

Bush's 'Incredible' Vote Tallies

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George W. Bush's vote tallies, especially in the key state of Florida, are so statistically stunning that they border on the unbelievable.

While it's extraordinary for a candidate to get a vote total that exceeds his party's registration in any voting jurisdiction - because of non-voters - Bush racked up more votes than registered Republicans in 47 out of 67 counties in Florida. In 15 of those counties, his vote total more than doubled the number of registered Republicans and in four counties, Bush more than tripled the number.

Statewide, Bush earned about 20,000 more votes than registered Republicans.

By comparison, in 2000, Bush's Florida total represented about 85 percent of the total number of registered Republicans, about 2.9 million votes compared with 3.4 million registered Republicans.

Bush achieved these totals although exit polls showed him winning only about 14 percent of the Democratic vote statewide - statistically the same as in 2000 when he won 13 percent of the Democratic vote - and losing Florida's independent voters to Kerry by a 57 percent to 41 percent margin. In 2000, Gore won the independent vote by a much narrower margin of 47 to 46 percent.

[For details on the Florida turnout in 2000, see <http://www.msnbc.com/m/d2k/g/polls.asp?office=P&state=FL> .

For details on the 2004 Florida turnout, see <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/FL/P/00/index.html>]

Exit Poll Discrepancies

Similar surprising jumps in Bush's vote tallies across the country - especially when matched against national exits polls showing Kerry winning by 51 percent to 48 percent - have fed suspicion among rank-and-file Democrats that the Bush campaign rigged the vote, possibly through systematic computer hacking.

Republican pollster Dick Morris said the Election Night pattern of mistaken exit polls favoring Kerry in six battleground states - Florida, Ohio, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada and Iowa - was virtually inconceivable.

"Exit polls are almost never wrong," Morris wrote. "So reliable are the surveys that actually tap voters as they leave the polling places that they are used as guides to the relative

honesty of elections in Third World countries. ... To screw up one exit poll is unheard of. To miss six of them is incredible. It boggles the imagination how pollsters could be that incompetent and invites speculation that more than honest error was at play here.”

But instead of following his logic that the discrepancy suggested vote tampering – as it would in Latin America, Africa or Eastern Europe – Morris postulated a bizarre conspiracy theory that the exit polls were part of a scheme to have the networks call the election for Kerry and thus discourage Bush voters on the West Coast. Of course, none of the networks did call any of the six states for Kerry, making Morris’s conspiracy theory nonsensical. Nevertheless, some Democrats have agreed with Morris’s bottom-line recommendation that the whole matter deserves “more scrutiny and investigation.” [[The Hill](#) , Nov. 8, 2004]

Erroneous Votes

Democratic doubts about the Nov. 2 election have deepened with anecdotal evidence of voters reporting that they tried to cast votes for Kerry but touch-screen voting machines came up registering their votes for Bush.

In Ohio, election officials said an error with an electronic voting system in Franklin County gave Bush 3,893 extra votes in suburban Columbus, more than 1,000 percent more than he actually got.

Yet, without a nationwide investigation, it’s impossible to know whether those cases were isolated glitches or part of a more troubling pattern.

If Bush’s totals weren’t artificially enhanced, they would represent one of the most remarkable electoral achievements in U.S. history.

In the two presidential elections since Sen. Bob Dole lost to Bill Clinton in 1996, Bush would have increased Republican voter turnout nationwide by a whopping 52 percent from just under 40 million votes for Dole to just under 60 million votes for the GOP ticket in 2004.

Such an increase in voter turnout over two consecutive election cycles is not unprecedented, but has historically flowed from landslide victories that see shifting voting patterns, with millions of crossover voters straying from one party to the other.

For example, in 1972, Richard Nixon increased Republican turnout by 73.5 percent over Barry Goldwater’s performance two elections earlier. But this turnout was amplified by the fact that Goldwater lost in 1964 to Lyndon Johnson by about 23 percentage points and Nixon trounced George McGovern by 23 percentage points.

What’s remarkable about Bush’s increase over the last two elections is that Democrats have done an impressive job boosting their own voter turnout from 1996 to 2004. Over this period, candidates Al Gore and John Kerry increased Democratic turnout by about 18 percent, from roughly 47.5 million votes in 1996 to nearly 56 million in 2004.

What this suggests is that Bush is not so much winning his new votes from Democrats crossing over, but rather by going deeper than many observers thought possible into new pockets of dormant Republican voters.

Bush’s Gains

But where did these new voters come from, and how did Bush manage to accelerate his turnout gains at a time when the Democratic ticket was also substantially increasing its turnout?

While the statistical analysis of these new voters is only just beginning, Bush's ability to find nearly 9 million new voters in an election year when his Democratic opponent also saw gains of about 5 million new voters is the story of the 2004 election.

Exit polls also suggest that voters identifying themselves as Republicans voted as a greater proportion of the electorate than in 2000 and that Bush won a slightly greater percent of the Republican vote.

The party breakdown in 2000 was 39 percent Democrats, 35 percent Republicans, and 27 percent independents. In 2000, Bush won the Republican vote by 91 percent to 8 percent; narrowly won the independent vote by 47 percent to 45 percent and picked up 11 percent of the Democratic vote compared with Gore's Democratic turnout of 86 percent. [See <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/epolls/US/P000.html> for details.]

