



# America's Progressive Metros

By Ruy Teixeira July 2009

The Progressive Studies Program released today a new report, [“The Coming End of the Culture Wars,”](#) which demonstrates how shifting demographics are rapidly eroding the mass base for culture wars politics. These demographic trends are having their greatest effects in America’s metropolitan areas, especially the largest ones. It is there that the culture wars are dying down the fastest, helping move these areas rapidly toward progressives—and not just in so-called blue states where progressives are already strong. Indeed, the biggest progressive shifts in America’s metros between 2004 and 2008 were mostly in traditionally conservative states such as Texas, Indiana, Utah, Nebraska, and North Carolina. And over the 1988-2008 period, the El Paso, Texas and very fast-growing Orlando, Florida metros recorded the largest progressive shifts in the country.

Residents in metro areas with a population of over 1 million people—which accounts for 54 percent of the population—scored 53.6 on PSP’s comprehensive 10-item progressive cultural index covering topics ranging from religion, abortion, and homosexuality to race, immigration, and the family. Residents in metro areas with between 250,000 and 1 million residents—another 20 percent of the population—scored 51 on the index. In contrast, small town rural residents scored 45.4 and deep rural residents scored just 44.6.

These cultural leanings are one important reason why America’s populous metros have been moving so heavily toward progressives. Obama won large metro areas with a population of over 1 million by 58 percent to 41 percent—a 17-point margin that was 10 points better than Sen. John Kerry’s (D-MA) margin in 2004. Obama also carried medium metropolitan areas with a population of 250,000 to 1 million in population by 4 points, which is 11 points better than Sen. Kerry, who lost these areas by 7 points in 2004.

This progressive surge in America’s metros is a central factor in progressives’ current domination of American politics. [A newly released update](#) of PSP’s New Progressive American map provides all the detail on this surge. The map shows the population size, progressive margin in 2008, progressive margin shift from 2004 to 2008, and progressive margin shift from 1988 to 2008 for America’s top 175 metros, which includes every metro with a popu-

lation of over a quarter of a million residents. You can see these data directly on the map by mousing over the metro's bubble (sized by progressive margin/shift or by population size) or view the data in a sortable list below the map.

The data provide many fascinating insights into America's progressive metros. Here are some of the most interesting. Let's start with the very largest metros. Twenty-one of the 25 largest metros in population size, which range from New York at 18.8 million to Cleveland at 2.1 million, voted for Barack Obama. The only ones he failed to carry were Dallas (4th on the list), Houston (6th), Phoenix (14th), and Cincinnati (24th).

Turning to the metros with the largest progressive voting shifts from 2004 to 2008, it is striking how counterintuitive the top 10 metros on this list are, especially when compared to the unsurprising list of metros with the largest percentage-point margins for Obama: San Francisco, Boulder, Madison, Ann Arbor, Honolulu, and so on. In contrast to this "round up the usual suspects" list, the top 10 progressive-shifting metros from 2004 to 2008 include Brownsville (30-point shift) and McAllen (29 points) in Texas, Indianapolis (25) and Fort Wayne (22) in Indiana, Salt Lake City (22) in Utah, Omaha (21) in Nebraska, and Fayetteville (20) in North Carolina, as well as Lancaster (20) in conservative southeastern Pennsylvania and Holland (20) in conservative southwestern Michigan.

Looking at the metros with the largest progressive shifts between 1988 and 2008, some of the figures are truly astounding. Orlando, the fastest-growing large metro in Florida, had a 48-point progressive shift over the time period, which was the second-largest shift in the country. Other noteworthy metro shifts include El Paso (51 points) in Texas, Port St. Lucie (39) in Florida, Chicago (36), Washington, D.C. (35), Reading (35) in Pennsylvania, Manchester (35) in New Hampshire, Reno and Las Vegas (both 35) in Nevada, Philadelphia (34), Richmond (34) in Virginia, Miami (32), and Columbus (31) in Ohio.

