

Democratic Underperformance in the 2004 Gubernatorial Election: Explaining 2004 Voting Patterns with an Eye Towards 2008

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Introduction

Heading into the 2008 election, polls once again suggest a consistent lead for Democrat Barack Obama at the presidential level (about 10-12 point advantage), while at the gubernatorial level Democrat Christine Gregoire appears to be in a very close race with GOP candidate Dino Rossi (SurveyUSA poll #14557). News reports suggest that the Puget Sound suburbs may hold the keys to the Governor's race with voters supporting both Obama and Rossi. However, a bigger surprise may be that in the Democratic stronghold of Seattle, Gregoire "lost" more votes than in any other region of King County, or any other County in the state (see Table 7, page 8). Yet the deficit of more than 44,000 Democratic votes for Gregoire in Seattle alone is often overlooked because the Governor still carried Seattle by a comfortable margin. In this report, we outline the Democratic advantage for John Kerry, as compared to Christine Gregoire in 2004, sorted by County, Legislative District, and specific Voting Precincts throughout the state to uncover, exactly where, the Governor did the worst, in relation to her fellow Democrat John Kerry.

In any statistical model analyzing voting patterns in general elections in American politics, party identification is the premier variable predicting which candidate an individual will vote for. Based on this logic, it could be presumed that those people who identify as Democrats will vote largely for the Democratic ticket, and those identified as Republicans will vote for the Republican ticket. In other words, if a voter casts a ballot for the Democratic nominee for president, it is reasonable to assume that that same voter will also vote for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, and so on down the list. This is, as close to a law that exists in political science research. But often times other factors, for instance candidate traits and personality, differences in policy positions, and political differences at the federal and local level, can alter the voting patterns of a sizeable part of the electorate. This is precisely what happened in the 2004 gubernatorial race in Washington, where, despite a fairly large victory for the Democrat at the presidential level, the vote for governor was the closest in the state's history.

Indeed, at the presidential level in 2004, Democratic candidate John Kerry received about 205,000 more votes than did George W. Bush. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Christine Gregoire, on the other hand, only bested Republican Dino Rossi by 133 votes in the third and final recount. This vote differential accounted for more than a seven percent Democratic shift of the statewide vote.

Table 1: Statewide Vote for President and Governor (2004)

Election	Total Votes	Percent
President		
Kerry	1,510,201	52.82
Bush	1,304,894	45.64
Total Vote	2,859,084	98.46
Dem Vote Advantage	+205,307	7.18
Governor		
Gregoire	1,373,361	48.87
Rossi	1,373,228	48.87
Total Vote	2,810,053	97.74
Dem Vote Advantage	+133	0.00
Dem Governor Roll-off	-205,174	-7.12

Methodology

The 2008 general election is just two weeks away and although unmistakably the political winds are significantly different from the 2004 election, the 2008 and 2004 elections will likely have one dynamic in common: a much closer gubernatorial than presidential race. This report takes a first cut at this comparison by looking at the distinctive geographic voting patterns across the presidential and gubernatorial races in the 2004 election.

To determine this question, voting results for both the presidential and gubernatorial races were compiled and analyzed by county, legislative district, and precinct. In many of the state's geographic localities, a clear trend emerged: Kerry received more votes than Gregoire and Rossi received more votes than Bush. Indeed in many places, voters cast a majority of their votes for Kerry and also Rossi. Apparently, many voters were voting Democratic at the presidential level but Republican at the gubernatorial level. The analysis in this report is based on, and attempts to get at, this notion. Thus, a variable was created, called Democratic roll-off, which is a measure of the vote difference between Gregoire and Rossi in the gubernatorial race minus the difference between Kerry and Bush at the presidential race. Essentially, this is the net vote difference between the races, and for the most part, this net vote difference benefited Rossi immensely.

Because this concept is relatively unfamiliar, a brief example is in order. In the Sammamish precinct 3215, Kerry received 443 votes to Bush's 433 votes, for a difference of +10 votes. Gregoire, on the other hand, garnered a much smaller 320 votes, while Rossi collected a rather large 548 votes, for a differential of +228 votes for Rossi. The Democratic roll-off, -238, then, is the difference between Kerry's advantage (+10) minus Gregoire's advantage (-228). This is an appropriate measure because it considers simultaneously Rossi's over-performance relative to Bush and Gregoire's under-performance relative to Kerry.

