

African American Votes Decline in Democratic Party Primaries

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While two district attorneys are turned away in response to racist police killings

Recent electoral data indicates that the number of African American voters going to the polls in the Democratic primaries and caucuses has taken a precipitous decline since 2008 when Barack Obama was elected.

Despite the much championed reliance on the African American electorate by the Clinton campaign, this trend of declining participation could prove to be an ominous sign for the Democrats in the upcoming general elections in November.

The number of African-Americans who voted in the March 15 primaries declined drastically by an estimated 40 percent in Ohio, 38 percent in Florida and 34 percent in North Carolina compared with the turnout in the 2008 Democratic primary when Obama was on the ballot. (New York Post, March 17)

The super PAC called Black Votes Matter founded by Charlie King has warned that even though primary turnouts are normally less than general elections, the Democratic Party must not assume that it will be able to mobilize the necessary electoral support to ensure a Clinton victory in November if she is able to maintain her lead in delegates.



“It will be very hard for the Hillary campaign alone to have a message that excites Reagan Democrats and the 4 million new Black Barack Obama voters to come out and vote. That is why Donald Trump poses a real challenge,” King said. “And if that is not corrected, a number of states like Ohio, Florida and Virginia can turn to Republican-leaning states . . . Trump could become president.”

King, who is based in New York and has served as a Democratic Party strategist, told the New York Times that “No one has captured the real dilemma in the 2016 election. It’s not a

question of whether Hillary Clinton would get 90 percent of the black vote. The question is: 90 percent of what?" (New York Times, March 3)

Results from the 2012 presidential elections indicate that the African American voters contributed significantly to the Obama campaign winning slim margins of victory over Republican candidate Mitt Romney in Florida (50-49 percent), Ohio (50-48), Virginia (51-48) and Pennsylvania (52-47). Higher turnouts among African Americans are presumed to have made the difference in North Carolina where a Democratic nominee won the state for the first time in decades.

The New York Times noted that "Even Mrs. Clinton's strong victory in South Carolina, which was celebrated for her dominance among African-American voters, obscured a decline in Black turnout of about 40 percent." (March 3)

Nonetheless, supporters of Clinton suggests that the prospects of a Trump victory, if he is nominated by the Republican Party at their upcoming Cleveland convention, will inspire traditional Democratic constituencies to show up in great numbers in November. A fundraiser for the Clinton campaign Robert Zimmerman said "There will be a spiritual fervor for Democrats to come out and vote." (New York Post, March 17)

Larger Votes for Sanders Among African Americans

At the same time greater numbers of African Americans and other oppressed groups are voting for Sanders illustrating the lack of enthusiasm for the Clinton campaign.

This was reflected in the exit poll results for Ohio, Illinois and Missouri, where African American support for Sanders rivaled that in Michigan. Hillary Clinton continued to win the majority of African American votes. Nonetheless, Sanders increased his percentage of African American votes in these states compared to his performance in the South.

Exit polls say Sanders was not able to exceed 20 percent of the Black voter share in southern states which made up the old Confederacy. Nevertheless, exit poll data shows he won 28 percent of the African American vote in Michigan and Ohio, 29 percent in Illinois, and 32 percent in Missouri. (ajc.com, March 17)

In Michigan where Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders staged an upset against Hillary Clinton, voter turnout exceeded expectations. Some 2.5 million cast ballots which was the largest level of participation since 1972 when George Wallace won the Democratic primary over the issue of cross-district busing.

However, more Republicans turned out than Democrats. A total of 1,322,742 voters participated in the Republican primary, giving Donald Trump a victory, while 1,193,169 voted in the Democratic primary. (mlive.com, March 9)

Lower Turnout of Democratic Voters in General

This level of participation is reflected throughout the entire Democratic electoral base where the former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is the favorite candidate among the party hierarchy and its backers on Wall Street.

According to the New York Times, "In Nevada, exit polls suggested that Hispanic voters —

who have helped push the once deeply Republican state toward Democrats in national elections — voted in significantly lower numbers than in 2008. In Iowa, where Mrs. Clinton barely won after a hotly fought battle with Sanders, exit polls suggested that turnout for voters under the age of 30 dropped by roughly 40 percent from 2008.” (March 3)

The closeness of the primary results in Illinois, Clinton’s home state, and neighboring Missouri, portends much for the potential outcome of the general elections as it relates to the degree of political interests in supporting Clinton. Although the Democratic Party leaders and elected officials speak with confidence leading toward the convention in Philadelphia during late July, there are still 31 more primaries and caucuses between March 22 and June 14.

Despite the suggestions that Clinton is well on her way to clinching the nomination, she only leads Sanders by 317 delegates, (1,147 to Sanders’ 830). Illustrating the undemocratic character of the selection process for nominees, there are 712 super delegates who have already pledged their allegiance to Clinton giving her the advantage. These super delegates can ostensibly switch sides to Sanders if he is able to overcome Clinton in the upcoming elections.

If Trump is selected as the nominee for the Republicans and the Democratic electoral base is not mobilized in support of the potential candidacy of Clinton, the probability for an extreme right-wing presidency exists.

Both Clinton and Trump represent ruling class interests from Wall Street and the Pentagon.

Either way the nationally oppressed and working people in general will be faced with the necessity of building an independent political movement to challenge and defeat the inevitable programs of economic austerity, state repression and imperialist militarism.

Overall there is a greater turnout in the primaries and caucuses among Republicans, largely due to the Trump campaign, than what exists among the Democratic electorate. The San Diego Union Tribune noted in a March 14 article, including graphs of electoral participation in various states, that “Republican voters have been turning out in record numbers in the primary contests held so far. Democrats on the other hand are showing up in lower numbers than they did in 2008, the last open election.”

African American Voters Defeat District Attorneys in Chicago and Cleveland

Another notable occurrence in the recent primary elections in Ohio and Illinois was the voting out of office of two county prosecutors in Chicago (Cook) and Cleveland (Cuyahoga). These electoral victories stemmed from two high-profile police killings of Laquan McDonald in Chicago and Tamir Rice in Cleveland during 2014.

In Chicago, Anita Alvarez was the target of mass demonstrations when it was revealed that police had attempted to cover up the killing of MacDonald, who was shot 16 times after walking away from the cops in Chicago. Rice, a 12-year-old African American youth, was shot down while playing with a toy gun in a public park in Cleveland.

There has been an indictment of one of the Chicago police officers involved in McDonald’s killing. However, no one has been held accountable in the shooting death of Tamir Rice.

Alvarez lost to Kim Foxx, a former assistant state’s attorney, and incumbent Tim McGinty

lost to challenger Michael O'Malley, a former Cuyahoga County assistant prosecutor.

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