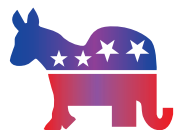




The Political Geography of the Intermountain West: The New Swing Region

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This is the second in a series of reports on the demographic and political dynamics under way in key “batleground” states, deemed to be crucial in deciding the 2008 election. As part of the Metropolitan Policy Program’s Blueprint for American Prosperity, this series will provide an electoral component to the initiative’s analysis of and prescriptions for bolstering the health and vitality of America’s metropolitan areas, the engines of the U.S. economy. This report focuses on the Intermountain West and covers Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona finding that:

A. One reason these states are increasingly “in play” is the rapid population growth among two key demographic segments—Hispanics and white college graduates—and the concomitant decline of the white working class. The growth of Hispanics and white college graduates is concentrated in these states’ major metropolitan areas, especially their very largest—Denver, Las Vegas, Albuquerque and Phoenix—and reflects the attraction of these groups to new economy growth generated by the Intermountain West’s “megapolitan” regions (agglomerations of economically-linked metros and counties).

B. In Colorado, these trends could have their strongest impact in the “battle of the suburbs” within the Denver metro (50 percent of state population), where Democrats need to expand their 2004 margin and the GOP needs to hold the line, and in the “battle of the metros” elsewhere, which pits the Democratic-trending Fort Collins metro, now the fourth largest in the state against the smaller GOP-trending metros of Grand Junction and fast-growing Greeley. Overall, the GOP will be looking to maintain their strong support among the declining white working class, the key to their electoral prospects. The Democrats will be relying on white college graduates, who are rapidly growing and have been moving toward the Democrats, especially since 2000 and Hispanics, who have been driving the growth of the minority vote and vote heavily Democratic.

C. In Nevada, these trends will determine whether the fast growing Las Vegas metro (72 percent of the statewide population), as well as Reno, continues trending toward

the Democrats. The GOP will be seeking to stem eroding support among the rapidly shrinking white working class. The Democrats will hope for the continuation of a pro-Democratic trend among the growing white college graduate group, as well as strong turnout among the burgeoning minority population, especially Hispanics.

D. In New Mexico, trends among these key groups will likely determine whether the relatively fast-growing Albuquerque metro (42 percent of the state population) and Northwest region (which includes Santa Fe) continue to shift Democratic, an outcome that would seriously compromise the GOP’s ability to hold the state. The GOP needs to, at minimum, stabilize its support among the white working class, whose ranks are declining, while encouraging a recent trend toward the GOP among Hispanic voters, the key growth constituency in the state. Democrats will be looking for continuation of a trend in their direction among white college graduates, who could tip from Republican to Democratic in this election.

E. In Arizona, these trends will likely determine whether and to what the very fast-growing Phoenix metro, along with Tucson (together they are 81 percent of the statewide population) continue to move toward the Democrats and cut into the GOP’s statewide lead. Republicans will be seeking to maintain their very strong support among the white working class. Democrats will try to move the growing white college graduate group into their camp, as well as reverse a recent pro-GOP trend among the even faster growing Hispanic population.

Overall, the Intermountain West has become the new swing region in the United States, moving from an average 14 point-GOP advantage in 1988 to a mere 5 point average advantage for the GOP in 2004.