

MICHIGAN
Winner: Democrats

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Michigan has long been considered both a safe haven for Democratic candidates as well as a proving ground for them to demonstrate their wide appeal across a diverse population. Comprised of predominately middle or low income voters as well as a healthy mix of urban and rural, black and white, Michigan's electorate is often a neat cross section of the Democratic coalition in effect since the departure of the Wallace Democrats. However, recent trends suggest this year may mark a turning point in the history of Michigan Presidential politics.

Recent elections, both presidential and congressional, have shown a conservative drift developing within the Michigan electorate. This seems consistent with the rest of the nation, especially when viewed in light of the failing automobile industry in the state. Workers are finding themselves without jobs making them likely to disapprove of further taxation to improve social services, often a linchpin of Democratic platforms. The last four elections have all seen Michigan award its Electoral College votes to Democrats, but by increasingly small margins. In Bill Clinton's second run, he carried the state by double digits. Al Gore managed to garner a five point win while John Kerry only took the state by three points (Leip, 2008). Add this factor in with the redistricting of the state and the subsequent takeover of Michigan's House of Representative delegation by the Republicans and there is strong evidence supporting a partisan change within the state (Trandahl, 2003, 2005; Miller, 2007).

At the same time, there are a number of indicators demonstrating continued Democratic dominance in the state. This is still the bastion of unions, the long-time standby for the Democrat Party, as well as the minority vote in cities like Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing and Flint. These population centers still serve as key Democrat strongholds; the shift is taking place in the more rural and remote regions of the state, who are less likely to see any benefit from state policies as well as are increasingly becoming more desperate for economic reform and social protections. The governor has been a Democrat for the last two terms, as well as both Senators since 2000, with one, Carl Levin, one of the longest serving and most influential Senators in Congress (CNN, 1996, 2000, 2002; Michigan Secretary of State, 2002, 2006; NY Times 2006).

The only conclusions one can draw from the most recent polling data in Michigan is nothing is certain. Democrats, historically comfortable here, have found themselves behind the Republican nominee John McCain; McCain's leads over Obama and Clinton are, however, right within the margin of error (Rasmussen, 2008). In addition, state wide polls asking simply where do you stand, Democrat or Republican, have the two parties at an almost even split, making definitive predictions difficult to stand on (SurveyUSA/Rasmussen, 2008). Finally, the tone of the campaign in Michigan has taken on a very different tenor than has been heard in years past. First, we have the presence of two highly popular celebrity candidates, both of whom inspire deep devotion and division amongst their followers. This could be hurting the Democratic vote in Michigan, with voters preferring

a candidate who is set in stone in McCain versus choosing between two candidates, one of whom will certainly be out in the cold when all is said and done (Beckel, 2008).

However, the primary factor depressing Democratic support in Michigan is just that: the state's primary, held earlier this year on January 15. The date of the primary, which was in violation of the DNC rules for primary dates, was set by Michigan's Democratic leadership of governor and legislature. As a result, the DNC has elected to strip the state of its representation at the national convention. While most experts believe there will be some sort of deal in which Michigan's delegates will be seated, there is no plan in place at this time and voters in Michigan have repeatedly expressed their displeasure at not being able to have their voices heard. In a state where individualism and activism are values held in high regard, moderate voters would likely have little trouble switching their vote to a different party if they felt the Democrats do not care about or represent their best interests (Associated Press, 2008).

In conclusion, I would make the case that Michigan will once again break for the Democratic Party candidate once the election takes place in November. This is by no means a lock. Should the Democratic nomination become so acrimonious or should the DNC never work out a compromise to seat Michigan delegates, when all this is combined with the perceived mismanagement of the state by its Democratic leadership, the state could easily swing the way of the Republicans. However, I do believe the nomination will be sorted out well before the convention and I also believe the DNC will find some way to bring the state of Michigan's delegates into the fold. Assuming these two events, the voters can likely be pushed back into the traditional alignment of unions, urban residents and minority voters carrying the state.

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