

OUT OF POWER

The Democratic Party Faces a Voter Registration Crisis

The party is bleeding support beyond the ballot box, a new analysis shows.

Florida has had a significant shift of registered voters in the Republican direction, a remarkable inversion that explains the state's transformation from a perennial battleground to the new symbol of red America. Scott McIntyre for The New York Times



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By **Shane Goldmacher** With **Jonah Smith**

Shane Goldmacher is a national political correspondent covering the rebuilding efforts of the Democratic Party. Jonah Smith is a data journalist focused on voter registration and election turnout data.

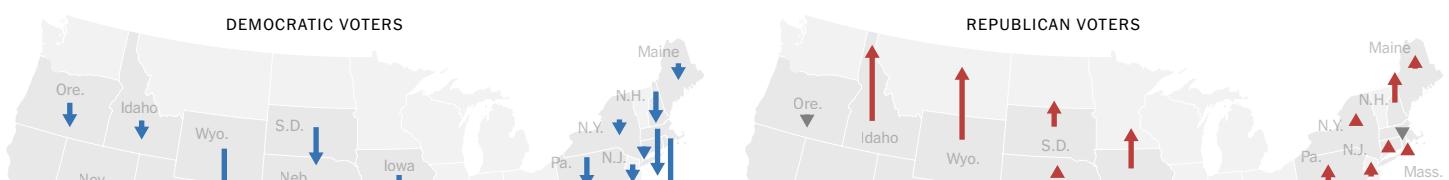
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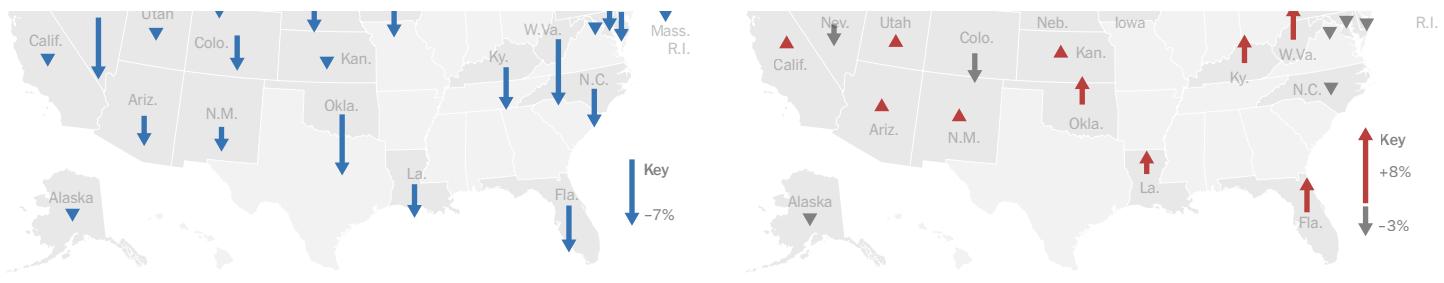
The Democratic Party is hemorrhaging voters long before they even go to the polls.

Of the 30 states that track voter registration by political party, Democrats lost ground to Republicans in every single one between the 2020 and 2024 elections — and often by a lot.

That four-year swing toward the Republicans adds up to 4.5 million voters, a deep political hole that could take years for Democrats to climb out from.

Change in share of registered voters, 2020-24





The stampede away from the Democratic Party is occurring in battleground states, the bluest states and the reddest states, too, according to a new analysis of voter registration data by The New York Times. The analysis used voter registration data compiled by L2, a nonpartisan data firm.

Few measurements reflect the luster of a political party's brand more clearly than the choice by voters to identify with it — whether they register on a clipboard in a supermarket parking lot, at the Department of Motor Vehicles or in the comfort of their own home.

And fewer and fewer Americans are choosing to be Democrats.

In fact, for the first time since 2018, more new voters nationwide chose to be Republicans than Democrats last year.

All told, Democrats lost about 2.1 million registered voters between the 2020 and 2024 elections in the 30 states, along with Washington, D.C., that allow people to register with a political party. (In the remaining 20 states, voters do not register with a political party.) Republicans gained 2.4 million.

