

The Boston Globe

T U E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 7 , 2 0 1 2

Changing Colo. poses challenge to Republicans

A shift from conservatism

By Bobby Caina Calvan

GLOBE STAFF

DENVER — Republicans here will tell you that Colorado's bedrock conservative values remain as solid as the Rocky Mountains. But a string of high-profile losses against Democrats in recent years has raised doubts about the party's ability to prevail against President Obama in a key battleground state in November.

There's little doubt Mitt Romney will be victorious after today's Republican caucuses in Colorado. Four years ago, Romney won convincingly here against Senator John McCain of Arizona, the eventual Republican presidential nominee. Months later, however, Obama handily beat McCain, adding to the sense of disarray in a rapidly growing state that just a generation ago was reliably Republican.

For all the talk about Colorado as a pivotal swing state this fall, Republicans have little to show for it in recent years. Republicans in 2010 had mile-high hopes to take the governor's man-

COLORADO, Page A10

Changing Colorado a challenge for Republican party

► COLORADO

Continued from Page A1

sion, and the national party had counted on Colorado to join the tide that narrowed the gap in the US Senate. Instead, Democrats won both seats.

Should Romney prevail as his party's nominee, Colorado could provide the biggest test of his ability to organize his troops and capture highly prized independent voters in a head-to-head contest against Obama.

Ryan Call, the new chairman of the Colorado GOP, concedes that challenges lie ahead, but he speaks confidently of delivering his state for the eventual Republican nominee.

"The pressure I feel is pressure I feel every day," Call said. "I've put this on my plate, and there are a lot of people, nationally and locally, counting on us to deliver victory in November."

While national Republicans, aligned super PACs, and the eventual candidate himself will be pouring resources into the state, much of the burden will have to be carried by state-level lieutenants who will have to organize volunteers and mobilize get-out-the-vote operations.

"There used to be a time when Republicans could win by appealing to their base. But with the state divided" among the two parties and independents, "that's basically a recipe for disaster," said Robert Duffy, who chairs the political science department at Colorado State University in Fort Collins.

Colorado's Latino vote could be of particular concern for Republicans. As in Florida, Latinos account for a fifth of the state's population and about 1 in every 8 registered voters. But unlike Florida, home to a substantial population of Cuban Americans who generally favor Republicans, Latinos in Colorado are more likely to lean toward Democrats, analysts say.

The Obama campaign has

been careful to cultivate support among Hispanic voters who might harbor reservations against Republicans, particularly Romney because he has taken a harder line than some of his opponents on immigration issues.

What's more, transplants from other states, such as California, are reshaping the state's political dynamics, according to analysts and longtime residents.

But independent voters, who account for about a third of all those registered, make up the big prize here. The rest of the state's voters are split about evenly between Republicans and Democrats.

If conventional wisdom holds, whoever wins the majority of the independent vote will probably win the election. In recent years, independents have leaned toward Democrats in key races. In 2010, independent voters helped US Senator Michael Bennett fend off a fierce challenge from his Republican opponent.

The race for governor was not even close and resulted in a huge embarrassment for the GOP, whose nominee garnered just 11 percent of the vote after a campaign rife with controversy.

Democrat John Hickenlooper, a former Denver mayor and brewpub entrepreneur, easily beat his closest competitor, a former Republican running as a third-party candidate.

"The Republicans were nominating very conservative, very socially conservative candidates for office, and voters were rejecting them," said Duffy.

"With Romney having to run so far to the right during the primaries, it could cause problems for him as he moves back to the middle and has to confront what he's been saying during the primaries."