After analyzing the voting patterns at the county and precinct level, three voting trends are clear: Rossi outperformed Bush in the majority of the state's counties, suburban areas in and around King County were most likely to support both Kerry and Rossi, and although Gregoire performed strongly in Seattle, there was nevertheless extreme democratic roll-off at the gubernatorial level thus giving Rossi large gains in some of the state's most liberal neighborhoods.

Broad County Voting Trends

In analyzing the vote at the county level, it is clear that Rossi outperformed Bush in the majority of the state's counties. In other words, the Democratic candidate for president did much better than the Democratic candidate for governor. However, as one moves further away from the Seattle metropolitan area into the southern, northern, and central parts of the state, Democratic roll-off tends to diminish as the voting patterns for governor and president begin to equate. And in eastern Washington—the most conservative part of the state—Democratic roll-off ceased as Gregoire actually outperformed the Democratic presidential ticket.

Overall, a Democratic gubernatorial roll-off was apparent in 25 of the state's 39 counties, totaling a net vote advantage for Rossi of over 200,000 votes. A large portion of the Democratic roll-off occurred in the Puget Sound metropolitan area (see Table 2). In King County, Rossi picked up a net 125,000 votes. Rossi's net advantage in Snohomish and Pierce counties, although not nearly as strong as his advantage in King was still strong, at roughly 28,000 and 20,000 votes, respectively.

Table 2: Puget Sound Metro Vote for President and Governor (2004)

County	Kerry – Bush diff	Gregoire – Rossi diff	Dem Roll-off
King	+279,335	+154,464	-124,871
Snohomish	+22,151	-6,484	-28,635
Pierce	+7,448	-12,486	-19,934

In general, however, as one moves farther from Seattle and into northwestern, southwestern, and central Washington, Democratic roll-off, while still apparent, begins to diminish. For instance, Democratic roll-off in the peninsula counties of Clallam, Jefferson, Mason, and Grays Harbor fell to five percent. In southwestern Washington, Rossi's net-advantage, or Democratic roll-off, fell to 2.3 percent of the overall vote. The cascade counties, although a little more favorable to Rossi than Bush compared to these other areas of the state, overall, did not give Rossi a very large net benefit, as Rossi only picked up about 8,000 votes in these areas, the preponderance coming from a single county, Yakima.

Table 3: Olympic Peninsula, Southwestern, and Cascade Votes for President and Governor (2004)

