

**The Unregistered:  
Voter Registration Declines in Many States**

Report prepared by the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance

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The presidential campaigns and press have highlighted the rise in voter registration during the 2008 campaign. The optimistic storyline misses, however, the large number of states that have seen their voter rolls decline or stagnate since 2004. The surge of registration has been highly concentrated in the states that the presidential campaigns have most intensely targeted.

A comparison of official voter registration records in the fall of 2004 with those in the fall of 2008 reveals the following:

- Registration has not improved in nearly half of the uncontested states.
- Registration has increased in nearly all of the states targeted by the campaigns.
- More Democrats than Republicans have been registered in targeted states.

**Registration Recession in Flyover States**

**Voter registration stagnated or declined in many of the states that have not been intensely contested in the presidential election.** Thirteen of the thirty-three states and District of Columbia that were not targeted saw their registration stagnate or decline between fall 2004 and fall 2008. For instance, registration declined in South Dakota by 5 percent since 2004 and slipped in New York by 2 percent. The crusade to reach out to new voters and bring them into the electoral process has skipped large parts of the country.

**Registration Decline and Stagnation in Non-Competitive States**

	<b>Registration in 2004</b>	<b>Registration in 2008</b>	<b>Change in registration from 2004 to 2008</b>	
Alabama	2,854,208	2,820,524	-33,684	Declined by: -1%
Alaska	461,056	482,045	20,989	Increased by: 5%
Arizona	2,723,073	3,294,370	571,297	Increased by: 21%
Arkansas	1,707,617	1,619,149	-88,468	Declined by: -5%

California	15,625,180	16,171,772	546,592	Increased by: 3%
Connecticut	1,989,913	1,967,543	-22,370	Declined by: -1%
Delaware	550,984	583,698	32,714	Increased by: 6%
District of Columbia	368,477	399,127	30,650	Increased by: 8%
Georgia	4,698,007	5,489,495	791,488	Increased by: 17%
Hawaii	626,120	667,647	41,527	Increased by: 7%
Idaho	798,015	733,784	-64,231	Declined by: -8%
Illinois	7,499,488	7,390,434	-109,054	Declined by: -1%
Kansas	1,694,365	1,659,561	-34,804	Declined by: -2%
Kentucky	2,794,286	2,894,299	100,013	Increased by: 4%
Louisiana	2,875,232	2,888,864	13,632	Increased by: 0%
Maine	1,023,956	1,003,901	-20,055	Declined by: -2%
Maryland	2,891,845	3,243,660	351,815	Increased by: 12%
Mississippi	1,469,608	1,873,740	404,132	Increased by: 27%
Montana	638,474	645,543	7,069	Increased by: 1%
Nebraska	1,160,193	1,133,226	-26,967	Declined by: -2%
New Jersey	5,005,959	5,127,790	121,831	Increased by: 2%
New York	11,837,068	11,638,639	-198,429	Declined by: -2%
Oklahoma	2,143,978	2,101,344	-42,634	Declined by: -2%
Oregon	1,949,592	2,066,593	117,001	Increased by: 6%
Rhode Island	672,807	693,949	21,142	Increased by: 3%
South Carolina	2,315,182	2,365,577	50,395	Increased by: 2%
South Dakota	552,441	523,078	-29,363	Declined by: -5%
Tennessee	3,532,364	3,788,858	256,494	Increased by: 7%
Texas	13,098,329	13,236,489	138,160	Increased by: 1%
Utah	1,278,251	1,515,856	237,605	Increased by: 19%
Vermont	420,554	431,631	11,077	Increased by: 3%
Washington	3,508,208	3,418,207	-90,001	Declined by: -3%
Wyoming	232,396	227,317	-5,079	Declined by: -2%

Registration in the largest and fastest growing states has been neglected. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the population in Texas expanded by 7 percent between 2004 and 2007, but the voter rolls grew by only 1 percent. Registration also lagged behind population growth in New York and Illinois. (Census Bureau data for 2008 are not yet available.)

There is a more general pattern: Registration trailed population growth in 17 of 33 uncontested states. What stands out is that many of these states experienced unusually large population growth. Indeed, registration rolls lagged behind population expansion in 6 of the 8 fastest growing states (including Arizona, Utah, North Carolina, and Georgia).

### Stalled Registration Lags Behind Population Growth

	<b>Change in Registration from 2004 to 2008</b>	<b>Population Change</b>	<b>Registration Lags Behind Population</b>
Alabama	-1%	2%	YES
Alaska	5%	7%	YES
Arizona	21%	11%	
Arkansas	-5%	3%	YES
California	3%	3%	
Connecticut	-1%	1%	YES
Delaware	6%	3%	
District of Columbia	8%	7%	
Georgia	17%	8%	
Hawaii	7%	3%	
Idaho	-8%	7%	YES
Illinois	-1%	2%	YES
Kansas	-2%	0%	YES
Kentucky	4%	2%	
Louisiana	0%	-4%	
Maine	-2%	0%	YES
Maryland	12%	2%	
Mississippi	27%	0%	
Montana	1%	3%	YES
Nebraska	-2%	1%	YES
New Jersey	2%	1%	
New York	-2%	2%	YES
Oklahoma	-2%	2%	YES
Oregon	6%	5%	
Rhode Island	3%	-1%	
South Carolina	2%	5%	YES
South Dakota	-5%	3%	YES
Tennessee	7%	4%	
Texas	1%	7%	YES
Utah	19%	11%	
Vermont	3%	1%	
Washington	-3%	5%	YES
Wyoming	-2%	2%	YES

## **Registration Surge in Contested States**

**Registration drives pay off.** States that are singled out by the presidential campaigns are showered with resources to register voters and the impact is plain: 14 of the 15 most contested states expanded voter registration since 2004.

