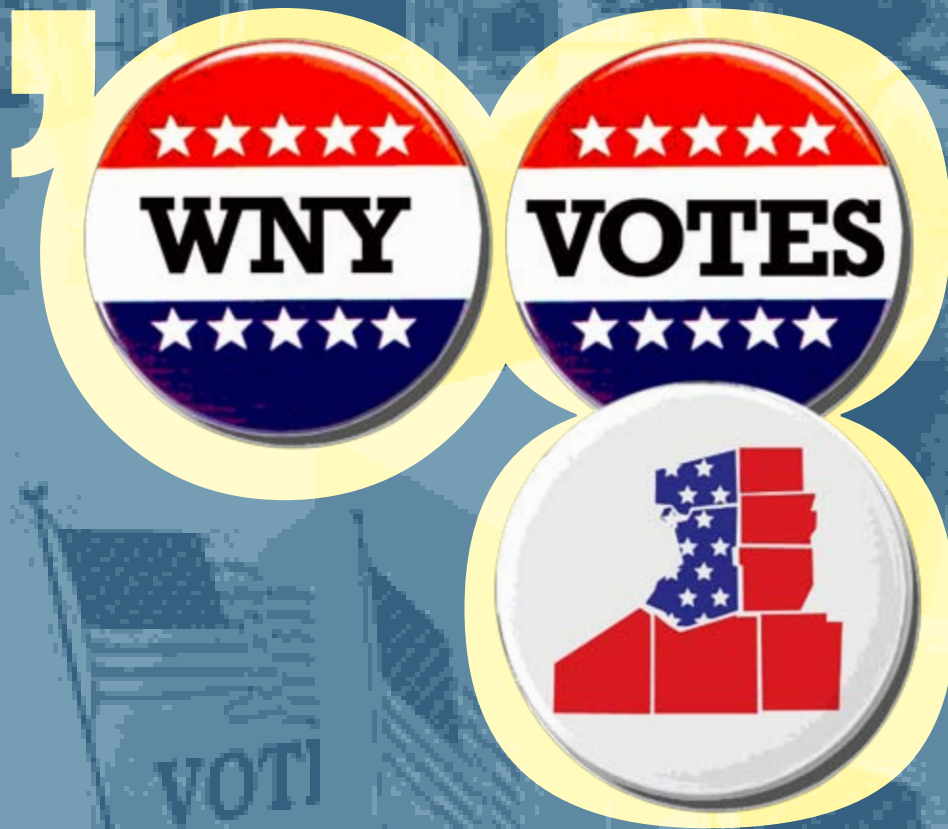


How did the region vote?

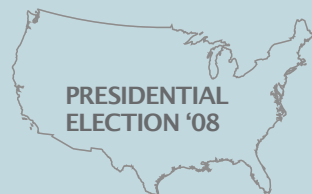
Did our voting habits change in 2008?

Who voted for whom?



