

The Shrink^{ing} Battleground

The 2008 Presidential Elections and Beyond



A report by FairVote – The Center for Voting and Democracy’s
Presidential Elections Reform Program

www.fairvote.org/presidential

Summary

The Shrinking Battleground uses a model of “state partisanship” to explain why the United States has experienced a decrease in the number of competitive battleground states in presidential elections, how these partisan divisions are hardening and what impact they have on American democracy. The fundamental reality is that fewer and fewer Americans play a meaningful role in electing the president – and that the major party campaigns act on that understanding with utter disregard for the interests and views of most voters outside of swing states. The result is a two-tiered system for voters, with damaging impact on voter turnout, racial fairness, political equality and the future of American democracy. The mounting evidence makes it clear that the solution is to establish a direct election of the president so that all votes count equally and the principles of majority rule and one person, one vote are respected. Among the report’s key findings:

- **A shrinking battleground**
 - In 1960, 24 states with a total of 327 electoral votes were battlegrounds. In 2004, only 13 states with 159 electoral votes were similarly competitive.
 - Of potential battleground states, five (Louisiana, Maine, Oregon, Tennessee, West Virginia) grew much less competitive. One (Colorado) grew more competitive.
 - Our partisanship model predicted state results within a 2% margin in 32 states. Only two minor states changed their partisanship by more than 3.9%.
- **Partisan consequences**
 - George Bush would have lost the 2004 election if he had won the national popular vote by less than 425,000 votes.
 - John Kerry and Democrats did relatively better in battleground states than the nation as a whole and are better positioned if the election is close in 2008.
 - 48 of 51 presidential contests went to the same party as in 2000. A shift of just 18,774 votes would have meant an exact repeat of the 2000 state-by-state results.
- **Civic consequences**
 - In the 12 most competitive states in 2004, voter turnout rose 9% to 63%. In the 12 least competitive states, voter turnout rose only 2% to 53%.
 - Voter turnout among 18-29-year-olds was 64.4% in the ten most competitive states and 47.6% in the remaining states – a gap of 17%.
 - More than 30% of whites live in battlegrounds, in contrast to only 21% of African Americans and Native Americans, 18 % of Latinos and 14% of Asian Americans.
 - A shift of just 20,417 votes would have given the country an Electoral College tie. An even smaller shift would have thrown the 2000 elections into the U.S. House.

Acknowledgements

The Shrinking Battleground was produced by FairVote’s Presidential Elections Reform Program, headed by Christopher Pearson. The report was produced by Pearson and his FairVote colleagues Rob Richie, Adam Johnson and Jeff Rezmovic. For more information, contact:

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The Shrinking Battleground

Presidential Elections in 2008 and Beyond

Overview

No elected office in the United States captures the public's imagination like the presidency. The White House represents this nation's elected royalty, providing a human face to our government and the inspiration for one key element of the American dream: belief that any young person, anywhere in the nation, can proudly announce to their friends, "Someday I will be president." The vast majority of Americans with that dream must settle for other opportunities in life, but in a nation founded on the principle that all men and women are created equal, all Americans should have the right to a meaningful vote in presidential elections.

This principle, however, is violated by our use of the Electoral College, a convoluted and capricious electoral process that weights Americans' votes differently based on where they live and allows a candidate to win election despite receiving fewer votes than another candidate – a perverse result that happened in 2000 and would have happened again in 2004 if George Bush had won the popular vote by less than 425,000 votes.

Inequality in our presidential election system is taking on disturbing new dimensions. The combination of the Electoral College, hardening partisan voting patterns, sophisticated campaign techniques and high-tech tools are creating a two-tier class structure in our democracy: second class citizens disregarded as irrelevant in presidential elections and the fortunate few who receive increasing care and attention by virtue of living in one of the dwindling number of competitive battleground states like Florida and Ohio.

In 1960, for example, when John Kennedy narrowly defeated Richard Nixon, two-thirds of states were competitive. Fully 24 states in 1960 were genuine political battlegrounds, together representing 327 electoral votes. Fast forward to 2004. The number of competitive races plunged to barely a third of the states, and the number of comparable battlegrounds dwindled to only 13, representing just 159 electoral votes. At the same time, the number of completely non-competitive states (those where one party would win by more than 16% in a nationally even race) increased from nine states representing 64 electoral votes in 1960 to 20 states with 163 electoral votes in 2004.

These changes have a direct impact on candidate behavior and voter participation, particularly with the modern era's precise methods of polling and marketing that allow campaigns to focus on narrow slices of the electorate. In August 2004, President George W. Bush's campaign strategist Matthew Dowd remarked that President Bush's campaign had not polled outside of the 18 closest states in more than two years. Despite having more resources than any campaign in history, Dowd knew his candidate didn't need to waste a dime on learning the views of most Americans. A cursory look at John Kerry's campaign itinerary during the general election suggests that his campaign also focused exclusively on the same battleground states. As a result, the interests and opinions of the bulk of "second-class" Americans living in what this report terms "spectator states" were only addressed if they happened to coincide with those of the "first-class" Americans living in

the states where their participation might affect the outcome of the election.

The trends behind this two-tier democracy show every indication of continuing to exacerbate these divisions. Many Americans would like to see the parties break out of their narrow focus on a handful of swing states and instead build national unity by seeking votes around the nation, in “red” and “blue” states alike. But unless we establish a national vote for president, those hopes are in vain. The partisan realignment responsible for increasing the division between first-class Americans in battleground states and second-class Americans in spectator states shows few signs of changing any time soon, and the stakes in winning the presidency are too high for major party candidates to “waste” resources on states that are simply not going to matter in a competitive election.

Indeed voting patterns across the country show less variation from election to election today than just twenty years ago, and majorities in most states are growing more solidly partisan. In a competitive election in 2008, therefore, the percentage of Americans likely to gain attention from presidential candidates in the general election almost certainly will be the lowest in the modern era.

As disturbing as this conclusion is in the short-term, there are even more serious long-term implications of our nation’s hardening partisan patterns and decreasing numbers of competitive states over time. New voter turnout analyses by scholars like Trinity College’s Mark Franklin provide convincing evidence that the voting behavior of most citizens is established for life during their first three or four elections when eligible to vote.

With hundreds of millions of dollars for voter registration and mobilization now targeted on battleground states and virtually nothing on spectator states, a sharp difference in turnout based on where one lives all too easily could continue for the rest of this young generation’s lives. Improving turnout in presidential elections is like changing the direction of the Titanic – it happens all too slowly. A clear rift is already evident in the voting patterns of citizens in battleground and spectator states, with those in spectator states being much less likely to go to the polls. Without changes in this division of battleground and spectator states, the principle of equality will be undercut for decades. Second-class status will become entrenched for millions of young Americans who have the misfortune to live in one of the two-thirds of states that aren’t battlegrounds in presidential elections.

The 2004 Presidential Elections: Accuracy, Trends and Partisan Implications

As detailed in our explanation of this report’s methodology (see next page), *The Shrinking Battleground* provides a valuable means to better understand the 2004 presidential election. Nationally Republican George W. Bush won 50.73% of the nationwide popular vote to Democrat John Kerry’s 48.27%. After losing the popular

vote by more a half-million votes in 2000 with 47.87%, Bush raised his vote share by nearly three percent in 2004 and defeated Kerry by more than three million votes in an election with the highest national election turnout since the 1960s.

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A Note on Methodology: Understanding “State Partisanship”

The Shrinking Battleground bases its analysis on a state’s “partisanship,” which measures the degree to which a state’s division of votes between the two major parties is likely to deviate from the national partisan division. A state’s “Republican partisanship” is equal to the vote percentage that a Republican presidential candidate would likely receive in that state when the national popular vote was dead even.

