BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

2012 Election Turnout Dips Below 2008 and 2004 Levels: Number Of Eligible Voters Increases By Eight Million, Five Million Fewer Votes Cast

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A cliff-hanger presidential election, major issues at stake, an estimated $6 billion spent in the 2012 campaigns and an eight million person increase in the eligible voters all failed to sustain the upward momentum for turnout from 2004 and 2008.

Voter turnout dipped from 62.3 percent of eligible citizens voting in 2008 to an estimated 57.5 in 2012. That figure was also below the 60.4 level of the 2004 election but higher than the 54.2 percent turnout in the 2000 election.

Despite an increase of over eight million citizens in the eligible population, turnout declined from 131 million voters in 2008 to an estimated 126 million voters in 2012 when all ballots are tallied. Some 93 million eligible citizens did not vote.

The turnout percentage of eligibles voting was down from 2008 in every state and the District of Columbia, except two – Iowa and Louisiana. The turnout numbers of citizens who cast ballots were down in every state but six – Delaware, Iowa, Louisiana, North Carolina, North Dakota and Wisconsin.

Turnout was down for both Republicans and Democrats, falling 4.2 percentage points for the Democrats from 33.0 percent of eligible citizens in 2008 to 28.8 this year; and 1.2 percentage points for the GOP from 28.4 in 2008 to 27.2 this year.

These were some of the highlights of a preliminary report on turnout and registration in the 2012 general election released today by the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) and the Center for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE). This report is the fourth in a series of reports released by the two organizations.

Other highlights of the report:

The winner-take-all aspect of choosing electors, effectively limiting presidential electoral competition to a handful of competitive states, has a major impact on turnout. In swing or battleground states, where large amounts of money are spent on saturation television advertising, massive mobilization efforts and the location of the majority of campaign forays - the average turnout in this year's election was 62.7 percent of eligible voters. Across the rest of the nation, average turnout was 54.8 percent.

Seven states set record lows for overall presidential year turnout – Hawaii, Kansas, Montana, New York, Oklahoma, Utah and West Virginia. There were four record Democratic turnout lows - in Indiana, Oklahoma, Utah and West Virginia. The Republicans achieved record high turnout in two states - Alabama and North Carolina - and one record low in Hawaii.

The highest overall turnout was recorded in Minnesota with 74.6 percent of eligible citizens voting, followed by Wisconsin (71.3), Iowa (69.2), New Hampshire (68.6 percent and still counting) and Massachusetts (66.6 percent) - likely due to the Warren/Brown race for the Senate.

The lowest overall state turnout - excluding two states, Arizona and Alaska, which still have many ballots to count - was in Hawaii at 43.6 percent of eligible citizens, followed by West Virginia (45.1), New York (46.3), Oklahoma (48.5) and Texas (48.9).

The highest Democratic turnout was in the District of Columbia which recorded a 47.9 percent turnout, followed by Massachusetts (40.4), Vermont (40.3) Minnesota (39.4) and Wisconsin (37.7). The lowest Democratic turnout occurred in Utah at 12.5 percent of citizen voters, followed by Wyoming (15.8), West Virginia (16.0), Oklahoma (16.1) and Arkansas (18.1).

There were only two states that increased their turnout in 2012 compared with 2008 – Louisiana which increased its turnout by .14 percentage points and Iowa which increased by .11. Excepting the states which are still counting large numbers ballots, those whose rates declined most were New York (minus 21 percentage points) and New Jersey (minus 15.6), probably in part due to the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Other states whose turnout rates dropped sharply were Maine (minus 8.1), Kansas (-7.4), Vermont (-7.4) and Rhode Island (-7.3).

Democratic turnout also increased in only two states and the same states—Louisiana (up .4 percentage points) and Iowa (0.1) The largest decreases were in New York (minus 7.8 percentage points), DC (-7.1), Utah (-6.7), and Illinois (6.4).

Republican turnout increased in 15 states led by North Dakota (up 2.7 percentage points), followed by Wisconsin (2.5), Utah (1.6), Iowa (1.5) and Massachusetts (1.1). The largest decreases were in Indiana (minus 5.1 percentage points), followed by New Jersey (-4.7), New York (-4.5), Oklahoma (-3.7) and Mississippi (-3.4).

It is not clear from the results of this election whether this year's low turnout is a one-time setback to the rise in turnout which started with the 2000 election or a return to the slide in participation that began in 1964 and continued, with two one-election interruptions, through 1998. That question will likely be answered by the 2014 midterm election and the 2016 presidential election.

This report also includes an update to the BPC/CSAE report on registration, adding three states that have certified their registration, including one state that has partisan

registration. This brings the total of the states that have reported registration to 37 and the states with partisan registration to 22.