It is of great significance that almost all the fastest-growing metros in the country have shifted progressive over both the 2004-2008 and 1988-2008 time periods. Start with Cape Coral in Florida, the fastest-growing metro with over 250,000 in population. Its population has increased 34 percent from 2000 to 2007, and has shifted toward progressives by 11 points between 2004 and 2008 and 26 points between 1988 and 2008. Other large shifts in the fastest-growing metros include Las Vegas (14 and 35 points, respectively, over the two time periods), Raleigh in North Carolina (16 and 24), Phoenix (4 and 19), Naples in Florida (8 and 28), Ocala in Florida (6 and 22), Port St. Lucie (6 and 39), Atlanta (15 and 24), Charlotte in North Carolina (17 and 29), Orlando (17 and 48), Reno (17 and 35), and Lakeland (12 and 27) in Florida.

The shifts described above—all of which and many more besides can be seen on the New Progressive American map—have played a huge role in the movement of many contested or "purple" states toward progressives. Here are some examples.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In what follows, margin and shift figures cited are for the part of a metro in the state under discussion. In most cases, where metros are entirely within the state boundaries, the figures cited in this part of the discussion will match up exactly with the figures in the New Progressive America map. Where metros spill over state lines (e.g., Philadelphia, Washington, D.C.), however, there will be some differences though they are usually not large.

## Pennsylvania

The growing areas of Pennsylvania are mostly located in three regions (see “[New Progressive America](#)” for region boundaries), all in the eastern part of the state: the northeast, containing the Allentown and Reading metros; the southeast, containing the York, Lancaster, and Harrisburg metros; and the suburban part of the Philadelphia metro. These regions are all notable for having added large numbers of minority and white college-graduate voters this decade.

Obama carried the Philadelphia suburbs by 16 points, a 9-point improvement over Kerry’s margin in 2004. The shift is even more impressive over the long-term: Progressives have enjoyed a spectacular 39-point improvement in their margin in the Philadelphia suburbs since 1988.

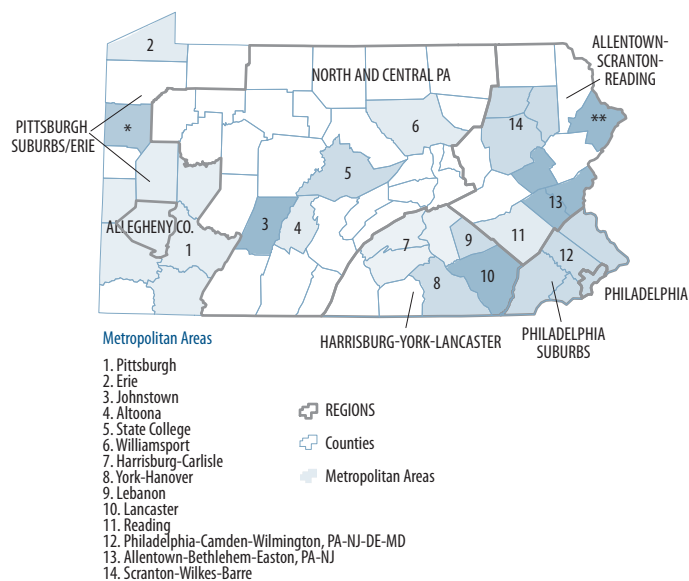
Obama improved even more over Kerry’s 2004 performance in the northeast region, carrying the region by 10 points—an 11-point shift toward progressives in 2008. This shift included progressive swings of 16 points and 11 points, respectively, in the relatively fast-growing Reading and Allentown metros. Since 1988, the entire northeast region has moved toward progressives by 22 points.

Progressives got their largest increment of support in the southeast region, which is the fastest-growing region in the state. Here they improved over Kerry’s performance by 16 points, with pro-progressive shifts of 20, 16, and 15 points, respectively, in the three metros that dominate the region: Lancaster, Harrisburg, and York. The overall shift reduced the progressive deficit in the region to 12 points, down from 28 points in 2004—a huge blow to conservative efforts in the state. Since 1988, this formerly rock-ribbed conservative region has shifted toward progressives by 20 points.

## Michigan

Progressives have made an impressive 33-point improvement in their margin in the suburban part of the Detroit metro since 1988. This is even greater than their 28-point gain over that time period in Wayne County, the urban core of the Detroit metro. These improvements translate into overwhelming dominance (62 percent to 36 percent) of progressives in the Detroit metro as whole, and account for 44 percent of the statewide vote.

