



President-elect Barack Obama

Blacks and the 2008 Elections: A Preliminary Analysis

By David A. Bositis

What follows is a brief review of some available evidence regarding the November 4, 2008 election. In particular, this review focuses on the election of President-elect Barack Obama, the behavior and significance of African American voters in the 2008 elections and the profiles of black candidates for federal office.

There were several significant developments for black politics in November 2008, the most significant being the election of Barack Obama as the first African

American President. A great deal of effort was made to bring black voters, especially young black voters, to the polls. Black turnout in the 2008 election increased substantially from 2004. In fact, black turnout was at an historic high. The total share of the national vote represented by black voters between 2004 and 2008 increased from 11 percent to 13 percent according to the exit polls, and the black share of the vote in many individual states increased substan-

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tially. In addition to record-setting turnout, President-elect Obama received 95 percent of the black vote, bettering President Lyndon B. Johnson's 94 percent in 1964, the previous high. The number of black major party federal candidates on the ballot in 2008 was similar to the number in 2006.

National Turnout Increases According to preliminary figures from the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE), overall turnout in the 2008 election was up from 2004. In 2004, 122 million people voted, while in 2008 (with ballots still being counted), CSAE estimates that when the count is complete, between 126.5 and 128.5 million

voters will have cast ballots. Using CSAE's mid-range figure (127.5 million), overall voter turnout was 61.2 percent in 2008, slightly better than 2004's 60.7 percent, which was the highest level since 1968.

Black Voter Turnout Smashes Record In 2008, according to the Edison/Mitofsky exit polls (see Table 1), the principal exit polling organization, black voters cast 13 percent of all ballots cast, or (based on assumptions about the final vote turnout numbers from CSAE) approximately 16.6 million votes. In 2004, according to Edison/Mitofsky, black voters cast 11 percent of all ballots, or approximately 13.42 million votes; thus, the increase from 2004 to 2008

was about 3.16 million voters, or 23.5 percent. The Census Bureau's November 2006 Current Population Survey reported that there were 24.81 million eligible African American adults, and with 16.6 million black votes cast, 2008 black turnout would be 66.8 percent - smashing the previous record of 58.5 percent in 1964; the post-Voting Rights Act turnout high was 57.6 percent in 1968. Furthermore, while the final vote for the 2008 presidential election has yet to be determined, it is likely that black turnout - for the first time in history - will surpass white turnout in a U.S. presidential election. Of the total black vote cast in 2008, black women represented 58 percent, while black men represented 42 percent of the total. According to the exit polls, Hispanic voters increased their share of the total vote from six percent (2004) to eight percent (2008). The

TABLE 1. The Black National Electorate By Demographic Group, 2000 v. 2004

SHARE OF TOTAL ELECTORATE			GROUP	PRESIDENTIAL VOTE 2000		PRESIDENTIAL VOTE 2004		PRESIDENTIAL VOTE 2008	
2000	2004	2008		Gore	Bush	Kerry	Bush	Obama	McCain
%	%	%		%	%	%	%	%	%
82	79	74	Whites	42	54	41	58	43	55
10	11	13	Blacks	90	8	88	11	95	4
7	6	8	Hispanics	67	31	56	43	66	32
			African American Voters						
2	3	3	18-29	91	8	86	13	95	4
4	4	4	30-44	91	7	89	11	96	4
3	3	4	45-59	89	9	88	11	96	3
2	2	1	60+	87	11	90	9	94	6
4	5	5	Men	85	12	86	13	95	5
6	7	7	Women	94	6	90	10	96	3

SOURCES: (2000/Voter News Service) N.Y. Times, 11/12/00; (2004/Edison/Mitofsky) www.nytimes.com/2004/11/07/weekinreview/07conn.html?ex=1108098000&en=fa91695cdadb2f1e&ei=5070&ex=1102568400&en=bbf8f44820e65ea7&ei=5070&oref=login; (2008/Edison/Mitofsky) www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USP00p1

Table 2. The Black Vote by State, Presidential Elections, 2000v2008, Selected States