These revised figures further support the trend in the states which have partisan registration toward increased registration for neither party, rising for the 13th consecutive presidential election year. Based on raw and unadjusted registration figures, Democratic registration is 36 percent of eligible voters, down by 2.2 percentage points from 2008; Republican registration is 27.2, unchanged from 2008 and on the same level as it has been for several election cycles. Republican registration has remained steady due to an increase in Southern and Mountain states registration that have compensated for losses in the West and New England. Registration for neither major party is at 23.8 percent of eligible voters, up from 22.0 in 2008 and now nipping at the heels of the two major parties.

SUMMARY CHARTS

1. Turnout Trend: The number and percentage of eligible citizens who voted for President in elections since 1920.
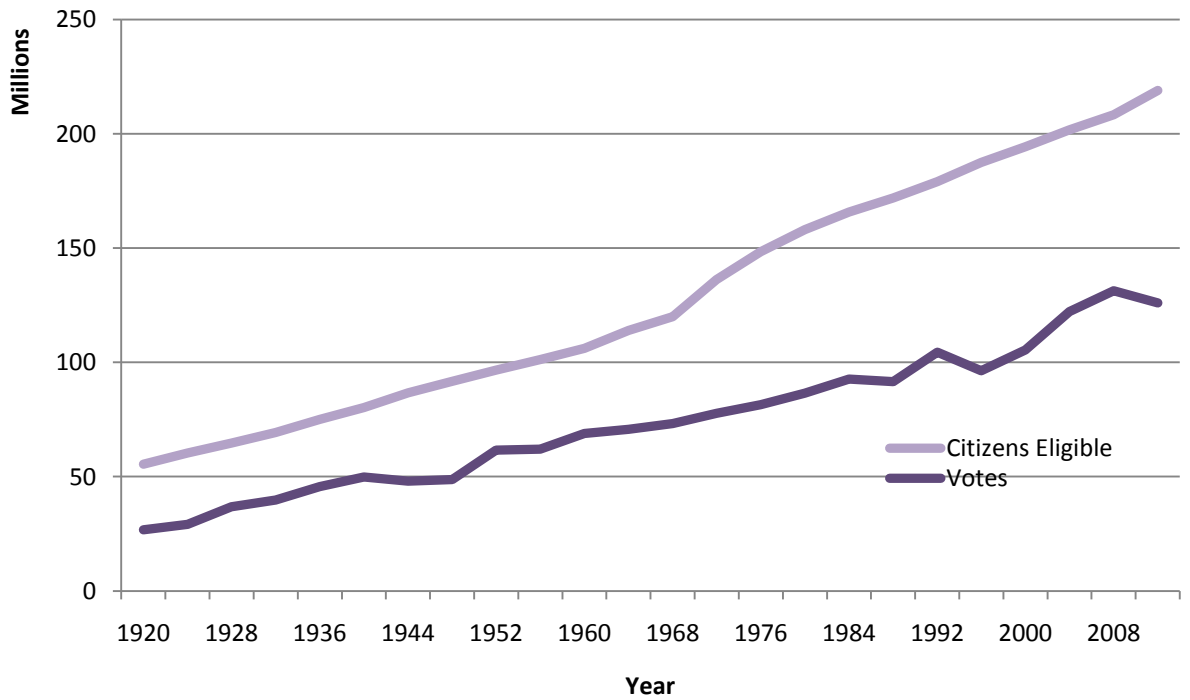
YEAR	Citizens Eligible	Vote	Percent of Eligible Voted	Pct. Pt. Dif.	Adj Pct * Voted
2012	218,959,000	126,000,000 (est.)	57.5	-4.8	
2008	208,323,000	131,304,357	62.3	2.4	
2004	201,780,000	122,265,430	60.6	6.4	
2000	194,327,000	105,399,313	54.2	2.8	
1996	187,437,000	96,277,872	51.4	-6.9	
1992	179,048,000	104,428,377	58.3	5.0	
1988	171,855,000	91,594,805	53.3	-2.6	
1984	165,727,000	92,659,600	55.9	1.2	
1980	158,111,000	86,515,221	54.7	-0.3	
1976	148,419,000	81,555,889	55.0	-2.1	
1972	136,228,000	77,718,554	57.1	-3.9	
1968	119,955,000	73,211,875	61.0	-1.0	
1964	113,979,000	70,645,592	62.0	-2.8	64.9*
1960	106,188,000	68,838,219	64.8	3.6	67.8*
1956	101,295,000	62,026,908	61.2	-2.5	63.9*
1952	96,607,000	61,550,918	63.7	10.5	66.8*
1948	91,689,000	48,793,826	53.2	-2.2	56.2*
1944	86,607,000	47,976,670	55.4	-6.8	58.8*
1940	80,248,000	49,900,418	62.2	1.3	66.1*
1936	75,013,000	45,654,763	60.9	3.5	63.5*
1932	69,295,000	39,758,759	57.4	0.5	61.4*
1928	64,715,000	36,805,951	56.9	8.6	61.2*
1924	60,334,466	29,095,023	48.2	0.1	51.9*
1920	55,441,000	26,762,613	48.3		52.2*

