



BLACK TURNOUT & THE 2014 MIDTERMS

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Executive Summary

This report outlines the potential impact of black voters in determining competitive 2014 senatorial and gubernatorial contests in thirteen states—Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. We examine national and state-specific registration and voting patterns, black-white differences in participation and in candidate preference, and the dynamics of inter-racial coalitions needed to secure Democratic victories. Key points include:

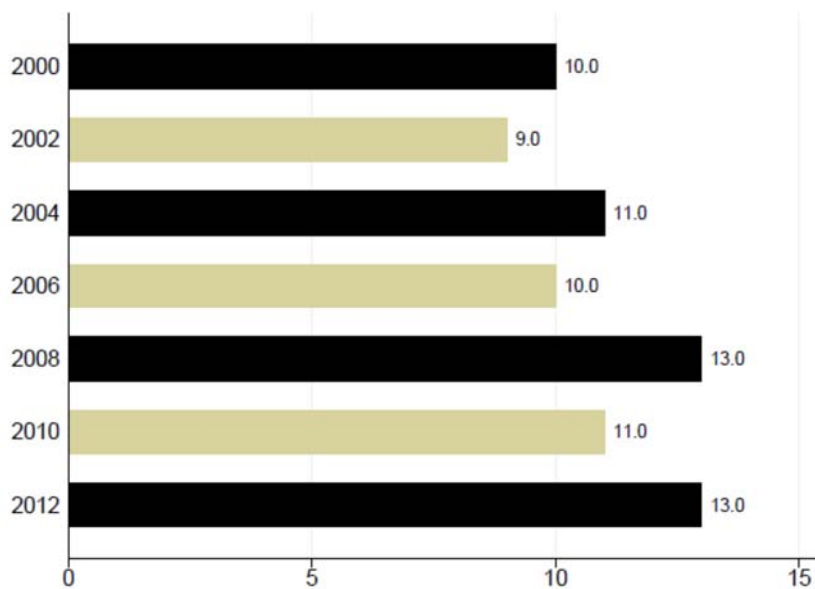
- **Black voters are a critical component of the electorate in eight competitive U.S. Senate races:** Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, and North Carolina.
- **Likewise, black voters are an important part of the electorate in nine competitive races for governor:** Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, and Wisconsin.
- **Black participation declines in midterm elections.** In the thirteen competitive states examined, the decline in voting among blacks between the 2008 presidential and 2010 midterm elections ranged from 10 to 29 percentage points.
- **Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Kentucky witnessed the steepest decline in black voter turnout** from 2008 to 2010 of the thirteen states examined, and Connecticut experienced the smallest reduction.
- **African Americans make up a smaller percentage of the electorate in midterm elections nationally, but a greater percentage of the electorate in midterms in some states.** According to Census Bureau data, African Americans averaged 10.95% of the national electorate in the last two midterm elections, compared with 12.65% of the national electorate in the last two presidential elections. However, African-American vote share in the 2010 midterms was higher than in the 2008 presidential election in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, and Louisiana, and it fell only slightly in Arkansas and Colorado.
- **Assuming a black vote share identical to 2010, the 2014 midterm election cycle will be a challenging year for Democrats, even with overwhelming African-American support.**

- **In the 2014 U.S. Senate races**, a highly mobilized black Democratic voting bloc would make it numerically possible for Democratic and Independent candidates to win outright majorities in Colorado, Michigan, and Kansas. Blacks would have to be in an electoral coalition with other minority and progressive white voters, who would also have to turn out in record numbers and strongly support the Democratic and Independent candidates.
- **In the 2014 gubernatorial races**, we predict a highly mobilized black Democratic voting bloc would allow Democrats to win in Maryland and Illinois and possibly in Florida and Kansas.
- **Democrats have a chance to win** in states where strong third party challengers have the potential to serve as spoilers in the race. Democratic gubernatorial and Senate candidates in Florida and North Carolina have opportunities to win with plurality votes under this model, and contests in Georgia and Louisiana are likely to go into runoff elections because of multiple candidates.