The formula used to derive partisanship is straightforward, and can allow us to determine what would have happened if the national results in an election had been divided 50-50 -- even if the election was in fact won by a landslide. For each major party candidate, we subtract the candidate’s national vote share from the candidate’s vote share in a particular state, and then find the average of those two numbers. A state’s partisanship based on the vote for one party’s results is based on this formula:

$$\frac{[\text{Candidate's \% of vote in state}] \text{ minus } [\text{Candidate's \% of national vote}] + 50\%}{2}$$

Note that we present partisanship in this report on a scale of 0% to 100% from the perspective of the Republican Party: meaning that a state where no votes were cast for Republicans would have a partisanship of 0% and a state where all votes were cast for Republicans would have a partisanship of 100%. The Democratic Party’s partisanship in a given state would simply be the mirror of the Republican partisanship: a state listed as having a partisanship of 55% in this report has a Democratic partisanship of 45%.

An example: Here’s an example of how we determine partisanship. Suppose that the national vote was 51% Republican to 47% Democrat during a year in which the Republican won West Virginia 55%- 44%. The partisan advantage based on the Republican’s relative performance would be 4% Republican (55% minus 51%). The partisan advantage based on the Democratic candidate’s relative performance would be 3% Republican (44% minus 47%). The average of these two numbers

gives the state a 3.5% Republican advantage and a partisanship of 53.5% Republican. In the next presidential race in West Virginia, we would expect the Republican to run 3.5% ahead of his or her national percentage. If the national vote were even, that would mean a West Virginia vote of 53.5% for the Republican. If the Republican won 57% nationally, he or she would likely win 60.5% in West Virginia.

Note that our model of partisanship does not provide a means to predict the national division between the major parties; rather, it is a relative measure of what is likely to happen in different states once we know the national results. Our partisanship measure has come to be a very reliable predictor of what will happen in any given state relative to the national average. Of the 51 contests in 2004, only two states were outside 4% of their projected partisanship: Alaska and Vermont. (Both are small states where Green Party candidate Ralph Nader ran relatively well in 2000.) The great majority of states were within 2% of their 2000 partisanship.

Partisanship of course is not fixed permanently. Long-term changes in the distribution of the American population can affect the partisan balance in specific regions. Changes in platforms and stances of the major parties over time can increase or decrease their appeal in given areas of the country. Events specific to a given election (Bill Clinton doing relatively well in his home state of Arkansas in 1992 for example) can have an effect on partisanship.

But partisanship generally is stable over time, gradually evolving with the political outlook of the national electorate. In fact partisan stability has increased in recent elections. Our conclusion from recent projection trends is that a century-long partisan realignment in the United States is nearing completion, with the red-blue map nearly perfectly reversed from the late 19th century. The parties seem to be settling deeper into their new bases of majority support, and the small partisanship shifts in recent elections have yet to indicate patterns of how these partisan divisions may change in the years ahead.

Partisanship by State 1960-2004*

State	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
AL	43.0%	80.8%	47.3%	61.9%	44.4%	45.8%	52.0%	55.8%	56.2%	57.7%	57.7%	61.6%
AK	51.0%	47.3%	51.0%	50.2%	62.1%	59.1%	59.3%	57.8%	57.4%	63.0%	65.7%	61.5%
AZ	55.7%	51.0%	59.5%	54.1%	59.3%	61.3%	57.8%	56.7%	53.8%	53.1%	53.4%	54.0%
AR	46.5%	59.5%	50.0%	57.5%	36.0%	45.4%	52.0%	53.2%	43.9%	45.8%	53.0%	53.6%
CA	50.4%	50.0%	51.2%	45.2%	51.9%	53.5%	49.0%	47.9%	46.1%	47.8%	44.4%	43.8%
CO	54.9%	51.2%	54.2%	52.4%	56.7%	57.1%	55.1%	50.0%	50.7%	54.9%	54.4%	51.1%
CT	46.4%	54.2%	47.1%	47.6%	53.6%	50.0%	51.8%	48.7%	49.6%	45.2%	41.5%	43.6%
DE	49.3%	47.1%	51.4%	48.6%	48.3%	46.3%	50.8%	52.3%	48.7%	46.6%	43.7%	45.0%
DC	--	51.4%	17.8%	10.2%	18.4%	14.4%	5.1%	12.0%	15.0%	16.3%	12.2%	8.8%
FL	51.6%	17.8%	54.4%	60.5%	48.4%	53.6%	56.2%	57.3%	53.7%	51.4%	50.3%	51.3%
GA	37.5%	54.4%	51.5%	63.6%	34.1%	37.7%	51.1%	56.3%	52.5%	54.8%	56.1%	57.1%
HI	50.1%	51.5%	39.1%	50.9%	49.7%	44.2%	46.5%	41.4%	47.1%	41.6%	41.1%	44.4%
ID	53.9%	39.1%	62.7%	57.5%	62.4%	65.8%	63.9%	59.2%	59.6%	63.5%	70.0%	67.8%
IL	50.0%	62.7%	51.1%	47.7%	52.0%	49.1%	47.3%	47.2%	45.7%	45.5%	44.3%	43.6%
IN	55.3%	51.1%	55.8%	54.8%	54.8%	54.3%	52.9%	56.2%	55.8%	57.1%	58.1%	59.1%
IA	56.8%	55.8%	55.7%	47.0%	51.5%	51.5%	44.6%	41.0%	49.8%	49.1%	50.1%	49.1%
KS	60.8%	55.7%	59.7%	57.5%	54.8%	57.4%	57.7%	52.8%	55.4%	63.4%	60.7%	61.5%
KY	53.7%	59.7%	52.7%	52.7%	47.4%	45.9%	51.2%	52.0%	51.2%	53.8%	57.8%	58.7%
LA	39.2%	52.7%	47.3%	56.9%	48.1%	47.9%	52.2%	51.2%	50.5%	48.2%	54.1%	56.0%
ME	57.1%	47.3%	43.5%	49.9%	51.4%	46.8%	51.9%	51.9%	48.6%	43.8%	47.7%	44.3%
MD	46.5%	43.5%	48.8%	50.4%	48.0%	43.7%	43.6%	47.6%	45.7%	46.3%	42.1%	42.3%
MA	39.8%	48.8%	34.6%	33.9%	43.2%	45.2%	42.3%	42.2%	43.5%	37.6%	36.6%	36.2%
MI	49.1%	34.6%	46.3%	45.6%	53.7%	48.4%	50.4%	50.1%	49.1%	47.7%	47.7%	47.1%
MN	49.4%	46.3%	43.4%	41.2%	44.6%	43.2%	40.8%	42.6%	47.0%	46.2%	49.1%	47.0%
MS	44.2%	43.4%	44.9%	67.7%	50.1%	45.8%	53.1%	56.6%	57.2%	56.8%	58.7%	58.6%
MO	49.8%	44.9%	50.2%	50.7%	49.2%	48.5%	50.9%	48.1%	47.7%	51.1%	51.9%	52.4%
MT	51.3%	50.2%	54.2%	48.5%	54.7%	57.3%	52.0%	49.1%	51.5%	55.7%	62.8%	59.0%
NB	62.2%	54.2%	63.7%	58.9%	61.4%	64.9%	61.8%	56.6%	61.4%	63.6%	64.8%	65.4%
NV	48.9%	63.7%	53.7%	52.1%	53.2%	63.0%	57.8%	56.6%	51.5%	53.8%	52.0%	50.1%
NH	53.5%	53.7%	53.7%	53.0%	56.6%	59.8%	59.7%	59.2%	52.2%	49.3%	50.9%	48.1%
NJ	49.7%	53.7%	50.7%	50.8%	52.1%	51.8%	51.3%	53.0%	51.6%	45.3%	42.3%	45.4%
NM	49.7%	50.7%	55.7%	50.7%	52.2%	54.2%	51.1%	48.6%	48.5%	50.6%	50.2%	49.2%
NY	47.5%	55.7%	46.9%	47.1%	48.8%	46.5%	44.9%	44.1%	44.9%	39.8%	37.8%	39.6%
NC	48.0%	46.9%	54.8%	58.7%	45.5%	46.2%	52.9%	54.3%	53.2%	56.6%	56.7%	55.0%
ND	55.5%	54.8%	58.5%	51.6%	53.9%	64.1%	56.4%	52.7%	58.8%	57.7%	64.1%	62.5%
OH	53.4%	58.5%	50.8%	49.2%	50.9%	50.4%	50.3%	51.6%	51.9%	51.1%	52.0%	49.8%
OK	59.1%	50.8%	57.5%	63.3%	51.6%	57.9%	59.9%	54.5%	57.1%	58.2%	61.2%	64.3%
OR	52.7%	57.5%	52.7%	43.5%	51.1%	50.0%	47.0%	43.8%	47.8%	50.2%	50.0%	46.7%
PA	48.9%	52.7%	47.9%	48.4%	49.7%	48.7%	44.6%	47.3%	48.3%	49.7%	48.2%	47.5%
RI	36.5%	47.9%	33.5%	41.5%	45.4%	39.9%	42.7%	40.3%	43.8%	37.8%	35.7%	38.4%
SC	48.8%	33.5%	53.9%	59.8%	44.5%	45.9%	54.9%	58.1%	56.9%	57.3%	58.2%	57.3%
SD	58.3%	53.9%	55.3%	42.7%	51.7%	59.6%	54.1%	49.3%	54.5%	56.0%	61.6%	59.5%
TN	53.7%	55.3%	54.5%	57.4%	44.5%	45.3%	49.0%	54.3%	50.5%	53.1%	52.2%	55.9%
TX	49.1%	54.5%	49.0%	54.9%	49.4%	52.1%	54.6%	52.4%	54.5%	56.7%	60.9%	60.2%
UT	54.9%	49.0%	59.4%	59.0%	65.4%	71.2%	65.8%	63.2%	62.1%	64.8%	70.5%	71.5%
VT	58.7%	59.4%	54.3%	51.5%	56.6%	48.1%	49.5%	47.9%	44.9%	43.1%	45.3%	38.7%
VA	52.8%	54.3%	55.1%	57.3%	51.7%	51.5%	53.5%	56.4%	55.0%	55.2%	54.3%	52.9%
WA	51.3%	55.1%	48.6%	47.6%	52.9%	51.3%	47.4%	45.3%	47.1%	48.0%	47.5%	45.2%
WV	47.4%	48.6%	45.2%	52.0%	42.9%	42.9%	46.2%	43.8%	46.3%	46.9%	53.4%	55.2%
WI	51.9%	45.2%	51.5%	43.3%	50.2%	47.5%	45.5%	44.3%	50.6%	49.1%	50.2%	48.6%
WY	55.1%	51.5%	59.8%	57.7%	60.7%	62.5%	62.0%	57.4%	55.6%	60.7%	70.3%	68.7%