State	BVAP (%)	Black Share of State Vote (%)			Total Voter Turnout (%)		Black Partisan Vote, 2004 (%)		Black Partisan Vote, 2008 (%)	
		2000	2004	2008	2004	2008	Kerry	Bush	Obama	McCain
AL	25	25	25	29	56.3	61.6	91	6	98	2
AR	15.1	11	15	12	52.4	52.1	94	6	94	4
CA	7.9	7	6	10	61.2	n/a	81	18	95	5
FL	14	15	12	13	62.8	62.5	86	13	96	4
GA	26.4	25	25	30	54.7	61.3	88	12	98	2
IL	15.1	14	10	17	62.3	62.5	89	10	96	3
LA	29.3	29	27	29	59.3	58.7	90	9	94	4
MD	29.6	22	24	25	65.5	61.1	89	11	94	6
MI	13.6	11	13	12	66.1	66.7	89	10	97	3
MO	10.8	12	8	13	64.6	67.4	90	10	93	7
NY	15.9	11	13	17	58.8	55.4	90	9	100	0
NC	21.4	19	26	23	56.8	66.3	85	14	95	5
OH	11.3	9	10	11	66.5	61.1	84	16	97	2
PA	9.5	7	13	13	61.9	61.7	83	16	95	5
SC	27.3	22	30	25	52.2	58.2	85	15	96	4
TN	15.8	18	13	12	55.7	57.9	89	10	94	6
TX	12.5	15	12	13	52.2	54.1	83	17	98	2
VA	19.7	16	21	20	59.9	62.2	87	12	92	8

SOURCES: Information on the black voting-age population is from the November 2006 U.S. Census Current Population Survey. The actual share numbers from 1992-2000 are from Voter News Service, and for 2004-2008 from the Edison/Mitofsky consortium. Total turnout numbers are from the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate.

share of the total 2008 presidential vote cast by non-Hispanic white voters declined from 79 percent in 2004 to 74 percent in 2008. The 74 percent represents the lowest share of the presidential vote cast by non-Hispanic whites in history.

State Turnout Varies While the black share of the national vote increased from 11 to 13 percent from 2004 and 2008, the changes in individual states varied considerably (see Table 2). There were six states that witnessed very large increases in the black share of the statewide vote between 2004 and 2008. In the two states with the numerically largest black voting-age populations, New York and California, the black share of the vote increased sharply - from 13 to 17 percent in New York and from six to 10 percent in California. In Alabama (from 25 to 29 percent) and Georgia (25 to 30 percent), the

share of black voters rose strongly. In the swing state of Missouri, the black share of the vote rose from eight to 13 percent of the total, and in President-elect Obama's home state of Illinois, the black share of the state vote increased from 10 to 17 percent. In two important battleground states, the black share of the vote declined slightly, although the number of black voters increased. In Virginia, the black share of the state vote declined from 21 to 20 percent, but overall turnout was up. In North Carolina, which had the largest increase in turnout of any state in the country, the black share of the vote declined from 26 to 23 percent. In both states, black voters over-voted their share of the black voting age population (BVAP). In Ohio, the black share of the total state vote increased by 10 percent.

The Partisan Picture The Democratic share of the black vote reached an all time high in 2008 with 95 percent of African Americans voting for Sen. Obama. Conversely, Sen. John McCain received a smaller percentage of black votes than any GOP nominee in history - only four percent. President-elect Obama broke President Lyndon B. Johnson's record, which was established in the fateful year 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was passed. There was no variation outside the margin of error among black subgroups (see Table 1) in 2008. There was no black gender gap, nor were there any generational differences among black voters. Simply put, President-elect Obama was the overwhelming choice of African American voters. In the states where most African Americans live, Barack Obama generally received a considerably higher percentage of the black

vote in 2008 than did Sen. Kerry in 2004 - despite Kerry's strong black support in that election. President-elect Obama received a larger share of the black vote than Sen. Kerry in all states. A few states are illustrative of the shift in black voting between 2004 and 2008. In the key state of Ohio, Obama received 97 percent of the black vote in 2008, while Kerry received 84 percent in 2004; in Pennsylvania, the shift was from 83 to 95 percent; in North Carolina, the shift was from 85 to 95 percent. The states where black voters represented the most important contributions to President-elect Obama's victory were Florida, North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia; black voters were key to his wins in these states. In other election contests, black voters were critical to the election of Senator-elect Hagan (D-NC), Sen. Landrieu (D-LA) and Governor Perdue (D-NC). Black voters in Georgia were also critical to Jim Martin in the U.S. Senate race, where he advanced to an early December runoff with Sen. Saxby Chambliss.