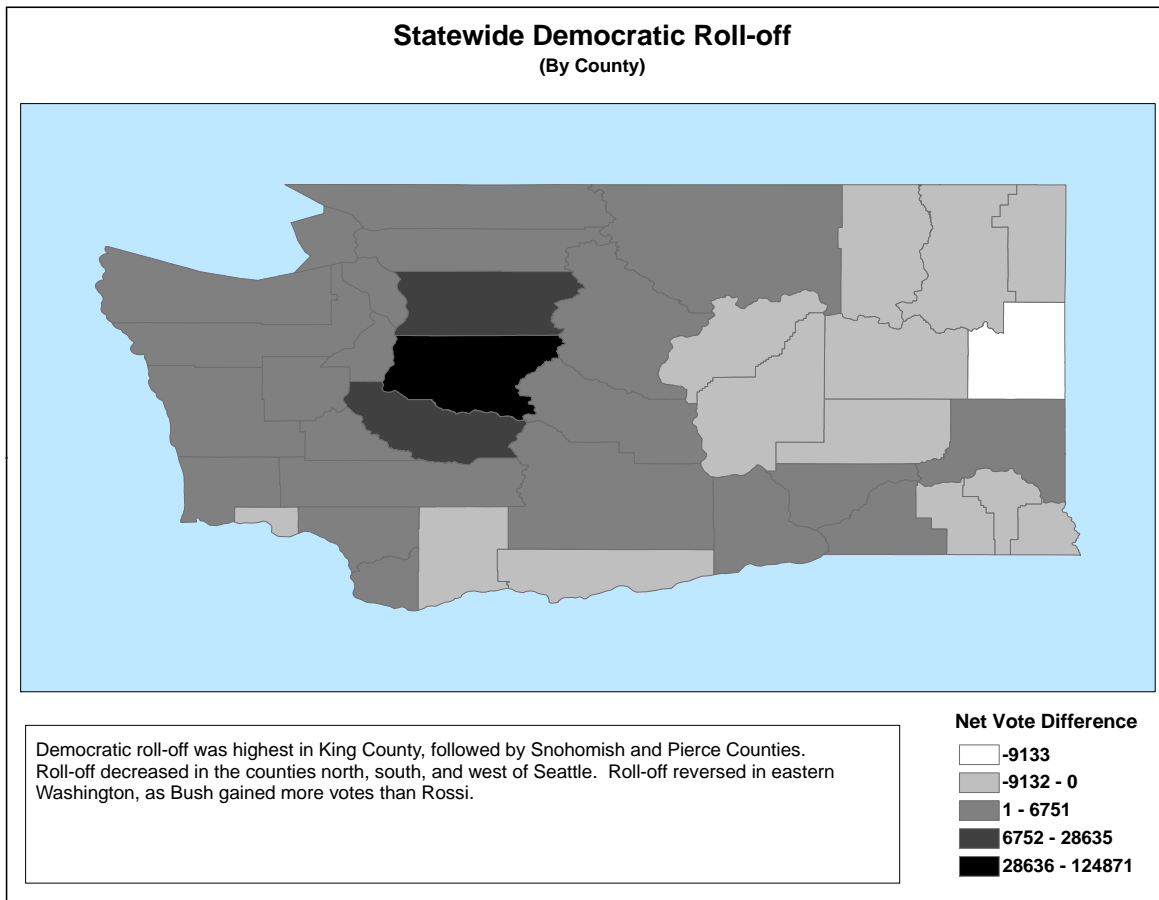
County	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire – Rossi	Dem Roll-off
Peninsula			
Mason	+907	-718	-1,625
Clallam	-1,822	-2,606	-784
Grays Harbor	+1,712	+269	-1,443
Jefferson	+4,960	+3,321	-1,639
Total	+5,757	+266	-5,491
Southwestern			
Clark	-9,108	-13,090	-3,982
Cowlitz	+1,372	+149	-1,223
Lewis	-10,316	-10,595	-279
Pacific	+936	+479	-457
Skamania	-321	-290	+31
Wahkiakum	-150	-106	+44
Total	-17,587	-23,453	-5,866
Cascades			
Chelan	-8,011	-8,362	-351
Kittitas	-2,321	-3,435	-1,114
Klickitat	-980	-847	+133
Okanogan	-3,330	-3,351	-21
Yakima	-14,878	-21,309	-6,431
Total	-29,520	-37,304	-7,784

Gregoire did outperform Kerry, however, in 14 counties, for a vote differential advantage of about 13,500 votes. The bulk of these counties reside in eastern Washington, in places such as Spokane County, Adams County, Pend Oreille County, and Lincoln County. These areas went heavily Republican in the 2004 contests: Rossi won by about 71,000 votes compared to 81,000 votes for Bush. This constitutes a Rossi underperformance—relative to Bush—of about 2.5 percent, suggesting that, outside of Spokane, these counties voted either more or less along traditional partisan lines in both races or so few voters reside in these areas that their relative impact was minor in terms of statewide effects.