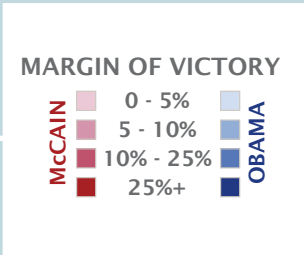
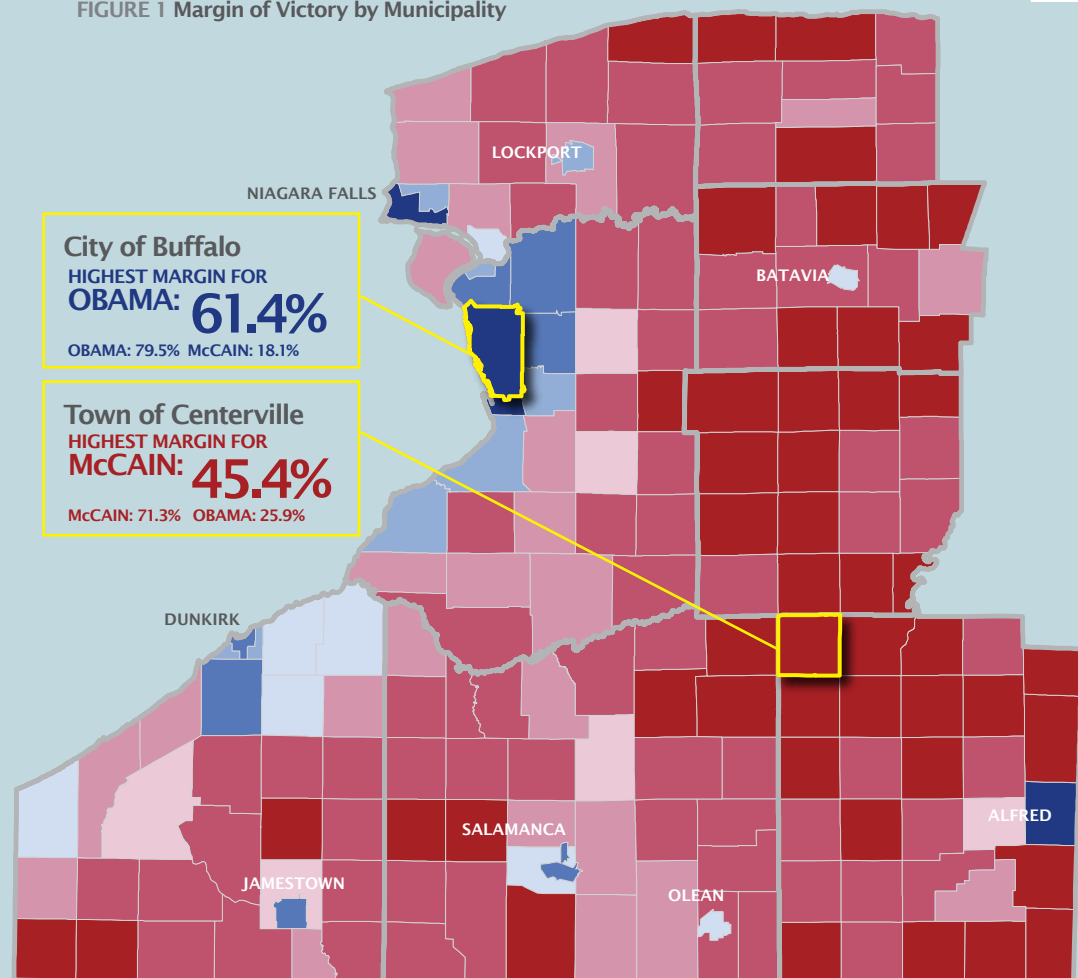
Inside the Ballot Box

The 2008 presidential election featured dramatic shifts in geographic and demographic voting patterns at the national level. In Western New York, an examination of federal election and voter registration data at the municipal level reveals a microcosm of many national trends, including the predominance of like-minded communities, a pronounced Democratic swing from 2004 to 2008, and a tendency among new voters to affiliate with minor parties or no party at all.



