

New Mexico and the 2012 President Election

FairVote Analysis Shows Likely Impact of No Longer Being a “Swing State”

In recent elections, New Mexico has received more presidential candidate attention than many states, but it is likely to be largely ignored in the 2012 election. Democrat Barack Obama’s landslide 15% victory despite intensive efforts by Republican John McCain suggest that New Mexico has shifted from being a swing state to a Democratic state in close elections.

Oregon’s comparable shift in 2004 provides a clear example of what happens when a state shifts from being a swing state to less competitive. In the 2000 election Oregon closely resembled New Mexico in 2004 – one of the nation’s closest states in a nationally close election. Unsurprisingly, Oregon in 2004 then was among the nation’s top 13 states in campaign attention despite state polls shifting toward Democrats. But in 2008, Oregon received not a single campaign visit and just \$144,720 in campaign spending in the peak season.

This shift was caused by shifts in the state’s underlying partisanship. State partisanship is calculated based upon what a state’s results would have been in a year where the national vote was exactly even. Using this measure, Oregon shifted from 49.8% Democratic in 1996 to 50.0% Democratic in 2000 to 53.3% in 2004. (This shift explains John Kerry’s 5% victory in the state even while losing the national popular vote.)

Quite similarly, New Mexico has shifted from 49.8% Democratic partisanship in 2000 to 50.8% Democratic partisanship in 2004 to 53.9% in 2008 – even more Democratic than Oregon in 2004. (See chart, reverse side, for NM and OR trend lines.)

This Democratic trend occurred despite McCain putting a much higher campaign priority on the state than Obama. Given his national polling advantage, Obama was able to expand his victory across many states vital to McCain. To have any chance of victory, McCain identified certain “must-win states” like New Mexico and Pennsylvania that were essential for him to have an Electoral College majority – but not essential for an Obama victory.

Those different campaign calculations explain why New Mexico ranked 3rd on John McCain’s campaign attention index (which calculates per capita attention using a simple formula of campaign visits and spending in the peak season¹) while New Mexico was 8th on Obama’s attention index.

Looking forward to 2012, Republicans are unlikely to make the same calculation again. If Republicans improve their national vote share, they will start winning additional states roughly in order of partisanship. Doing so, they would likely target 12 other states before repeating a heavy campaign in New Mexico. In other words, by the time New Mexico voted Republican, its five electoral votes would give the GOP 330 electoral votes rather than 325 – nowhere close to the magic 270 mark necessary to win the presidency.

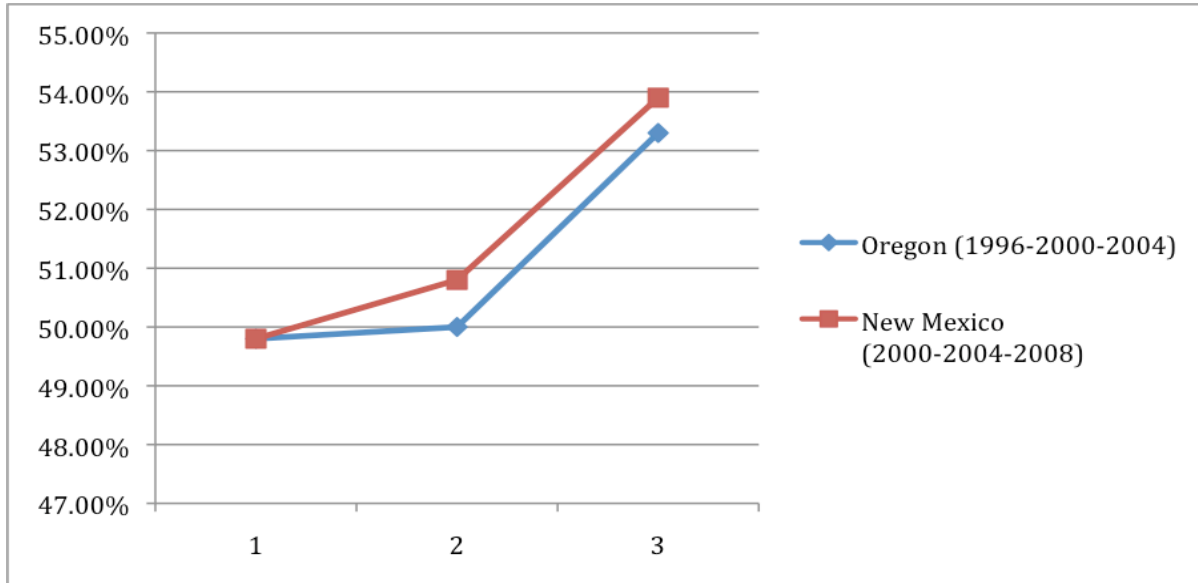
Rather than focus on New Mexico, Republicans will likely target the following states to build on John McCain’s 173 electoral votes:

- | <u>State (2008 margin) + # Electoral Votes</u> |
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| 1. North Carolina (0.33%) +15EV |
| 2. Indiana (1.02%) +11EV |
| 3. Florida (2.81%) +27EV |
| 4. Ohio (4.53%) +20EV |
| 5. Virginia (6.30%) +13EV |
| 6. Colorado (8.95%) +9EV |
| 7. Iowa (9.53%) +7EV (Enough for victory) |
| 8. New Hampshire (9.61%) +4EV |
| 9. Minnesota (10.27%) +10EV |
| 10. Pennsylvania (10.32%) +21EV |
| 11. Nevada (12.49%) +5EV |
| 12. Wisconsin (13.90%) +10EV |
| 13. New Mexico (15.13%) +5EV (330EV total) |

¹ For more information on FairVote’s Attention Index, please see our updated 2008 version of *Who Picks the President*



Comparison of Oregon Democratic Partisanship Trend 1996 – 2004 and New Mexico Trend 2000-2008



Source: Based on data from FairVote, "Presidential Election Inequality," Takoma Park, MD, 2009. (forthcoming)

