

DEMOCRATS GAINING STRENGTH IN NEW JERSEY

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In 1996 Democratic Congressman Robert Torricelli easily defeated Republican Congressman Dick Zimmer for the open U.S. Senate seat formerly held by Bill Bradley. In 1997 little known Democrat Jim McGreevey came within 25,000 out of the almost 2.5 million votes cast of defeating popular incumbent Republican Governor Christie Whitman. In 2000, Democrat Al Gore pulverized Republican candidate George W. Bush in the presidential election, while Democrat Jon Corzine defeated Republican Bob Franks for the open seat held by retiring Senator Frank Lautenberg. And now, Democrat Jim McGreevey holds a double digit lead over Republican Bret Schundler heading into the last few days of the 2001 gubernatorial race.

What's going on here? Have the Democrats had the better candidates in these races? Or, have Democrats had a better command of the issues that resonate with New Jersey voters? Or, has it been pure coincidence that Democrats have run so strongly recently? All of these are possible. But there is a more basic, more mathematical explanation that is even more compelling: there are simply more Democrats than Republicans in the Garden State, and their number is growing faster.

Yes, it's true that Republicans control both houses of the legislature and the Governor's mansion. But it was anger over Jim Florio's tax hikes at the beginning of the last decade that changed safe Democratic chambers to veto-proof Republican ones, and the margin has been shrinking ever since. And, it's worth remembering that Christie Whitman did not get a majority of votes in either of her two 25,000 vote "landslides," almost losing to first Florio and then McGreevey.

The argument here is that party identification is a primordial force in election decision-

making, and that over the past decade New Jersey has become an increasingly Democratic state. Moreover, because of the party preferences of young voters, this is likely to continue over the current decade. Given this natural Democratic advantage, only a low turnout (because Republicans are more motivated to vote than are Democrats) can stop Jim McGreevey from becoming the next Governor of New Jersey.

Let me say that my argument is not a partisan one. As director of the Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll, I'm a professional neutral. Democrats and Republicans—I love 'em both. And historically, things have gone both ways in New Jersey— we've been alternating the party of our Governor for three decades now—Cahill to Byrne to Kean to Florio to Whitman. Rather, the argument is based on an analysis of polling data we have been collecting since 1971. We have pooled all the individual statewide surveys we conducted in each of the presidential years from 1972 to the present—about 3,000 respondents each year, some more some less—to take a look at how New Jerseyans now see themselves and how this has changed over the years.

The key to understanding voting is what political scientists call “Party ID”—short for partisan identification. That is, most voters have a standing decision to support either the Democratic or Republican candidate for an office long before an election even takes place. Yes, it is true that issues matter and that candidate traits—such as charisma, leadership ability and the like—also matter. But the bald fact remains that most of the electorate relies on partisan labels to help them sort through the morass of information available to help them choose whom to support.

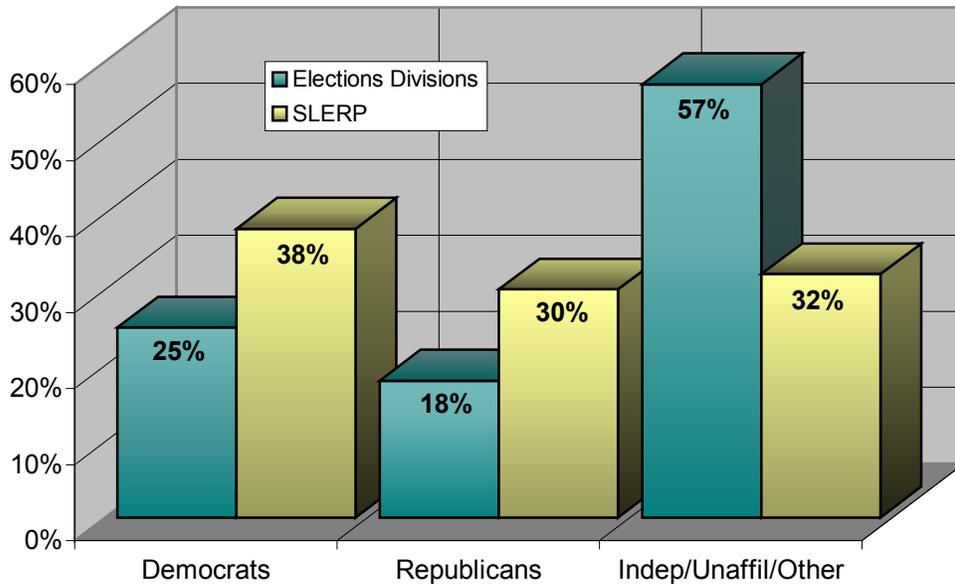
Consider the Star-Leger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll conducted in October of this year. In that survey 75 percent of the Democrats interviewed said they intended to vote for McGreevey and 73 percent of the Republicans interviewed said they intended to vote for Schundler. No other

category of voters were so polarized or clear in their vote intentions. Take blacks, the most steadfast pillar in the Democratic coalition—just 66 percent said they would vote for McGreevey. Among those opposed to abortion, just 48 percent said they would vote for Schundler and 28 percent for McGreevey in the Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll in September. In mid-October, women, who clearly tilt Democratic, embraced McGreevey over Schundler by 50 to 28 percent; while men were divided by 39 (McGreevey) to 37 (Schundler). Those thought to be Republicans by interest or class—earning over 100,000 a year—actually preferred McGreevey over Schundler by 43 to 35 percent.