### Pennsylvania metropolitan areas and regions

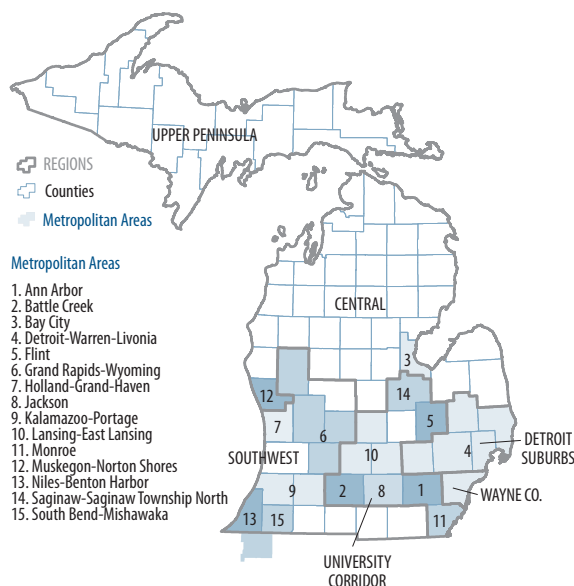


\* Mercer County, PA is an outer county in the Youngstown-Warren-Boardman, OH-PA Metropolitan Statistical Area.  
\*\* Pike County, PA is an outer county in the New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Statistical Area.

The southwest region is generally considered the most conservative in Michigan, but Obama improved even more over Kerry than in the relatively liberal Detroit suburbs. Kerry lost the southwest by 16 points, so Obama's modest one-point victory in the region actually represented an 18-point swing toward progressives. Even in the conservative anchors of the region—the Grand Rapids and fast-growing Holland metros—Obama posted big 18-point and 20-point improvements, respectively. Progressives have improved their position by 27 points over the entire 1988-2008 period. The southwest region contributes about one-fifth of the statewide vote.

The University Corridor contributes another fifth of the statewide vote. This is the cluster of counties to the immediate west and south of the Detroit metro that includes the Lansing (Michigan State University) and Ann Arbor (University of Michigan) metros. It is also the other region of the state where some growth is taking place, particularly in the fast-growing Ann Arbor metro. Obama carried the University Corridor by a very strong 61 percent to 38 percent margin, a 13-point improvement over Kerry's performance. Looking back to 1988, there has been a 23-point pro-progressive swing in this region.

## Michigan metropolitan areas and regions



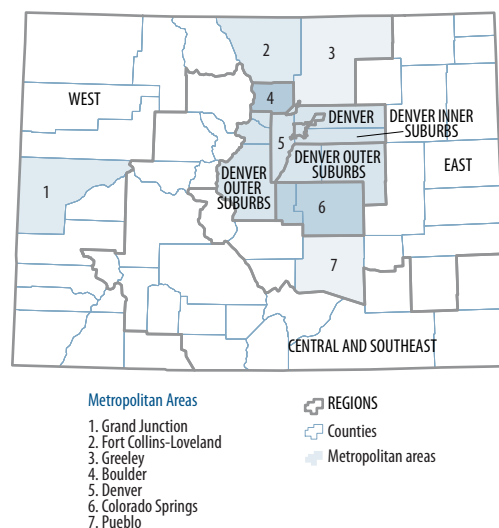
## Colorado

Obama carried the Denver metro by 17 points, which is a 14-point improvement over 2004 and a 20-point improvement over 1988. These would be huge progressive advances by themselves, but Obama's gains were by no means limited to the Denver metro.

Obama did well in the liberal Boulder metro, carrying it by 72 percent to 26 percent, a 12-point margin gain over 2004. But he also made bigger gains in the very conservative, fast-growing Colorado Springs metro (12 percent of the statewide vote), bettering Kerry by 16 points and shaving the progressive deficit to 19 points. Since 1988, progressives have improved their performance in this metro by 22 points.

Obama also made good progress in the very fast-growing north and west region. Population in this area is up 20 percent since 2000, and accounts for a fifth of the statewide vote. It includes

## Colorado metropolitan areas and regions



both the relatively liberal Fort Collins metro and the very conservative Greeley metro—the fastest-growing metro in the state. There was a progressive swing of 16 points in Fort Collins between 2004 and 2008. But the swing was even larger in the Greeley metro: 18 points. The latter result is particularly significant since, prior to the 2008 election, that metro was trending conservative, in contrast to most of Colorado. Now, this metro too is trending progressive over the 1988-2008 period, albeit modestly (4 points).