*Partisanship is based on projected performance of a Republican presidential candidate in a dead-even national election

Presidential Elections and State Partisanship. 2000-2004

2000 - Bush 47.87% Gore 48.38%

2004 - Bush 50.73% Kerry 48.27%

State	Bush %	Gore %	Partisan-ship*	Expected '04 Based on '00	Deviation	Bush%	Kerry%	Partisan-ship*	Status***	Partisanship change '00-'04
AL	56.5%	41.6%	57.7%	58.4%	4.0%	62.5%	36.8%	61.6%	<i>Landslide R</i>	3.9%
AK	58.6%	27.7%	65.7%	66.5%	-5.4%	61.1%	35.5%	61.5%	<i>Landslide R</i>	-4.2%
AZ	51.0%	44.7%	53.4%	54.1%	0.7%	54.9%	44.4%	54.0%	Lean R	0.6%
AR	51.3%	45.9%	53.0%	53.7%	0.6%	54.3%	44.5%	53.6%	Lean R	0.7%
CA	41.7%	53.4%	44.4%	45.1%	-0.7%	44.4%	54.3%	43.8%	Comfortable D	-0.6%
CO	50.8%	42.4%	54.4%	55.2%	-3.5%	51.7%	47.0%	51.1%	<i>Tossup R</i>	-3.3%
CT	38.4%	55.9%	41.5%	42.3%	1.7%	43.9%	54.3%	43.6%	Comfortable D	2.1%
DE	41.9%	55.0%	43.7%	44.5%	1.3%	45.8%	53.3%	45.0%	Comfortable D	1.2%
DC	9.0%	85.2%	12.2%	12.9%	-3.5%	9.3%	89.2%	8.8%	Landslide D	-3.3%
FL	48.8%	48.8%	50.3%	51.0%	1.1%	52.1%	47.1%	51.3%	<i>Tossup R</i>	1.0%
GA	54.7%	43.0%	56.1%	56.8%	1.1%	58.0%	41.4%	57.1%	Comfortable R	1.0%
HI	37.5%	55.8%	41.1%	41.8%	3.4%	45.3%	54.0%	44.4%	Comfortable D	3.3%
ID	67.2%	27.6%	70.0%	70.8%	-2.4%	68.4%	30.3%	67.8%	Landslide R	-2.2%
IL	42.6%	54.6%	44.3%	45.0%	-0.5%	44.5%	54.8%	43.6%	Comfortable D	-0.7%
IN	56.6%	41.0%	58.1%	58.8%	1.1%	59.9%	39.3%	59.1%	Landslide R	1.0%
IA	48.2%	48.5%	50.1%	50.8%	-0.9%	49.9%	49.2%	49.1%	<i>Tossup D</i>	-1.0%
KS	58.0%	37.2%	60.7%	61.4%	0.6%	62.0%	36.6%	61.5%	Landslide R	0.8%
KY	56.5%	41.4%	57.8%	58.6%	1.0%	59.6%	39.7%	58.7%	<i>Landslide R</i>	0.9%
LA	52.6%	44.9%	54.1%	54.8%	1.9%	56.7%	42.2%	56.0%	Comfortable R	1.9%
ME	44.0%	49.1%	47.7%	48.4%	-3.9%	44.6%	53.6%	44.3%	Comfortable D	-3.4%
MD	40.2%	56.6%	42.1%	42.8%	0.1%	42.9%	55.9%	42.3%	Comfortable D	0.2%
MA	32.5%	59.8%	36.6%	37.3%	-0.6%	36.8%	61.9%	36.2%	<i>Landslide D</i>	-0.4%
MI	46.1%	51.3%	47.7%	48.4%	-0.6%	47.8%	51.2%	47.1%	Tossup D	-0.6%
MN	45.5%	47.9%	49.1%	49.8%	-2.2%	47.6%	51.1%	47.0%	<i>Tossup D</i>	-2.0%
MS	57.6%	40.7%	58.7%	59.5%	0.0%	59.5%	39.7%	58.6%	Landslide R	-0.1%
MO	50.4%	47.1%	51.9%	52.7%	0.6%	53.3%	46.1%	52.4%	<i>Tossup R</i>	0.4%
MT	58.4%	33.4%	62.8%	63.5%	-4.5%	59.1%	38.6%	59.0%	<i>Landslide R</i>	-3.8%
NB	62.2%	33.3%	64.8%	65.5%	0.4%	65.9%	32.7%	65.4%	<i>Landslide R</i>	0.6%
NV	49.5%	46.0%	52.0%	52.8%	-2.3%	50.5%	47.9%	50.1%	Tossup R	-2.0%
NH	48.1%	46.8%	50.9%	51.6%	-2.7%	48.9%	50.2%	48.1%	<i>Tossup D</i>	-2.8%
NJ	40.3%	56.1%	42.3%	43.1%	3.2%	46.2%	52.9%	45.4%	Lean D	3.1%
NM	47.8%	47.9%	50.2%	51.0%	-1.1%	49.8%	49.0%	49.2%	<i>Tossup D</i>	-1.1%
NY	35.2%	60.2%	37.8%	38.5%	1.6%	40.1%	58.4%	39.6%	Landslide D	1.9%
NC	56.0%	43.2%	56.7%	57.4%	-1.4%	56.0%	43.6%	55.0%	Comfortable R	-1.7%
ND	60.7%	33.1%	64.1%	64.8%	-1.9%	62.9%	35.5%	62.5%	Landslide R	-1.6%
OH	50.0%	46.5%	52.0%	52.7%	-1.9%	50.8%	48.7%	49.8%	<i>Tossup D</i>	-2.2%
OK	60.3%	38.4%	61.2%	61.9%	3.6%	65.6%	34.4%	64.3%	Landslide R	3.1%
OR	46.5%	47.0%	50.0%	50.8%	-3.6%	47.2%	51.3%	46.7%	<i>Lean D</i>	-3.3%
PA	46.4%	50.6%	48.2%	48.9%	-0.5%	48.4%	50.9%	47.5%	Tossup D	-0.7%
RI	31.9%	61.0%	35.7%	36.5%	2.2%	38.7%	59.4%	38.4%	<i>Landslide D</i>	2.7%
SC	56.8%	40.9%	58.2%	59.0%	-1.0%	58.0%	40.9%	57.3%	Comfortable R	-0.9%
SD	60.3%	37.6%	61.6%	62.4%	-2.4%	59.9%	38.4%	59.5%	<i>Landslide R</i>	-2.1%
TN	51.1%	47.3%	52.2%	52.9%	3.9%	56.8%	42.5%	55.9%	<i>Comfortable R</i>	3.7%
TX	59.3%	38.0%	60.9%	61.6%	-0.6%	61.1%	38.2%	60.2%	<i>Landslide R</i>	-0.7%
UT	66.8%	26.3%	70.5%	71.2%	0.3%	71.5%	26.0%	71.5%	Landslide R	1.0%
VT	40.7%	50.6%	45.3%	46.0%	-7.2%	38.8%	58.9%	38.7%	<i>Landslide D</i>	-6.6%
VA	52.5%	44.4%	54.3%	55.0%	-1.3%	53.7%	45.5%	52.9%	<i>Tossup R</i>	-1.4%
WA	44.6%	50.2%	47.5%	48.2%	-2.6%	45.6%	52.8%	45.2%	<i>Lean D</i>	-2.3%
WV	51.9%	45.6%	53.4%	54.2%	1.9%	56.1%	43.2%	55.2%	Comfortable R	1.8%
WI	47.6%	47.8%	50.2%	50.9%	-1.6%	49.3%	49.7%	48.6%	<i>Tossup D</i>	-1.6%
WY	67.8%	27.7%	70.3%	71.0%	-2.2%	68.9%	29.1%	68.7%	Landslide R	-1.6%