Beyond race gender and income, go down the list of conventional wisdoms to religion, labor union status, education, region of the state, suburban vs urban, whatever—and you won't find anything that discriminates voters' intentions more strongly than Party ID.

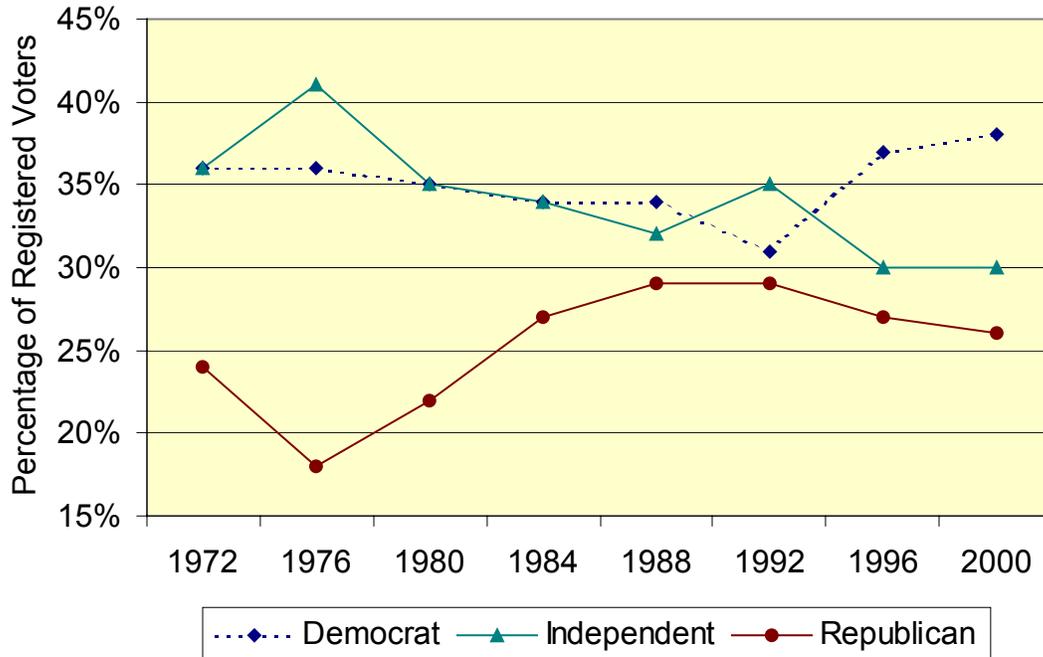
To begin with, let's explode the myth that the great majority of New Jersey voters are independent. They are not. True, the registration recorded by the state's Elections Division shows most New Jerseyans (57 percent) are "undeclared." However, undeclared is not the same as independent. In fact, when we ask registered New Jerseyans if they consider themselves to be a Democrat, Republican or independent, 38 percent check in as Democrats, 30 percent as Republicans and 32 percent as independents. And, when those who initially say they are independent are asked if they "lean" towards either party, just about one in ten registered voters remain truly independent with no partisan leaning. Looking behind the veil, most voters actually consider themselves to be a Democrat or a Republican.

**Voter Registration: "Official" Figures
vs. Respondents' Self-Description**



And New Jersey has clearly become more of a Democratic state over the last decade. At the end of Ronald Reagan's second term, partisan forces in the state were fairly evenly balanced: 34 percent Democrats, 29 percent Republicans and 32 percent independents, with the remainder identifying with some other party. And so this small gap remained when Bill Clinton was elected in 1992. By 1996, however, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by 10 percentage points—37 to 27 percent, and by 2000 the margin had drifted even further out to 12 points—38 to 26 percent. This is a significant built-in Democratic advantage going into any statewide election. If partisan voters were equally loyal and turned out in similar numbers, and independents split down the middle, the Democrats would win every time.

Growth of Democrats



Moreover, when we look at the composition of the two parties by age, it is likely that the Democratic advantage will continue through the current decade. Democrats are younger, and younger people are decidedly Democratic. Twenty-eight percent of registered Republicans compared to 22 percent of Democrats are over 65, and will be voting less frequently in the years ahead. Just 10 percent of Republicans and 16 percent of Democrats are under 30, and their voting rate should increase in the years ahead.

