

August 13, 2012

**TO:** Interested Parties

**FROM:** Michelle Diggles, Senior Policy Advisor and  
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**RE:** The I's Have It: Pre-Convention Voter Registration Analysis

In just a few weeks, Democrats and Republicans will descend upon Charlotte and Tampa Bay, respectively, for their party's nominating conventions. Both North Carolina and Florida are key presidential battlegrounds in 2012, and both parties hope the attention and engagement in these contested states will excite their members and attract new voters. But on the eve of these quintessential partisan gatherings, new voter registration statistics show that it is Independents, not party members, who are skyrocketing this election season.

Our latest analysis finds that since 2008, both parties have lost voters, with Democratic registration decreasing by approximately 800,000 and Republican registration decreasing by a much smaller 80,000. (The competitive GOP presidential primary likely slowed Republican losses.) However, during the same time period Independent registration has increased by nearly half-a-million in the 8 presidential battlegrounds that keep voter registration data by party.\*

In this memo, we build on our ongoing study of voter registration data in the presidential battleground states, as well as taking a deeper dive to better understand the patterns in the convention states which will be the focus of so much energy for the next month. The numbers show that since 2008:

1. Independent voter registration has increased while both Democratic and Republican registration have declined;
2. Independents gained in North Carolina, particularly in the largest counties of Mecklenburg and Wake, which accounted for nearly one-quarter of President Obama's votes in 2008; and,
3. In Florida, nearly as many Hispanics have registered as Independents as have registered as Democrats or as Republicans, combined.

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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.

## Independents Gain in Battleground States

Since 2008, the number of Independents in the 8 presidential battleground states has increased substantially. By contrast, party registration is down, with Democratic registration declining significantly and Republican registration doing so by a lesser margin. In total, since 2008 in these 8 states:

- Democratic registration has declined by 800,329, or 5.2%, and now stands at 14,624,665;
- Republican registration has declined by 78,985, or 0.7%, and now stands at 12,114,524; and,
- Independent registration has increased by 486,677, or 6.4%, and now stands at 8,083,829.<sup>†</sup>

In 6 of the 8 states—Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania—Independent registration has outpaced both Democratic and Republican registration since 2008. In the remaining two, Republicans have had the edge—likely the result of the competitive GOP primary. In Iowa, Republican registration increased by 6.4% while Democratic and, to a lesser extent, Independent registration fell. In New Hampshire, voter registration has declined across the board; however, Republicans have shed the fewest voters.

**Percent Change in Partisan Voter Registration  
in 8 Battleground States, 2008-2012**

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Colorado	+3.0	+5.3	+12.6
Florida	-4.9	+0.5	+8.2
Iowa	-9.5	+6.4	-3.2
Nevada	-1.4	-0.7	+11.1
New Hampshire	-19.7	-7.3	-23
New Mexico	-2.3	+2.3	+14.4
North Carolina	-4.1	-0.7	+14.4
Pennsylvania	-7.4	-5.1	+0.5
<b>8 State Total</b>	<b>-5.2</b>	<b>-0.7</b>	<b>+6.4</b>

<sup>†</sup> All data sources for statewide voter registration statistics can be found in the Appendix. Where possible, we have included data for both active and inactive voters.