Introduction

Turnout in midterm (or off-year) elections in the United States is significantly lower than in presidential election cycles. The rise and fall of the black vote share over the last seven elections (2000 – 2012) reflects this pattern of punctuated participation. Figure 1 charts black voter participation as a percentage of the overall electorate for the last six presidential and midterm election cycles. In the last two presidential elections (2008 and 2012), the black vote share was comparable to the black share of the overall population (according to the Census Bureau, blacks made up 12.6 percent of the population in 2010 and 13.2 percent of the US population in 2013). By contrast, blacks under-participated relative to their proportion of the US population in the last two midterm elections (2006 and 2010). If black voters follow the latter pattern of participation (the more likely scenario), we predict that the 2014 black vote share will be about 11 percent of the overall electorate.

Figure 1. Exit Poll Reports of Black Share of the Vote, 2000-2012



Source: Reports on National Exit Polls from CNN, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, and the *New York Times*.

Table 1 compares voter registration and turnout patterns in presidential and midterm elections in thirteen competitive states. The registration and voting rates for the 2010 election cycle are lower than in the 2008 and 2012 election cycle. For example, there is nearly a 26 percentage point decrease in voting by blacks in Maryland between 2008 and 2010. Out of the thirteen states examined, Michigan, Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Kentucky witnessed the steepest decline in black voter turnout from 2008 to 2010 (29, 27, 27, and 27 percentage points respectively) and Connecticut experienced the smallest reduction (nearly 10 percentage points). Overall, these data confirm two long-held axioms of American politics: midterm election turnout is significantly lower than presidential election turnout and black turnout will be less robust in midterm elections than in presidential elections. This problem could be particularly acute in states such as Arkansas, Kansas and Kentucky, which had black turnout rates below 40 percent in 2010.

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Table 1. Black Registration and Voting Rates, 2008 – 2012, Select States

State of Interest in 2014	Black Citizen Voting Age Population 2010	2008 Participation		2010 Participation		2012 Participation	
		<u>Registered</u>	<u>Voted</u>	<u>Registered</u>	<u>Voted</u>	<u>Registered</u>	<u>Voted</u>
U.S.	12.2 %	69.7 %	64.7 %	62.8 %	43.5 %	73.1 %	66.2%
Arkansas	14.9	53.2	44.1	54.3	32.5	61.3	49.4
Colorado	3.7	61.6	58.9	63.8	46.6	60.1	55.6
Connecticut	8.6	59.1	54.1	63.1	44.6	64.0	62.2
Florida	13.7	63.5	58.5	61.4	41.5	65.8	57.6
Georgia	30.2	73.4	67.9	63.5	46.8	72.3	65.0
Illinois	14.4	65.5	62.2	66.7	52.0	77.2	71.8
Kansas	5.3	59.6	54.0	49.3	32.3	62.5	52.4
Kentucky	6.2	70.0	65.5	60.1	38.8	73.8	56.9
Louisiana	30.3	75.4	66.2	75.8	48.9	77.1	69.5
Maryland	28.1	78.2	74.2	63.3	48.6	72.8	67.5
Michigan	13.6	77.2	71.1	61.4	41.8	69.3	63.3
North Carolina	21.4	72.2	68.3	61.3	41.0	85.3	80.2
Wisconsin	4.6	73.1	73.1	58.5	46.3	81.0	78.5

Note: All figures for black alone.

Source: All data come from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November, relevant years

Competitive Senatorial and Gubernatorial Contests in the 2014 Elections

Table 2 lists eight competitive U.S. Senate races in 2014 in which black voters make up a large share of the electorate or could play an important role in the final electoral margins. Four of these contests are in southern states (Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina). The 2010 black voter turnout in these states ranged from a high of 48.9 percent in Louisiana to a low of 32.5 percent in Arkansas, according to the Current Population Survey. Many of these races are challenging for Democrats, and low black turnout will guarantee Democratic losses. Other states have smaller black populations but potentially large white Democratic voting populations. In these states, high black Democratic turnout, coupled with strong white Democratic support could be the key to Democratic victory. While blacks have only accounted for 1.4 to 3.5 percent of Colorado’s electorate in the last four elections, their turnout will be a crucial factor in a close election between Cory Gardner and Mark Udall. Similarly, if black Democratic voters turn out at rates higher than their share of the voting population in Kansas (where Independent Greg Orman has surged to the forefront in the absence of a Democratic candidate on the ballot), they could play a pivotal role in upsetting incumbent Senator Pat Roberts and Governor Sam Brownback.

High black voter turnout in states with small black populations—like Colorado and Kansas—could play a key role in determining outcomes.