There are still more Democrats registered nationwide than Republicans, partly because of big blue states like California allow people to register by party, while red states like Texas do not. But the trajectory is troublesome for Democrats, and there are growing tensions over what to do about it.

Democrats went from nearly an 11-percentage-point edge over Republicans on Election Day 2020 in those places with partisan registration, to just over a 6-percentage-point edge in 2024.

That swing helps to explain President Trump's success last year, when he won the popular vote for the first time, swept the swing states and roared back to the White House.

"I don't want to say, 'The death cycle of the Democratic Party,' but there seems to be no end to this," said Michael Pruser, who tracks voter registration closely as the director of data science for Decision Desk HQ, an election-analysis site. "There is no silver lining or cavalry coming across the hill. This is month after month, year after year."

The shifts also previewed Democratic weaknesses in 2024. The party saw some of its steepest declines in registration among men and younger voters, the Times analysis found — two constituencies that swung sharply toward Mr. Trump.

All four presidential battleground states covered by the Times analysis — Arizona, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania — showed significant Democratic erosion.

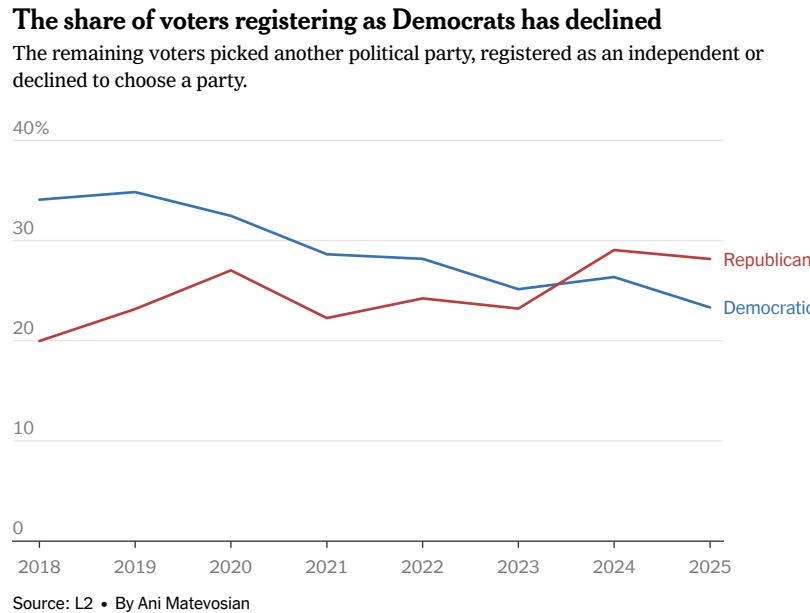
In North Carolina, Republicans erased roughly 95 percent of the registration advantage that Democrats held in the fall of 2020, according to state records as of this summer. In Nevada, Democrats suffered the steepest percentage-point plunge of any state but West Virginia between 2020 and 2024. The share of voters choosing to register with either party went down after the state adopted an automatic voter registration system, but the Democratic decline allowed Republicans to briefly surpass Democrats earlier this year.

For many years, more and more voters have been registering as independents or unaffiliated, sapping both parties' rolls. More recently, however, that growth has come mostly at the expense of Democrats.

Top Democratic strategists say the party's nationwide registration decline is a hidden-in-plain-sight crisis that must be reversed before the 2028 election.

Consider this: In 2018, Democrats accounted for 34 percent of new voter registrations nationwide, while Republicans were only 20 percent. Yet by 2024, Republicans had overtaken Democrats among new registrants.

In six years, the G.O.P.'s share rose by 9 percentage points; the Democratic share dropped nearly 8 points.



The Times compiled registration data from L2 and compared it to state records across the country to show the scope of the registration decline for Democrats, and interviewed more than two dozen party strategists and officials involved in registration efforts.

"We fell asleep at the switch," said Maria Cardona, a veteran party strategist and longtime member of the Democratic National Committee.