Table 4: Eastern Washington Vote for President and Governor (2004)

County	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire – Rossi	Dem Roll-off
Eastern Washington			
Adams	-2,436	-1,942	+494
Asotin	-2,001	-1,381	+620
Benton	-22,801	-25,058	-2,257
Columbia	-802	-700	+102
Douglas	-4,594	-4,305	+289
Ferry	-818	-623	+195
Franklin	-5,569	-5,650	-81
Garfield	-570	-412	+158
Lincoln	-2,309	-1,835	+474
Pend Oreille	-1,387	-803	+584
Spokane	-24,116	-14,983	+9,133
Stevens	-6,193	-5,301	+892
Walla Walla	-6,066	-6,293	-227
Whitman	-1,110	-1,643	-533
Total	-80,772	-70,929	+9,843

Figure 1



The Suburban Seattle and East Side Vote

Much has been made of the chameleon nature of the Seattle suburbs during the 2004 election. A cursory glance at the voting statistics supports this notion with one notable caveat. The vote on the east side, compared to areas north (e.g., Edmonds and Lynwood) and south (e.g., Kent and Auburn) of Seattle, were far more likely to contain Democratic roll-off precincts. In other words, more precincts on the east side voted for Kerry and then turned around and voted for Rossi than in other suburban Seattle areas.

The three legislative districts that comprise the bulk of the east side in King county (5, 41, 45, and 48) include the cities of Kirkland, Bellevue, Sammamish, Redland, Mercer Island, Newcastle, and a smidgeon of other smaller cities. These districts all voted for both Kerry and Rossi.

District 5, comprising most of Sammamish—the city where Rossi lives—for example, went for Kerry by 1,100 votes at the presidential level, but turned around and went for Rossi by almost 11,000 votes, a net shift of nearly 12,000 votes. While not each legislative district supported Rossi at such high levels, Rossi won these districts by about 19,000 votes, whereas Bush lost these areas by more than 25,000 votes, giving Rossi a net vote swing of approximately 44,000 votes, or 16 percent of the vote.

Table 5: East Side Vote for President and Governor (2004)

Leg. District	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire - Rossi	Dem Roll-off
5	+1,102	-10,763	-11,865
41	+10,764	-965	-11,729
45	+5,578	-5,647	-11,225
48	+8,054	-1,461	-9,515
Total	+25,498	-18,836	-44,334

However, analyzing voting trends at the legislative district level—while certainly indicative of broad voting patterns—is still a fairly crude form of analysis. Analyzing geographic voting patterns at the precinct level allows for a more fine-tuned look at the data. Indeed, when this analysis is conducted, many precincts on the east side experience Democratic roll-off of over 20 percent. In legislative district 5, for instance, 38 precincts recorded a 20 point or higher net advantage for Rossi, totaling nearly 5,000 votes. And although District 5 experienced the greatest share of Democratic roll-off, an analysis of the top 20 roll-off precincts on the east side suggests that the roll-off occurred not just in Rossi’s home city of Sammamish but in places like Bellevue, Issaquah, and other areas. In short, the roll-off was broad on the east side.

Moving south and north of Seattle, the Democratic roll-off, although still reasonably high, begins to diminish relative to the roll-off on the east side. For instance, looking south to Legislative District 33, which includes parts of the cities of Renton, Tukwila, SeaTac and Kent, Rossi gained a net vote advantage of 5,280 votes (slightly more than 11 percent). District 47, comprising the cities Covington, Black Diamond, and parts of Auburn and Kent, showed similar voting patterns at 10 percent Democratic roll-off (5,700 votes).

Table 6: Top 20 Roll-off Precincts: East Side Vote for President and Governor (2004)