*Partisanship based on projected Republican Performance **Deviation from 50 - Landslide >8%, Comfortable 5-8%, Lean 5-3%, Tossup 3-0%, † italicized reflects a change from '00

But just because the 2004 elections escaped sustained national attention on a state's controversial ballot count on the order of Florida in the 2000 elections should not disguise the fact that this election again was historically close, that the Ohio election process caused partisan bitterness and that the narrow national division that has existed between the major parties since the end of the Cold War shows every indication of continuing. One measure of current partisan consistency was how closely the partisanship of states in 2000 tracked state partisanship in 2004. Of the presidential contests in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, only two states (the low-population states of Vermont and Alaska) changed their partisanship by more than 3.9%. Partisanship in 32 states stayed nearly the same, changing by 2% or less.

The summary charts on the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections and partisanship trends by state from 1960 to 2004 (see preceding pages) are important building blocks for our analysis. They reveal that the generally modest changes in partisanship (Democratic gains in 29 contests, Republicans in 22) had little impact on the results.

Of those changes affecting which states are or might become battlegrounds, most moved the affected state in the direction of being less competitive, rather than more. For example, the table below lists the ten states where partisanship shifted the most for each party. Of those changes that had any impact on battleground status, five states (Louisiana, Maine, Oregon Tennessee, West Virginia) became notably less competitive. Only Colorado grew more competitive.

Table 1: Biggest Pro-Republican Partisan Shifts in 2004 Election

<u>State</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>Gain</u>	<u>Analysis</u>
Alabama	57.72%	61.58%	3.86%	<i>Shift from comfortable R to landslide R</i>
Tennessee	52.19%	55.91%	3.71%	<i>Shift from lean R to comfortable R</i>
Hawaii	41.10%	44.40%	3.30%	<i>Remains comfortable D</i>
Oklahoma	61.20%	64.34%	3.14%	<i>Remains landslide R</i>
New Jersey	42.34%	45.43%	3.08%	<i>Remains comfortable D</i>
Rhode Island	35.72%	38.39%	2.67%	<i>Remains landslide D</i>
Connecticut	41.53%	43.59%	2.06%	<i>Remain comfortable D</i>
Louisiana	54.10%	56.02%	1.93%	<i>Secures state as comfortable R</i>
New York	37.77%	39.63%	1.86%	<i>Remains landslide D</i>
West Virginia	53.42%	55.20%	1.78%	<i>Secures state as comfortable R</i>

Table 2: Biggest Pro-Democratic Partisan Shifts in 2004 Election

	<u>2000</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>Gain</u>	<u>Analysis</u>
Vermont	45.29%	38.70%	6.59%	<i>Shifts from comfortable D to landslide D</i>
Alaska	65.74%	61.54%	4.19%	<i>Remains landslide R</i>
Montana	62.80%	59.02%	3.78%	<i>Remains comfortable R</i>
Maine	47.70%	44.27%	3.43%	<i>Shift from lean D to comfortable D</i>
Oregon	50.04%	46.69%	3.35%	<i>Shift from tossup to comfortable D</i>
Colorado	54.44%	51.11%	3.33%	<i>Shift from comfortable D to tossup R</i>
Dist. Of Columbia	12.16%	8.85%	3.31%	<i>Exaggerates existing landslide D</i>
New Hampshire	50.89%	48.09%	2.81%	<i>Remains tossup, now favoring D</i>
Idaho	70.03%	67.83%	2.20%	<i>Remains landslide R</i>
Ohio	52.01%	49.82%	2.19%	<i>Remains tossup, now favoring D</i>

In partisan terms, a close inspection of the 2004 elections provides one conclusion that may be counter-intuitive given the national results. In the most hotly contested battleground states, John Kerry's campaign in fact did relatively well. While George Bush won the presidency in 2000 even as he lost the national popular vote by more than 500,000, our analysis suggests that he would have lost the 2004 election even if *winning*

the national popular vote by as many as 425,000 votes. A reduction in Bush's national victory margin from 2.46% to 0.35% likely would have tipped Ohio toward John Kerry, along with Iowa and New Mexico, giving Kerry a 284 to 254 electoral vote victory.

Here is an analysis of the 13 closest states in 2004 and their partisan shifts.