But Democrats are divided and flummoxed over what to do.

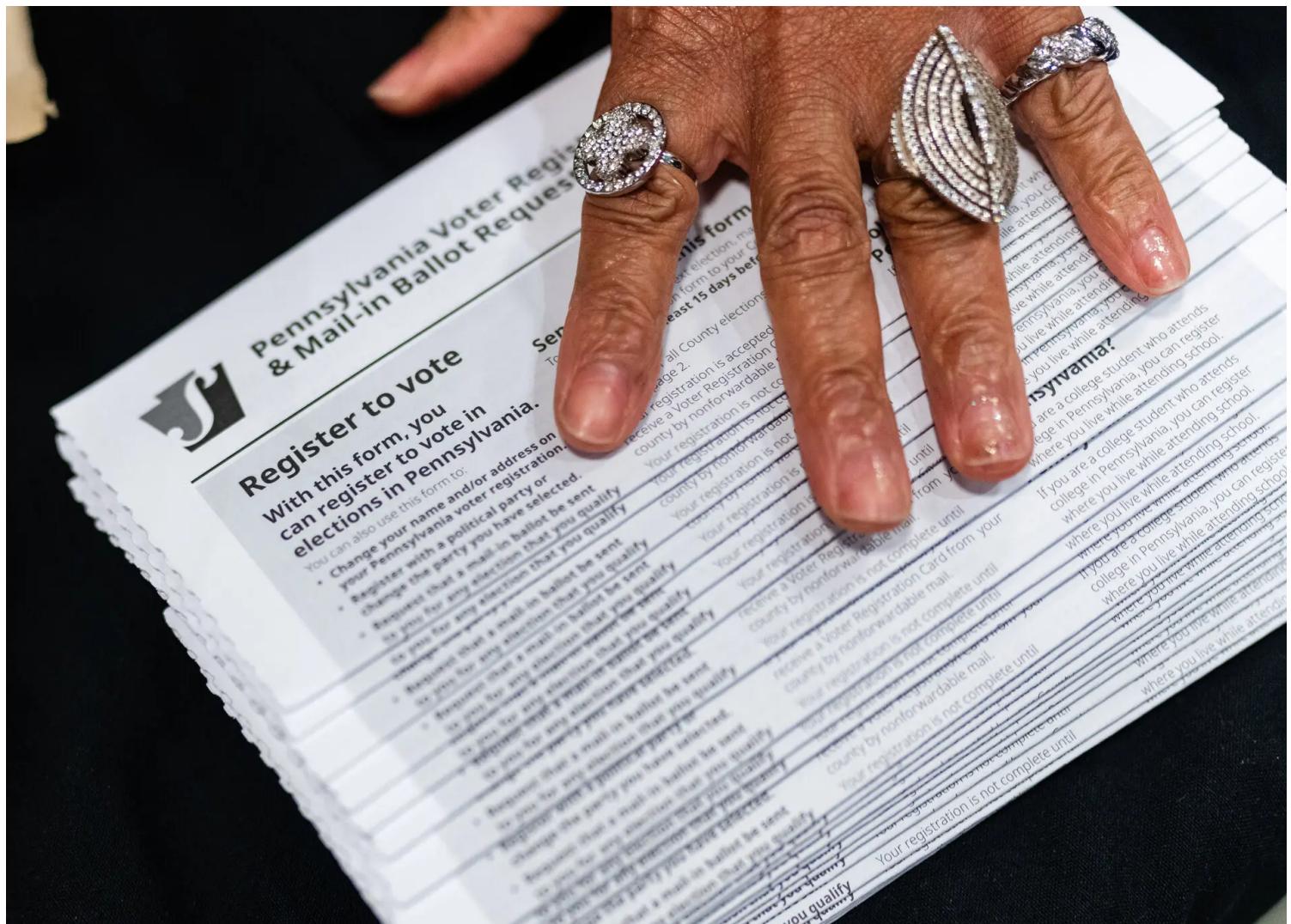
For years, the left has relied on a sprawling network of nonprofits — which solicit donations from people whose identities they need not disclose — to register Black, Latino and younger voters. Though the groups are technically nonpartisan, the underlying assumption has been that most new voters registering would vote Democratic.