### Actual Change in Partisan Voter Registration in 8 Battleground States, 2008-2012

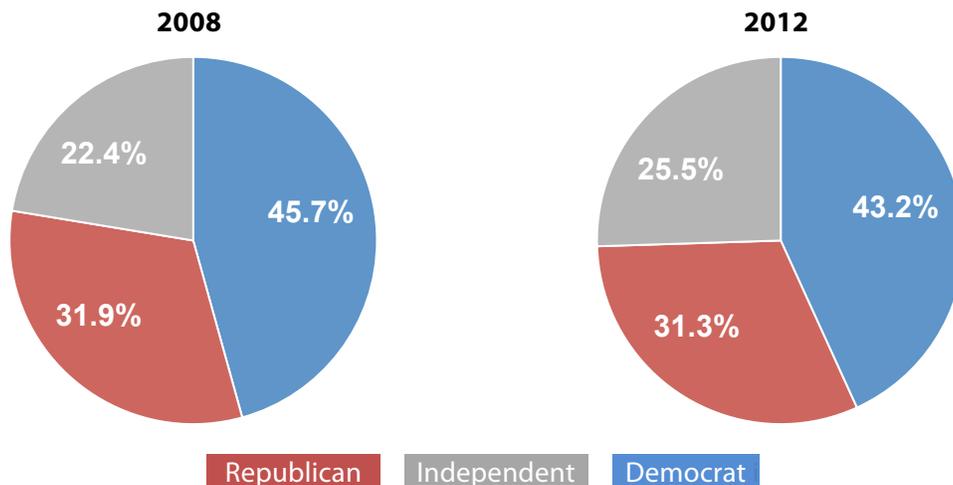
	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
Colorado	+31,942	+56,088	+134,701
Florida	-235,378	+18,990	+205,537
Iowa	-71,034	+40,342	-25,358
Nevada	-7,963	-3,465	+23,676
New Hampshire	-55,701	-20,539	-91,039
New Mexico	-13,451	+8,528	+26,419
North Carolina	-116,662	-13,017	+207,173
Pennsylvania	-332,082	-165,912	+5,568
<b>8 State Total</b>	<b>-800,329</b>	<b>-78,985</b>	<b>+486,677</b>

Given their heightened numbers, Independents will play an even more important role in determining the outcome in these battleground states this November.

#### The Democratic Convention State: North Carolina

Since 2008, North Carolina has witnessed a decline in both Democratic and Republican registration, coupled with a staggering increase in Independent voters. Democratic registration has fallen by 116,662, or 4.1%, and now stands at 2,753,838. Republican registration has fallen by 13,017, or 0.7%, and now stands at 1,992,465. However, Independent voter registration has increased dramatically, by 207,173, or 14.4%, and now sits at 1,609,644. As a result, Independents now comprise one-quarter of North Carolina's registered voters.

#### Composition of Registered Voters in North Carolina, By Party Identification



These changes in the electorate are especially evident in the state’s two largest counties—both of which were crucial to President Obama’s victory in North Carolina in 2008. During the last presidential election, President Obama won 62% of the vote in Mecklenburg County and 57% in Wake County.<sup>1</sup> Combined, these counties supplied President Obama with 504,849 of his 2,142,651 votes in North Carolina, 23.6% of all votes he received in the state. In these two counties, Independent registration has increased by nearly 11% and 17% respectively since the last presidential election. With these gains, Independent voters now make up 27% and nearly 30% of the electorate in these two key counties.