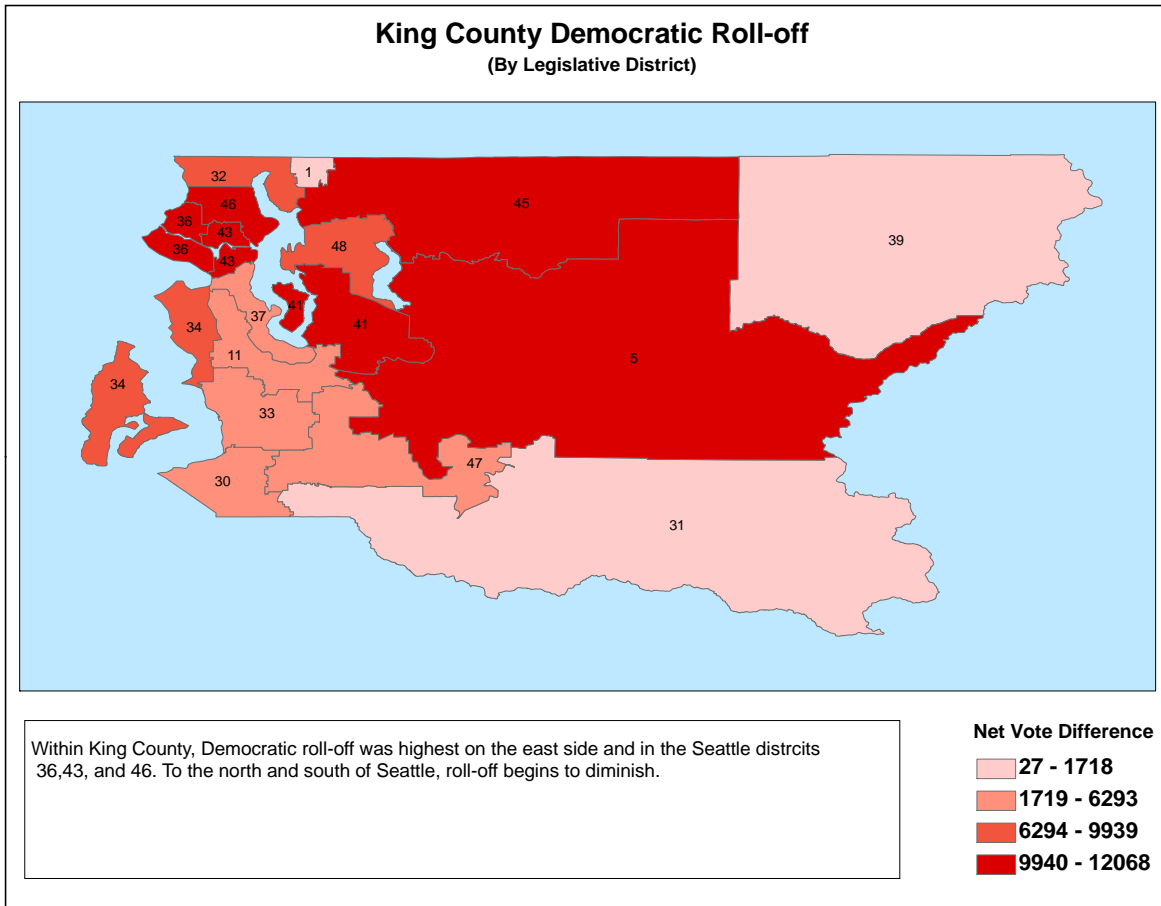
Leg. District	Precinct	Rank	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire - Rossi	Dem Roll-off
5	SNQ 05-3409	1	-76	-537	-461
5	SAM 05-3215	2	+10	-228	-238
5	MARGERY	3	+162	-62	-224
5	SAM 05-2973	4	-76	-299	-223
5	ISS 05-3464	5	+86	-131	-217
5	SAM 05-3385	6	-271	-485	-214
5	SAM 05-3412	7	+16	-195	-211
41	NEW 41-0840	8	-13	-206	-193
45	BIG BEND	9	-99	-290	-191
5	ISS 05-2602	10	+80	-109	-189
5	SAM 05-2693	11	+41	-142	-183
45	ELSIE	12	+56	-124	-180
41	BEL 41-3225	13	+41	-129	-170
5	SAM 05-3213	14	+105	-60	-165
5	SAM 05-2575	15	-9	-172	-163
41	BEL 41-2935	16	+164	+3	-161
41	ISS 41-3145	17	+91	-69	-160
5	MORGAN	18	+72	-80	-152
45	WOD 45-1225	19	+30	-120	-150
5	SAM 05-3386	20	-102	-249	-147
Total			+308	-3,684	-3,992

And as one moves north into Snohomish County, which gave Rossi a total net differential advantage of more than 28,000 votes (10 percent of the vote), Democratic roll-off tends to diminish as well, especially in districts farther from Seattle. Districts 1 and 32, areas that cut across both King and Snohomish counties, include the cities of Shoreline and Bothell, as well as Kenmore and parts of Edmonds. These areas experienced Democratic roll-off of 13-14 percent, comparable to but nevertheless lower than Seattle. But District 38, which includes most of Everett, only gave Rossi a net vote differential advantage of about 7 percent.