Table 3: Shifts in GOP Partisanship in 2004 Election's 13 Closest States (within 47%- 53%)

State	2000	2004	Change	Dem. gains	Rep. Gains
Colorado	54.44%	51.11%	-3.33%	3.33%	
Florida	50.26%	51.27%	1.01%		1.01%
Iowa	50.10%	49.10%	-1.00%	1.00%	
Michigan	47.69%	47.06%	-0.63%	0.63%	
Minnesota	49.06%	47.03%	-2.03%	2.03%	
Missouri	51.93%	52.37%	0.44%		0.44%
Nevada	52.03%	50.07%	-1.97%	1.97%	
New Hampshire	50.89%	48.09%	-2.81%	2.81%	
New Mexico	50.23%	49.17%	-1.06%	1.06%	
Ohio	52.01%	49.82%	-2.19%	2.19%	
Pennsylvania	48.18%	47.52%	-0.66%	0.66%	
Virginia	54.28%	52.87%	-1.41%	1.41%	
Wisconsin	50.15%	48.58%	-1.57%	1.57%	
Average	50.87%	49.54%	-1.33%		

In these battlegrounds, Democrats on a per-state average improved their performance by 1.33% percent, with gains in 11 of 13 states. This slight shift toward Democrats could have an impact on the 2008 elections. George Bush would have won 10 of these 13 hotly contested states in 2000 had the election been tied in the national popular vote, but in 2004 he would have won only five of these states in a nationally even election. The fact that Democrats did *relatively* better in battlegrounds than in the rest of the country suggests that the Democrats' campaign efforts centered on swing states were slightly more effective than those of the Republicans. It was George Bush's national advantage in voter preference that carried him to victory.

The Kerry campaign's relative success in battlegrounds thus helps explain why there were so few shifts in the Electoral College map. Indeed 47 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia awarded their electoral votes to parties exactly as they had done in 2000. The three states that shifted – New Hampshire (to Democrat), Iowa and New Mexico (to Republican) – were among the five most closely contested elections in the 2000 election. A shift of just 18,774 votes in those states would have meant an exact repeat of the 2000 state-by-state election results. A shift of just 20,417 votes in Iowa, New Mexico and Nevada would have given the country an Electoral College tie and thrown the outcome of the race to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Shrinking Battlegrounds and the Hardening of the Partisan Divide: Elections 1960-2004

On average the last five electoral cycles have seen a deepening schism between Democratic and Republican states. This schism can be measured both by the number of states that have shifted from being relatively competitive to safe for one party and by the number of highly partisan states that have now become extremely different from the national average.

For the past four and a half decades the difference in partisanship between the ten most Republican and the ten most

Democratic states ranged between 18% and 22%. As recently as 1988 this disparity was only 16%. The past two elections, however, have seen an average spread of 27.5% in 2000, and 26.6% in 2004.

The rise in partisanship has been particularly pronounced for Republican states. In 1988, the ten most Republican states had an average partisan bias of 58.2%. By 2004, the ten most Republican states had average partisanship of 64.5%, with all ten of these states having partisanship scores over 60%.

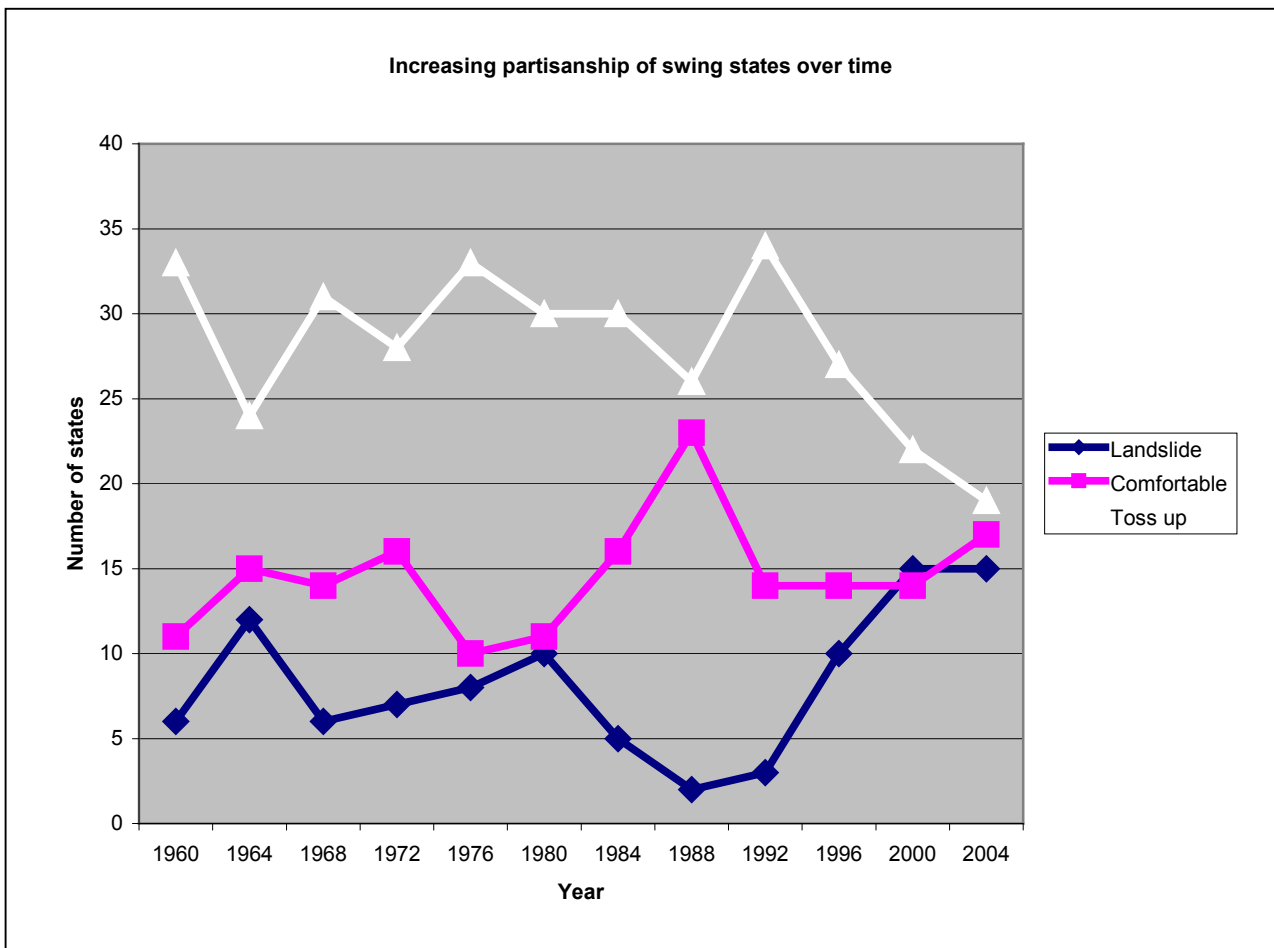


Table 4: Number of states within partisanship brackets, 1960 to 2004
(Note steady decline in competitive bracket 45-55)

Partisanship Scores	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	Average
60+	2	8	2	5	5	7	4	1	2	6	11	10	5
55-60	9	9	11	11	4	7	9	14	9	11	7	10	9
55-50	16	9	20	16	21	10	21	15	17	11	16	8	15
50-45	17	15	11	12	12	20	9	11	17	16	6	11	13
45-40	2	6	3	5	6	4	7	9	5	3	7	7	5
40-0	4	4	4	2	3	3	1	1	1	4	4	5	3

The result of this growing division is that less and less of the population lives in competitive states in a nationally competitive election. While at least half the states were within five percent of even partisanship in every election between 1960 and 1996, this number of potentially competitive states dropped to 22 states in 2000 and to only 19 states in 2004.