* Prior to 1964, African-Americans in the south were considered eligible voters but were almost universally unable to vote until the Voting Rights Act became law in 1965 because of Jim Crow laws. The percentages in this column are based on subtracting the Census Bureau's estimate of southern African-Americans from the overall citizen-eligible population for the nation and interpolating between censuses and dividing the vote for President by these interpolated figures. This probably provides a more accurate turnout percentage of those who could actually vote but for the purposes of consistency, all percentage in the text are based on citizen-eligible vote as explained in the notes below without this adjustment.

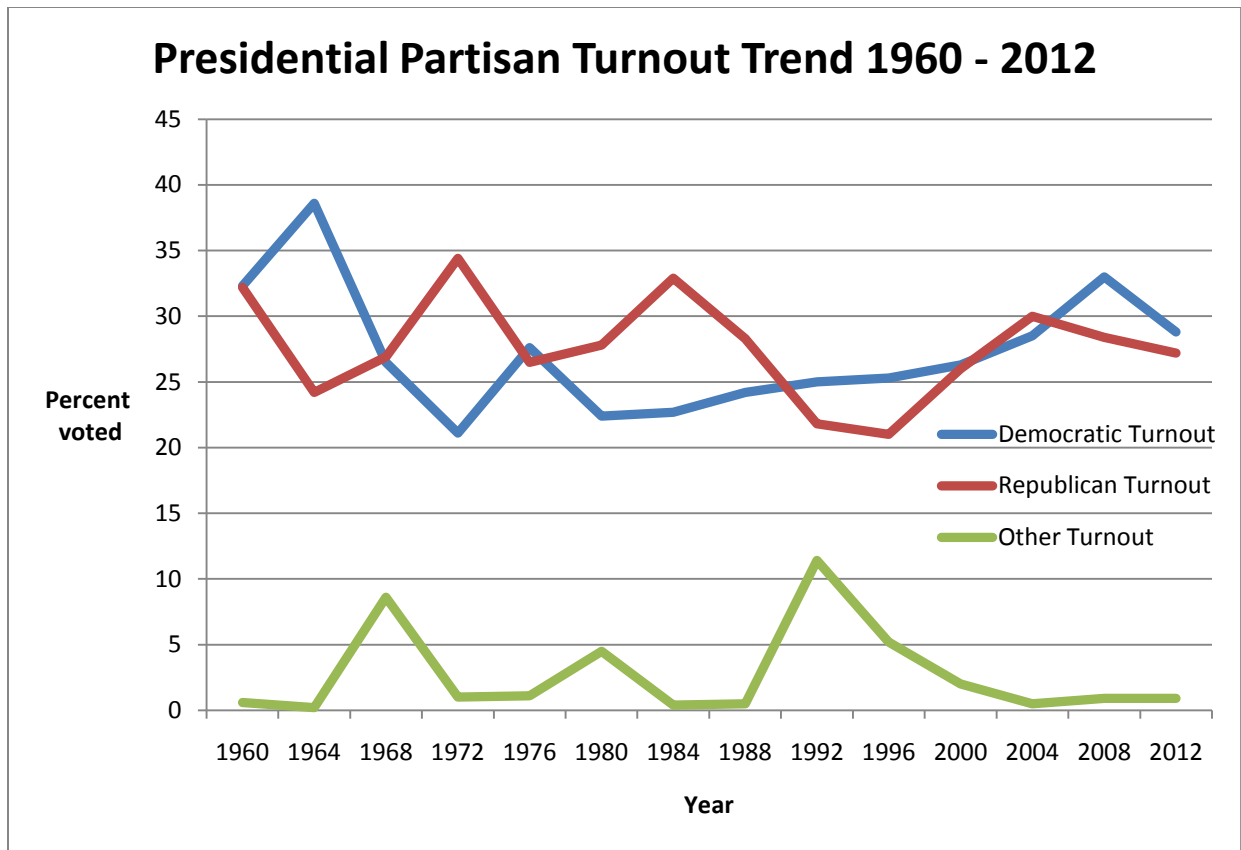# Turnout Trend 1920 - 2012 Percent Eligible Citizens Voted