Table 6: Suburban Northern Seattle Vote for President and Governor (2004)

Leg. District	Kerry - Bush	Gregoire – Rossi	Dem Roll-off
32	+19,676	+10,196	-9,480
1	+7,929	-321	-8,250
21	+9,819	+3,400	-6,419
38	+6,551	+3,419	-3,132

Figure 2



The Seattle Vote

Alongside cities such as San Francisco, Austin, Washington, and New York, Seattle is one of the most Democratic cities in the country. It is interesting, then, that the voting patterns across the presidential and gubernatorial contests in 2004 benefitted Rossi immensely. In fact, Rossi gained more votes in the city of Seattle than anywhere else in the State of Washington, relative to the Kerry-Bush election.

To be clear, Seattle contained few areas—unlike the east side—that voted for Kerry and then turned around and voted for Rossi. In fact, this dynamic occurred in only six precincts in the entire city. For instance, Seattle precinct 46-2266, located in Sand Point, gave Kerry an 11 vote victory, but Rossi a margin of 109 votes, for a swing of 120 votes (29 percent). The real story in Seattle is the simple fact that Gregoire garnered much less support than John Kerry. Speaking numerically, while Gregoire obtained more than 155,000 votes than Rossi in the city, Kerry bested Bush by nearly 200,000 votes, constituting a drop-off in performance for Gregoire of about 44,500 votes. As it turns out, this is about the same number of votes Rossi picked up on the east side.

Table 7: King County Seattle-East Side-Other Vote for President and Governor (2004)

Area	Kerry - Bush	Gregoire – Rossi	Dem Roll-off
Seattle	+199,940	+155,398	-44,542
East Side	+25,498	-18,836	-44,334
Other King	+53,897	+18,206	-35,691

This under-performance is not due to people voting for president, but then abstaining from voting for governor, as one may expect. In fact, in Seattle, about 1,400 more people voted in the gubernatorial election than the presidential election. The difference is simply the fact that many Seattleites voted for Kerry, but, similar to some of their counterparts on the east side, turned around and cast their ballot for Rossi. Indeed, Rossi received 17,000 more votes than Bush, whereas Kerry out-performed Gregoire by more than 27,000 votes.

Overall, then, the Democratic roll-off in Seattle (14 percent) was about two points lower than on the east side (16 percent), but because of the greater number of votes in Seattle, the Democratic roll-off in terms of raw numbers is about the same. But within Seattle’s districts and precincts, a notable pattern emerges. Democratic roll-off in the Legislative Districts 36, 43, and 46—the parts of the city north of downtown and Capital Hill—generally had higher roll-off than the precincts south of downtown. Although the difference is only one to three points, because these areas contain larger populations, the net vote difference is sizable.

Table 8: North Seattle and South Seattle Vote for President and Governor (2004)

Leg. District	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire - Rossi	Dem Roll-off
North Seattle			
36	+47,638	+35,570	-12,068
43	+53,940	+43,690	-10,250
46	+40,971	+30,937	-10,034
South Seattle			
37	+34,036	+27,743	-6,293
34	+30,296	+21,444	-8,852
11*	+14,727	+9,473	-5,254

*This district is not all in Seattle

When Democratic roll-off is analyzed at the precinct level, 15 of the top 20 precincts come from Legislative Districts 36, 43, and 46. In fact, despite the fact that only three of the top 20 roll-off precincts actually voted majority Kerry and Majority Rossi, the percentage roll-off is just as high as it was on the east side. And actually, SEA 46-2248 has a higher roll off percentage than the highest east side precinct, M-I 41-0758, which had roll-off at 33.89 percent.¹ In brief, the preponderance of roll-off precincts are located in areas such as Ravenna, the University District, Greenlake, Fremont, Ballard, Sand Point and Queen Anne.

¹ In terms of percentage, not raw figures. Three precincts technically had higher roll-off but such few voters reside in these precincts that they were excluded from this ranking.