Mr. Trump upended that calculation with the inroads he made with working-class nonwhite voters.

"You can't just register a young Latino or a young Black voter and assume that they're going to know that it's Democrats that have the best policies," Ms. Cardona said.

Behind the scenes, a fierce fight is underway over how Democrats should address their sagging voter registration numbers and which groups should receive funding to do the work. It's a battle with hundreds of millions of dollars at stake, pitting partisans against philanthropists and some of the Democratic Party's most important constituencies against one another.

Grim milestones of decline



Democrats held a roughly 517,310 registration advantage among active voters in Pennsylvania in November 2020, according to state records, but that edge dwindled to 58,530 voters this summer. Eric Lee/The New York Times

Voter registration is an important barometer of a state's political tilt, even if it doesn't necessarily predict the outcome of the next election.

Experts sometimes call it a lagging indicator, because people typically stop voting with a party years before they formally register with a new one. Kentucky and West Virginia, for example, each flipped to a Republican registration advantage only in recent years, though both states turned red in presidential contests long ago.

Tom Bonier, one of the Democratic Party's leading experts on voter registration trends, spent much of 2024 downplaying the seriousness of his party's registration woes. He has now come around.

"I was wrong," he said in an interview.

"Clearly, in retrospect, we can say the Democratic Party had dug itself in too deep a hole in the preceding four years for the Harris campaign to dig itself out in the last few months," added Mr. Bonier, referring to the 2024 bid by former Vice President Kamala Harris. He now calls the registration figures "a big flashing red alert."

Grim milestones of Democratic decline have been piling up.

Last summer, Bucks County, a competitive Philadelphia suburb, tilted Republican in registration for the first time since 2007, according to state records. In the fall, Mr. Trump became the first Republican presidential candidate to carry the county this century.

This spring, it was Miami-Dade County in Florida, where the number of active Republican voters in the county zoomed past Democrats just months after Mr. Trump became the first Republican presidential candidate to carry the county in decades. As recently as November 2020, Democrats outnumbered Republicans there by 200,000.

Statewide, a 1.2 million-voter swing flipped Florida into the Republican column by registration, according to the Times analysis of L2's data.

North Carolina could be the next battleground state to tip. State records show the Democratic edge there is down to less than 17,000 voters — from nearly 400,000 four years ago.

And Pennsylvania may be on deck.

Democrats held a registration advantage of 517,310 among active voters there in November 2020, according to state records, but that edge dwindled to 53,303 voters this summer.

Much of that change is from party switchers. From 2020 through July 2025, nearly twice as many Pennsylvania Democrats switched to become Republicans (314,000) as the other way around (161,000), state records show.

"Anyone who says that these things are not concerning for Democrats is, in my opinion, mostly lying," said Lakshya Jain, a Democratic analyst and co-founder of Split Ticket, a nonpartisan election-analysis site. "The act of being a registered Democrat is still psychologically something. The act of switching is a political statement."

Signs of struggle among men, younger voters and Latinos



Mr. Trump courted Latino voters on the campaign trail, including at this stop in Las Vegas last October. Few states offer partisan registration data by race, but those that do reflect the Democratic Party's fading allure to Latino voters, according to the Times analysis of the L2 data. Kenny Holston/The New York Times

The Democratic Party's diminished appeal to men and younger voters was evident in partisan registration data long before it became apparent to everyone in the 2024 election.

Not so long ago, in 2018, Democrats had accounted for 66 percent of new voters under 45 who registered with one of the two major parties. Yet by 2024, the Democratic share had plunged to 48 percent, the Times analysis of L2's data found.

In other words, Republicans went from roughly one-third of newly registered voters under 45 to a majority in the last six years.

The story is even bleaker for Democrats in some key states. In Nevada, which releases particularly detailed data, Republicans added nearly twice as many voters under 35 to the rolls as Democrats did last year, state records show.