## Nevada

Obama carried the Las Vegas metro in 2008—which accounts for 67 percent of the statewide vote—by 19 points, 58 percent to 39 percent. This margin was 14 points better than Kerry’s performance in 2004. And there has been a 35-point swing toward progressives in the Las Vegas metro compared to 1988.

The Reno metro contributes another fifth of the statewide vote. It still lags far behind Las Vegas, but is the fastest-growing metro in the state with a 20-percent population increase since 2000. Obama carried the Reno metro by 12 points, 55 percent to 43 percent, a 17-point improvement over 2004. Reno, just like Las Vegas, has experienced a 35-point shift toward progressives since 1988.

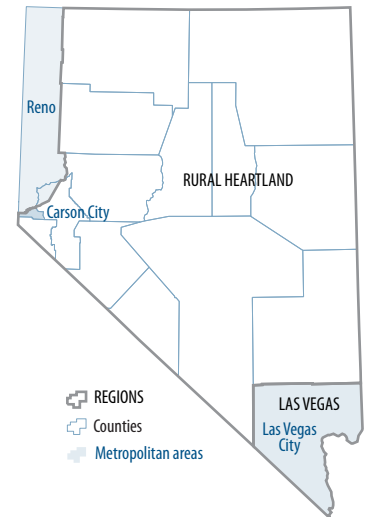
## Ohio

The Columbus metro, which accounts for 15 percent of the statewide vote, is easily the fastest-growing metro in the state, up 9 percent in population since 2000. Compared to other parts of Ohio, the Columbus metro has seen the biggest decline in the share of white working-class eligible voters and the sharpest increases in the shares of white college-graduate and minority voters. Obama carried the area by 4 points, a 9-point improvement over Kerry in 2004. And there has been a 31-point pro-progressive swing in the Columbus metro since 1988. This includes an incredible 40-point swing in Franklin County—the metro’s central county—and a 20-point swing in the Columbus suburbs.

The second-fastest-growing metro in the state is the Cincinnati metro (14 percent of the statewide vote), which is up 5 percent since 2000. Here Obama also registered a 9-point improvement over 2004. Since 1988, the Cincinnati metro as a whole has swung toward progressives by 18 points.

The other part of Ohio where progressives made substantial progress is the north-west region, which includes the Toledo metro (a 21-point shift toward progressives

### Nevada metropolitan areas and regions

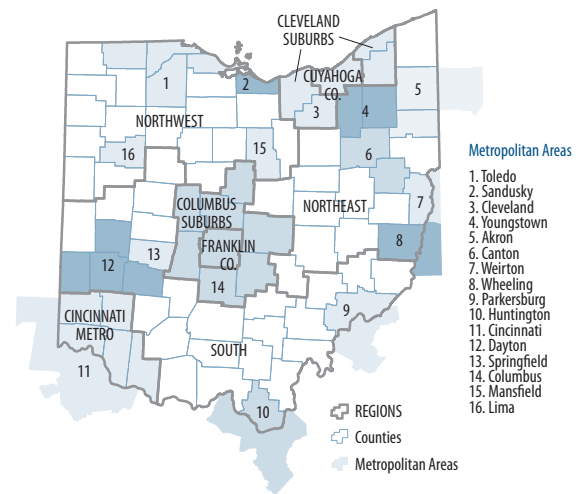


Shifts between 2004 and 2008 were more modest in the rest of Ohio. Both Cuyahoga County—the central county of the Cleveland metro—and the Cleveland suburbs had pro-progressive margin shifts of just 4 points. Even with this modest shift, however, the Cleveland metro as a whole, which accounts for 18 percent of the statewide vote, still went for Obama by 25 points, which is a 15-point progressive swing relative to 1988.

The Orlando metro is the fastest-growing large metro in the state, having grown by 24 percent since 2000. Obama carried the Orlando area by 9 points in 2008—a 17-point gain over Kerry’s margin in 2004. There has been an astonishing 48-point swing toward progressives in this metro since 1988.

Both the Orlando and Tampa metros are located in the I-4 Corridor, which also includes the progressive-shifting Lakeland, Deltona, and Palm Bay metros. Obama carried the I-4 Corridor as a whole by 3 points—a 10-point improvement over 2004, and 28 points better than 1988. These progressive shifts are highly significant since the I-4 Corridor is growing so fast—17 percent since 2000—and accounts for 37 percent of the statewide vote.