Table 2. Election Statistics, Competitive 2014 Senate Elections and Historic Black Vote Share

	Black Vote Share 2006	Black Vote Share 2008	Black Vote Share 2010	Black Vote Share 2012	October 2014 Cook Report Designation	Party Holding Seat	2014 Democratic Candidate	2014 Republican Candidate
U.S.	10.3%	12.3%	11.6 %	13.4%				
Arkansas	11.1	12.2	11.9	13.8	Toss Up	Democrat	Mark Pryor	Tom Cotton
Colorado	1.4	3.5	3.3	2.8	Toss Up	Democrat	Mark Udall	Cory Gardner
Georgia	27.0	31.3	32.4	32.1	Toss Up	Republican [Open]	Michelle Nunn	David Perdue
Kansas	4.0	5.1	3.7	4.3	Toss Up	Republican	Greg Orman *	Pat Roberts
Kentucky	5.7	6.6	5.1	6.6	Toss Up	Republican	Alison L. Grimes	Mitch McConnell
Louisiana	26.6	29.1	29.7	32.2	Toss Up	Democrat	Mary Landrieu	Bill Cassidy / Rob Maness
Michigan	13.4	14.0	12.0	12.9	Leans Dem	Democrat [Open]	Gary Peters	Terri Lynn Land
North Carolina	16.8	21.0	19.3	26.0	Toss Up	Democrat	Kay Hagan	Thom Tillis

Note: * Greg Orman is running as an Independent. All figures for black alone.

Sources: Authors calculations of citizen voting from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November, relevant years; Analysis of Cook Political Report, *2014 Senate Race Ratings for October 17, 2014*

Table 3. Election Statistics, Competitive 2014 Gubernatorial Elections and Historic Black Vote Share

	Black Vote Share 2006	Black Vote Share 2008	Black Vote Share 2010	Black Vote Share 2012	October 2014 Cook Report Designation	Party Holding Seat	2014 Democratic Candidate	2014 Republican Candidate
U.S.	10.3%	12.3%	11.6 %	13.4%				
Colorado	1.4	3.5	3.3	2.8	Toss Up	Democrat	John Hickenlooper	Bob Beauprez
Connecticut	6.6	7.5	7.7	10.1	Toss Up	Democrat	Daniel Malloy	Tom Foley
Florida	12.0	12.4	13.0	13.6	Toss Up	Republican	Charlie Crist	Rick Scott
Georgia	27.0	31.3	32.4	32.1	Toss Up	Republican	Jason Carter	Nathan Deal
Illinois	15.2	14.4	16.5	16.9	Toss Up	Democrat	Pat Quinn	Bruce Rauner
Kansas	4.0	5.1	3.7	4.3	Toss Up	Republican	Paul Davis	Sam Brownback
Maryland	27.2	30.2	28.0	30.2	Leans Dem	Democrat	Anthony Brown	Larry Hogan
Michigan	13.4	14.0	12.0	12.9	Toss Up	Republican	Mark Schauer	Rick Snyder
Wisconsin	3.8	5.0	3.9	5.7	Toss Up	Republican	Mary Burke	Scott Walker