The shifts among male voters tell a similar story.

Nearly 49 percent of men newly registering with a major party chose the Democrats in 2020. In 2024, that figure was down to roughly 39 percent.

At the same time, the Democratic edge among women registering to vote has shrunk. The combination inverted a gender gap that in recent years had heavily benefited Democrats.

Few states offer partisan registration data by race. But those that do reflect the Democratic Party's fading allure to Latino voters, according to the Times analysis of the L2 data.

In Florida, a slim 52 percent majority of new Latino registrants who chose one of the two major parties had aligned with the Democrats in 2020. By last year, the party's share of new Latino voters had collapsed to 33 percent.

Democrats fared only slightly better in North Carolina: The party's share of Latino registrants picking one of the two major parties declined from 72 percent in 2020 to 58 percent last year.

Fierce debate over reversing 'distressing trend'



Outreach workers from the Madison County Republican and Democratic parties were set up on Election Day last year outside a polling site in Marshall, N.C. *Travis Dove for The New York Times*

Within the small community of Democratic data and voter-registration experts, a confidential memo circulated early last year was explosive.

Aaron Strauss, a data scientist who has spent years studying how to elect Democrats, wrote that the old way of registering voters — working through nonprofit groups to enroll young people and people of color in general rather than explicitly seeking new Democrats — might actually backfire in 2024.

“If we were to blindly register nonvoters and get them on the rolls, we would be distinctly aiding Trump’s quest for a personal dictatorship,” Mr. Strauss wrote in the memo, which *The Washington Post* reported at the time.

Mr. Strauss argued that the left needed to target its new voters more surgically, because Mr. Trump’s support was growing among traditional Democratic constituencies. Registering voters without regard to their political beliefs remained cost-effective for Democrats only with Black voters. With other demographic groups, explicitly partisan groups ought to make explicitly partisan arguments in order to actually benefit Democratic campaigns.

“It would be naïve to call 2024 anything other than a reckoning on the Democratic brand,” said Tory Gavito, the president of Way to Win, a progressive donor network, who argued that more spending on nonpartisan registration was misguided. “To solve a brand problem, you need people talking about that brand — and that requires partisan dollars.”

But that would be a huge shift, including for politically minded donors, who reap tax breaks from their gifts to some groups that register voters on a nonpartisan basis and that are considered charities. The donors would not get such tax breaks if they gave to traditional PACs.

Registering voters is a big business — and an expensive endeavor. Every new sign-up costs \$30 to \$80, one official involved in registering voters said. The memo from Mr. Strauss, who declined to comment, estimated that netting extra Democratic votes by registering Black voters cost \$575 per vote in 2020.

Héctor Sánchez Barba, the president and chief executive of Mi Familia Vota, a nonpartisan group that registers Latino voters, said it would be a “major mistake” if progressive donors cut off organizations like his.

He said that it was the job of Democratic leaders to sell Latinos on the Democratic Party — and that it would be shortsighted to invest expecting only short-term gains.

J.B. Poersch, who heads the leading super PAC aligned with Senate Democrats and an affiliated nonprofit, called the shrinking Democratic registration margins a “distressing trend.”

In recent years, he said, it has been “lonely out there” for his organization’s nonprofit arm, which is an advocacy group rather than a charity, when trying to lift registrations, especially in conservative states that Democrats must win to have any chance at a majority.

Mr. Poersch called the debate between spending money to persuade or register new voters a “false choice.”

“If we’re going to win, if we’re going to be competitive, we need to be investing in both,” he said.

Any hope that the drift away from the Democratic Party would end organically with Mr. Trump’s election has been dashed by the limited data so far in 2025. There are now roughly 160,000 fewer registered Democrats than on Election Day 2024, according to L2’s data, and 200,000 more Republicans.

“It’s going to get worse,” Mr. Pruser, of Decision Desk HQ, said of the outlook for Democrats, “before it gets better”

Shane Goldmacher is a Times national political correspondent.

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