Percent Eligible Citizens

Year

Percent Voted

Turnout Trend 1920 - 2012

Millions

Year

Citizens Eligible

Votes
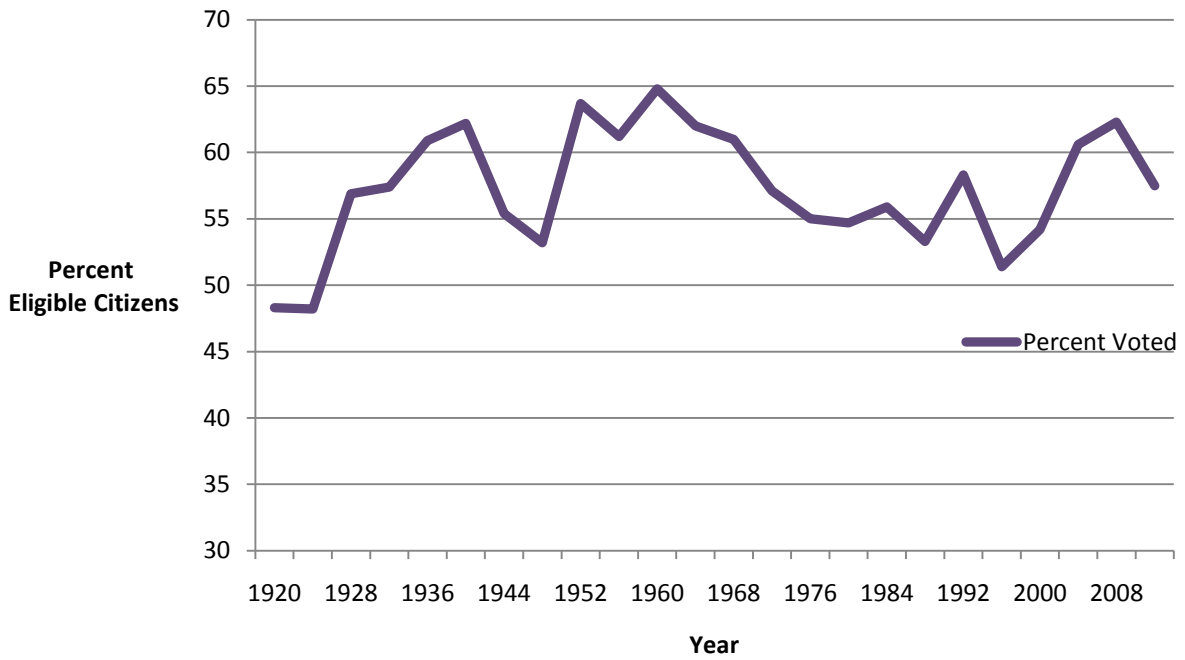
2. Presidential Partisan Turnout Trend: Percentage of eligible citizens who voted for the presidential candidate of each major party and those who voted but did not vote for either major party. The vote percentage in 2012 is based on near final but unofficial counted returns, those which were available by the end of the day after the election and provided to Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC)/Center for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE) by the Associated Press. Percentages for previous years are based on final and official results:

Year	Democratic	Republican	Other
2012	28.8	27.2	0.9
2008	33.0	28.4	0.9
2004	28.5	30.0	0.5
2000	26.3	26.0	2.0
1996	25.3	21.0	5.2
1992	25.0	21.8	11.4
1988	24.2	28.3	0.5
1984	22.7	32.9	0.4
1980	22.4	27.8	4.5
1976	27.6	26.5	1.1
1972	21.2	34.4	1.0
1968	26.5	26.9	8.6
1964	38.6	24.2	0.2
1960	32.3	32.2	0.6

# Presidential Partisan Turnout Trend 1960 - 2012

3. Partisan Turnout Trend Based on Races for U.S. House of Representatives: The percentage of the eligible citizens who voted in races for the U.S. House of Representatives for each major party and for neither party. Figures represent the aggregate of all the votes cast for all general election House candidates in each state. These figures offer a better basis for evaluating the partisan vote over time since they are less subject to the fluctuations driven by the presidential contest. But these figures also have their limitations. Several states do not count the vote for uncontested races. In 2012, there are 61 such races. Figures for the 2012 election are based on the vote counts compiled by the Associated Press by Wednesday evening after the Tuesday election. Figures for previous years are final and official.