How did the region **vote?**

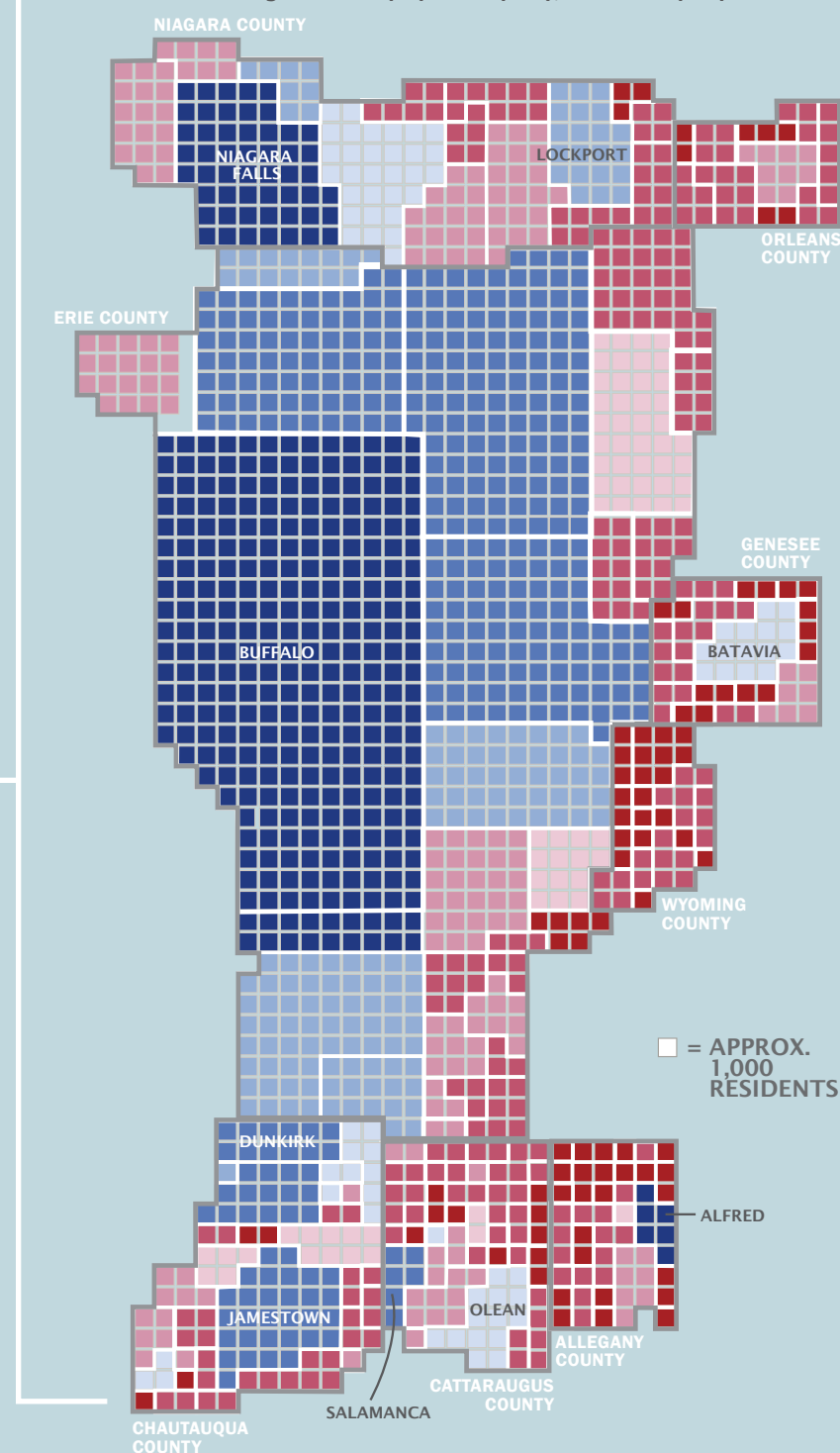
FIGURE 1 Margin of Victory by Municipality



**For maps with complete municipal labels, visit Reference Maps on the Regional Knowledge Network (rkn.buffalo.edu)

Most places in WNY voted Republican...

FIGURE 2 Margin of Victory by Municipality, Distorted by Population



...but the most populated places voted Democratic.

Few people paid much attention to New York State on Election Day 2008. It was long considered safe for the Democratic ticket and proved to be so, with Senator Barack Obama receiving 63% of votes in the Empire State. But, for the most part, Western New York mirrored the voting behaviors of many swing states and the nation at large. Of the 716,000 votes for president in the eight counties, 52.8% were for Obama, compared to his 52.9% vote share nationwide.

The underlying geography of the presidential election in this region reflected several patterns observed in recent past elections, as well as nationally in 2008. Obama carried the region's urban centers, winning all eleven cities. He also carried the region's largest and most developed suburban communities—Amherst, Cheektowaga, Tonawanda, West Seneca and Hamburg—while Senator John McCain, the Republican, won developing exurban towns such as Clarence, Lancaster, Orchard Park and Wheatfield (Figure 1).

Rural areas, accounting for the vast majority of the region's land mass and government units, voted solidly for McCain—including all of Orleans and Wyoming Counties, and everywhere in Allegany County except the college town of Alfred. In fact, McCain won in 85% of the region's 175 cities and towns, resulting in a mostly red election map.

When the map is distorted to reflect population (Figure 2)—known as a cartogram—the influence of the fewer but more populous Democratic-leaning places becomes apparent. Buffalo and its first-ring communities occupy almost half of the resulting image, while cities such as Jamestown, Olean, Batavia and Lockport fill large areas outside the metropolitan core.

