

Early Miami Voting Suggests Florida May Go Democratic

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MIAMI — With early voting for president in heavily Democratic Miami-Dade County running ahead of 2004, there's a good chance Florida could end up in the Obama column Nov. 4th.

Of the 100 Miami area early voters emerging from the polling places interviewed by this reporter over the past two days, 53 identified themselves as Democrats and 15 as independents while only 32 said they are Republicans.

What's more, eleven of the 15 independent voters told me they had just voted for Obama. Overall, 67 of those interviewed at two different polling sites Thursday and Friday said they voted for Obama compared to 33 for McCain.

Among the 100 voters, there were nine that voted against their party of registration. Two of the nine said they were registered Democrats that crossed over to McCain and seven said they are registered Republicans that crossed over to Obama. Both McCain's crossovers were men over 40. One said, "I'm afraid of going toward socialism" and the other said, "I didn't like Obama's associations." Among Republicans that switched to Obama, one said, "I can't begin to enumerate. Let's just say 'leadership.'" Others cited the Iraq war and/or the economy as their reasons.

In the first four days of early voting alone this past week, 60,000 Miami-Dade voters stood patiently in line often for several hours or longer to cast their ballots. This reporter, however, waited just 20 minutes and thought the voting was conducted smoothly and efficiently.

In 2004, Democrat John Kerry drubbed President Bush in Miami by 53 per cent to 46 per cent of the 770,000 votes cast but still lost the state, with 47 per cent compared to 52 percent for Bush. This year, the total turnout in Miami could top 900,000 or more, counting the early vote. According to McClatchey Newspapers, since 2004, Miami has added 184,514 voters to its rolls, bringing total registration to 1,243,315.

The outcome in Florida may well depend on the size of the South Florida vote (Miami and Broward counties) and how efficiently those voters are counted Nov. 4th.

Among early voters I spoke with, Obama is getting strong support from women and students as well as African-Americans. No African-American in this sample said he or she would vote for McCain. One of this group identified herself as a Republican but said she voted for Obama because "I'm a conservative, and I have problems with McCain's personal life."

Among women interviewed, 36 said they had just voted for Obama compared with 14 for

McCain. While women generally vote more Democratic than men, the reason may have less to do with gender and more to do with their higher levels of education. University towns, for example, are commonly thought of as Democratic voting strongholds and those with higher levels of education tend to support Democratic candidates.

One of these, Teddi Litmen, a local dentist, said she voted for Obama because, "I want to get us out of Iraq and to improve the economy." One African-American woman said, "My only son is in Iraq and they send him back and back and I want to see him. I am sick of them (the Republicans). Another woman, Joan Treacy, of Coral Gables, said, "I am absolutely against the war." And a woman over 40 dubbed Obama as "The best candidate of my lifetime."

Among men that supported Obama, Jeff Bailey, a Coral Gables lawyer, said, "He has shown he has the ability to lead with reason."

Among the half dozen students that showed up from the nearby University of Miami campus — a campus festooned with Obama stickers — each said they voted for Obama. One 21-year-old finance major said he voted "against McCain because of his tax policies."

Of those supporting McCain, it was apparent the Republican message that Obama was unprepared to become president had gotten through. One man of about 50 said, "I don't think Obama is straightforward. I think he's got a lot of things hidden."

McCain voters repeatedly said McCain was "better qualified." David Smith, a senior citizen from Coral Gables, said, "McCain's experienced. Our Number One fear is terrorism and he's stronger on that and on defense." One woman, though, Eris Gonzales of Coral Gables and a lifelong Republican, said she voted for McCain because "I heard Obama was a Muslim."

This reporter's sample is somewhat biased as a number of presumably McCain supporters — elderly naturalized citizens from Cuba — could not express themselves in English. One Hispanic male, Ignacio Barroso of Miami, however, spoke English well enough: "We need a change. I think the GOP administration is too far to the right favoring capital and large corporations. There's not enough GDP (gross domestic product) trickling down to the people."

McClatchey newspapers Oct. 23 reported Republican legislators in Tallahassee three years ago claimed that early voting was too expensive and "set new statewide standards limiting the number of polling sites and their hours of operation," trimming early voting from 12 to eight hours per day. The results, McClatchey reported, have resulted in waits of from two to five hours for early voting.

Pollsters currently give Obama a very slight edge over McCain in Florida and the race is expected to be a toss-up. Given the number of independents that say they support Obama and the larger number of Republicans than Democrats switching sides, Florida could end up in the Democratic column Nov. 4th.

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