

Candidates In The Spotlight: The Presidential Race In The Upper Midwest

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INTRODUCTION

The outcome of the 2004 presidential election will be determined in a dozen or so battleground states including three key states in the Upper Midwest: Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

The Democratic Party has won all three Upper Midwest states during the last four presidential campaigns – 2000, 1996, 1992, and 1988. John Kerry is counting on winning these traditional Democratic states, which represent 27 Electoral College votes (the same as Florida).

Kerry currently holds narrow leads in most Iowa and Minnesota polls, while volatile polling results in Wisconsin do not paint a clear frontrunner.

That all three states are toss-ups is no comfort to Kerry who is counting on these states and faces three hurdles in winning them in 2004. First, third party success in winning even a few percentage points may affect the outcome. In the 2000 presidential election, third party candidates led by Green Party candidate Ralph Nader averaged 4.8% of the vote in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, with an additional 2.1% third party support coming in neighboring South Dakota. The Libertarian candidate in the Wisconsin gubernatorial race drew 10.5 percent and helped tilt the election in favor of Democrat Jim Doyle. In 2004, the Independent ticket of Ralph Nader and Peter Camejo and the Libertarian Party's Michael Badnarik may also affect the presidential races.

Second, candidate Bush came within 2 percentage points or less of winning in all three states in 2000, partly because Nader drained votes from Gore.

Third, the strength of the Republican Party is growing in all three states. This is most apparent in state elections during the past dozen years, where the GOP has seized control over the state houses in all 3 states and the state senates in 2 of the 3 states (the one exception – Minnesota – has seen a once imposing Democratic advantage dwindle to fewer than a handful of seats).

Although closely fought contests are likely in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, South Dakota appears primed to continue its track record of routinely voting for Republican presidential candidates.

STATE-BY-STATE OVERVIEW

MINNESOTA

Minnesota has voted Democratic in 10 of the last 11 presidential elections, including each of the last seven. Five of these ten Democratic victories were landslides, with a winning margin of more than 10 points.

In the 2000 election, however, Al Gore edged out George W. Bush by 2 percentage points or 57,900 votes. Green Party candidate Ralph Nader received a significant 5.2% of the vote.

Third parties have historically been given a warm reception by Minnesota voters, receiving at least 4.5% of the presidential vote in 5 of the last 9 elections. Third party candidates have also prospered in gubernatorial elections as witnessed by Jesse Ventura’s win in 1998 and by former Congressman Tim Penny’s impressive 16-point showing in 2002.

Outlook: Minnesota tends to vote for Democratic nominees and John Kerry is narrowly leading George W. Bush in current polls, but Republicans have made strong gains in state elections and a strong showing for Ralph Nader, if he is on the ballot in the state, could further threaten Kerry’s chances of victory in the Gopher state.

Minnesota Presidential Election Results, 1960-2000						
Year	Winner	Loser	% Democrat	% Republican	% Leading Third Party	% Other Third Party
2000	Al Gore	George W. Bush	47.9	45.5	5.2 (a)	1.4
1996	William Clinton	Robert Dole	51.1	35.0	11.8 (b)	2.2
1992	William Clinton	George Bush	43.5	31.9	24.0 (c)	0.7
1988	Michael Dukakis	George Bush	52.9	45.9	--	1.2
1984	Walter Mondale	Ronald Reagan	49.7	49.5	--	0.7
1980	Jimmy Carter	Ronald Reagan	46.5	42.6	8.5 (d)	2.4
1976	Jimmy Carter	Gerald Ford	54.9	42.0	--	3.1
1972	Richard Nixon	George McGovern	46.1	51.6	--	2.4
1968	Hubert Humphrey	Richard Nixon	54.0	41.5	4.3 (e)	0.2
1964	Lyndon Johnson	Barry Goldwater	63.8	36.0	--	0.2
1960	John F. Kennedy	Richard Nixon	50.6	49.2	--	0.3
a. Green Party (Ralph Nader); b. Reform Party (Ross Perot); c. Independent (Ross Perot); d. Independent (John Anderson); e. American Independent Party (George Wallace).						
Source: Data compiled from Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives						

IOWA

Iowa has supported the Republican presidential nominee in 6 of 11 presidential elections since 1960, but has voted for the Democrat in each of the last four.

Traditionally, Iowa has not been a classic “battleground state” in the race for president: 7 of these 11 races have been decided by more than 10 points: 1964, 1988, and 1996 for the Democrats; 1960, 1968, 1972, and 1980 for the Republicans.

Only two presidential elections since 1960 have been decided by less than 5 points. However, one of these close races was in 2000, and it was *very* close: Al Gore defeated George W. Bush by a scant margin of 4,130 votes.

Outlook: Recent polling shows Senator Kerry ahead of President Bush by just single digits in Iowa, indicating that the Hawkeye State will remain one of the key toss-up states in the 2004 Election.