Independent voters, of course, are notoriously difficult to predict, especially out West, where a cowboy mentality that revels in bucking trends and ex-

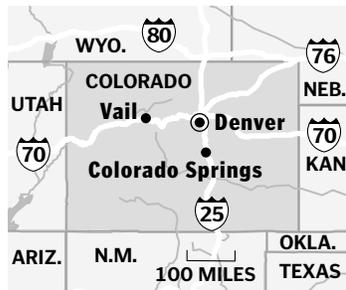
COLORADO PRIMARY

When: Today

Type of voting system:
Unpledged

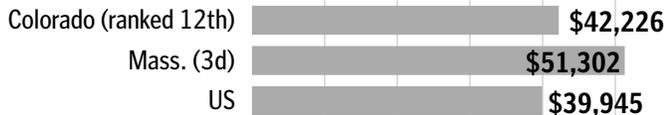
Number of delegates: 36

2008 candidate results

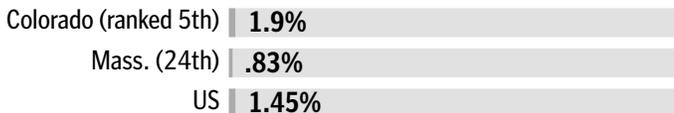


COLORADO AT A GLANCE

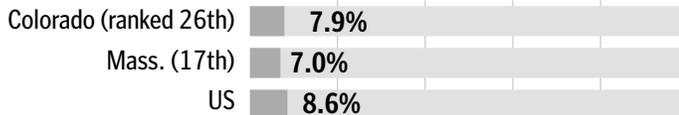
Per capita personal income in 2010



Foreclosure rates, 2011

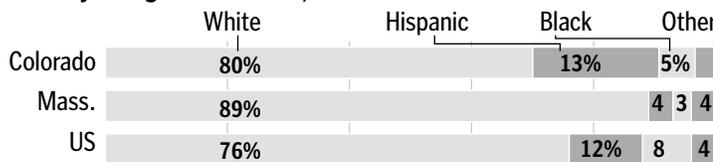


Unemployment rates, Nov. 2011



VOTER DEMOGRAPHICS

Ethnicity of registered voters, 2008



NOTE: Because of rounding, some numbers won't add to 100.

SOURCES: The New York Times, US Census Bureau, RealtyTrac, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, US Dept of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis, Congressional Quarterly, Clemson University

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pectations still pervades.

Of the dozen states that many consider among the swing states that could determine the presidency, three lie out West: Nevada, New Mexico, and Colorado. They provide fewer than a tenth of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency but could

help a candidate reach that threshold in a tight race.

"Colorado's demographics speak well to the electoral map the president will be trying to put together more broadly," said Matt Inzeo, the spokesman for the Colorado Democratic Party. "We're a very good bellwether for

'We're a very good bellwether for the region.'

MATT INZEO, *Colorado Democratic Party spokesman*

the region."

Obama's public approval has risen in recent months as the economy begins to improve — Colorado's unemployment rate stands at 8 percent, slightly lower than the national average — and in a head-to-head contest with Romney, Obama is in a virtual tie in important battleground states, according to a Gallup poll taken last month.

Yesterday, a Washington Post-ABC News poll showed Obama widening his lead against Romney among registered voters nationally, 51 percent to 45 percent — and by even wider margins against Newt Gingrich.

In what could be a deeper sign of trouble for Romney, his standing among independents has fallen precipitously. A poll conducted by NBC and the Wall Street Journal taken last month showed that 42 percent of self-described independent voters held a dim view of Romney, nearly double from November.

Even supporters express pessimism.

"I don't think he stands a shot," said Brad Beale, a Framingham native who has lived in Colorado for 18 years. "It's not a Republican state anymore. Now it's a bleeding-liberal state."

Two other votes are being held today: Minnesota Republicans will caucus and there will be a nonbinding primary in Missouri. Maine Republicans started caucusing over the weekend and will finish Saturday.

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The Boston Globe

W E D N E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 8 , 2 0 1 2

Santorum roars back with wins in 3 states

Jolts Romney
with victories in
Colo., Mo., Minn.

By Bobby Caina Calvan

GLOBE STAFF

DENVER — Rick Santorum catapulted back into the primary limelight last night, stunning presumed Republican front-runner Mitt Romney with a win in the Colorado caucuses while handily winning in Minnesota and Missouri. The trio of losses sows doubts about the former Massachusetts governor's ability to win over conservatives in the nation's heartland.