Year	Democratic	Republican	Other
2012	25.7	25.9	2.0
2008	31.2	24.7	1.8
2004	25.9	27.8	1.5
2000	24.0	24.2	1.9
1996	23.4	23.5	1.3
1992	27.2	24.4	2.0
1988	25.4	21.7	0.7
1984	26.1	23.4	0.7
1980	24.9	23.7	0.9
1976	28.2	21.1	0.9
1972	26.6	23.9	0.8*

1968	27.7	26.6	0.9*
1964	33.4	23.4	0.4*
1960	33.1	23.7	0.4*

4. Overall Registration: The chart below represents BPC/CSAE's best estimate of the percentage of the citizen eligible vote which will have been registered in 2012 and were registered in previous years, adjusting for all the problems in registration lists outlined in note 3 in the notes section of this report. The estimate for 2012 is based on the 34 states which have completed registration and reported their results.

| Year	Estimated Number and Percent Registered	
2012	153,271,300	70.0
2008	153,100,000	73.5
2004	143,000,000	71.0
2000	133,780,000	68.0
1996	132,000,000	70.0
1992	123,649,000	68.4
1988	116,820,000	67.0
1984	114,750,000	68.8
1980	103,500,000	65.9
1976	95,850,000	66.0
1972	92,700,000	68.7
1968	81,000,000	70.3
1964	78,300,000	72.1
1960	74,250,000	70.9

Estimated Percent Voters Registered
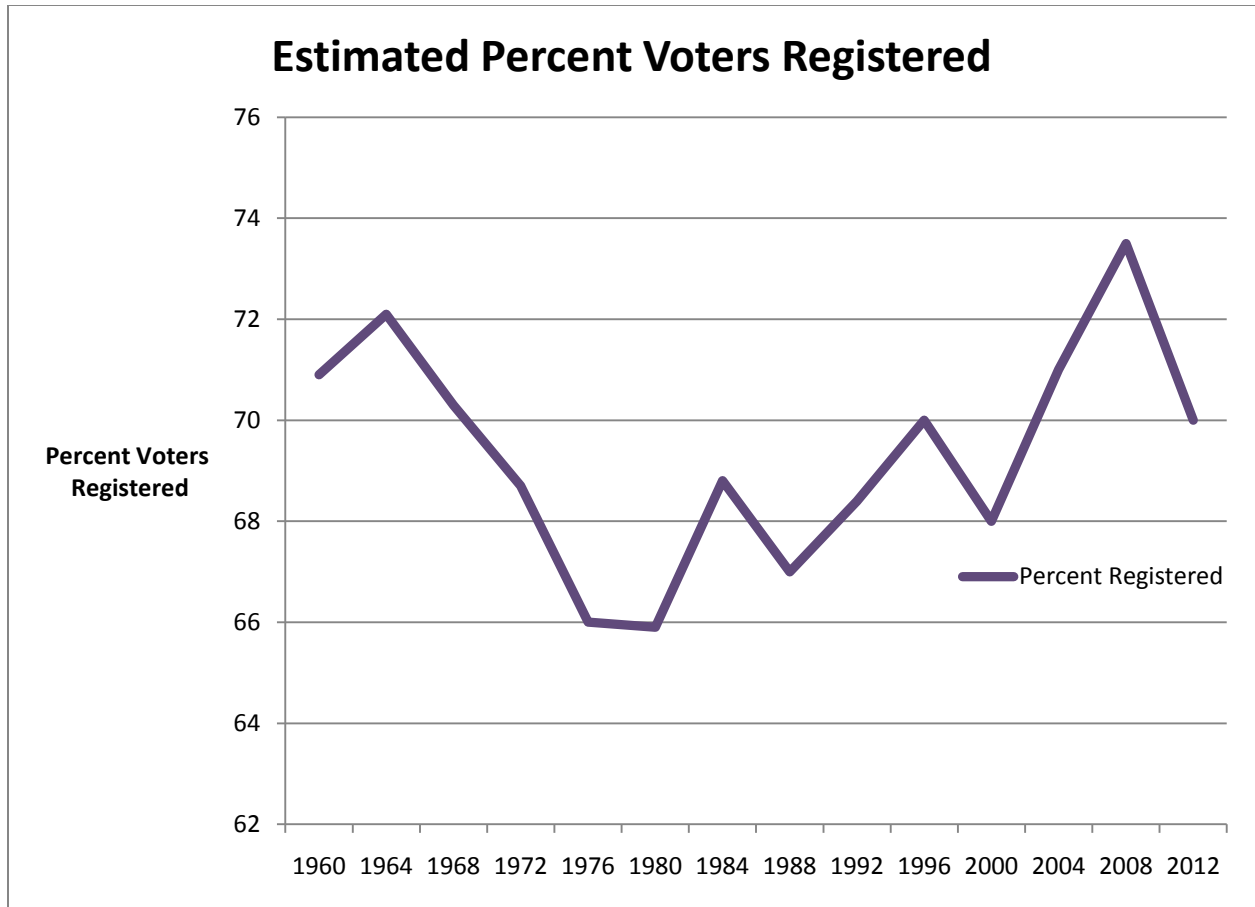
5. Partisan Registration Trend: Estimated partisan registration based on registration figures available at the time of this release. The other category includes those registered for parties other than the Democratic and Republican parties and those who register without affiliation or as independents. Note the percentages for previous elections are for all states and the District of Columbia, while the percentages for 2012 are for the 21 states that have completed their registration and compiled the numbers. Note: This update of partisan registration figures is adjusted slightly to offset the high Democratic voter registration of the last state to report – Massachusetts. As additional states report their final registration numbers, the Democratic voter registration is projected to come in line with this finding.