In some places, the election was very close. Fourteen cities and towns had margins of victory of less than five percent, and one in four had margins of victory below 10 percent—many of which were concentrated on the Lake Erie shoreline and along the Route 219 corridor through southern Erie and Cattaraugus Counties. At the same time, three out of four cities and towns had margins of victory exceeding 10 percent and one-third had margins higher than 25 percent, including most of Allegany and Wyoming Counties. Obama's biggest margin of victory—61.4 percent—came in Buffalo, while Centerville in Allegany County gave McCain his largest margin, at 45.4 percent. The lopsided tallies in most communities reflect a region where people tend to live near like-minded people.

Did our voting habits **change** in 2008?

In most communities, Obama did better than John Kerry did in 2004.

As in most of the U.S., Western New York saw a noticeable Democratic shift between the election of 2004—featuring President George W. Bush (R) against Senator John Kerry (D)—and the race between Senators Obama and McCain. In more than 80% of the region's cities and towns (Figure 3), the margin of victory swung to the Democrats between 2004 and 2008—either by widening a Democratic margin of victory or, as in most places, narrowing a Republican margin of victory.

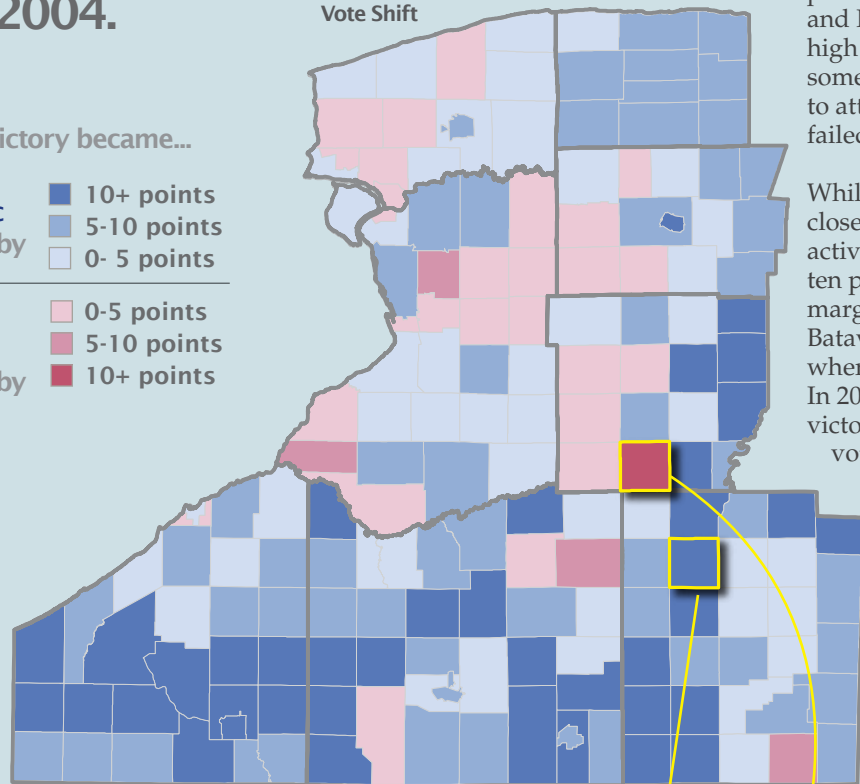
The greatest shifts occurred in rural areas—especially the Southern Tier, where all but five communities voted more Democratic in 2008 than 2004. The Town of Caneadea in Allegany County experienced the largest Democratic shift, as the Republican margin of victory narrowed from 57 percent in 2004 to 36 percent in 2008. Nearby, the Town of Eagle in Wyoming County had the biggest shift in the opposite direction, with the Republican margin widening from 19 percent to 32 percent.

Shifts were less pronounced in Erie and Niagara Counties, reflecting the already high Democratic vote totals from 2004 in some places and, perhaps, McCain's ability to attract some moderate voters that Bush failed to capture in 2004.

While most communities voted in ways that closely tracked the party affiliations of their active registered voters (Figures 4 and 5), ten places did the opposite—albeit by small margins. One of these places was the City of Batavia, the only city in Western New York where Republican affiliation predominates. In 2004, Batavia gave George Bush a 747 vote victory. In 2008, Obama won the city by two votes. The other nine places were rural and suburban communities with small Democratic majorities that voted narrowly for McCain.