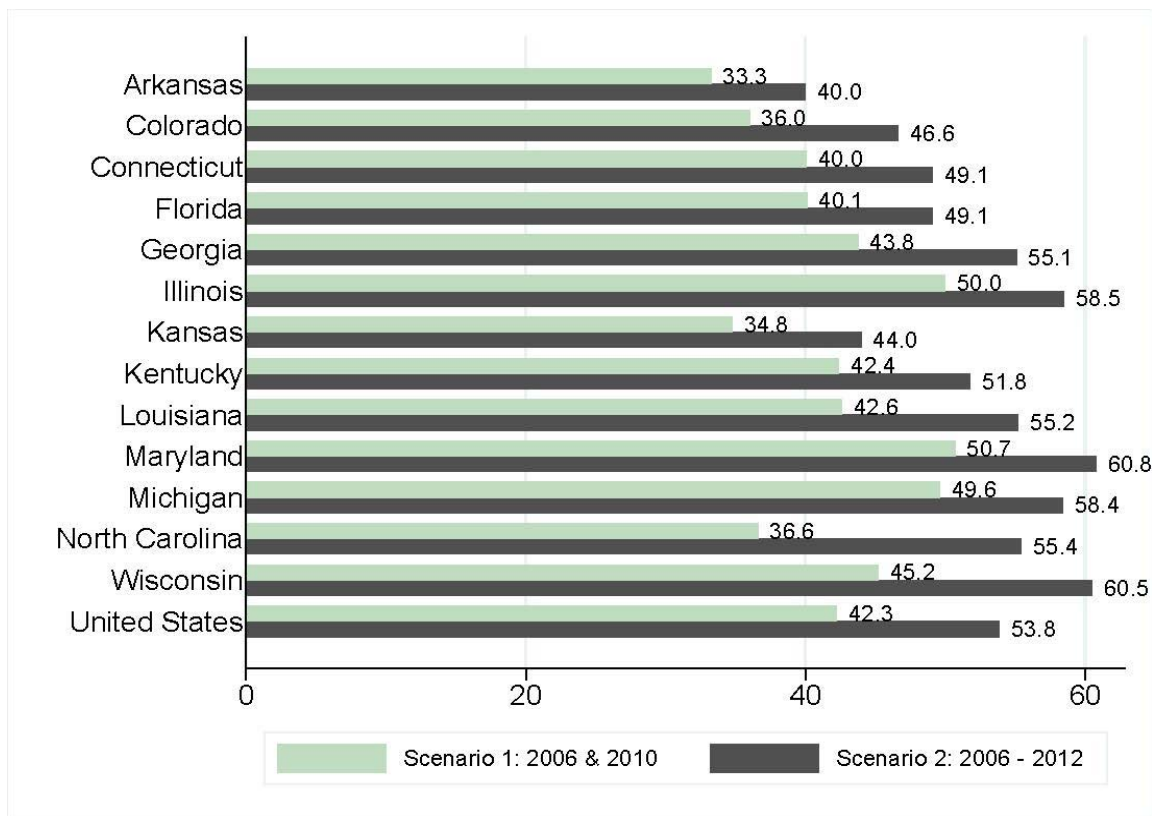
Note: All figures for black alone.

Sources: Authors calculations of citizen voting from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November, relevant years Analysis of Cook Political Report, *2014 Governors Race Ratings for October 17, 2014*

There are eight competitive elections for governor in 2014 in which black voters could play a prominent role. They are listed in Table 3. Maryland is particularly noteworthy for two reasons. First, the Democratic candidate, Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, is African American. Brown is the second African American in Maryland history to hold the position of Lieutenant Governor, and the first African American in the Maryland executive cabinet to run for governor. Second, the contest between Lt. Governor Brown and Republican Larry Hogan has defied expectations by becoming increasingly competitive over the last few weeks. In addition, the Hogan campaign and journalists have accused the Maryland Democratic Party of sending racially inflammatory campaign materials to predominately black voting jurisdictions in battleground sections of the state. The most recent *Cook Report* designated the Maryland gubernatorial contest as 'Leans Democrat' rather than 'Solid Democrat' or 'Likely Democrat.' Black turnout will be critical in Maryland if the Democrats are to retain the Governor's Mansion. Black Democrats in Illinois are also in a position to be as equally pivotal as black Democrats in Maryland.

In short, the leverage black voters will be able to wield in any of these competitive senatorial and gubernatorial elections is based upon their level of enthusiasm for particular candidates and their ability to cast a protected vote. In Figure 2, we estimate 2014 black turnout under two different scenarios: first, as an average of the two previous midterm elections; second, as an average of the last four elections, which would include both presidential and midterm elections. The former is a more conservative, apples-to-apples comparison of turnout in comparable congressional elections. Some may argue, though, that it may be appropriate to consider presidential turnout in predictions of congressional election turnout because of perceptions that the election of Barack Obama has empowered blacks and contributed to their greater formal political engagement. As Figure 2 shows, the estimates of black voter turnout are markedly different, and that will have an impact on predictions about Democratic candidate viability in key statewide races.

Figure 2. Estimating 2014 Black Turnout Using Two Different Scenarios, Select States



Source: Authors calculations of black citizen voting from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November, relevant years

Multiracial Coalitions Based on 2010 Black Voter Share

Strong Democratic prospects are predicated on the ability of Democrats to attract strong multiracial coalitions. Table 4 shows the numeric possibility of Democrats being able to win competitive elections with multiracial coalitions. Here, we are interested in estimating the number of votes Democratic candidates can expect from black voters and determining whether Democratic candidates appear to be in reach of being able to win majorities, assuming robust nonblack support.