## Ohio metropolitan areas and regions



**REGIONS**

Counties

Metropolitan Areas

**Metropolitan Areas**

1. Pensacola
2. Fort Walton Beach
3. Panama City
4. Tallahassee
5. Jacksonville
6. Gainesville
7. Ocala
8. Deltona-Daytona Beach
9. Palm Bay
10. Orlando
11. Tampa-St. Petersburg
12. Lakeland
13. Vero Beach
14. Port St. Lucie
15. Sarasota-Bradenton
16. Punta Gorda
17. Cape Coral-Fort Myers
18. Naples
19. Miami Metro

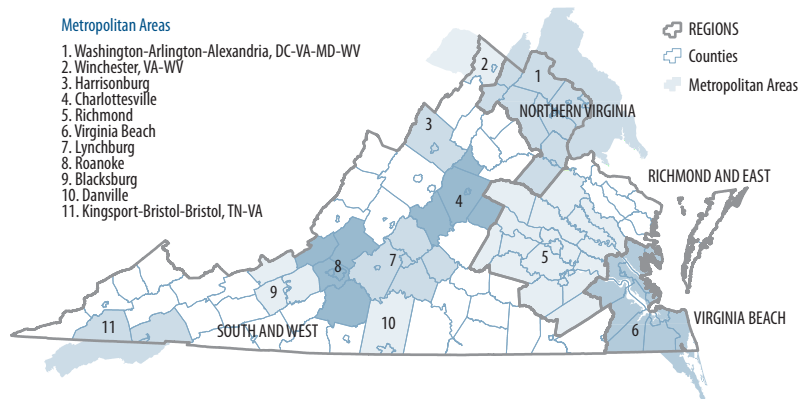
points, but that was an 8-point improvement over Kerry's performance in 2004. Going back to 1988, there has been a 25-point pro-progressive swing in the region.

The progressive shift was slightly less in the Miami metro, at 6 points, but the metro still casts 26 percent of the statewide vote, and Obama beat McCain by a 62 percent to 38 percent margin. The overall swing from 1988 to 2008 in Miami has also been an impressive 32 points.

## Virginia

Virginia's growth is driven first and foremost by the Washington, D.C. metro's northern Virginia suburbs. That area has grown by 16 percent since 2000, fueled by rapid increases in minorities and white college graduates, and it casts a third of Virginia's ballots. This is also the area where progressives have made their greatest gains. Obama carried the northern Virginia suburbs by 59 percent to 40 percent, 15 points better than Kerry did, and a staggering 38 points better than Dukakis.

### Virginia metropolitan areas and regions



Progressives have also gained strength in the Richmond and east region. This region has grown by 10 percent since 2000 and accounts for 19 percent of the statewide vote. Obama won the region by 5 points, 17 points better than the progressive margin in 2004 and 31 points better than 1988. This result is driven by gains in the Richmond metro, which has shifted toward progressives by 32 points since 1988.

Obama also carried the slow-growing Virginia Beach metro, which accounts for 21 percent of the statewide vote, by 12 points—56 percent to 44 percent. That was an 18-point improvement over Kerry's performance in 2004 and 30-points better than Dukakis in 1988.

## North Carolina and Indiana

The two large metros in North Carolina are Charlotte and Raleigh, each with over a million in population and each growing rapidly—24 percent and 31 percent, respectively, since 2000. Progressives made huge strides in each of these metros. In the Charlotte metro, Obama beat McCain 53 percent to 46 percent—a 17-point swing toward progressives since 2004. Since 1988, there has been a 31-point pro-progressive swing in this metro. In



the Raleigh metro, Obama won 54 percent to 45 percent, which is 16 points better than Kerry's margin in 2004 and 24 points better than Dukakis' in 1988.

Indianapolis is the largest metro in Indiana with 1.7 million residents, and it is the only one growing by double digits—11 percent since 2000. Indianapolis swung to progressives by 25 points in this election, giving Obama a 51 percent to 48 percent victory.

These are just some examples of how America's progressive metros have moved state after state toward progressives. Many more examples can be found by exploring the data in our updated New Progressive America map. I urge you to do so.