Year	Democratic	Republican	Other
2012	36.0	27.2	23.8
2008	38.2	27.2	22.0
2004	36.8	27.9	21.7

2000	36.3	27.8	19.6
1996	35.9	26.9	15.8
1992	36.6	25.4	12.7
1988	37.6	25.6	10.5
1984	40.2	24.0	10.2
1980	40.0	22.4	8.2
1976	41.5	21.6	6.8
1972	44.4	24.7	4.7
1968	45.8	26.1	3.2
1964	49.4	24.2	1.7
1960	48.3	27.2	1.6

Partisan Registration Trend

% Registered

Year

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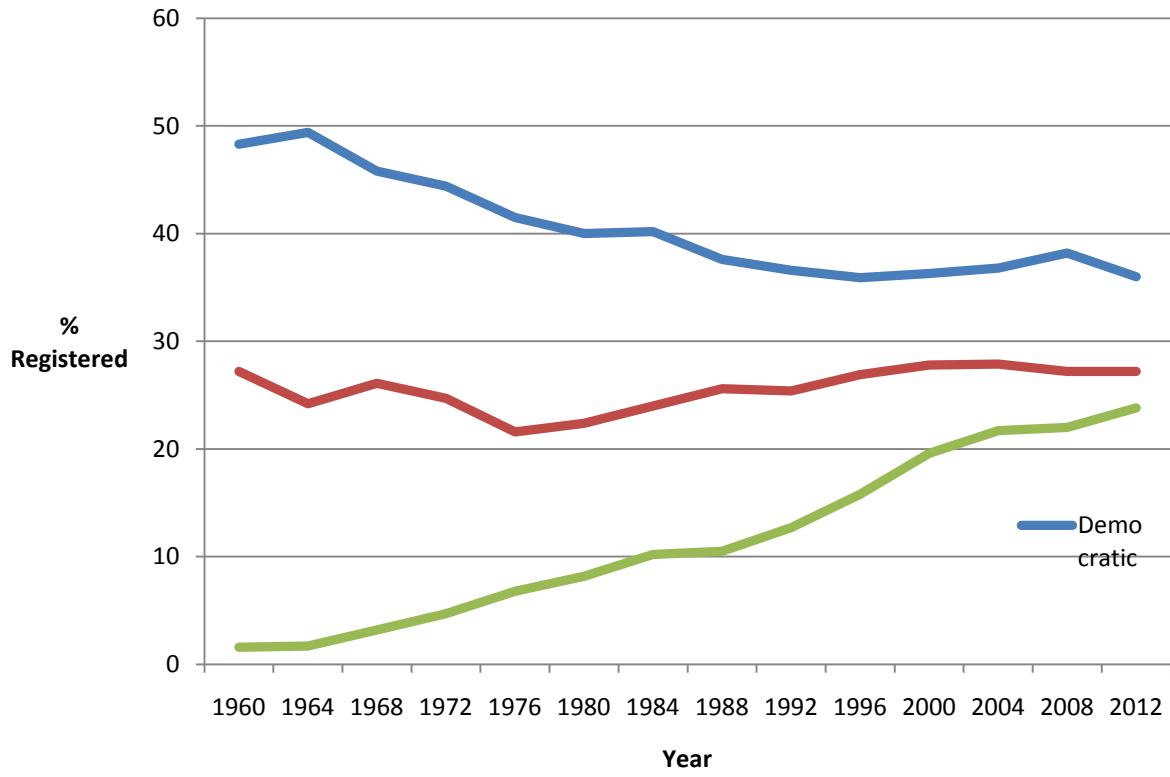
NOTES

1. Turnout defined: Turnout should be a simple calculation - the number of eligible citizens who voted divided by the number of eligible citizens. While the calculation isn't necessarily simple, it is the standard that CSAE has used and is the basis for this and other BPC/CSAE reports.

