



Seeing 'Red': Candidates Target Republican States

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Thirty states with Republican majorities could prove tough terrain for Democrats to crack in the 2004 presidential election.

This election year, the contest between the presidential candidates – Republican incumbent George W. Bush and Democratic nominee John Kerry – is practically guaranteed to reflect just how ideologically divided voters have become.

Across the country, many voters have already made up their minds about who they plan to vote for and those voters are divided into "red" or Republican states, "blue" or Democratic states and "swing" states-- states that could go either way come Election Day.

What are "red" states?

In the 2000 election, there were more red than blue states - 30 in all, ranging from several states in the Deep South to a slice of the Midwest, from the Dakotas to Texas, the Utah-Wyoming-Idaho triangle, and Alaska.

In red states, owning a gun, going to church on Sunday, supporting the war in Iraq and opposing tax increases, gay marriage and abortion are more or less the norm. Experts agree that many red states will probably stay red right through this year's election.

The Southern factor

With states that Democrat Al Gore won in 2000 considered up for grabs this time around, Kerry is spending time and money in historically "red" states that, due to different people moving in and out, could be winnable this year.

The Democratic candidate is doing his best to win over potentially undecided voters -- even in the red, red territory of the Deep South. A onetime Democratic stronghold, many white Southern voters turned to the Republican Party during the turbulent Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, being Southern, carried at least a few Southern states apiece, but Al Gore lost them all, including Florida (by 537 votes) in 2000.

In addition, the number of black voters, who traditionally vote Democratic, is going up in the South, a factor that could help Kerry.

In May he launched a \$25 million television advertising campaign aimed at Southerners and he has visited Southern states such as Virginia and North Carolina.

Strategies for wooing red

Kerry's choice of charismatic southerner John Edwards as his running mate could also give him a chance at winning over at least one traditionally red state -- North Carolina, Edwards' home state.

Before Kerry chose Edwards though, some Democrats had floated the idea of choosing a Republican vice president to help bring in some "red" votes. Some possibilities were Republican Senator Chuck Hagel from Nebraska -- another red state -- and popular Arizona Senator John McCain.

The Democratic candidate, analysts say, has also started to shape his message to appeal to more conservative voters. "[This race is] ... about common sense, mainstream American values and how we make our country stronger," Kerry said at a Connecticut fundraiser in late May — sentiments very similar to his opponent's campaign.

What red means for President Bush

For his part, President Bush has spent a vast amount of money -- \$130 million so far -- on his reelection effort throughout the country. He has spent more time and money in crucial "swing" states like Ohio than he has in red states, where his campaign can rely on party activists to make sure that Republicans get out and vote on Nov. 2.

However the president has also traveled to the South to reconnect with his support base and rally his troops, and has visited voters in red states like Missouri, Idaho, Alaska and Utah.

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