Santorum's close victory in Colorado, considered the prize of the night, came despite aggressive campaigning by Romney in a state where he dominated John McCain in 2008.

For Romney, there was no doubt that the results staggered his momentum after decisive victories in Florida and Nevada, but it's unclear whether the setback will be sustained or momentary. None of the votes were binding. After Maine completes its caucuses Saturday, the next vote will not be until primaries on Feb. 28 in Arizona and Michigan, where he has been heavily favored.

Yet after Romney banked on his vastly superior organizations in Colorado and Minnesota, his weak showing could persuade more conservatives to

CONTESTS, Page A6

Santorum roars back with wins in Colo., Minnesota, Missouri

► CONTESTS

Continued from Page A1

flock to Santorum.

Romney spoke directly last night about who carried the day.

"This was a good night for Rick Santorum," Romney told supporters in Denver. "But I expect to become your nominee."

He then quickly reassumed a front-runner posture, pivoting into how President Obama's promises, many made in Denver when he accepted the Democratic nomination, have been barren and peppering his speech with a mantra he uses often in stump speeches: "President Obama has failed, and we will succeed."

The Missouri primary was considered little more than a straw poll, with the actual delegates decided at the state caucuses on March 17. And both caucuses in Minnesota and Colorado were nonbinding, with the delegates distributed at state conventions in the weeks to come.

Yet, the decisive wins by Santorum were startling:

■ With 99 percent of precincts reporting in Colorado, he took 40 percent of the vote, with Romney trailing with 35 percent. Newt Gingrich had 13 percent and Texas Representative Ron Paul 12 percent. "Obviously it's a surprising result, but one that underscores the dynamic nature of this race," said Ryan Call, the chairman of Colorado's GOP. "Colorado voters are an independent minded group."

■ In Minnesota, with 88 percent of precincts reporting, Santorum led with 45 percent of the vote. Romney, who won in Minnesota in 2008, could do no better than third place, at 17 percent. Paul took second place, with 27 percent.

■ In Missouri, Santorum led Romney 55 percent to 25 percent, with Paul garnering 12 percent, with 99 percent of the pre-

dicts reporting.

Missouri was considered particularly important to Santorum, since Gingrich was not able to get on the ballot. That afforded the former Pennsylvania senator an opportunity to present himself as the true conservative in a head-to-head match with Romney.

A jubilant Santorum told supporters in St. Charles, Mo., that his victories would be heard loud across the country. "They were probably heard loud in Massachusetts," he said.

Although Romney's campaign had begun early yesterday to downplay the eventual results, the breadth of Santorum's wins were surprising. The scarcity of reliable polling data had made it difficult to predict the outcomes, particularly in Minnesota and Colorado where turnout was dif-

ficult to predict.

Even before yesterday, there were signs of another surge by Santorum, who rocketed from single digits in polls before the caucuses in Iowa to take the first-in-the-nation caucus, after a recount. On Monday, Romney's campaign criticized Santorum over his support for earmarks when he was in Congress.

That line of attack is expected to intensify.

As the race heads toward next month's Super Tuesday, Romney will try to reassert his standing atop the field. The only debate of the month, on Feb. 22 in Arizona, now looms larger.

While the Romney campaign could argue that the losses were superficial, his rivals will pounce on his poor performance as a repudiation of his candidacy by the GOP's conservative wing, particularly in Minnesota.

Super Tuesday's role in determining the GOP's presidential nominee is now outsized. Questions about Romney's ability to consolidate a sturdy base are sure to dog him in Bible Belt states such as Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Gingrich's home state of Georgia, which has the largest delegate prize on March 6.

At stake in the 10 states will be 437 delegates — nearly two-fifths of the 1,144 needed to secure the nomination. That puts a premium on organization, where Romney has shown himself to be strongest.

"The thing that Romney's got going for him is that he's planned for a long campaign. He's got the money," said John Geer, a political science professor at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, another Super Tuesday state. "A tough battle gets him ready for November."

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