Even before Election Day, the 2008 election brought about shifts in party enrollment, with a notable increase in independent and minor party affiliation (Figures 6 and 7). Between the primary election in March 2008 and the general election in November, the total number of registered voters in the region not enrolled in one of the two major parties grew by 1.4%, compared to a 0.2% increase in Democrats and a 1.2% decrease in Republicans. In 60% of the region's towns and cities, the combination of non-affiliation and minor party affiliation represented the fastest growing (or slowest declining, in Erie County's case) enrollment status during that period. Democrats, meanwhile, were the fastest growing group in one-third of the region's jurisdictions. National trends such as young voters registering for the first time, older voters becoming re-engaged in the political process, an overall bad year for Republicans and other developments may have influenced this rise in non-affiliation. Whether it will last beyond 2008 is unclear.

FIGURE 3 '04-'08 Presidential Vote Shift



Margin of victory became...

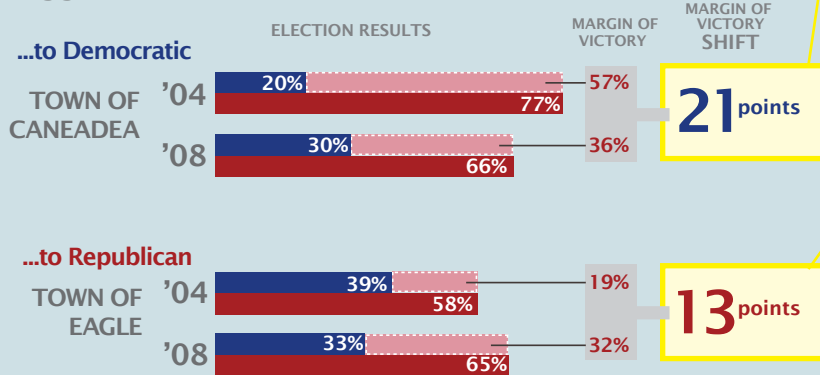
...more Democratic than 2004 by

- 10+ points
- 5-10 points
- 0-5 points

...more Republican than 2004 by

- 0-5 points
- 5-10 points
- 10+ points

Biggest shift...



Republican enrollment predominates in most municipalities in Western New York...

FIGURE 4 Party Enrollment in November 2008, by County

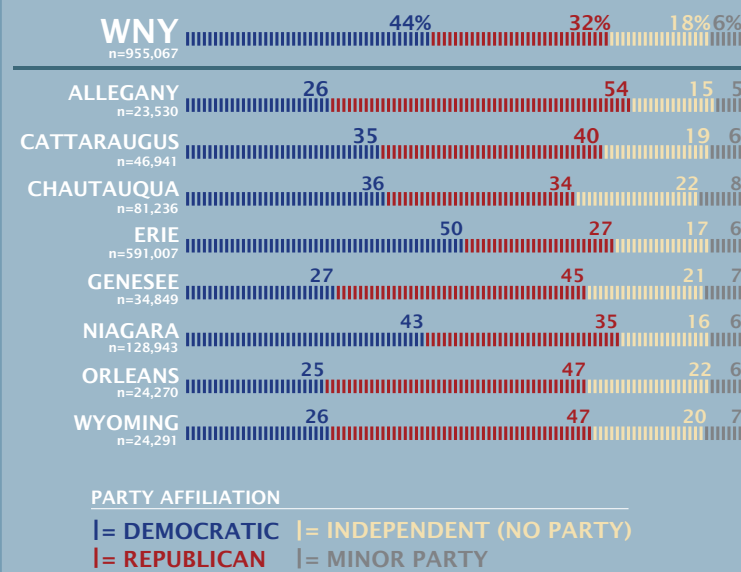
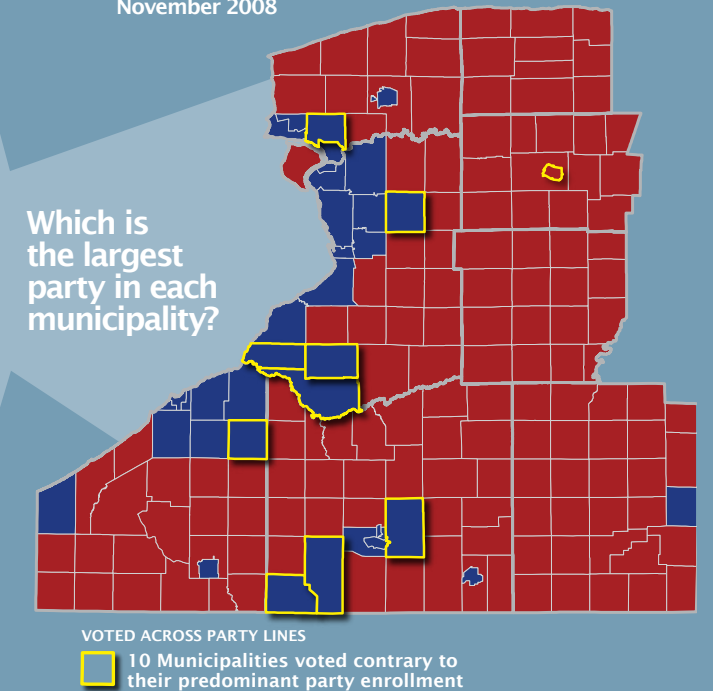