## **Registration Surge in Competitive States**

	<b>2004 Total</b>	<b>2008 Total</b>	<b>Change from 2004 to 2008</b>	
Colorado	2,925,611	3,022,067	96,456	Increased by: 3%
Florida	10,301,290	11,247,634	946,344	Increased by: 9%
Indiana	4,296,602	4,409,399	112,797	Increased by: 3%
Iowa	2,045,050	2,095,831	50,781	Increased by: 2%
Michigan	7,164,047	7,243,261	79,214	Increased by: 1%
Minnesota	2,977,496	3,145,575	168,079	Increased by: 6%
Missouri	4,194,416	4,096,410	-98,006	Declined by: -2%
Nevada	1,071,101	1,395,484	324,383	Increased by: 30%
New Hampshire	735,054	863,542	128,488	Increased by: 17%
New Mexico	1,105,372	1,122,043	16,671	Increased by: 2%
North Carolina	5,519,992	5,995,514	475,522	Increased by: 9%
Ohio	7,972,826	8,180,346	207,520	Increased by: 3%
Pennsylvania	8,366,663	8,509,941	143,278	Increased by: 2%
Virginia	4,387,413	4,793,148	405,735	Increased by: 9%
West Virginia	1,168,694	1,196,606	27,912	Increased by: 2%

**Increased voter registration in contested states consistently exceeded population growth:** two-thirds of these states (10 out of 15) expanded registration at rates that were greater than the changes in their population. Registration grew in Florida by 9 percent since 2004 while its population expanded by 6 percent. Registration also outpaced population in Virginia and Ohio. The electorate in Nevada has been transformed since 2004 because of the 30 percent jump in registration; by contrast, its population grew by 10 percent. Put simply, investment by presidential campaigns and their allies pays off with increased registration beyond what the rising tide of population might have accomplished.

## **Registration Surge in Competitive States Matches or Exceeds Population Growth**

	<b>Change in Registration from 2004 to 2008</b>	<b>Population Change</b>	<b>Registration Greater than Population</b>
Colorado	3%	7%	
Florida	9%	6%	YES
Indiana	3%	3%	
Iowa	2%	0%	YES
Michigan	1%	1%	

Minnesota	6%	2%	YES
Missouri	-2%	2%	
Nevada	30%	10%	YES
New Hampshire	17%	2%	YES
New Mexico	2%	4%	
North Carolina	9%	7%	YES
Ohio	3%	0%	YES
Pennsylvania	2%	1%	YES
Virginia	9%	4%	YES
West Virginia	2%	0%	YES

### **Democrats Win Registration War**

More Democrats than Republicans have been registered in 8 of the 9 most contested states for which there are data. More than twice as many Democrats have been added to the voter rolls in Florida, Iowa, Nevada, and Pennsylvania. The Democrats won a critical component of the ground game in 2008.

### **Democratic Registration Advantage**

	<b>Changes in Registration by Democrats</b>	<b>Changes in Registration by Republicans</b>	<b>Population Change</b>
Colorado	Increased by: 7%	Declined by: -4%	7%
Florida	Increased by: 11%	Increased by: 4%	6%
Iowa	Increased by: 15%	Declined by: -2%	0%
Nevada	Increased by: 39%	Increased by: 16%	10%
New Hampshire	Increased by: 27%	Increased by: 9%	2%
New Mexico	Increased by: 2%	Increased by: 0%	4%
North Carolina	Increased by: 5%	Increased by: 3%	7%
Pennsylvania	Increased by: 9%	Declined by: -6%	1%
West Virginia	Declined by: -2%	Declined by: -9%	0%

### **Partial Democracy**

The battle for election drives registration. For states in play, this means an avalanche of resources for registration. But for states that are on the sidelines, many citizens remain unregistered even in the fastest growing and largest states.

## About the study

The analyses presented in this report are based on voter registration data from 2004 and 2008 that were directly collected from the each state's Secretary of State Office or its Election Board. In all, voter registration data was collected from 47 states and the District of Columbia. These data were unavailable from three states: Massachusetts was unable to provide fall voter registration data before the release date of this report, North Dakota does not have voter registration, and Wisconsin did not have statewide voter registration before 2006.

Our calculations of change in registration were based on comparing similar time periods in the fall of 2004 and 2008. Our analyses rely on figures from similar time periods during the general election campaigns in 2004 and 2008 as well as turnout figures that were calculated using identical methods. The latter point is particularly important. Official registration figures include different mixes of active and inactive voters; our approach was to compare sets of numbers for both years that were calculated using identical counting methods (e.g. we compared figures for active voters in 2004 with active voters in 2008).

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