

# Behind the nationwide sweep by Democratic Party

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The Democratic Party victory in Tuesday's presidential and congressional elections was propelled by a record turnout of minority workers and among wide layers of young people, both college students and those just entering the work force.

As many as 133 million people cast ballots in the 2008 election, according to estimates by election analysts, an increase of more than 10 million over 2004. Turnout rose in most states and across most demographics, with the exception of a few heavily Republican states in the interior West.

Some 24 million voters were young people aged 18-29, an increase of 3.2 million over 2004. Obama swept this section of the population by a margin of 66 to 32 percent, according to exit polls. His margin among young people, about 8 million votes, was almost exactly equal to his margin overall. Obama and McCain ran nearly even among voters over 30, regardless of race and ethnicity.

African-Americans accounted for four million of the increase in turnout, while the total vote among Latinos rose by 2.7 million. The increase in turnout among these voters alone accounts for two-thirds of the increase in the number of voters. By one estimate, black turnout was nearly 70 percent of those eligible, far surpassing the previous record of 58 percent in 1968, the first presidential election after the Voting Rights Act put an end to the disenfranchisement of most blacks in the South.

While excitement over the election of the first black president contributed to the huge increase in minority turnout, there is no doubt that economic issues—jobs, living standards and the looming prospect of a major recession—were the driving force of Obama's victory, not race. This was coupled with the intense and entirely justified popular hatred of the Bush administration. Among the 72 percent of voters who disapprove of Bush's performance in office, two thirds voted for Obama.

Exit polls showed that the vast majority of voters said race was not a major consideration in their decision. Most of

those voting for Obama would have backed his main rival for the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton, or any other nominee of the Democratic Party. They were voting to throw out the Republicans and repudiate Bush.

Given the narrow and reactionary political framework of the United States, with only two officially recognized parties, both right-wing defenders of big business, that meant placing the Democrats in power. [See, "Class divisions begin to emerge in Obama coalition" ]

Antiwar sentiment played a contributing role—those citing the war in Iraq as the most important issue voted 5 to 1 for Obama over McCain—but more than 60 percent of those interviewed in exit polls cited the economy as the most important issue, and most rated Bush's performance on economic matters as poor or bad. As the *Wall Street Journal* admitted, in its analysis of the Republican debacle, "The economy was by far the dominant issue, and voters held GOP members who belonged to the party in the White House responsible."

Significantly, Obama carried nearly all the states that have been hardest hit by the collapse of the subprime mortgage market and skyrocketing foreclosure rate: California, Florida, Nevada, Virginia, Ohio and Michigan—all except Arizona, the Republican candidate's home state, where McCain actually ran behind Bush's numbers in 2004.

Obama carried all of the industrial Midwest from Pittsburgh to Minneapolis, including the state of Indiana, which voted for a Democratic presidential candidate for the first time since 1964.

Like Indiana, Virginia voted for a Democratic president for the first time since 1964. The symbolic significance of the state, which was once the capital of the Confederacy, voting for the first African-American president, was widely noted in media coverage.

Obama won all 19 states carried by John Kerry in 2004, improving on the Democratic performance in each of these states except Massachusetts, Kerry's home state, where his margin was the same. He carried nine states won by Bush in 2004: Ohio, Indiana and Iowa in the Midwest, Virginia,

North Carolina and Florida in the South, and Colorado, New Mexico and Nevada in the West.

Exit polls showed that Obama ran ahead of Kerry in every demographic group except those 65 or older. This includes those layers, such as white working class men and rural voters, whom the media falsely characterized as too culturally conservative to vote in significant numbers for a black candidate.

Jewish voters, traditionally Democratic, voted by a higher percentage for Obama than for Kerry four years ago, an indication that the persistent attempts to smear Obama as a Muslim and a terrorist sympathizer had little impact on them. Obama received 53 percent of the votes of Roman Catholics, compared to 47 percent in 2004 for Kerry, a Catholic himself, despite increasingly heavy-handed efforts by Catholic bishops to discourage a vote for candidates who support a woman's right to abortion.

The congressional victory for the Democrats was not as sweeping as Obama's for the presidency, but still one of the biggest in decades, particularly following on the 2006 results, when the Democrats gained six seats in the Senate and won 31 additional seats in the House. The Democratic Party won another five seats in the Senate Tuesday and 20 additional seats in the House of Representatives.

In the Senate, incumbent Republicans John Sununu in New Hampshire and Elizabeth Dole in North Carolina were defeated—Dole held the seat occupied previously for four terms by arch-reactionary Jesse Helms. Three Senate seats left vacant by Republican retirements were captured by Democrats, in Virginia, Colorado and New Mexico.

Four Senate seats remain undecided, all now held by Republican incumbents: in Georgia, where there will be a December runoff after neither candidate won 50 percent; in Minnesota, where incumbent Norm Coleman was narrowly ahead but facing a recount; in Oregon, where incumbent Gordon Smith was trailing; and in Alaska, where incumbent Ted Stevens was leading despite a corruption conviction two weeks before the vote.

At this point the Democrats hold a 54-40 majority in the Senate, with two unaffiliated: right-wing Independent Democrat Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, who supported McCain, and independent Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who backed Obama. Both currently caucus with the Democrats.

Democratic candidates for the House of Representatives defeated 13 Republican incumbents and captured 11 seats left vacant by retiring Republicans. The Republicans only averted a complete debacle by defeating four Democratic incumbents, in Florida, Louisiana, Texas and Kansas.

The current balance in the House is 256 Democrats and 173 Republicans, compared to 236-199 before the election. Four seats remain too close to call, in Virginia, California,

Washington and Alaska, and two Louisiana seats will be decided in a December runoff. Five of the six seats were held by Republicans in the previous Congress.

The congressional Republican Party was nearly wiped out in the Northeast. All 22 House seats in the six New England states are held by the Democrats, as well as 28 of 31 seats in New York State. There is no region of the country where the Republican Party has similar dominance.

In one seat, California's Eighth District, held by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, independent antiwar candidate Cindy Sheehan placed second ahead of the Republican. Pelosi took 72 percent of the vote against 17 percent for Sheehan and 9 percent for the Republican candidate. The district comprises most of the city of San Francisco.

The Democratic gains in the congressional races were in large measure due to the increased turnout among youth and minority workers associated with the Obama campaign. The Democrats also had an unusual financial edge as corporate donors shifted a considerable amount of campaign funds away from the Republicans. Both House and Senate Democrats raised more than their Republican counterparts.

According to data filed with the Federal Election Commission, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee spent \$77.5 million in the 90 most competitive House races, compared to only \$24.4 million for the National Republican Congressional Committee. This three-to-one spending advantage mirrors that enjoyed by the Obama over McCain in the final month of the campaign.

Democratic candidates also made significant gains in state legislative races, taking over control of the New York state senate, giving them control of the entire legislature and governor's office there for the first time since 1935. In the entire Northeast region comprising 11 states from Maine to Maryland, the Republican Party controls only one state legislative chamber, the Pennsylvania state senate.



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