a total of 4,153,287, or about 110%. And, in Florida, New Mexico, and North Carolina, the number of Independents has more than doubled.

Change in Registered Independent Voters, 1996 to 2012

	% Change in Independents	Increase in Independents
Colorado	62.7%	462,836
Florida	151.8%	1,594,487
Iowa	34.7%	199,806
Nevada	113.6%	120,808
New Hampshire	59.9%	114,141
New Mexico	157.8%	124,486
North Carolina	207%	1,058,200
Pennsylvania	88.8%	478,523
Avg/Total	**109.6%**	**4,153,287**

[‡] Jeffrey M. Jones, "Record-High 40% of Americans Identify as Independents in '11," Gallup, Published January 9, 2012, Accessed May 2, 2012. Available at: http://www.gallup.com/poll/151943/record-high-americans-identify-independents.aspx.

Independents More Volatile In Recent Elections

Historically, Independents have split their vote fairly evenly between the two parties. The chart below illustrates that neither the Democratic nor Republican parties scored large victories on the Congressional Ballot since 1996.[§] But since 2006, Independents have become much more volatile. In 2006, Independents handed the House to Democrats by an 18 point margin. In 2010, Republicans won back the majority, with a 19 point lead among Independents. Over time, these voters have become more volatile, while their share of the electorate continues to climb.

Independent Voting, National House Ballot, Exit Polls

	Dem Candidate	Rep Candidate	Difference
1996	47%	49%	2
1998	45%	48%	3
2000	46%	49%	3
2002	44%	49%	5
2004	49%	46%	3
2006	57%	39%	18
2008	51%	43%	8
2010	37%	56%	19

Conclusion

Since the historic 2008 election, the electorate in the 8 presidential battleground states has changed substantially. The ranks of Independents have swelled by nearly half a million. By contrast, Democratic registration is down 840,749. While Republican registration had declined in recent years, the competitive and drawn-out primary stemmed the tide, with GOP registration down only 156,970. Increasingly, Independents are a more volatile voting bloc, and they have expanded nationally and in the battlegrounds since 1996. To win in November, both campaigns will need to woo these voters.

[§] See Appendix B for exit poll sources.

Appendix A

Voter registration data is available from states' Election/Secretary of State websites. The exact webpages where voter registration data is housed for the 3 years used in this report—1996, 2008, and 2012—are listed in the table below. All of the data for 1996 and 2008 were final tabulations after the November elections. The websites were checked and verified on May 2, 2012. The data for 2012 is current through the most recently released reports:

Colorado: May 1, 2012
Florida: March 1, 2012
Iowa: May 1, 2012
Nevada: May 2, 2012
New Hampshire: January 10, 2012
New Mexico: April 18, 2012
North Carolina: April 28, 2012
Pennsylvania: April 30, 2012

Voter Registration Data Sources

State	1996 Data	2008 Data	2012 Data
Colorado	Secretary of State's office	http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2008/December/PartyAffiliation.pdf	http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/VoterRegNumbers.html
Florida	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp
Iowa	http://www.sos.state.ia.us/pdfs/elections/vtreport.pdf	http://www.sos.state.ia.us/pdfs/VRStatsArchive/2008/CoDec08.pdf	http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2012/CoMay12.pdf
Nevada	Secretary of State's office	http://www.nvsos.gov/SOSElectionPages/voter-reg/2008/1208maint.aspx	http://nvsos.gov/index.aspx?page=1060
New Hampshire	http://www.sos.nh.gov/presprim1996/namessum.htm	http://www.sos.nh.gov/Voter%20Registration%20Statistics/Voters%20on%20the%20Checklist%20by%20Town%20-%20City%20Ward%202008-08-18.pdf	http://sos.nh.gov/2012BallotsNamesPresPrim.aspx?id=12982
New Mexico	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/Main/Elections/1996/PDF%27s/96Voters.pdf	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/pdf/COUNTY1031.pdf	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/AVRSINDX.html
North Carolina	ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/data/voterstats/199610.htm	http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/NCSBE/VR/VR%20Stats/vr_stats_main.asp	http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=04-28-2012
Pennsylvania	Secretary of State's office	http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=572645&mode=2	http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/voter_registration_statistics/12725

Appendix B

Data for Independent voting on the House National Ballot was taken from publicly released exit polls. Websites were accessed on May 2, 2012.

Exit Poll Data Sources

Year	Source
1996	ABC News/Associated Press/CBS News/CNN/Fox News/NBC News, "VNS 1996 Election: National Election Day Exit Poll [USVNS1996– NATELEC]," Conducted by Voter News Service, Field Dates: November 5, 1996, Accessed May 2, 2012. Available at: http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/catalog/abstract.cfm?label=&keyword=USVNS1996-NATELEC&fromDate=&toDate=&organization=Any&type=&keywordOptions=1&start=1&id=&exclude=&excludeOptions=1&topic=Any&sortBy=DESC&archno=USVNS1996-NATELEC&abstract=abstract&x=32&y=9
1998	ABC News/Associated Press/CBS News/CNN/Fox News/NBC News, "VNS 1998 Election: National Election Day Exit Poll [USVNS1998– NATELEC]," Conducted by Voter News Service, Field Dates: November 3, 1998, Accessed May 2, 2012. Available at: http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/catalog/abstract.cfm?label=&keyword=USVNS1998-NATELEC&fromDate=&toDate=&organization=Any&type=&keywordOptions=1&start=1&id=&exclude=&excludeOptions=1&topic=Any&sortBy=DESC&archno=USVNS1998-NATELEC&abstract=abstract&x=32&y=9
2000	ABC News/Associated Press/CBS News/CNN/Fox News/NBC News, "VNS 2000 Election: National Election Day Exit Poll [USVNS2000– NATELEC]," Conducted by Voter News Service, Field Dates: November 7, 2000, Accessed May 2, 2012. Available at: http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/catalog/abstract.cfm?label=&keyword=USVNS2000-NATELEC&fromDate=&toDate=&organization=Any&type=&keywordOptions=1&start=1&id=&exclude=&excludeOptions=1&topic=Any&sortBy=DESC&archno=USVNS2000-NATELEC&abstract=abstract&x=32&y=9
2002	Associated Press/CBS News/CNN/NBC News, "VNS 2002 Election: National Election Day Exit Poll [USVNS2002– NATELEC]," Conducted by Voter News Service, Field Dates: November 5, 2002, Accessed May 2, 2012. Available at: http://webapps.ropercenter.uconn.edu/CFIDE/cf/action/catalog/abstract.cfm?label=&keyword=USVNS2002-NATELEC&fromDate=&toDate=&organization=Any&type=&keywordOptions=1&start=1&id=&exclude=&excludeOptions=1&topic=Any&sortBy=DESC&archno=USVNS2002-NATELEC&abstract=abstract&x=32&y=9
2004	"U.S. House National Exit Poll," CNN, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/H/00/epolls.0.html.
2006	"U.S. House National Exit Poll," CNN, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/US/H/00/epolls.0.html.
2008	"U.S. House National Exit Poll," CNN, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=USH00p1.
2010	"U.S. House National Exit Poll," CNN, http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#val=USH00p1.