

November 2012

TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Michelle Diggles, Senior Policy Advisor
RE: Rage Against the Machine: Independent Registration Soars Since 2008, Democratic Registration Surges Late

In the final stretch of campaigning, both the Obama and Romney camps have stressed their superior ground games, highlighted favorable polls, and staged countless events in swing states. Romney supporters claim enthusiasm on their side; Obama supporters highlight their extensive state operations and volunteer base. But neither campaign has stopped the deluge in Independent voter registration since 2008. Refusing to align with either of the major two parties, these voters are raging against the [party] machines.

Our final analysis of voter registration changes since 2008 finds that Democrats have shed 372,827 voters and Republicans have gained 158,037 voters. Of note is a recent surge in Democratic registration in these swing states—an increase of over 400,000 in the past 3 months. But the real change is with Independents, who have increased by nearly 1 million in the 8 presidential battleground states that keep voter registration data by party.*

In this memo, we conclude our ongoing study of voter registration in the presidential battleground states as well as analyze early voting data in the battlegrounds—an indicator of the ground game each campaign insists will make the difference. The data shows that:

- 1) Independent voter registration has increased dramatically since 2008, while Republicans saw modest gains and Democratic registration fell slightly;
- 2) Democrats lead Republicans in early voting in the 5 states with updated numbers available by party identification;
- 3) Presidential battleground state polls give Obama an edge.

Dramatic Increases in Independent Registration Since 2008

The number of registered Independents in the 8 presidential battleground states has increased by nearly 1 million since 2008. During the same time period, Democratic registration has fallen slightly and Republican registration has inched up.

* 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.

In total, since 2008 in these 8 states:

- Independent registration has increased 969,589, or 14.4%, and now stands at 7,697,565;
- Republican registration has increased by 158,037, or 1.3%, and now stands at 12,047,112; and,
- Democratic registration has decreased by 372,827, or 2.5%, and now stands at 14,723,535.[†]

Democratic registration was down over 800,000 in our August voter registration report. Since then, Democrats have added 427,502 to the voter rolls just in these 8 states.

In 6 states—Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania—Independent registration has grown faster than either Democratic or Republican registration. In Iowa, Republicans gained while Democrats and, to a lesser extent, Independents fell. In New Hampshire, voter registration fell across the board, but Republicans shed the fewest voters. And in 5 states—Colorado, Florida, Nevada, New Mexico, and North Carolina—Independent registration increased by double-digits, the largest a gain of 25.2% in Colorado and the smallest 19.5% in Nevada.

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

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
CO	+3.5%	+6.4%	+25.2%
FL	-0.4%	+3.4%	+22.3%
IA	-11.1%	+5.8%	-3.5%
NV	-0.8%	+1.4%	+19.5%
NH	-20.4%	-7.8%	-22.2%
NM	+0.3%	+5.4%	+23%
NC	-0.6%	+1.9%	+22%
PA	-5.1%	-3.5%	+7.1%
8 State Total	-2.5%	+1.3%	+14.4%

[†] All data sources for statewide voter registration statistics can be found in Appendix A. This data only includes active voters.

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

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
CO	+29,228	+54,703	+241,294
FL	-18,912	+139,248	+469,782
IA	-77,438	+34,111	-25,056
NV	-4,331	+6,205	+35,710
NH	-57,506	-21,793	-87,795
NM	+1,860	+20,223	+42,150
NC	-16,986	+38,136	+305,663
PA	-228,742	-112,796	+73,043
8 State Total	-372,827	+158,037	+969,589

Early Voting Favors Democrats

Only 5 presidential battlegrounds with partisan voter registration have released early/absentee voting figures by party identification. On average in those 5 states, Democrats maintain a combined edge, although individually the party has an edge in only 4 of 5 states. As of November 1, 2012, 43.6% of the early votes have been cast by Democrats, 36.8% by Republicans, and 19.6% by Independents.[‡] Since early voting field operations tend to target partisans and not Independent voters, it is expected that the number of Independents voting early will be considerably less than Democrats and Republicans.

Early & Absentee Voter Turnout by Party Identification, November 1, 2012

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
CO	343,721	370,982	241,294
FL	1,134,962	1,086,358	446,707
IA	241,530	179,675	135,547
NV	235,514	200,678	96,872
NC	996,299	654,125	407,651
5 State Total	2,952,026	2,491,818	1,328,071
% of Total	43.6%	36.8%	19.6%

Unfortunately, Ohio does not keep voter registration data by party identification. However, they do report early and absentee voting by county. The most vote-rich county for Obama in 2008 was Cuyahoga—where he garnered 458,422 of his 2,940,044 votes.¹ As of Tuesday, October 30, 2012, 27,865 people had already voted in

[‡] All data sources for early voting can be found in Appendix B. Totals include returned ballots only, not requested. Where the distinction is made, we have combined early and absentee voters.

Cuyahoga County. By comparison, by this time in 2008, 30,850 people had voted, a very slight decrease of 2,985.²

Obama Maintains an Edge in Battleground Polls

In all 12 of the presidential battleground states, Obama maintains leads in polling averages in 9 states and Romney in 3 states. Using the RealClearPolitics aggregation of state polls, the President maintains a significant lead in 2 states—New Mexico and Pennsylvania. However, he has leads of 2 points or more in 5 additional states—Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Romney leads by 3.8 points in North Carolina and has slim leads in Florida (R+1.2) and Virginia (R+0.5).

