

Who has the edge is more muddled in the bigger swing states of Ohio and Florida, while Republicans have a narrow lead in Colorado. Early, in-person voting started in Florida over the weekend, and dozens of Democrats in Tallahassee marched five blocks from a church to an early-voting site yesterday, chanting "Vote early."

Almost 15 million people have already cast ballots nationwide, according to the United States Elections Project at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. Both parties are spinning their versions of what the turnout means as they seek to project momentum in a contest where more than a third of the nation's vote probably will be cast before Election Day, Nov. 6.

"The data are confirming what we are seeing in the polling, which is that these state races are going to be narrower than in 2008," said Michael McDonald, a professor at George Mason who studies early voting.

In Iowa, more than 470,000 people had cast ballots through Oct. 27, according to the Iowa secretary of state's office. If as many people vote this year as did in 2008, that would represent 30 percent of the total vote. Registered Democrats have cast 44.6 percent of the ballots so far, compared with 32 percent by Republicans and 23.3 percent by independents.

Polls Versus Voting

"The main thing is not to look at the polling but to look at the voting," David Axelrod, a senior campaign strategist for President Barack Obama, said yesterday on CNN's "State of the Union" program. "We are mounting up a very, very large lead in Iowa based on where those early votes are coming from."

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