To do this, we used current¹ voter registration counts and historic turnout data (based on state government records of the turnout of registered voters in the 2006 and 2010 midterms) to estimate the number of likely potential voters in each state. Then, assuming that candidates win with a majority of the vote plus one, we estimated the number of Democratic votes that were likely to come from black and white voters using a combination of exit poll data (to estimate the share of black and white voters in each state based on 2010² turnout) and recent poll data that estimated candidate support by race. We estimate two different scenarios of black voting behavior: if black voters were to vote 85 and 95 percent Democratic.³ This allows us to see if increased black Democratic support improves Democrats' odds of winning electoral majorities. We then subtracted that sum from the number of votes needed to ensure a majority vote to determine the number of outstanding votes needed. The difference would presumably be the number of votes that would have to come from Latino, Asian American, and Native American voters. We compared the outstanding number of votes needed to the size of the remaining electorate (i.e., those who had not been predicted to be white or black) to determine if the number of votes needed to win was more than the estimated remaining size of the electorate.

Because states base their calculations of turnout on voter registration and not the general citizen population, we are going to shift away from using CPS data for this part of the analysis, as the CPS statistics we report are a function of the citizen population over age 18 and not registered voters. The other reason we shy away from CPS data here is that there are some discrepancies in CPS estimates of turnout versus state reporting on turnout. The CPS records self-reported turnout. State elections officials count actual voters and typically get different findings. For instance, the CPS reports that blacks made up 32 percent of the electorate in Georgia in 2010. However, the Georgia Secretary of State's office contends that blacks made up about 28 percent of the electorate that year. Thus, where we know the actual size of the black electorate, we include it. Where states do not report voter turnout by race, we use exit polling data, which breaks down the white, black and nonblack/nonwhite vote. Since exit polling data tends to report lower levels of black voter participation, this represents a conservative estimate of the number of black votes needed to ensure electoral victories.

¹ We used the most recent voter registrations statistics we could find. Most states had 2014 registration numbers available online, but a few states only had 2012 to 2013 numbers available.

² We only used 2010 turnout because not all of the states examined had statewide contests that warranted exit polls in 2006.

³ We also examined scenarios in which blacks vote 90% Democratic. The results were similar to the 85% Democratic scenario, so we omitted it from the report.

The most conservative estimates of voter turnout and vote choice—including a black vote share identical to 2010—evinced the challenges that Democratic candidates face in this year’s election, even with strong African-American support. Approximately 10 to 30 percent of the votes in the states examined will be cast by voters who are Latino, Asian American, Native American, multi-racial, or who refuse to identify a race. As such, it is important to consider whether, after accounting for black and white Democratic votes, there are enough remaining voters to allow for plausible Democratic victories. In most states, there are not enough remaining votes. As the last three columns of Table 4 indicate, whether we estimate that Democrats win 85 or 95 percent of the black vote, there are not enough votes left to provide Democrats with a path to the majority in about half of the contests we examine. If current polls are accurately assessing the number of whites who will vote Democratic, Democrats will find it difficult to win clear majorities. Even if 95 percent of blacks vote Democratic, there are just not enough nonblack/nonwhite voters to make up for the deficits in the current estimated Democratic vote share among blacks and whites. Democrats have the clearest path to victory in states where 40% or more of whites surveyed have expressed support for the Democratic candidate. In only two states (Maryland and Illinois) are Democrats in a numerical position to win with less than 40% of the white vote. Here, Democrats will be aided by larger than average minority populations who are expected to vote Democratic. For instance, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn can hold on to his seat if 85 percent of blacks support him in this year’s election (assuming that blacks turn out at the same rate they did in 2010), he gets 40 percent of the white vote, and he gets 56 percent of the nonblack/nonwhite vote. With 85 percent black support, Democratic candidates in states where there is a numerical possibility of winning would all have to get at least 50 percent of the nonblack/nonwhite vote in order to have a chance at winning a majority. In the case of Florida, Charlie Crist would have to get 70 percent of the nonblack/nonwhite vote, as would Mark Udall in Colorado. In the Wisconsin gubernatorial and Kansas Senate races, the non-Republican candidates would have to win more than 90 percent of the nonblack/nonwhite vote. Clearly, while Democratic victories are possible, they will be difficult to achieve.