Between 1960 and 1992 an average of 20 states could be fairly classified as likely to have been highly competitive in a nationally close election (meaning that a candidate from either major party could expect to win between 47% and 53%). Among these states typically were almost all of the nation's most populous states and enough total states to represent a majority of American citizens.

In the last three elections cycles, however, there was a marked reduction in the number of competitive states, even as the national electorate as a whole has become more evenly divided. Whereas 22 states were competitive in the 1992 election, only 13 states were up for grabs when Clinton ran against Bob Dole in 1996. The number of contested states rebounded somewhat to 16 states in 2000 – still well below the number common in previous close elections without an incumbent candidate – then plunged back to 13 in 2004.

This represents the smallest number of battleground states in the entire course of our analysis since 1960. While no fewer than 319 electoral votes were located in battleground states in 1960 (more than enough to elect a President), only 159 electoral votes could reasonably be considered up for grabs in 2004. While a majority of electoral votes were located in swing states as recently as 1988, the total number of competitive electoral votes began to drop in 1992 to the point where the elections in 2000 and 2004 saw the number of competitive electoral votes fall below 200 for the first time in the post-1960 period of our analysis.

At the same time, the number of spectator states (ones where one party enjoys a partisanship advantage of at least 58%) has risen to unprecedented levels. Just five states with a total of 20 electoral votes were completely out of reach in 1992. The number of uncontested electoral votes skyrocketed to 20 states with 166 electoral votes in 2000 and 163 electoral votes in 2004. From 1960 to 1996, the total number of uncompetitive electoral votes had never exceeded 100. In 2004, for the first time, the number of completely uncompetitive electoral votes exceeded the number of electoral votes in competitive states.

Table 5: Shifts in Numbers of Swing States and Uncompetitive States, 1960 – 2004

Year	Swing States	Electoral Votes	Uncompetitive States	Electoral Votes
2004	13	159	20	163
2000	16	167	20	166
1996	13	206	13	90
1992	22	207	5	20
1988	21	272	8	40
1984	21	260	9	44
1980	15	221	13	58
1976	24	345	9	46
1972	22	235	9	46
1968	19	273	11	57
1964	17	204	13	100
1960	23	319	9	64

Swing states are within 3.0% of a 50% partisanship; uncompetitive states are more than 8.0% from a 50% partisanship.

What’s behind this growth in the number of spectator states? Our research supports the common perception that our country is becoming more starkly divided along “red” and “blue” political lines, with Democrats becoming more clearly a party of the coasts and big cities and with Republicans dominating the interior. As these battle lines become increasingly well defined, the populations of rural states become less likely to vote Democrat while urban dwellers become equally less likely to vote Republican. This leaves a small minority of states, with roughly equal numbers of rural and urban voters, as the true “tossup” regions of the country.

It also appears likely that the number of competitive states will stabilize at present

levels for the next several electoral cycles. While the exact number of battleground and spectator states varies from election to election, it typically takes a significant change in partisan makeup of a state’s population to have a substantial impact on its partisanship. Major changes can happen, but almost always over time – the South, for example, has nearly completely shifted from Democratic majorities to Republican majorities over the past forty years – but there is no indication of comparable shifts currently underway. Over the coming years, we are likely to continue to see a fairly deep, regional-based partisan schism between the major parties in which few states will be truly up for grabs in any election that is close nationally.

Partisan Implications for the 2008 Elections

Looking toward the 2008 presidential election, FairVote’s electoral model allows us to broadly project state-by-state voting outcomes based on historic voter behavior

and the nationwide appeal of the major party candidates. While it is impossible to guess the exact popular vote total in the next

election, we can build scenarios based on theoretical vote outcomes.

We base our 2008 election analysis on state partisanship and trends in the 2004 election. If John Kerry had captured exactly half of the popular vote in 2004 he would likely have become president. With three million more votes, Kerry would have slightly improved his performance in all the states, allowing him to narrowly carry Iowa, New Mexico, and Ohio, in addition to the states he already won. This would have given Democrats a 284-254 victory in the Electoral College. Under this scenario, Ohio

would have remained the critical race of the election, with Kerry likely winning the statewide vote by 0.36 percentage points, slightly more than 20,000 votes.

We recognize that factors beyond party control have the capacity to move the electorate away from a 50%-50% division. But using our partisanship model and applying it to likely outcomes of the popular vote demonstrates a slight Electoral College bias to Democrats in tight elections while Republicans gain a larger Electoral College majority in comfortable wins.

<i>Republican with 52% of the Popular Vote Wins Electoral College 300-238</i>	<i>Republican with 55% of the Popular Vote Wins Electoral College 384-154</i>
<i>Democrat wins 52% of the Popular Vote Wins Electoral College 321-217</i>	<i>Democrat wins 55% of the Popular Vote Wins Electoral College 376-162</i>

Assuming another close presidential contest in 2008 – a plausible assumption, but one that our analytical model of partisanship does not address – our analysis suggests that the “big three states” of 2004 may well be reduced to “the big two”: Ohio and Florida. Pennsylvania might stay highly competitive, but no other big state appears likely to have a chance to be in play, and far more 2004 battleground states moved away from being toss-ups than toward them. If a Republican carries both Ohio and Florida, therefore, that candidate almost certainly will win. If a Democrat wins just one of these two states,

that Democrat likely will win. Given that the major parties almost certainly have come to this same conclusion, how they position themselves to win those two states may well determine the presidency in 2008.

There are a handful of other states that will matter, although there likely will be fewer than ten true battlegrounds in 2008. More than ever, the vast majority of Americans will be reduced to spectator status in the next election, looking on as candidates shower all their attention and money on a narrow slice of the American public.

**Reform Implications of the Shrinking Battleground:
Voter Turnout, Election Administration, Civil Rights and the Electoral College**

The implications of our analysis of the shrinking battleground in American

presidential elections go beyond which party might win the 2008 election: they go to the

heart of American democracy. Consider its impact in four areas: voter participation, controversies over election administration, racial fairness and the Electoral College.

Voter turnout now and over time

The current two-tier system of electing the president is creating a culture of political haves and have-nots that will likely affect voter participation rates in battleground states and spectator states for generations to come. With only a small number of battleground states, and a closely divided electorate, it becomes increasingly likely that future elections will be decided by some combination of the same states that decided the 2004 election.

Thus, meaningful suffrage – the ability to go to a poll and cast a vote for a candidate without effective foreknowledge of the electoral outcome in that state – will be restricted to citizens in a small number of highly contentious states that represent perhaps a quarter of the nation’s electorate. The parties and their backers will spend hundreds of millions of dollars to register and mobilize these voters. The rest of the nation will be spectators to the election, ignored by the campaigns.

The impact on voter turnout is already pronounced. In the 12 most competitive states in 2004, turnout was 63%, up from 54% in 2000. In the 12 most lopsided states, turnout was 53%, up from 51% in 2000. The gap in turnout between these two state groupings soared from 3% to 10%. Given the financial resources certain to be targeted on mobilization in 2008 battlegrounds, expect this gap to widen.