In years with presidential elections, the numerator is the votes cast for president, mindful that all who cast ballots do not necessarily vote for president and occasionally the total vote for a governor or U.S. Senator exceeds the total vote for president in a state. There are also blank ballots and mutilated ballots, but since many states have no historical record of counting the total number of ballots cast, the most consistent numerator is the presidential vote, for which there are records by state and nation from the first election in 1788 to the present.

The denominator - those eligible to vote - has been a source of contention in some academic circles. What is not in contention is that in order to vote a person must be of age (18 years or older) and must be a citizen. It is the standard used in the report. Since the founding of the republic the decennial census provided an accounting of those age-eligible to vote (it was not always 18 and over and not always uniform in all states) and from 1870 through 2000, with the exception of the census of 1960, the census enumerated those residing in the several states who were not citizens. One could, after each decennial census, subtract the non-citizens of age from the total age-eligible population, emerge with a citizen eligible figure and interpolate between censuses for denominators for the intervening years. The decennial census of 2010 only provided the number of those age-eligible, but the American Community Survey of the Census Bureau, published biennially, provides a non-citizen estimate from its survey. Thus, for the 2012 election, this report (and subsequent ones) BPC/CSAE uses the age-eligible figures from the 2010 census, minus the estimated non-citizens in the 2010 American Community Survey and interpolates forward from 2010 based on the rate of change of the citizen age-eligible population between 2000 and 2010. The methodology for arriving at these interpolated numbers was pioneered by Dr. Walter Dean Burnham. His interpolations were between censuses or usually in recent times from April to April. CSAE has also interpolated from November to November, a figure that will be used in its general election reports.

There are many other factors that affect the denominator of age-eligible citizens. With few exceptions, convicted felons serving prison sentences and many ex-felons who have served their time can't vote but are included in those age-eligible. The problem with correcting for their number is that the laws affecting their enfranchisement are subject to changes, many between one election and the next, and accurate data for the number of disenfranchised felons and ex-felons is not available beyond a certain number of years, making historical comparisons of their impact on the eligible vote difficult. People in mental institutions who are deemed incompetent cannot vote, though they are included in the figure of age-eligible persons. But no one has accurate data on how many are so deemed. U.S. citizens residing in places other than the United States are not included in the census enumeration, despite the fact that they can vote. While it possible to allocate those living outside the United States in government and the military to the states from whence they came, it is impossible to accurately estimate overall the balance of those residing outside of the United States or allocate them to states for voting purposes. People who

are naturalized in the year of the election are not included in the biennial estimate of the eligible, and their numbers cannot be accurately determined until months after the election. People who move also affect state and national denominators, but their number also cannot be accurately ascertained until after the election. In addition, the estimated undercounts and overcounts in census enumerations can also affect the denominator. For all of these reasons BPC/CSAE has chosen to use the citizen age-eligible denominator, as the most accurate way of determining turnout and the one that has the greatest present and historical validity.

Turnout is <u>NOT</u> the percentage of those registered who voted. There are three basic reasons for this: 1) Using registration as a denominator does not account for the whole of the electorate, including those who are not registered. Thus, it gives a false picture of true citizen engagement. 2) Changes in registration law can dramatically affect the figures. If the nation adopts, as it did, a registration law that provides for national mail registration, registration at motor vehicle bureaus, and at social service agencies, registration will go up but turnout of those registered will decline artificially by a greater amount than it does when using the entire eligible electorate as a denominator. 3) Registration figures are subject to the fluctuations of election administration. If a state conducts a thorough purge of its registration lists close to election, its registration figures will be lower and thus its percentage of registered voting will be higher. But if registration lists are not so purged, as is the case in many states, the figures for registration will be higher and the turnout based on these inflated registration figures will be lower. Consider how distorted a turnout percentage using registration as a base would be in states, where because of a lack of regular list cleaning and potential flaws with the Census Bureau's estimates of the state's eligible population, registration figures are regularly in excess of 100 percent of the eligible vote.

2. The votes: The votes in this report are the tallies made available by the Associated Press and state election sites at the end of the business day November 7. The actual votes contained in this study are lower than they will be when final returns are in for all states, latest the first week in December although not much lower. Most states' results are official, three – Colorado, Maine and Montana's tallies are less than 90 percent in. Because California's results tend to be complete only in December and the all-mail states of Oregon and Washington likely will not have completed their counting until next week, CSAE accepted the estimates of likely final turnout from the Secretaries of State in Oregon and Washington and the Field polling organization in California, included these estimate in the votes counted and proportioned the partisan vote count based on the votes already counted. In the summary chart, the national projected ultimate vote count and percentage projection is of necessity an estimate.

If possible and pending how many votes have been counted, there will be two BPC/CSAE historical charts – one based on presidential vote, the other based on the aggregate of votes for U.S. House of Representatives. BPC/CSAE believes that the latter is a better true measure of partisan voting trends.