Iowa Presidential Election Results, 1960-2000						
Year	Winner	Loser	% Democrat	% Republican	% Leading Third Party	% Other Third Party
2000	Al Gore	George W. Bush	48.5	48.2	2.2 (a)	1.0
1996	William Clinton	Robert Dole	50.3	39.9	8.5 (b)	1.3
1992	William Clinton	George Bush	43.3	37.3	18.7 (c)	0.7
1988	Michael Dukakis	George Bush	54.7	44.5	--	0.8
1984	Ronald Reagan	Walter Mondale	45.9	53.3	--	0.8
1980	Ronald Reagan	Jimmy Carter	38.6	51.3	8.8 (d)	1.3
1976	Gerald Ford	Jimmy Carter	48.5	49.5	--	2.1
1972	Richard Nixon	George McGovern	40.5	57.6	--	1.9
1968	Richard Nixon	Hubert Humphrey	40.8	53.0	5.7 (e)	0.5
1964	Lyndon Johnson	Barry Goldwater	61.9	37.9	--	0.2
1960	Richard Nixon	John F. Kennedy	43.2	56.7	--	0.1
a. Green Party (Ralph Nader); b. Reform Party (Ross Perot); c. Independent (Ross Perot); d. Independent (John Anderson); e. American Independent Party (George Wallace).						
Source: Data compiled from Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives						

WISCONSIN

Wisconsin has voted for the Democratic nominee in 6 of the last 11 presidential elections, including each of the last four. However, Wisconsin is a toss-up state.

Historically, presidential races in Wisconsin have been narrowly won. Seven of the last eleven presidential elections have been decided by less than 5 points (1960, 1968, 1976, 1980, 1988, 1992, and 2000), and only two have been decided by more than 10 points (1964 and 1996 – both Democratic victories).

Most importantly, the 2000 election was decided by less than 1 point (5,396 votes) in favor of Gore.

Outlook: Current polls in Wisconsin have been extremely volatile in recent months with Bush and Kerry unable to build a consistent advantage over the other. This

indicates Wisconsin will certainly be one of the dozen toss-up states across the country in the 2004 election.

Wisconsin Presidential Election Results, 1960-2000						
Year	Winner	Loser	% Democrat	% Republican	% Leading Third Party	% Other Third Party
2000	Al Gore	George W. Bush	47.8	47.6	3.6 (a)	0.9
1996	William Clinton	Robert Dole	48.8	38.5	10.4 (b)	2.4
1992	William Clinton	George Bush	41.1	36.8	21.5 (c)	0.6
1988	Michael Dukakis	George Bush	51.4	47.8	--	0.8
1984	Ronald Reagan	Walter Mondale	45.0	54.2	--	0.8
1980	Ronald Reagan	Jimmy Carter	43.2	47.9	7.1 (d)	1.9
1976	Jimmy Carter	Gerald Ford	49.5	47.8	--	2.8
1972	Richard Nixon	George McGovern	43.7	53.4	2.6 (e)	0.3
1968	Richard Nixon	Hubert Humphrey	44.3	47.9	7.6 (f)	0.3
1964	Lyndon Johnson	Barry Goldwater	62.1	37.7	--	0.2
1960	Richard Nixon	John F. Kennedy	48.0	51.8	--	0.2

a. Green Party (Ralph Nader); b. Reform Party (Ross Perot); c. Independent (Ross Perot); d. Independent (John Anderson); e. American Independent Party (John Schmitz); f. American Independent Party (George Wallace).

Source: Data compiled from Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota has voted for the Republican Party nominee in 10 of the last 11 presidential elections, including each of the last nine. Five of these Republican victories have been landslides – with a winning margin of more than 10 points (and more than 20 points in three elections).

In only 3 of these 10 races were Democratic nominees competitive within 5 points of the Republican victor (in 1976, 1992, and 1996). Two of those competitive showings resulted from Ross Perot's third party candidacy, which drained conservative or independent voters from the GOP.

Most importantly, South Dakotans like George W. Bush – he won South Dakota by more than 22 points in 2000.

Outlook: Based on historical election trends and current state polling, South Dakota's 3 electoral votes are quite likely to end up in the Republican column in this year's presidential race.

South Dakota Presidential Election Results, 1960-2000						
Year	Winner	Loser	% Democrat	% Republican	% Leading Third Party	% Other Third Party
2000	George W. Bush	Al Gore	37.6	60.3	--	2.1
1996	Robert Dole	William Clinton	43.0	46.5	9.7 (a)	0.8
1992	George Bush	William Clinton	37.1	40.7	21.8 (b)	0.4
1988	George Bush	Michael Dukakis	46.5	52.8	--	0.6
1984	Ronald Reagan	Walter Mondale	36.5	63.0	--	0.5
1980	Ronald Reagan	Jimmy Carter	31.7	60.5	6.5 (c)	1.3
1976	Gerald Ford	Jimmy Carter	48.9	50.4	--	0.7
1972	Richard Nixon	George McGovern	45.5	54.2	--	0.3
1968	Richard Nixon	Hubert Humphrey	42.0	53.3	4.8 (d)	0.0
1964	Lyndon Johnson	Barry Goldwater	55.6	44.4	--	0.0
1960	Richard Nixon	John F. Kennedy	41.8	58.2	--	0.0
<p>a. Reform Party (Ross Perot); b. Independent (Ross Perot); c. Independent (John Anderson); d. American Independent Party (George Wallace)</p>						
<p>Source: Data compiled from Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives</p>						