FIGURE 5 Predominant Party Affiliation of Active Registered Voters, November 2008



Which is the largest party in each municipality?

...but independent and minor party enrollment grew the fastest in 2008.

FIGURE 6 Change in Party Enrollment between March 2008 and November 2008

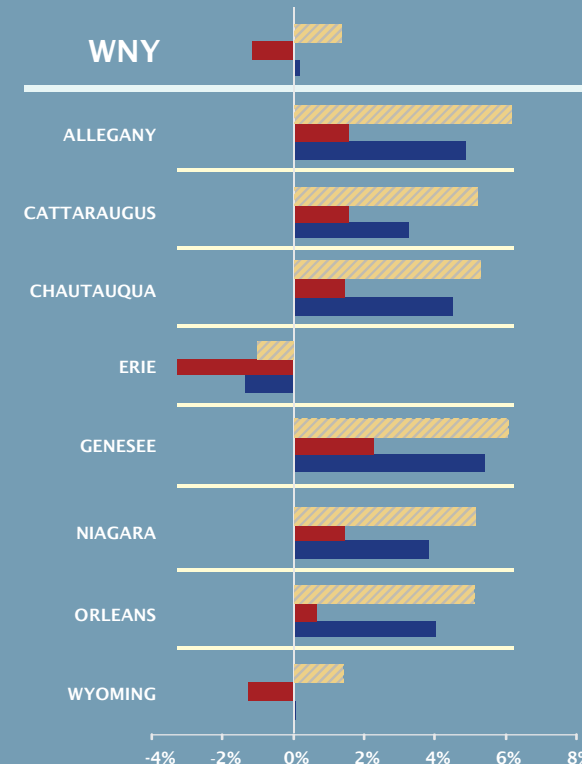
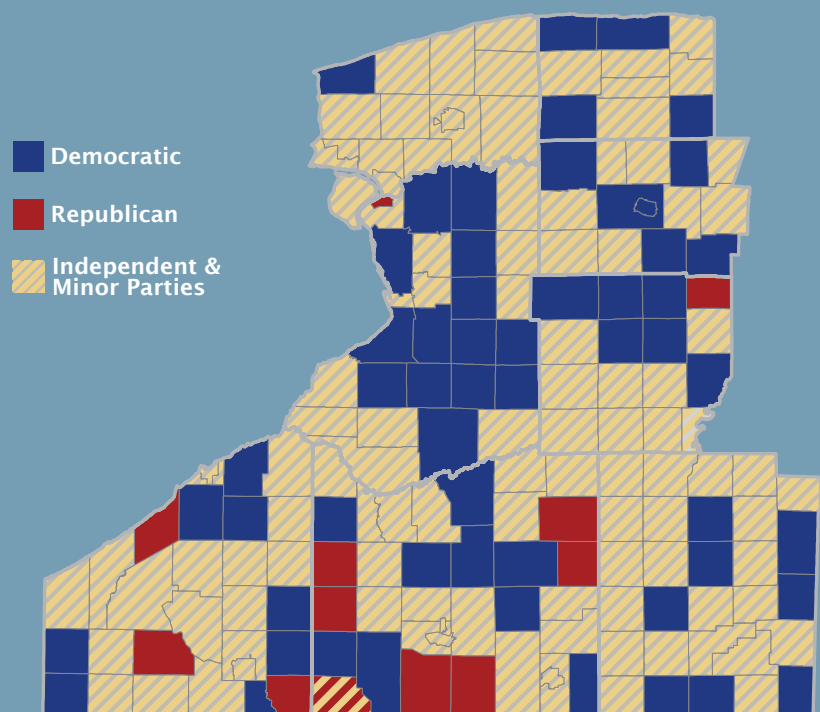
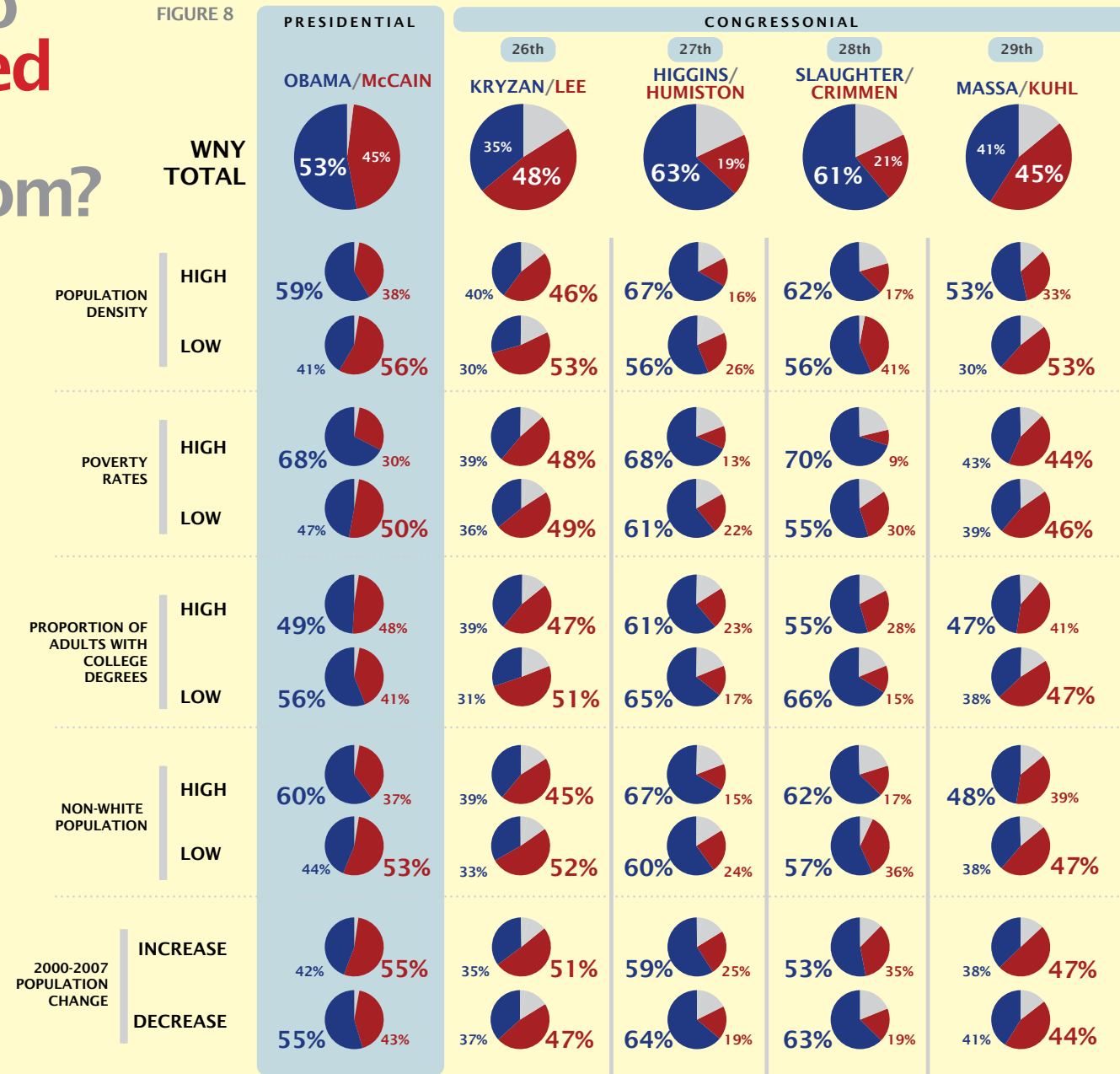


FIGURE 7 Fastest Growing Voter Enrollment Status between March 2008 and November 2008



Who voted for whom?