According to exit polls this year, the turnout broke evenly among Democrats and Republicans, with about 37 percent each. Independents represented about 26 percent of the electorate. Kerry actually did better among independents, winning that group of voters by a narrow 49 percent to 48 percent margin.

However, Bush did slightly better among the larger number of Republican voters, winning 93 percent of their vote, while matching his 2000 performance by taking about 11 percent of the Democratic vote.

Registration Up

While this turnout might strike many observers as unusual in an election year that witnessed huge voter registration and mobilization efforts by Democrats and groups aligned with Democrats, the increased GOP turnout does seem to fit with the campaign strategy deployed by the Bush team to run to the base.

From the start of the 2004 campaign, political strategist Karl Rove and the Bush team made its goals clear - maximize Bush's support among social and economic conservatives - including Evangelicals and Club for Growth/anti-government conservatives - and turn them out by driving up Kerry's negatives with harsh attacks questioning Kerry's leadership credentials.

This strategy emerged from Rove's estimate after the 2000 election that 4 million Evangelical voters stayed home that year. The Bush/Rove strategy in 2004 rested primarily on turning out that base of support.

But, even if one were to estimate that 100 percent of these Evangelical voters turned out for Bush in 2004 and that 100 percent of Bush's 2000 supporters turned out again for him, this still leaves about 5 million new Bush voters unaccounted for.

Altogether, Bush's new 9 million votes came mainly from the largest states in the country. But nowhere was Bush's performance more incredible than in Florida, where Bush found roughly 1 million new voters, about 11 percent all new Bush voters nationwide and more than twice the number of new voters than in any other state other than Texas.

Bush increased his turnout in all 67 Florida counties, marking the second consecutive election in which Bush increased Republican vote totals in all Florida counties, and overall achieved a 34 percent increase in Florida votes over his 2000 total.

Since Bob Dole's 1996 turnout of 2.24 million Florida votes, Bush has increased the GOP's performance in the state by an astonishing 74 percent. Making Bush's gains even more impressive, Kerry also saw gains in all but five Florida counties and in 22 counties earned at least 10,000 more votes than Gore earned in 2000.

Exceeding Kerry

But Bush's vote gains exceeded Kerry's in all the large counties in the state except in heavily Democratic Miami-Dade, where Kerry increased his turnout by 56,000 new votes compared with Bush's 40,000 new votes. This Democratic improvement in Miami-Dade seems to have come in large part from Democratic success in registering new voters in the county by almost a 2-to-1 margin over Republicans.

In spite of this new-voter registration advantage, Kerry only earned a 7-to-5 increase of new voter turnout over Bush in Miami-Dade, a statistical oddity given the fact that Kerry did a better job than Gore in turning out his Democratic base, earning a vote total equaling 85 percent of all registered Democrats in the county compared with Gore's total in 2000 equaling 83 percent of all registered Democrats.

In other Democratic strongholds of Broward and Palm Beach counties, Kerry gained 114,000 new voters, earning nearly 770,000 votes, and bested Bush by more than 320,000 votes. But, this was actually a modest improvement for Bush over 2000, thanks to Bush's increase of 119,000 new voters in these counties, from 330,000 votes in 2000 to 449,000 votes in 2004.

Bush's performance in these two counties is worth studying in greater detail. In both counties, Democrats saw a significant increase in new voter registration since 2000, more than 77,000 newly registered Democrats in Broward and 34,000 newly registered Democrats in Palm Beach.

Republicans on the other hand only registered 17,000 new voters in Broward and a bit more than 2,000 new voters in Palm Beach. While both counties saw substantial numbers of new unaffiliated or third party registered voters, the Democratic advantage in both counties combined of more than 111,000 newly registered Dems against fewer than 20,000 newly registered GOP voters, as well as the voter intensity that these new registration rates usually represent, suggested that Kerry should have done better than Bush relative to the 2000 election.

Instead, Bush actually increased his vote total in the two counties by earning about 5,000 more new voters than Kerry.

New Level

Beyond southern Florida, Bush took turnout throughout the state to a new level, testing the bounds of statistical probability by winning votes seemingly from every corner of the state, from the panhandle to the Gulf Coast, from the I-4 corridor to the Atlantic Coast from Jacksonville to Miami.

Another county worth examining in some detail is Orange County, a swing county home to Orlando in the center of the state. As in Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, and Broward counties, Democrats successfully registered substantially more new voters than Republicans, about 49,000 new Democrats against about 25,000 new Republicans.

These gains broke what was once a statistical tie in registered voters between the parties, giving Democrats a 214,000 to 187,000 advantage across the county. But Kerry only managed a narrow countywide victory with 192,030 votes against 191,389 votes for Bush. In 2000, Gore carried the county with 140,115 votes against 134,476 votes for Bush.

While it's conceivable Bush might have achieved these and other gains through his hardball campaign strategies and strong get-out-the-vote effort, many Americans, looking at these and other statistically incredible Bush vote counts, are likely to continue to suspect that the Republicans put a thumb on the electoral scales, somehow exaggerating Bush's tallies through manipulation of computer tabulations.

Only an open-minded investigation with public scrutiny would have much hope of quelling these rising suspicions.

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