Table 9: Top 20 Seattle Democratic Roll-off Precincts (2004)

Precinct	Rank	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire – Rossi	Dem Roll-off
SEA 46-2266	1	+11	-109	-120
SEA 46-2057	2	+161	+43	-118
SEA 46-2247	3	+215	+110	-105
SEA 34-1516	4	+178	+85	-93
SEA 43-2105	5	+257	+166	-91
SEA 43-2089	6	+176	+92	-84
SEA 46-2248	7	+169	+86	-83
SEA 36-1761	8	+166	+83	-83
SEA 36-1666	9	+106	+30	-76
SEA 34-1477	10	+152	+78	-74
SEA 37-1911	11	+116	+43	-73
SEA 43-1275	12	+186	+116	-70
SEA 46-1311	13	+151	+85	-66
SEA 34-1509	14	+165	+100	-65
SEA 36-1664	15	+64	-1	-65
SEA 36-1661	16	+85	+20	-65
SEA 34-1535	17	+132	+76	-56
SEA 46-1960	18	+91	+38	-53
SEA 36-1671	19	+45	-8	-53
SEA 43-2081	20	+88	+37	-51
Total		+2,714	1,170	-1,544

As one would expect, this pattern reverses itself when the precincts with the lowest percentage of Democratic roll-off are analyzed. Here, only four precincts come from Legislative Districts 36, 43, and 46. The majority of these precincts come from the areas south of downtown, particularly in Legislative District 37, which includes the areas of Beacon Hill and First Hill. The precincts reported below in table 10 show the areas that fit the “traditional” Democratic ticket voting pattern in which the Kerry-Bush result was nearly identical to the Gregoire-Rossi result. However, there were only two precincts in the entire city of Seattle in which Gregoire exceeded the Kerry advantage, and an additional two precincts where the Kerry advantage and Gregoire advantage were exactly the same. In every other precinct in Seattle, Gregoire under-performed Kerry’s advantage, hence the Democratic roll-off.

**Table 10: Bottom 20 Seattle Democratic Roll-off Precincts (2004)
(Least amount of Dem Roll-off in Seattle)**

Precinct	Rank	Kerry – Bush	Gregoire – Rossi	Democratic Roll-off
SEA 37-1629	1	+154	+162	+8
SEA 11-1624	2	+249	+252	+3
SEA 43-2065	3	+105	+105	0
SEA 11-1626	4	+138	+138	0
SEA 37-1650	5	+96	+95	-1
SEA 11-1622	6	+281	+278	-3
SEA 37-1853	7	+126	+123	-3
SEA 37-1827	8	+161	+157	-4
SEA 37-1880	9	+205	+201	-4
SEA 37-1950	10	+139	+134	-5
SEA 34-1255	11	+135	+130	-5
SEA 37-1617	12	+148	+143	-5
SEA 46-2221	13	+213	+206	-7
SEA 37-1652	14	+111	+104	-7
SEA 46-2252	15	+167	+160	-7
SEA 46-2220	16	+131	+123	-8
SEA 34-1545	17	+168	+159	-9
SEA 37-2686	18	+186	+176	-10
SEA 37-1607	19	+205	+194	-11
SEA 37-1637	20	+288	+276	-12

Towards 2008

The unique voting circumstances that brought about the closest gubernatorial election in the state's history appear to be at work in the current race. To be sure, some broad political trends are at work now that has made the overall environment less favorable to Republicans and incumbents, generally. George Bush's approval ratings, nationally as well as locally, are near historic lows as well as the ratings for Congress. These broad conditions may of course affect the gubernatorial race, but so far, it appears that the 2008 gubernatorial election will be extremely close again. Both candidates have raised large sums of money, much of the polling has shown a tight race, and advertising has been intense. The extent, then, that either candidate is able to adjust the geographic voting patterns in their favor will likely determine the victor in the 2008 gubernatorial race.

While Senator Obama may be able to improve over Kerry's 2004 showing, it may be at the expense of votes for Governor Gregoire, especially in King County. Analysis of the 2004 election clearly indicates that, as compared to the performance of a Democratic presidential candidate, Democratic Governor Gregoire "lost" more votes in Democratic strongholds of King County, and especially the City of Seattle, than anywhere else in the state.