

Voter rolls are up in Louisiana - Registration drives boost both parties
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BATON ROUGE -- Stoked in large part by party and candidate registration drives, almost 94,000 more Louisiana voters will be eligible to cast ballots for president, U.S. senator, members of Congress and a host of other offices Nov. 4 than were on the rolls for last year's governor's race, figures released Sunday by Secretary of State Jay Dardenne's office show.

More than half of those registered to vote in the past year are African-American.

Voter registration in the state is down by 2,703, however, from those eligible to cast ballots in the 2004 presidential and congressional races.

Dardenne said that when early voting starts Tuesday for a weeklong run, 2,920,692 eligible voters will be on the rolls, up from the 2,826,771 who were registered for the Oct. 10, 2007, governor's race, but down from the record-high registration of 2,923,395 of 2004.

"We have kept our numbers fairly steady" during the past four years, Dardenne said.

Dardenne said that the number of new voters basically offsets an estimated 180,000 voters who have been stricken from the rolls in the past four years. He said no hurricane-displaced voters have been removed, just those who died, have been incarcerated or have not voted in a four-year cycle of elections and have not responded to election officials attempts to contact them -- all in keeping with state law.

"And Louisiana is not growing in population," he said.

Dardenne said that statistically, the net loss of voters from 2004 is almost nil.

But the new voters do rearrange the party and racial dynamics of the electorate somewhat, heading into an election in which Sen. John McCain, a white Republican, battles Sen. Barack Obama, an African-American Democrat, for the White House on Nov. 4.

In recent months, Obama and the Democratic Party and the GOP and McCain's machine, as well as independent groups, have launched voter registration drives.

McCain is expected to carry Louisiana. Dardenne said he expects a turnout of 65 percent to 70 percent on Election Day.

Between the two presidential election years, the new data show a decline of about 33,000 white voters, a gain of about 21,000 African-American voters and a growth of about 9,000 voters of other groups.

In 2004, there were 1.936 million white voters registered, compared to 870,201 African-American voters and 116,470 from other groups; now those number are 1.903 million white voters, 891,424 African-Americans and 125,512 other voters.

Politically, Democrats lost almost 86,000 voters since the last presidential race in 2004, while the Republicans gained 39,000, and independents and those aligned with smaller parties grew by 44,000.

In 2004, there were 1.618 million Democrats compared with 1.532 million now, and in 2004 there were 700,691 GOP voters compared with 739,350 now. The "other" party adherents grew from 604,273 in 2004 to 648,774 today.

Dardenne said that means Democrats have gone from about 55 percent of the registered voters to 52 percent, while independents have grown from 21 percent to 23 percent and the GOP has gone from about 24 percent to 25 percent of all registered voters.

In terms of race, Dardenne said, white people make up about 65 percent of the voters, down slightly from 2004, while African-American voters have gone from 24 percent to 25 percent. Other groups make up about 4 percent.

Dardenne's data show that 1.867 million white people were registered to vote in the 2007 governor's race, 36,000 fewer than now, while the number of black voters has grown by almost 48,000 voters in a year -- from 843,674 to 891,424. Other voting groups added almost 10,000 in a year, from 115,690 to 125,512.

In the same one-year period, the number of Democrats increased by almost 33,000 from 1.499 million to 1.532 million, while the number of registered Republicans jumped since 2007 by almost 42,300 voters -- from 697,060 to 739,350. Independents grew since October 2007 by a little less than 19,000, from 629,975 to 648,774.

In the New Orleans area, net registration figures show a gain for Jefferson Parish of 7,888 voters since the governor's race, a loss of 282 in Orleans; a loss of 387 in Plaquemines Parish; a loss of 2,421 in St. Bernard; a gain of 1,333 in St. Charles; a gain of 1,503 in St. John the Baptist Parish; and a gain of 7,873 in St. Tammany.

Although the period for voter registration ended Oct. 6, it took until last week to finalize the voting rolls, the secretary of state's office said.

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