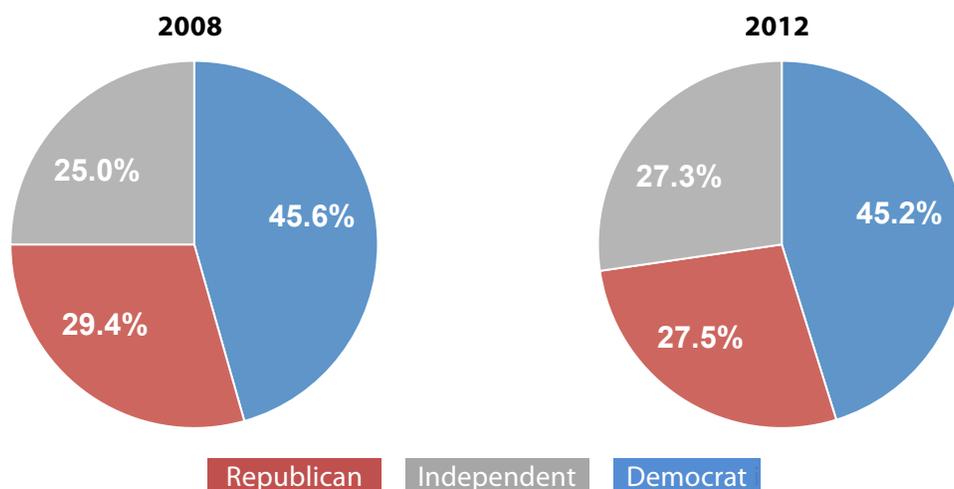
### **Mecklenburg County**

Mecklenburg County is home to Charlotte, the largest city in North Carolina and the site of the Democratic National Convention, and is the largest county in the state. Between 2000 and 2010, the county’s population increased by 32.2% to more than 900,000.<sup>2</sup> Since 2008, voter registration in the county has increased by 11,804, or 1.9%, and now stands at 639,801.<sup>3</sup> Between 2008 and 2012:

- Democratic registration increased by 2,806, or 1.0%, and now stands at 289,384;
- Republican registration decreased by 8,768, or 4.8%, and now stands at 175,803; and,
- Independent registration increased by 16,552, or 10.6%, and now stands at 173,046.

Independent voters now comprise 27.3% of Mecklenburg County’s registered voters, up 2.3 points since 2008. Gains in Independent registration appear to have come from Republicans, who have shed the most voters and shrunk from 29.4% of the county’s registered voters to 27.5%.

### **Composition of Registered Voters in Mecklenburg County, By Party Identification**



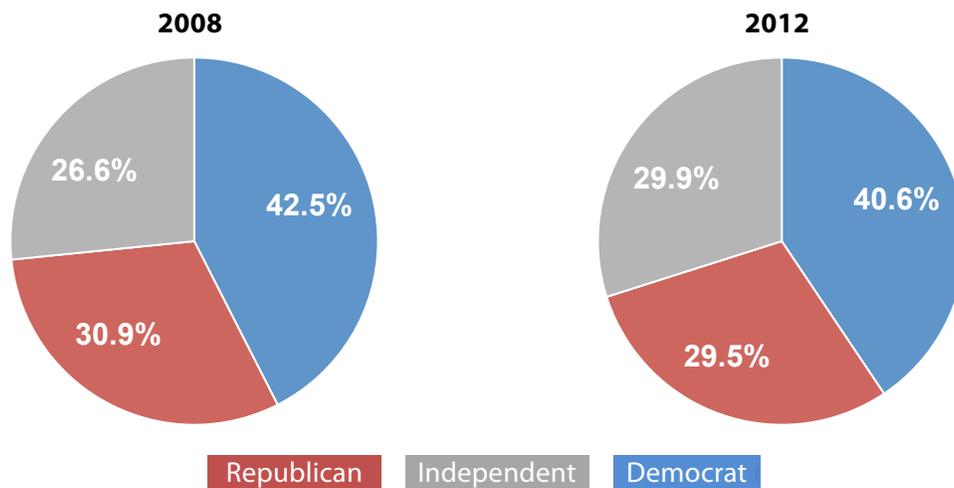
## Wake County

Wake County is home to Raleigh, the capitol of North Carolina, and is the state's second largest county. Between 2000 and 2010, its population increased by 43.5% and is now over 900,000.<sup>4</sup> Since 2008, voter registration in Wake County has increased by 26,850, or 4.5%, and now stands at 622,563.<sup>5</sup> Between 2008 and 2012:

- Democratic registration decreased by 514, or 0.2%, and now stands at 252,540;
- Republican registration decreased by 245, or 0.1%, and now stands at 183,857;
- Independent registration increased by 26,156, or 16.6%, and now stands at 184,137.

Independent voters now comprise 29.9% of Wake County's registered voters, up 3 points since 2008. Indeed, Independents in Wake County are now a larger portion of registered voters than Republicans.