While the final vote tallies for 2012 in this report are unofficial, all the voting data for previous years is final and official.

Note: The Wisconsin gubernatorial recall election is included here as a general election contest.

It should also be noted that Colorado, Maine and Montana have, at the time of publishing, only barely reached a 90 percent count of their votes, except the votes for U.S. Senate in Montana which has been 94 percent counted.

In the regional charts presented in the summary section and in the detailed charts, it should be noted that Texas is counted in both the South and Southwest region.

3. Registration: The registration figures in the back of this report are, for most of the 37 states in this report, final, official and certified by the chief election officer (or, in a few cases, close to final) in each state and totally misleading. Because of the problems with registration tallies, all numerical conclusions in this report are estimates.

In any given election the official registration figures provided by the states are inaccurate because they contain the names of people who have either died or moved but have not been removed from the registration rolls. The degree of inaccuracy in any given state would depend both on when they conducted a list cleaning and how thorough such a list cleaning was. A state which conducted a thorough list cleaning close to an election would likely have fewer names that were not eligible. But because of non-thorough and early list cleaning, some states - frequently Alaska, Maine and Mississippi and this year Colorado and Michigan - have registration rolls which exceed 100 percent of the Voting Age Population. Prior to the enactment of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), it was at least possible to make a national estimate of registration which would be, on the average, ten percent lower than the official figures provided by the states.

But the NVRA mandated that states must keep even those who have moved or died on their registration rolls for at least two federal elections, even if the people whose names have remained on the rolls have been determined to have moved or died. And, this, in turn, accounts for the substantially higher official figures than prior to the NVRA's implementation.

While states cannot remove names, they can transfer those for whom they have evidence have died or moved to an inactive list, which they are required by the NVRA to report each biennium by March of the year following a national election. A truer picture of actual active registration can be gleaned from the chart below which compares registration rates based on official figures and rates based on official figures minus those kept on inactive lists for a few states. But even this chart overestimates by about 10 percent nationally the actual level of registration. Accordingly the overall registration figures in the summary charts are estimates. BPC/CSAE has made no attempt to adjust individual state statistics because the procedures for list cleaning and timing of those procedures varies widely, even in comparison with previous state procedures.

Overall and Active Registration

State	VAP	Total Reg.	Pct. Reg.	Inact. Reg.	Act. Reg	Pct. Reg	Pct. Dif
UT	1840000	1508215	0.819682	234298	1273917	0.692346	0.127336
AZ	447200	3725362	0.833042	600650	3124712	0.698728	0.134314

WA	4861000	4335775	0.891951	426055	3909720	0.804304	0.087648
IL	8887000	8586527	0.96619	1099693	7486834	0.842448	0.123742
CO	3635000	3645274	1.002826	944162	2701112	0.743084	0.259742
NV	1869000	1500818	0.803006	243064	-1743882	-0.93306	1.736062
Total	**25564000**	**23301971**	**0.911515**	**3547922**	**19754049**	**0.772729**	**0.138786**

The partisan summary charts are based on unadjusted data for the 22 of the 28 states and the District of Columbia who have partisan registration and reported their figures at the time of this release. This data, however flawed, is useful for looking at trends. It should be noted, however, that the figures in this summary chart do not add up to 100 percent and are arrived at by ascertaining the partisan share of the eligible citizen population. The difference between these numbers and 100 percent is the unregistered.

The registration figures in the detailed charts in this report are the compilations by the states and should be taken with large grains of salt. For most of the states reporting the figures used in the detailed charts are overall registration including both active and inactive voters. The numbers for some states, like Ohio, are only for active voters, but they correspond to the figures for previous elections.

BPC/CSAE believes that the only valid time to compare registration with previous registration is at the close of registration.

4. All comparisons in this report are made between similar elections – presidential year elections against earlier or later presidential year elections; and mid-term elections against other mid-term elections.

5. Acknowledgements: There are too many to thank for making this report possible, but some include John Fortier, Eric Larson and the leadership of the Bipartisan Policy Center: Corey Lewin who helped make this report possible by working long hours from election night on; Samuel Schreiber who many years ago designed a custom database program that makes my analysis possible; to a series of research assistants the most recent of which are Matthew Mulling and Mark Harvey; the many state election officials who provided information and data and Dr. Walter Dean Burnham who provided the wisdom and methodology that made the work and analysis of CSAE sound.

A special thanks goes to the Associated Press, which for nearly three decades has made these post-election reports possible through access to their data.

6. The analysis and conclusions in this report are the responsibility of Curtis Gans, CSAE's director.