President-elect Obama and White Voters Nationally, President-elect Obama received 43 percent of the white vote - up only marginally from Sen. Kerry's 41 percent in 2004. However, the national numbers are deceiving. In all states outside of the South, Obama received significantly more of the white vote - more than any Democratic nominee since Lyndon Johnson. He received an absolute majority of the white vote in 16 states and the District of Columbia. In the rest of the states in the U.S. outside of the South (with the exception of the Republican can-

didates' home states of Alaska and Arizona where Obama ran one point worse than Kerry) Obama demonstrated significantly increased appeal. Although he ran behind Kerry in Kerry's home state of Massachusetts, and its neighboring states of Connecticut and Rhode Island, Obama still won all three with 60+ percent of the vote. Obama ran ahead of Sen. Kerry among white voters in such reliably Republican states as Utah (nine points better among whites) and Idaho (seven points better than Kerry). In two southern states, Obama received an increased share of the white vote - North Carolina and Virginia - both of which he won. However, in four southern states, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, he received a smaller share of the white vote than John Kerry received in 2004. Given the political environment of 2008, these results certainly suggest that the race variable was a factor. There are three factors that reliably predict election results in U.S. presidential elections: the state of the economy, the approval/disapproval ratings of the incumbent party and the proportion of voters who think the country is going in the right direction or is on the wrong track. It was these factors that explain why in 2008, voters moved in Obama's direction. In the remaining five southern states, Obama matched Kerry's white vote. And interestingly, Obama won Florida by flipping the Hispanic vote. In 2004, Bush won Florida's Hispanic vote by 15 percentage points; in 2008, Obama won Florida's Hispanic vote by 12 percentage points.


Black Candidates for Federal Office There were 56 black major party nominees for federal office in 2008, down one from 2006. There were 47 black Democratic nominees (one off from the all-time high), and nine black Republican nominees (tied for the lowest number since 1990); there were 24 black Republican nominees in 1994 and 2000. There were also two black nominees for the U.S. Senate in Alabama and Mississippi who were not elected. The number of black members in the 111th Congress may decline by one from the present Congress as President-elect Obama departs the legislative branch to assume control of the executive. If an African American is appointed to fill either Sen. Obama's seat or Sen. Biden's seat, the number of black members would remain the same. Of the 47 Democratic nominees, 42, or 89 percent, won with an average vote of 80 percent; 15 U.S. House incumbents were unopposed. All of the nine black Republican nominees lost while averaging 19 percent of the vote in the districts where they ran. Among the black Democratic nominees, 64 percent ran in majority-minority districts, and 36 percent in majority white districts. There will be 40 black Democratic U.S. Representatives in the new Congress, no black U.S. Senators (unless an African American is appointed to fill either Sen. Obama's or Sen. Biden's seat) and two black Democratic delegates. There is only one new black member of the U.S. House, Marcia Fudge (D-OH), who was elected to the seat held by the late Stephanie Tubbs Jones. Information on all black major party nominees for federal office in 2008 is provided in Table 3. 

