

## **Rhode Island Among Nation's Most Ignored States in '08 Election** *FairVote Analysis Finds State Received No Presidential Campaign Spending, Visits*

As part of its ongoing analysis of presidential election campaign spending and events, FairVote compiled its 2008 campaign attention index, analyzing the campaign resources per capita that were directed into each state during the peak season. Based on this analysis, Rhode Island tied for dead last, showing that its voters were completely ignored by both major party campaigns.

Upon securing their parties' nominations, both 2008 major party candidates made a simple promise – to reach out to as many voters in as many states as possible. Barack Obama hired field staff in every state, while John McCain pronounced he would engage democratic strongholds like California. But these well-intentioned goals of political inclusiveness ultimately failed, due to the reality of the current Electoral College system and its application of statewide winner-take-all rules.

Based on this anachronistic system, candidates are rewarded for funneling their resources and attention into a handful of battleground states containing a fraction of the population. Our research shows that this narrow focus ignores millions of Americans who happen to live in the two-thirds of states that are discounted: Democrats, independents, and Republicans; rural, urban, and suburban; and residents of small and big states and from every profession, ethnicity, and walk of life.

Rhode Island is no exception to this rule. Because no presidential candidate in recent history has viewed Rhode Island as a state where a Democrat might lose, it is ignored in general election campaigns. Our analysis of 2008 campaign behavior reflects Rhode Island's stark contrast with heavy battleground states. In fact, it tied for last in our analysis of the campaign attention index.<sup>1</sup> Along with 24 other states, its campaign index – which calculates campaign attention on a per capita basis – was zero. Rhode Island was among 9 states to receive no campaign ad spending and among 32 states to

receive no visits in the peak season.<sup>2</sup> In other words, Rhode Island's 1,000,000 people were among the most marginalized groups in the election.

To put this in perspective, if Rhode Island had received an amount of campaign spending and visits proportionate to its share of the national population, then the state would have seen \$742,114 in spending and a campaign visit in 2008. Visits and money are not, of course, the only barometer of political attention; they are merely indicators of the value that campaigns place on various states. The true worth is the excessive weight that battleground state voters have on shaping national campaign policy and topics. What matters most to campaigns are issues important to voters in Ohio, Florida, Virginia and Pennsylvania, far outweighing those important in states like Rhode Island, Utah, and Texas.

Rhode Island is joined in this no-attention status by nearly every other small population state. In fact, even though Ohio and the 12 smallest states both have eight and a half million eligible voters, Ohio had 62 campaign events (more than a fifth of all events), dwarfing the total number of campaign events in all small states combined.

If states representing a majority of Americans apportioned their electoral votes based on the national popular vote, as proposed by the National Popular Vote plan for president ([www.nationalpopularvote.com](http://www.nationalpopularvote.com)), then every vote and every voice in every state would be treated as equal. Recent polling data indicates that more than 70% of voters in a full range of states support such a change. Certainly it would benefit tens of millions, including the voters of Rhode Island.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on FairVote's Attention Index, please see our updated 2008 version of *Who Picks the President*

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<sup>2</sup> Visits based on *Washington Post* tracker for major party candidates and running mates. Visits not recorded by the *Washington Post* were not part of our analysis.

