

County picks up 3,200 voters
 Almost half of the new voters claim no party affiliation with either major party

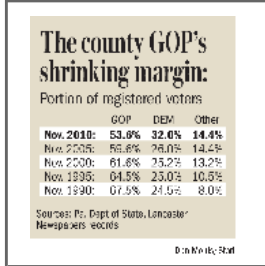
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By TOM MURSE, Staff Writer

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Lancaster County has added more than 3,200 new voters over the last year, nearly half of whom claim no affiliation with either major party, new data show.

Republicans still make up a majority of the 316,878 voters registered for the Nov. 2 election, but the GOP's margin continues to slip here, according to the Pennsylvania Department of State.

If the next five years are anything like the previous five, the portion of Republican voters could dip below 50 percent for the first time in modern history.

Of all county voters:

- 169,870, or 53.6 percent, are Republicans, an increase of 895, or 0.5 percent, over November 2009. Still, the GOP has lost more than 5,000 since 2005, Department of State records show. Five years ago, GOP voters made up 59.6 percent of county voters.

- 101,467, or 32 percent, are Democrats, an increase of 948, or nearly 1 percent, over last year. It's an increase of more than 25,000 since 2005, State Department records show. Five years ago, Democratic voters made up only 26 percent of county voters.

- 43,915, or 13.9 percent, are independents, are registered with third parties or have no party affiliation. That's an increase of 1,269, or about 3 percent, over last year, and nearly 2,900 over the past five years.

- 1,626, or 0.5 percent, are registered Libertarians, an increase of 112, or about 7.4 percent, over last year, and nearly 200 over the past five years.

The sharp growth in Libertarian voters marks a continuation of a trend, as the party noted this summer.

"The fact that Libertarian Party and nonaffiliated voters registration is increasing while big party registration is stagnant or declining is a sign of increasing dissatisfaction with politics-as-usual," the party's statewide chairman, Michael Robertson, said in August. "Registration with alternative

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political parties shows that voters are supporting new ideas and candidate choices as we move our commonwealth forward."

Patrick Rieker, who is involved with the county's Libertarian party, said the growth in registered voters is a result of the broader movement's growing popularity. Groups such as the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, and candidates such as Ron Paul have helped to spread the word, he said.

"They do a good job of advertising the political philosophy, but they also do a lot of really good work," Rieker said.

Also helping fuel the growth of the Libertarians is the enthusiasm of tea party groups, who value some of the same principles, he said.

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