Indeed the effect on turnout will likely go beyond just one or two elections. Young Americans becoming eligible to vote will be treated quite differently based on where they

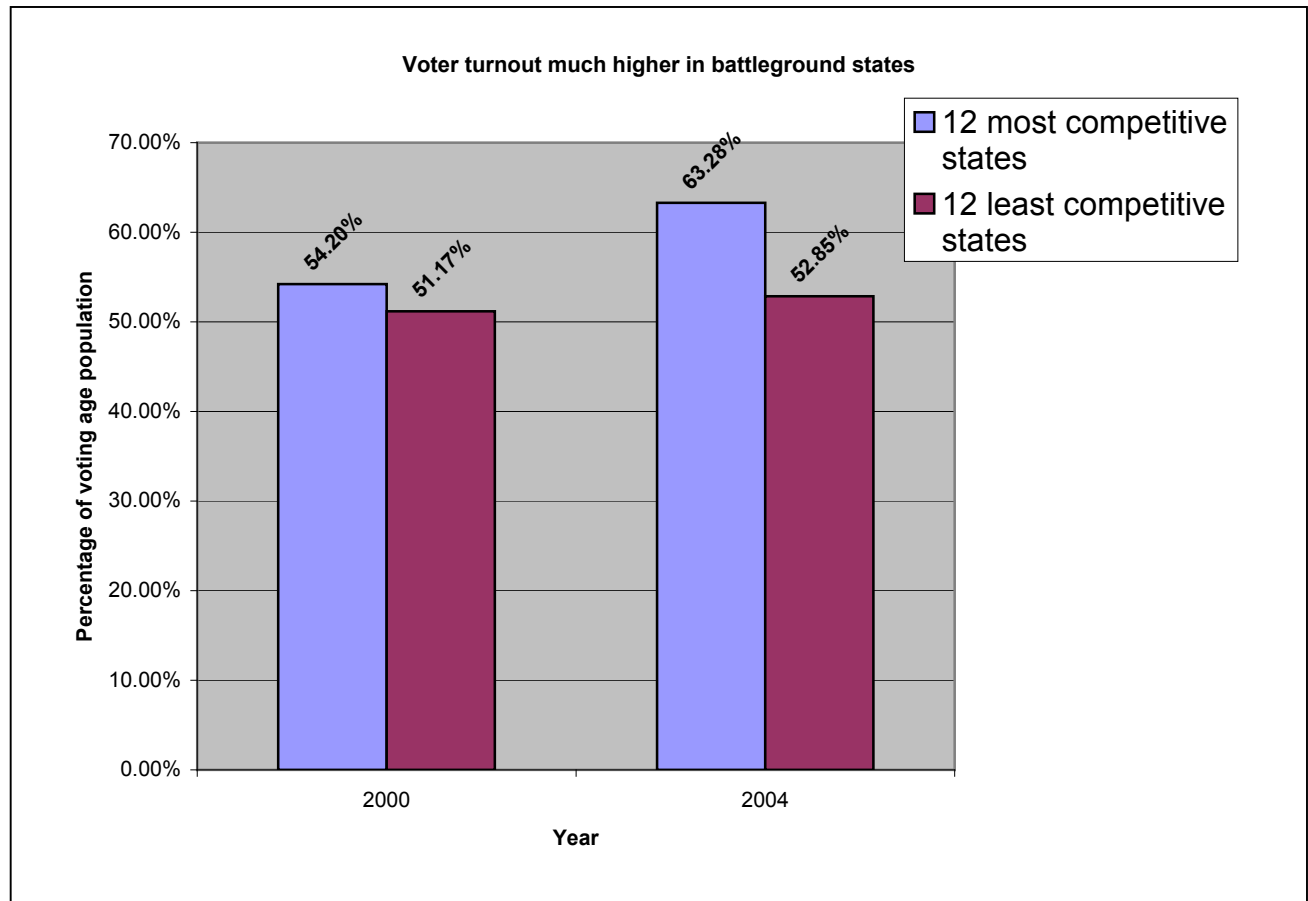
live, with far more intense efforts to register and mobilize newly eligible voters in battleground states. Mark Franklin’s recent seminal work on voter participation (*Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945*) provides an analysis of voter turnout and factors affecting it in more than two dozen nations over several generations. One of his findings is that voting behavior is often established by what a person does in the first elections after becoming eligible to vote. The “imprint” of whether one votes in these elections typically lasts a lifetime.

We already can see dramatic evidence of the impact of our two-tiered system in youth participation rates. According to the University of Maryland-based organization CIRCLE, in 2000 a slim majority (51%) of young voters (age 18-29) turned out in battleground states, while only 38% of young voters in the rest of the country went to the polls. In 2004 the gap between youth turnout in battleground and non-competitive states widened. CIRCLE found that 64.4% of young people voted in ten battleground states. Their turnout was only slightly less than the average swing state turnout of 66.1%, showing that young adults were mobilized to vote where their votes clearly mattered. (Note that CIRCLE’s numbers are based on survey data. Surveys slightly inflate turnout numbers for all groups.)

The story was very different in the rest of the country. Only 47.6% of 18-29 year olds voted in the other forty states and the District of Columbia. This is fully 17% below the turnout rates of youth voters in battleground states and much farther below the average turnout for older voters (58.9%) in these non-battleground states. Another election or two with this disparity will make it very likely that turnout in current non-battleground states will stay below turnout

in current battleground states for decades even if by 2016 we were to get rid of the

Electoral College and provide a fair, one-person, one-vote presidential election.



Election Administration Controversies

The 2000 presidential elections exposed just how antiquated and underfunded our system of registering voters, counting ballots and running elections had become in most states. In our dangerously decentralized system of protecting the right to vote, states typically delegate the conduct of elections to localities – meaning most important decisions about presidential elections are made separately by more than 13,000 local governments. In the wake of Florida’s election fiasco, Congress for the first time in history helped fund elections and established a national commission to set some national standards. But the United States still falls short of

establishing the kind of predictable election administration found in most democracies. In an era of close presidential elections with continued use of the Electoral College, this kind of election administration is highly problematic. A national election would almost never be so close that the results wouldn’t be definitive. But with 51 separate contests deciding the presidency, the odds are increased that in every close election there will be narrow votes in enough states that the conduct of election will be controversial – and end up in courts. Even in 2004, in an election where George Bush won the popular vote by more than three

million votes, the serious problems with Ohio's elections – featuring battles over voter registration, provisional ballots, partisan observers in polling places and the shockingly long lines experienced by many voters – led to expensive litigation and suspicions that the election was not decided

fairly. Given today's hardening partisan divisions, expect even more controversy and litigation in our elections until we take the right to vote more seriously, increase funding for elections and establish stronger national standards and clearer pre-election and post-election accountability,