### Composition of Registered Voters in Wake County, By Party Identification



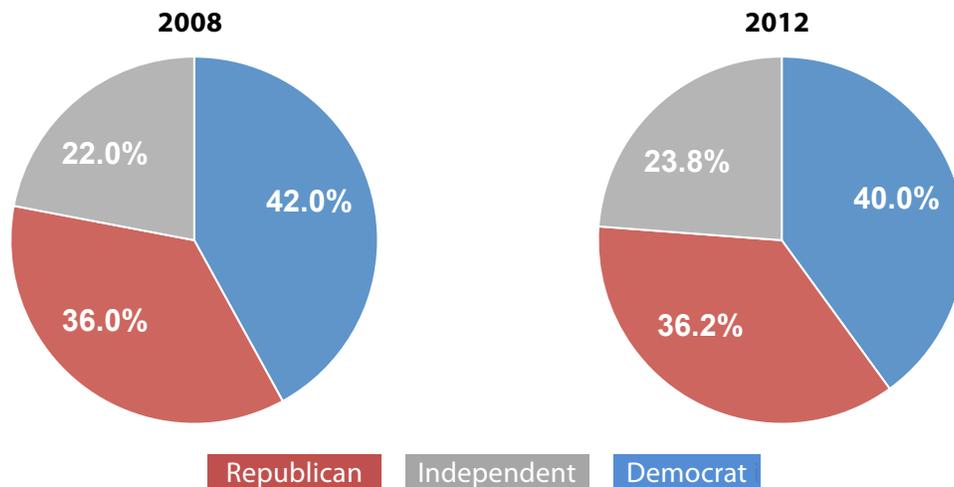
If President Obama is going to repeat his 2008 victory in North Carolina, it will likely be by the smallest of margins. These growing groups of Independents in key counties and throughout the state will hold the keys to a repeat performance for Democrats.

## The Republican Convention State: Florida

Since 2008, Democratic registration in Florida has decreased while Republican registration has remained flat. Democratic registration fell by 235,378 voters, or 4.9%, and is now at 4,565,512. Republican registration inched up by 18,990, or 0.5%, and is now at 4,125,733. But the biggest gains in Florida came from Independents, whose numbers increased by 205,537, or 8.2%, and now sit at 2,709,827. As a result of these changes, the composition of registered voters in Florida has shifted, with Democrats down 2 points, Republicans up two-tenths of a point, and Independents netting the rest.<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> Voters who do not select either the Democratic or Republican parties—those with no affiliation or belonging to a minor party—are categorized as “Other” by Florida's Division of Elections. Comparative

## Composition of Registered Voters in Florida, By Party Identification



### Race and Party Registration

This increase in Independents is not the only story in Florida. While there were more Black, non-Hispanic registered voters in 2008 than Hispanic registered voters in the state, those numbers have now flipped. Since 2008, the number of Hispanic registered voters has increased by 195,365, or 14.4%, and now stands at 1,550,635.<sup>6</sup> During that same time period, the number of Black, non-Hispanic registered voters increased by 50,722, or 3.5%, and now stands at 1,519,404. The number of White registered voters in the state declined slightly by 44,309, or 0.6%, to 7,729,110.

This increase in Hispanic voters has coincided with an increase in Independents.<sup>5</sup> Since 2008, nearly as many Hispanic voters have registered as Independents as have registered as Democrats or Republicans combined—96,296 for the former and 96,954 for the latter. And there are now more Hispanics registered as Independents in Florida than as Republicans, which was not the case in 2008.

### Hispanic Voter Registration in Florida, 2008-2012

	Difference (Raw Total)	Difference (% Change)	Total Registered 2012
<b>Democratic</b>	+79,182	+15.4%	592,434
<b>Republican</b>	+17,772	+4.0%	463,298
<b>Independent</b>	+96,296	+25.8%	469,288

The trend is somewhat different with Black, non-Hispanic registered voters, whose numbers have grown at a much slower rate. Black voter registration increased by

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data over several years is available in this format for statewide statistics. The figures for Independent voter registration statewide reflect this “Other” category.

