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Rove: Sifting the Numbers for a Winner

A crucial element: the mix of Democrats and Republicans who show up this election.

By [KARL ROVE](#)

It comes down to numbers. And in the final days of this presidential race, from polling data to early voting, they favor Mitt Romney.

He maintains a small but persistent polling edge. As of yesterday afternoon, there had been 31 national surveys in the previous seven days. Mr. Romney led in 19, President Obama in seven, and five were tied. Mr. Romney averaged 48.4%; Mr. Obama, 47.2%. The GOP challenger was at or above 50% in 10 polls, Mr. Obama in none.

The number that may matter the most is Mr. Obama's 47.2% share. As the incumbent, he's likely to find that number going into Election Day is a percentage point or so below what he gets.

For example, in 2004 President George W. Bush had 49% in the final Gallup likely-voter track; he received 50.7% on Election Day. In 1996, President Clinton was at 48% in the last Gallup; he got 49.2% at the polls. And in 1992, President George H.W. Bush was at 37% in the closing Gallup; he collected 37.5% in the balloting.



Associated Press

One potentially dispositive question is what mix of Republicans and Democrats will show up this election. On Friday last week, Gallup hinted at the partisan makeup of the 2012 electorate with a small chart buried at the end of its daily tracking report. Based on all its October polling, Gallup suggested that this year's turnout might be 36% Republican to 35% Democratic, compared with 39% Democratic and 29% Republican in 2008, and 39% Republican and 37% Democratic in 2004. If accurate, this would be real trouble for Mr. Obama, since Mr. Romney has consistently led among independents in most October surveys.

Gallup delivered some additional bad news to Mr. Obama on early voting. Through Sunday, 15% of those surveyed said they had already cast a ballot either in person or absentee. They broke for Mr. Romney, 52% to 46%. The 63% who said they planned to vote on Election Day similarly supported Mr. Romney, 51% to 45%.

Furthermore, in battleground states, the edge in early and absentee vote turnout that propelled Democrats to victory in 2008 has clearly been eroded, cut in half according to a Republican National Committee summary.

But doesn't it all come down to the all-important Buckeye State? Here, too, the early voting news isn't encouraging for the president.

Adrian Gray, who oversaw the Bush 2004 voter-contact operation and is now a policy analyst for a New York investment firm, makes the point that as of Tuesday, 530,813 Ohio Democrats had voted early or had requested or cast an absentee

ballot. That's down 181,275 from four years ago. But 448,357 Ohio Republicans had voted early or had requested or cast an absentee ballot, up 75,858 from the last presidential election.

That 257,133-vote swing almost wipes out Mr. Obama's 2008 Ohio victory margin of 262,224. Since most observers expect Republicans to win Election Day turnout, these early vote numbers point toward a Romney victory in Ohio. They are also evidence that Scott Jennings, my former White House colleague and now Romney Ohio campaign director, was accurate when he told me that the Buckeye GOP effort is larger than the massive Bush 2004 get-out-the-vote operation.

Democrats explain away those numbers by saying that they are turning out new young Ohio voters. But I asked Kelly Nallen, the American Crossroads data maven, about this. She points out that there are 12,612 GOP "millennials" (voters aged 18-29) who've voted early compared with 9,501 Democratic millennials.

Are Democrats bringing out episodic voters who might not otherwise turn out? Not according to Ms. Nallen. She says that about 90% of each party's early voters so far had also voted in three of the past four Ohio elections. Democrats also suggest they are bringing Obama-leaning independents to polls. But since Mr. Romney has led among independents in nine of the 13 Ohio polls conducted since the first debate, the likelihood is that the GOP is doing as good a job in turning out their independent supporters as Democrats are in turning out theirs.

Desperate Democrats are now hanging their hopes on a new Quinnipiac University/New York Times/CBS News poll showing the president with a five-point Ohio lead. But that survey gives Democrats a +8 advantage in turnout, the same advantage Democrats had in 2008. That assumption is, to put it gently, absurd.

In addition to the data, the anecdotal and intangible evidence—from crowd sizes to each side's closing arguments—give the sense that the odds favor Mr. Romney. They do. My prediction: Sometime after the cock crows on the morning of Nov. 7, Mitt Romney will be declared America's 45th president. Let's call it 51%-48%, with Mr. Romney carrying at least 279 Electoral College votes, probably more.

Mr. Rove, a former deputy chief of staff to President George W. Bush, helped organize the political action committee American Crossroads.