Table 4 assumes that candidates win with an absolute majority of the vote. However, in some states, candidates may win with less than a majority. Democrats may find a path to victory more plausible under these conditions, particularly in Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina. In all three states, third-party candidates appear strong enough to play spoilers in the election. Charlie Crist would need a plurality vote to win in Florida. Kay Hagan is also in a position to win a plurality vote in North Carolina’s Senate contest. Georgia’s third-party candidates will likely push these contests into runoff elections. Democrats will then have to ensure that minority voters remain engaged and turn out

to vote in two distinct runoff elections in December (for the gubernatorial race) and January (for the Senate race). Louisiana also requires runoff elections if candidates cannot win an outright majority on the first ballot. Democratic incumbent Mary Landrieu is expected to make it into a December 6 runoff election, but she faces an uphill climb to win there.

Table 4: Estimates of Non-black Votes Needed to Guarantee Democratic Victories with 2010 Black Vote Share

State/ Contest	Average historical turnout, 2006 and 2010 (total votes/total registered voters)	Black % of electorate, 2010 exit polls ⁴	Dem Polling Average (Real Clear Politics; all voters)	GOP Polling Average (Real Clear Politics; all voters)	Percentage of whites indicating Democratic vote preference (October poll average) ⁵	Are there enough available votes remaining to make a Democratic majority possible? (Assume blacks vote 85% Dem)	Are there enough available votes remaining to make a Democratic majority possible? (Assume blacks vote 95% Dem)
AR Sen	47.8%	11.0%	41.8%	46.8%	36.0%	No	No
CO Gov	68.0%	3.0%	46.0%	44.8%	44.3%	Yes	Yes
CO Sen	68.0%	3.0%	43.8%	46.6%	46.7%	Yes	Yes
CT Gov	58.7%	8.0%	43.3%	43.5%	38.0%	No	No
FL Gov	48.0%	11.0%	44.2%	43.7%	40.7%	Yes	Yes
GA Gov	49.8%	28.0%	44.2%	46.2%	24.0%	No	No
GA Sen	49.8%	28.0%	45.4%	45.4%	24.5%	No	No
IL Gov	24.0%	19.0%	45.0%	44.7%	39.5%	Yes	Yes
KS Sen	50.8%	5.0%	44.8%*	44.2%	44.0%	Yes	Yes
KS Gov	50.8%	5.0%	45.4%	44.8%	46.0%	Yes	Yes
KY Sen	30.9%	6.0%	41.8%	46.2%	38.0%	No	No
LA Sen	38.6%	27.0%	37.5%	34.3%	22.0%	No	No
MD Gov	55.8%	23.0%	49.0%	39.3%	38.0%	Yes	Yes
MI Gov	46.8%	12.0%	43.2%	46.6%	41.0%	No	No
MI Sen	46.8%	12.0%	47.8%	37.7%	46.0%	Yes	Yes
NC Sen	40.2%	20.0%	43.6%	42.6%	34.7%	No	No
WI Gov	50.3%	4.0%	47.0%	46.8%	45.5%	Yes	Yes

*Kansas Senate candidate Greg Orman is running as an Independent. There is no Democrat in the Kansas Senate race.

⁴ 2010 black voter share based on official state reports/exit polls rather than CPS data used in Tables 2 and 3 (see text for explanation).

⁵ This figure was derived by averaging the percentages of whites indicating a Democratic vote preference across three October polls: The New York Times/CBS YouGov Wave IV poll; October Rasmussen Report polls (note that early October polls do not include leaners); and SurveyUSA polls in select markets. Collectively, these agencies all polled in every state at least once. Maryland is the only state for which we had one poll.

Conclusion

The analysis of voter turnout data corroborates the suspicion that this will be a challenging year for Democrats. Assuming black turnout consistent with recent midterm elections and current polling data, Democrats will find it hard to put together winning coalitions, even with overwhelming African-American support. Democratic candidates with the best prospects of winning include those running in states with relatively strong third-party candidates who can serve as spoilers and states with small black populations where Democrats (or, in the case of Kansas, Independents) are performing strongly among white voters.

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