If these polls held on Election Day, President Obama would be reelected with 290 electoral votes and Romney would have 248 electoral votes.

RealClearPolitics Average of Presidential Battleground State Polls, November 1, 2012

	Obama	Romney	Margin
CO	48.3%	47.7%	O+0.6
FL	47.9%	49.1%	R+1.2
IA	48.2%	46.0%	O+2.2
MI	47.7%	44.7%	O+3
NV	50%	47.3%	O+2.7
NH	48.8%	47.5%	O+1.3
NM	51.7%	41.7%	O+10
NC	46.0%	49.8%	R+3.8
OH	48.9%	46.6%	O+2.3
PA	49.4%	44.8%	O+4.6
VA	47.4%	47.9%	R+0.5
WI	49.7%	46.0%	O+3.7
Natl Avg.	47.4%	47.4%	Tie

It is difficult to assess how the candidates are performing among Independents in the state polls. Many of the state-level polls do not report data for Independents, have very small sample sizes for their crosstabs, or provide contradictory data.

For example, in Ohio both Quinnipiac³ and Public Policy Polling⁴ released state level data this week. Both had Obama winning the state by 5 points, but Quinnipiac has Romney winning Independents by 6 (49% to 43%) while PPP has Independents evenly split.

Conclusion

In the past 4 years the electorate has changed dramatically. The Democratic advantage in voter registration in the presidential battlegrounds has shrunk. But Republicans are not the winners. Rather, Independent registration has increased by nearly 1 million during this time. Early voting has favored Democrats, who are outpacing Republicans everywhere except for Colorado. Independents are not voting early in the same numbers as partisans, and they may be late deciders. While the current state-level polls favor Obama, state-level data on Independent voting does not paint a clear picture. It's likely that in several close states, Independent turnout on Election Day could be the difference.

Appendix A

Voter registration data is available from states' Election/Secretary of State websites. The data here represents the book closing voter registration statistics for active voters in advance of the election. Both Iowa and Wisconsin have day-of voter registration.

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: October 19, 2012	New Hampshire: October 15, 2012
Florida: October 9, 2012	New Mexico: October 19, 2012
Iowa: October 22, 2012	North Carolina: October 27, 2012
Nevada: October 2012	Pennsylvania: October 22, 2012

Voter Registration Data Sources

State	2008 Data	2012 Data
Colorado	http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2008/December/PartyAffiliation.pdf	http://www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/2012/20121019/VotersByPartyStatus.pdf
Florida	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2008/2008genParty.pdf	http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voter-registration/statistics/pdf/2012/GEN2012_CountyParty.pdf
Iowa	http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2008/CoNov08.pdf	http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/VRStatsArchive/2012/CoOct2212.pdf
Nevada	http://nvsos.gov/SOSElectionPages/voter-reg/2008/CLOSEmaina.aspx	http://www.nvsos.gov/index.aspx?page=1269
New Hampshire	http://sos.nh.gov/NamesHist.aspx	http://sos.nh.gov/NamesHist.aspx
New Mexico	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/pdf/COUNTY1031.pdf	http://www.sos.state.nm.us/uploads/FileLinks/2966cef424224c59b1abaf5b30a91116/VR_Stats_STATEWIDE_1019.PDF
North Carolina	http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=11-04-2008	http://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/webapps/voter_stats/results.aspx?date=10-27-2012
Pennsylvania	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

The websites were checked and verified October 30–31, 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>.

Appendix B

Early Vote Tracking, October 30, 2012

State	Website
Colorado	http://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/COSOS/2012/10/30/file_attachments/171833/Gen%2BTurnout%2B10%2B30%2B2012.pdf
Florida	http://miamiherald.typepad.com/nakedpolitics/2012/10/27m-floridians-have-voted-30-dems-stretch-early-ballot-lead-to-nearly-49000-over-republicans.html
Iowa	http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/2012/general/absenteestats.pdf
Nevada	http://nvsos.gov/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=2500
North Carolina	ftp://www.app.sboe.state.nc.us/enrs/absentee11xx06xx2012_Stats.pdf

Endnotes

¹ "President / Vice-President: November 4, 2008," Ohio Secretary of State. Accessed on October 31, 2012. Available at: <http://www.sos.state.oh.us/sos/elections/Research/electResultsMain/2008ElectionResults/pres110408.aspx>.

² "In House Voting Comparison," Cuyahoga County Board of Elections. Accessed October 31, 2012. Available at: http://boe.cuyahogacounty.us/pdf_boe/en-US/2012/2008_2012InHouseVotingDailyComparison.pdf.

³ "Swing State Polls," Quinnipiac University. Accessed October 31, 2012. Available at: [http://www.quinnipiac.edu/institutes-centers/polling-institute/presidential-swing-states-\(fl-oh-and-pa\)/release-detail?ReleaseID=1812](http://www.quinnipiac.edu/institutes-centers/polling-institute/presidential-swing-states-(fl-oh-and-pa)/release-detail?ReleaseID=1812).

⁴ "Obama leads 50-45 in Ohio," Public Policy Polling. Accessed October 31, 2012. Available at: <http://www.publicpolicypolling.com/main/2012/10/obama-leads-50-45-in-ohio.html>.