<sup>5</sup> The data for voter registration by race and party released by Florida’s Division of Elections include only those without party affiliation—No Party Affiliation (NPA)—as opposed to the “Other” category, which includes minor parties.

25,863, or 2.1%, for Democrats and by 29,081, or 18.3%, for Independents since 2008. But despite the increase in Independents, 82.5% of Black voters in Florida are still registered as a Democrat. By contrast, only 38.2% of Hispanics are registered as Democrats in the state.

### **Black, Non-Hispanic Voter Registration in Florida, 2008-2012**

	<b>Difference (Raw Total)</b>	<b>Difference (% Change)</b>	<b>Total Registered 2012</b>
<b>Democratic</b>	+25,863	+2.1%	1,253,833
<b>Republican</b>	-2,900	-4.6%	60,006
<b>Independent</b>	+29,081	+18.3%	188,150

Among White, non-Hispanic registered voters, the biggest changes since 2008 have occurred in the numbers of Democrats and Independents. Democratic registration among White voters in Florida fell by 240,974, or 8.8%, since 2008. By contrast, White, non-Hispanic registration for Independents increased by 153,568, or 11.7%.

### **White, Non-Hispanic Voter Registration in Florida, 2008-2012**

	<b>Difference (Raw Total)</b>	<b>Difference (% Change)</b>	<b>Total Registered 2012</b>
<b>Democratic</b>	-240,974	-8.8%	2,508,525
<b>Republican</b>	+59,299	+1.7%	3,465,669
<b>Independent</b>	+153,568	+11.7%	1,469,685

Florida will no doubt be a crucial battleground in the 2012 presidential race, and the rise of Independents across these demographic groups will give Independent voters an outsize role in deciding which way the state swings.

## **Conclusion**

Both voter registration statistics and public polling have consistently shown that Independents are on the rise. These newest numbers indicate just how important Independent voters will be to winning the key battleground states that will decide the election. This year, both parties (and especially Democrats) will be starting with a smaller coalition than they had in 2008, and wooing Independents will be the only path to make up that gap and declare victory.

## Appendix

Voter registration data is available from states' Election/Secretary of State websites. It is updated at different intervals—some doing so only when the registration books are closed before elections and others releasing updated information weekly. The exact webpages where voter registration data is housed for the 2 years used in this report—2008 and 2012—are listed in the table below. The data for 2012 is current through:

**Colorado:** August 1, 2012

**Florida:** June 2012

**Iowa:** August 2, 2012

**Nevada:** July 31, 2012

**New Hampshire:** January 10, 2012  
(no updates until book closing)

**New Mexico:** July 31, 2012

**North Carolina:** August 4, 2012

**Pennsylvania:** July 30, 2012

### Voter Registration Data Sources

State	2008 Data	2012 Data
Colorado	<a href="http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2008/December/PartyAffiliation.pdf">http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2008/December/PartyAffiliation.pdf</a>	<a href="http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2012/July/VotersByPartyStatus.pdf">http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2012/July/VotersByPartyStatus.pdf</a>
Florida	<a href="http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp">http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp</a>	<a href="http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp">http://election.dos.state.fl.us/nvra/history.asp</a>
Iowa	<a href="http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2008/CoDec08.pdf">http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2008/CoDec08.pdf</a>	<a href="http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2012/CoAug12.pdf">http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2012/CoAug12.pdf</a>
Nevada	<a href="http://nvsos.gov/SOSElectionPages/voter-reg/2008/1208maint.aspx">http://nvsos.gov/SOSElectionPages/voter-reg/2008/1208maint.aspx</a>	<a href="http://www.nvsos.gov/index.aspx?page=1209">http://www.nvsos.gov/index.aspx?page=1209</a>
New Hampshire	<a href="http://sos.nh.gov/2008BallotsNamesGen.aspx?id=1869">http://sos.nh.gov/2008BallotsNamesGen.aspx?id=1869</a>	<a href="http://sos.nh.gov/2012BallotsNamesPresPrim.aspx?id=12982">http://sos.nh.gov/2012BallotsNamesPresPrim.aspx?id=12982</a>
New Mexico	<a href="http://www.sos.state.nm.us/pdf/COUNTY1031.pdf">http://www.sos.state.nm.us/pdf/COUNTY1031.pdf</a>	<a href="http://www.sos.state.nm.us/uploads/FileLinks/2966cef424224c59b1abaf5b30a91116/STATEWIDE73112.PDF">http://www.sos.state.nm.us/uploads/FileLinks/2966cef424224c59b1abaf5b30a91116/STATEWIDE73112.PDF</a>
North Carolina	<a href="http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=12-27-2008">http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=12-27-2008</a>	<a href="http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=08-04-2012">http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=08-04-2012</a>
Pennsylvania	<a href="http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&amp;objID=572645&amp;mode=2">http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&amp;objID=572645&amp;mode=2</a>	<a href="http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/voter_registration_statistics/12725">http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/voter_registration_statistics/12725</a>

The websites were checked and verified August 3–7, 2012. The 2008 data from New Mexico had been available on-line through their website listed above. However, they have recently altered their website and the data is no longer available. The data was previously found and cited in Third Way's initial report, released in November of 2011 and available here: <http://www.thirdway.org/publications/470>.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> "Mecklenburg County Board of Elections 2008 General Election," Updated December 28, 2008, Accessed August 7, 2012. Available at: <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NC/Mecklenburg/7997/14386/en/summary.html>; "Wake County Board of Elections 2008 General Election," Updated November 24, 2008, Accessed August 7, 2012. Available at: <http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NC/Wake/8029/14005/en/summary.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "U.S. Census Bureau Deliver's North Carolina's 2010 Census Population Totals, Including First Look at Race and Hispanic Origin Data for Legislative Redistricting," U.S. Census Bureau, Published March 2, 2011, Accessed August 6, 2012. Available at: <http://2010.census.gov/news/releases/operations/cb11-cn61.html>.

<sup>3</sup> North Carolina State Board of Elections, "Voter Statistics," Published December 27, 2008, Accessed May 6, 2012. Available at: [http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter\\_stats/results.aspx?date=12-27-2008](http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=12-27-2008). North Carolina State Board of Elections, "Voter Statistics," Published August 4, 2012, Accessed May 6, 2012. Available at: [http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter\\_stats/results.aspx?date=08-04-2012](http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=08-04-2012).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. Census Bureau Delivers North Carolina's 2010 Census Population Totals, Including First Look at Race and Hispanic Origin Data for Legislative Redistricting," Published March 2, 2011, Accessed August 6, 2012. Available at: <http://2010.census.gov/news/releases/operations/cb11-cn61.html>.

<sup>5</sup> North Carolina State Board of Elections, "Voter Statistics," Published December 27, 2008, Accessed May 6, 2012. Available at: [http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter\\_stats/results.aspx?date=12-27-2008](http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=12-27-2008). North Carolina State Board of Elections, "Voter Statistics," Published August 4, 2012, Accessed May 6, 2012. Available at: [http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter\\_stats/results.aspx?date=08-04-2012](http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=08-04-2012).

<sup>6</sup> Florida Department of State, "County Voter Registration By Party and Race," Division of Elections, Released October 19, 2008, Accessed August 7, 2012. Available at: <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2008/2008genPartyRace.pdf>; Florida Department of State, "County Voter Registration By Party and Race," Division of Elections, Released July 29, 2012, Accessed August 7, 2012. Available at: [http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2012/PRI2012\\_CountyPartyRace.pdf](http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2012/PRI2012_CountyPartyRace.pdf).