FIGURE 8



Without a detailed exit poll for Western New York, it is difficult to gauge demographic voting patterns. Categorizing the region's towns and cities by certain characteristics, however, provides some sense of how communities of varying types voted in the presidential and congressional races.

At the presidential level, several patterns mirrored the urban/rural divide. Places with relatively high population densities voted for Obama by 21 points, while those with lower densities voted for McCain by 15 points. This pattern was similar in places with relatively large non-white populations—primarily cities and large suburbs—and rural areas with more homogenous populations.

More variability was apparent with characteristics that apply to a broader range of places. Areas with relatively high poverty rates—including cities and many rural areas—voted for Obama by a 38 point margin, with McCain winning

areas of lower poverty by 3 points. At the same time, Obama won regardless of a community's educational attainment levels.

There was less variation in the region's congressional races, as winning candidates won by large margins in most places. An exception, though, was the Massa/Kuhl race in the 29th district, including all of Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties. Massa, the Democrat, won the election, while Kuhl won the WNY portion of the district. But Massa won the region's cities and major college towns—reflected by his performance in densely settled areas with relatively high proportions of minorities and college-educated adults.

As in years past, ticket splitting between the presidential and congressional races was widely observed in 2008, with 50 municipalities in the region voting for opposite parties. Forty six of those places voted for McCain and a Democratic congressional candidate, with 34 of them voting for the incumbent Brian Higgins in the 27th District.

Figure 8 Data Notes:

UB Regional Institute analysis of 2008 election data from county boards of election; results for congressional races reflect district votes within the eight counties of Western New York

Population Density: 'High' is density at or above 500 persons per square mile in 2007, 'Low' is below 500.

Poverty Rates: 'High' is a poverty rate at or above 12.5% in 2000 (the 75th percentile of WNY municipalities in the 2000 Census), 'Low' is below 12.5%.

Proportion of Adults with College Degrees: 'High' is 18.9% or more adults over age 25 with college degrees (the 75th percentile of WNY municipalities in the 2000 Census), 'Low' is below 18.9%.

Non-white Population: 'High' is 3.6% or more residents who identify themselves as a race other than white (the 75th percentile of WNY municipalities in the 2000 Census), 'Low' is below 3.6%.

2000-2007 Population Change: 'Increase' is a population change of 0% or more between the 2000 Census and the 2007 population estimate, 'Decrease' is a net population loss.

For More Information

New York State Board of Elections, online at <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/>

Allegany County Board of Elections, online at http://www.alleganyco.com/default.asp?show=btn_elections

Cattaraugus County Board of Elections, online at <http://ww2.cattco.org/tag/department-board-elections>

Chautauqua County Board of Elections, online at <http://www.votechautauqua.com/>

Erie County Board of Elections, online at <http://www.erieboe.com/>

Genesee County Board of Elections, online at <http://www.co.genesee.ny.us/dpt/elections/>

Niagara County Board of Elections, online at <http://elections.niagara.ny.us/>

Orleans County Board of Elections, online at <http://orleansny.com/PublicRecords/Elections/tabid/97/Default.aspx>

Wyoming County Board of Elections, online at <http://www.wyomingco.net/BOE/>

Need to know more?

UB Regional Institute
regional-institute.buffalo.edu



Find this and other policy briefs at UB Regional Institute's Web site.

Regional Knowledge Network
rkn.buffalo.edu



For detailed election data, visit the UB Regional Institute's Regional Knowledge Network:

View and dynamically map 2004 and 2008 presidential election results, voter registration and turnout data

View legislative district and county jurisdiction maps

UB Regional Institute
University at Buffalo The State University of New York

A unit of the University at Buffalo Law School

The Regional Institute
University at Buffalo
The State University of New York
Beck Hall
Buffalo, NY 14214-8010
Phone: 716 829-3777 Fax: 716 829-3776
Web: regional-institute.buffalo.edu
E-mail: regional-institute@buffalo.edu

From West Seneca to Wellsville, how did Western New York vote in 2008?