Table 3. Black Major Party Nominees for Federal Office, November 2008

U.S. House of Representatives					
District	BVAP	Democrat	Dem Vote	Rep Vote	Republican
AL 7	57.8	<u>/Artur Davis</u>	-	-	Unopposed
CA 9	24.5	<u>/Barbara Leel</u>	86	10	<u>Charles Hargrave</u>
CA 33	29.6	<u>/Diane Watson</u>	88	12	<u>David Crowley</u>
CA 35	35	<u>/Maxine Waters</u>	83	13	Ted Hayes
CA 37	24.7	<u>/Laura Richardson</u>	76	-	Unopposed
D.C.	55.7	<u>/Eleanor Holmes Norton</u>	93	7	<u>Adrian Salsgiver</u>
FL 3	45.1	<u>/Corrine Brown</u>	-	-	Unopposed
FL 17	51.3	<u>/Kendrick Meek</u>	-	-	Unopposed
FL 22	24.6	<u>/Ron Klein</u>	55	45	Allen West
FL 23	46.2	<u>/Alcee Hastings</u>	82	18	Marion Thorpe, Jr.
GA 2	40.9	<u>/Sanford Bishop</u>	69	31	<u>Lee Ferrell</u>
GA 4	48.8	<u>/Hank Johnson</u>	-	-	Unopposed
GA 5	51	<u>/John Lewis</u>	-	-	Unopposed
GA 13	37.3	<u>/David Scott</u>	69	31	Deborah Honeycutt
IL 1	63.2	<u>/Bobby Rush</u>	86	14	Antoine Members
IL 2	59.4	<u>/Jesse Jackson, Jr.</u>	89	11	Anthony Williams
IL 7	55.9	<u>/Danny K. Davis</u>	85	15	<u>Steve Miller</u>
IL 10	6.7	Dan Seals	44	56	<u>/Mark Kirk</u> I
IN 7	26.7	<u>/Andre Carson</u>	65	35	Unopposed
LA 21	59.3	William Jefferson	Runoff 12/2/2008		Anh "Joseph" Cao
LA 7	22.7	Don Gravins, Jr.	34	62	<u>/Charles Boustany, Jr.</u> I
MD 4	55.3	<u>/Donna Edwards</u>	85	14	<u>Peter James</u>
MD 7	57	<u>/Elijah Cummings</u>	79	19	<u>Mike Hargadon</u>
MI 13	57.9	<u>/Carolyn Kilpatrick</u>	74	19	Edward Gubics
MI 14	58.9	<u>/John Conyers</u>	92	-	Unopposed
MN 5	10.2	<u>/Keith Ellison</u> (DFL)	71	22	Barb Davis White
MS 2	58.9	<u>/Bennie Thompson</u>	69	31	<u>Richard Cook</u>
MO 1	45.8	<u>/William Clay, Jr.</u>	87	-	Unopposed
MO 5	21.8	<u>/Emanuel Cleaver</u>	64	36	<u>Jacob Turk</u>
NJ 10	54.3	<u>/Donald Payne</u>	99	-	Unopposed
NY 6	51.1	<u>/Gregory Meeks</u>	-	-	Unopposed
NY 10	60	<u>/Edolphus Towns</u>	94	6	Salvatore Grupico
NY 11	56.8	<u>/Yvette Clarke</u>	93	7	<u>Hugh Carr</u>
NY 15	30.5	<u>/Charles Rangel</u>	87	9	Ed Daniels
NC 1	47.6	<u>/George K. Butterfield, Jr.</u>	70	30	<u>Dean Stephens</u>
NC 12	41.9	<u>/Mel Watt</u>	72	28	<u>Ty Cobb, Jr.</u>
OH 11	51.6	<u>/Marcia Fudge</u>	85	15	<u>Thomas Pekarek</u>
PA 1	42.2	<u>/Robert Brady</u>	91	9	Mike Muhammad
PA 2	56.5	<u>/Chaka Fattah</u>	89	11	<u>Adam Lang</u>
SC 6	53.5	<u>/James Clyburn</u>	68	32	<u>Nancy Harrelson</u>
TX 9	36.5	<u>/Al Green</u>	94	-	Unopposed
TX 18	40.3	<u>/Sheila J. Lee</u>	77	20	<u>John Faulk</u>
TX 30	41	<u>/Eddie B. Johnson</u>	83	16	<u>Fred Wood</u>
VA 3	52.7	<u>/Robert Scott</u>	-	-	Unopposed
VA 4	33.3	Andrea Miller	40	60	<u>/Randy Forbes</u> I
V.I.	61.4	<u>/Donna Christian-Cristensen</u>	-	-	Unopposed
WI-4	27.8	<u>/Gwen Moore</u>	89	-	Unopposed
U.S. Senate					
State	BVAP	Democrat	Dem Vote	Rep Vote	Republican
Alabama	24	Vivian D. Figures	37	63	<u>/Jeff Sessions</u> I
Mississippi	33.1	Erik Fleming	38	62	<u>/Thad Cochran</u> I

KEY: Non-African American candidates' names are underlined; I incumbent / Winner