

13 March 2008

### **A Problem with Seating the Florida and Michigan Delegates Based on Existing Primary Results**

Among the proposed alternatives for seating the delegates from Florida and Michigan is to use the results of the primaries that already happened, based on the argument that doing so would avoid disenfranchising the 1.7 million Floridians and 600,000 Michiganders who already voted. However, doing so would disenfranchise many people from Florida and Michigan who did not vote in the earlier primaries because they did not expect their delegates would be seated at the convention. Based on a statistical comparison with turnout in other states' primaries, it appears that roughly two million more people would have voted in Florida and Michigan had they expected their delegates to be seated.

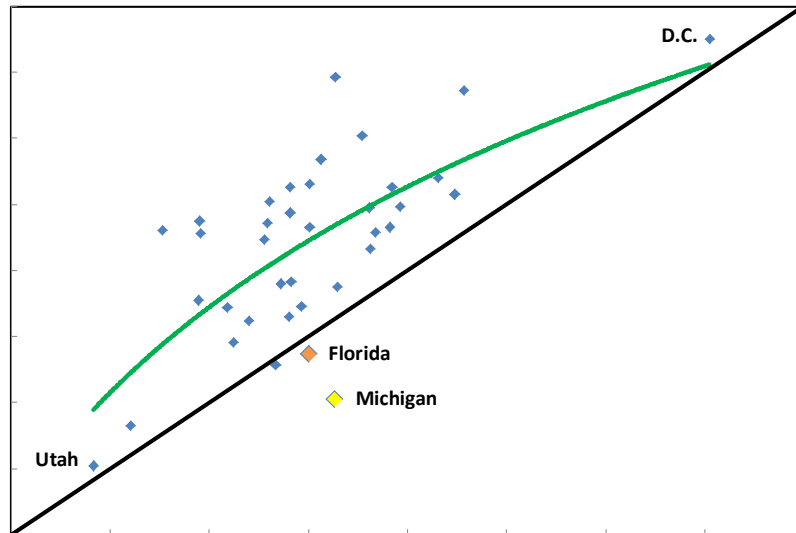
Although the Democratic turnout rate was impressive in Florida and Michigan, it was not nearly as high as it has been in other primaries so far. Of the first 37 states that have held either a primary or caucus for both Republicans and Democrats, only six states have had a larger turnout for Republicans than for Democrats: Florida and Michigan, plus heavily Republican Alaska, Alabama, and Utah, as well as Arizona, where many voters turned out to support home state favorite John McCain. In many other states, Democratic voters outnumbered Republican voters by at least 3 to 2. Simply stated, in states where Democratic voters expected their delegates to count and the candidates spent time and money campaigning, Democratic turnout has vastly exceeded Republican turnout. The fact that Republicans outnumbered Democrats in Florida and Michigan suggests that many would-be Democratic voters in those states chose not to vote at a much higher rate than in other states.

In order to quantify the size of the under-vote, we can compare Democratic turnout relative to Republican turnout in the 2008 primaries with the Democratic turnout relative to the Republican turnout in the 2004 presidential election. The following chart shows such a comparison for states that held elections for both parties prior to March 4<sup>th</sup>. For example, in Washington D.C. (upper right), more than 90% of voters voted for John Kerry in 2004 and more than 90% of voters voted in the Democratic primary. Analogously, in Utah (lower left), about 30% of voters voted for Kerry in 2004 and about 30% voted in the Democratic primary. The strong upward sloping flow of the data points confirms that there is a strong positive relationship between Kerry's share of the vote in 2004 and the relative Democratic primary turnout percentage in 2008, as logically would be expected.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gregory P. Nini is an assistant professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Hurowitz is the president of Democratic Courage PAC, the author of *Fear and Courage in the Democratic Party*, and a frequent contributor to major magazines and newspapers.



The dotted black line cuts the picture in half, with data points lying above the line being states where the Democratic share in the 2008 primaries has been higher than in the 2004 election. Only three states lie below the line: Arizona (small diamond to the left of Florida), Florida (orange), and Michigan (gold). Again, the evidence suggests that Democratic voters did not turn out in Florida and Michigan as strongly as they did in the other states.

The solid green curve is an estimate of the relationship between the Democratic share in 2008 and the Democratic share in 2004, based on the data shown in the chart. We can use this relationship to estimate what Democratic turnout in Florida and Michigan would have been if voters behaved as they did in other states. A reasonable estimate for what Democratic turnout would have been for both Florida and Michigan is somewhere between 55% and 70% of the total turnout. As a conservative estimate, I assume that Democratic voters would have been 60% of the total in both Florida and Michigan, about 10 percentage points higher than the Democratic share in 2004.

This assumption means that Democratic primary voters would have outnumbered Republican primary voters by 3 to 2. With 1.9 million Republican voters in FL and 870,000 Republican voters in MI, Democratic voters should have numbered 2.85 million and 1.305 million in Florida and Michigan, respectively. Given actual numbers of 1.7 million and 590,000, an estimated 1.15 million Floridians and 715,000 Michiganders stayed home on primary day, who otherwise would have voted had they behaved like voters in other states.

Any suggestion to seat the Florida and Michigan delegates based on the existing primaries must consider the expectations of voters in those states at the time of the primary. Reasonable people would not have expected the nomination process to remain close into the middle of March and could not have foreseen how important their votes would become. The evidence suggests that many people in Florida and Michigan, likely about 2 million in total, did not participate in their primaries but likely would have had they expected their vote to count as much as voters in other states.