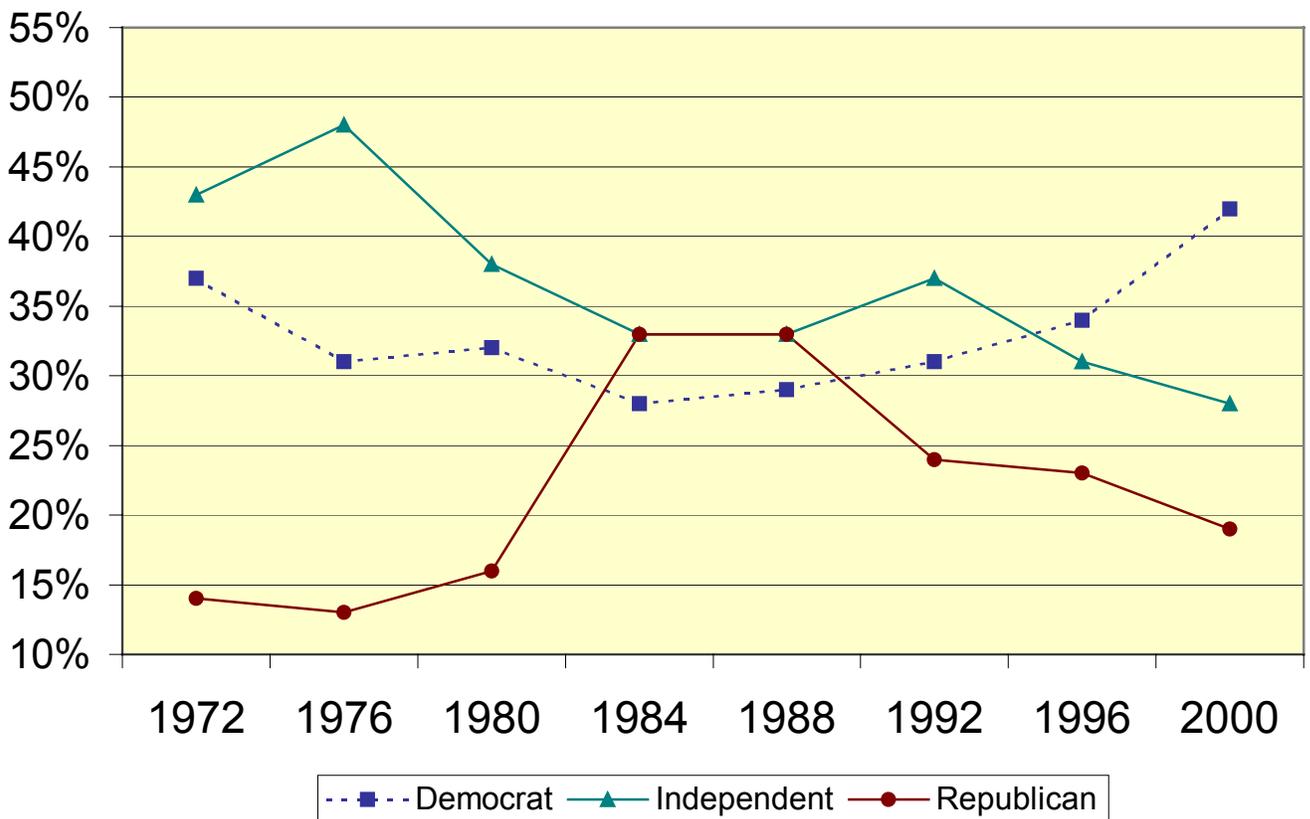
Even more ominous for the GOP is the tremendous advantage that Democrats have among the youngest age cohort. At the end of the Reagan presidency in 1988, more of those registered voters under 30 actually claimed Republican than Democratic allegiance by a margin of 33 to 29 percent. Bill Clinton's campaign and election in 1992 changed that landscape, giving

Democrats a 31 to 24 percent advantage. By the end of the Clinton presidency in 2000

Democratic identifiers outnumbered Republicans by a margin of better than two-to-one (42 to 19 percent).

Calls to patriotism in the aftermath of the national tragedy of September 11, during a Republican administration, could of course change this. But should this not happen, and as younger people hold to their party allegiance and vote in increasing numbers as they age, the Democratic advantage would be expected to increase over the current decade.

Age and Partisanship: 18 to 29-year-olds



What is the Republican hope this November and next year when Senator Torricelli stands

for reelection? Low turnout. Exit polls have consistently shown that Republicans vote in greater numbers than Democrats. Presidential elections garner a turnout of about three-quarters of registered voters, this drops to between 55 and 60 percent in gubernatorial and Senatorial elections, and to under half of all registered voters in state Senate and Assembly contests. And, the smaller the electorate, the more Republican it is. In 2000 the electorate was composed of 40 percent Democrats, 30 percent Republicans and 30 percent independents. In fact, Jon Corzine actually lost the independent vote, but was able to squeak by because there were so many more Democrats than Republicans going to the polls. The Democratic advantage has been much less in the last three gubernatorial elections: 7 percentage points in 1989, 1 point in 1993 and 4 points in 1997. Eagleton's model of the likely electorate in mid October projected a Democratic advantage of 7 percentage points, if turnout is a normal 55 to 60 percent. Under this scenario, McGreevey wins easily. Should turnout drop to a historically low 50 percent or less—unlikely, but not out of the question given the small number of New Jerseyans who tell us they are following the election closely due to the focus on Anthrax and Afghanistan—the Republicans have a chance to steal the election as Democrats sleep.

But unless the Republicans can do something they run the risk of watching New Jersey drift from a 25 year history of being competitive to a state with a decidedly Democratic tilt on a statewide level.