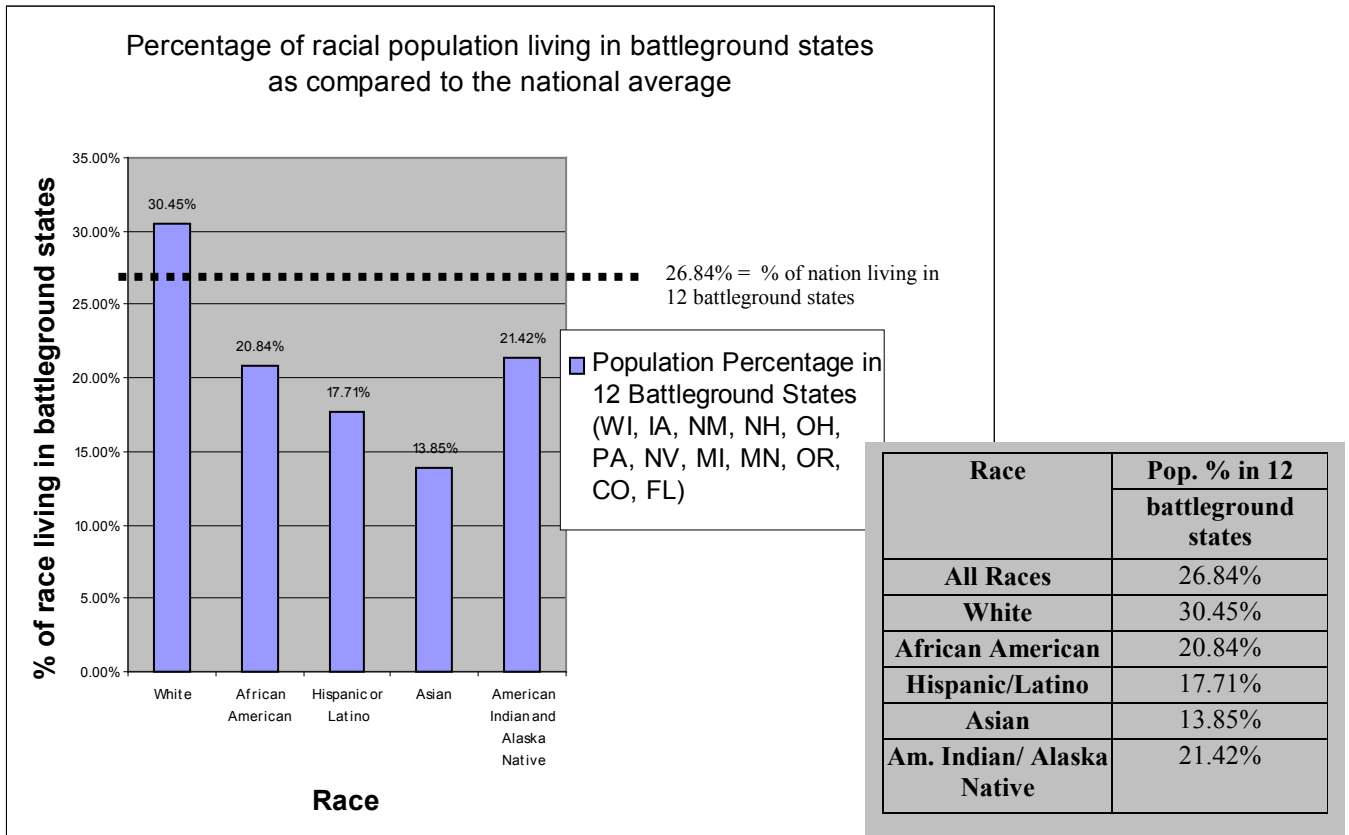
Racial Fairness

The United States has a disturbing history of policy on race relations, from slavery to Jim Crow laws to having an Electoral College in the first place. Race remains a powder keg, regularly ignited in political battles and policy debates. With that history, it is essential we have a presidential election system that encourages fairness and does away with discrimination at the polls.

distributed evenly throughout the country, therefore, 27% of each of the nation's racial and ethnic groups would live in these states.

The current breakdown of battlegrounds and spectator states does the opposite. Consider that 27% of the nation's population lives in the twelve closest battleground states in the 2004 elections. If all racial groups were

The reality is far different. Racial minorities are far more likely to live in spectator states than white voters. While more than 30% of the nation's white population lives in the battleground states, just 21% of African Americans and Native Americans, 18 % of Latinos and 14% of Asian Americans live in these states. In other words, three out of every 10 white Americans live in a battleground state, but less than two of every ten people of color share this opportunity.



Electoral College Reform

FairVote is unambiguous in its support for abolishing the Electoral College and establishing direct election of the president by majority vote, with elections decided according to the fundamental democratic principles of majority rule and of one person, one vote.

But direct election isn't the only constitutional amendment that a responsible Congress would be debating. Even Electoral College defenders have little excuse to maintain certain elements within the current structure that have every chance of causing major problems in the years ahead. Consider two examples that demand attention all the more in this time of close national elections.

Faithless Electors: Voters have every right to expect electors in their state to represent their state's popular will. However, there remains no federal law preventing electors from voting for someone other than a state's popular choice, and laws in some states that seek to shield voters against such "faithless electors" may not be constitutional.

On a regular basis, some electors indeed disregard the will of their state's voters. In 2000, an elector from Washington, D.C. refused to vote for Al Gore. In 2004, an elector in Minnesota mistakenly voted for John Edwards instead of John Kerry, and a West Virginian Republican elector publicly considered not voting for George Bush. In the modern era, it's hard to imagine why we should risk the possibility that one elector could unilaterally reverse the outcome of a Presidential election. In this era of close elections, backers of the Electoral College are flirting with disaster if they do not pursue constitutional change to either bind electors or eliminate the office of electors

and have electoral votes awarded automatically according to a state's rules.

The method of choosing the president when the Electoral College deadlocks: As long as the U.S. House of Representatives has an uneven number of Representatives or does not give the citizens of Washington, D.C. representation in the House, the total number of electoral votes will be even. An even number of electoral votes makes a tie in the Electoral College possible. When no candidate wins an Electoral College majority, the election is decided by the U.S. House of Representatives, with each state's delegation casting one vote.

Indeed we narrowly missed ties in the Electoral College in our two most recent elections. In 2004, a change of 18,776 votes (just 0.015% of national total) in Iowa, New Mexico and Nevada would have resulted in a tie. In 2000, a change of 5,381 votes (0.0051% of national total) in four states (Florida, New Mexico, Wisconsin and Iowa) would have resulted in a tie.

Third party and independent candidates also periodically tend to run well in the United States. In 2008, it will have been 16 years since Ross Perot won nearly a fifth of the national vote and 40 years since George Wallace won several southern states. In this era of tightly contested elections, comparable success by a third party or independent candidate in winning just a handful of electoral votes could deny any candidate an Electoral College majority. Having an election decided in the House would likely be fiercely contested by whichever party lost, particularly if its candidate won the popular vote. There is simply no 21st century justification for the

Constitution's provision that each state's House delegation casts one vote regardless of population. Thus, when Congress picks the president, 36 million Californians and 22 million Texans would have no more voice in the selection of the President than less than half a million people of Wyoming. States with evenly divided partisan delegation would somehow need to pick a winner. Consider what might have happened in 2000, when Al Gore won the popular vote, but Republicans controlled a majority of state delegations. Partisan bitterness in the

wake of such a vote would likely dwarf anything this nation has experienced since the Civil War.

This rule for picking presidential winners is even harder to defend than faithless electors, yet may well come into play in upcoming elections given our state of partisan division and potential third party candidacies. Electoral College defenders have every reason to develop a more equitable process to prevent such a constitutional crisis.

A National Popular Vote

FairVote's analysis in *The Shrinking Battleground* provides powerful evidence that the time has come for a renewal of the movement for direct popular election of the president that came so close to success in Congress in the late 1960's. In every election in this country we adhere to the principle of one person, one vote, except when it comes to the presidency. The Electoral College already has seated four second-place winners, and a shift of less than 1% of the vote in several additional elections would have handed the presidency to candidates losing the popular vote.

For more than fifty years the Gallup poll has shown that a large majority of Americans wants to abolish the Electoral College and adopt a straight, one-person, one-vote system of electing the president. A national popular vote for president, particularly one held under Australian-style instant runoff voting rules that ensure a majority winner in every election, would ensure that every vote is equally important, that candidates address regional issues everywhere, that campaigns reach for support into every corner of this vast country and that winners reflect the will of the people.

The United States calls for spreading democracy throughout the world, yet our presidential system at home is terribly flawed. It undercuts basic democratic principles and entrenches a two-tier democracy with a minority of first-class citizens and a majority of second-class citizens. It leaves a majority of our young adults and a disproportionate share of our people of color shut out of opportunities to meaningfully engage in electing their national leader – a dangerous and divisive precedent for the future.

We call on Congress to address this report's disturbing findings and to prove that basic principles of democracy like equality, majority rule and one-person, one-vote are as important to Americans as they should be to emerging democracies. Abolishing the Electoral College will help make the United States a modern democracy ready for today's complex times. The integrity and health of our democracy depend upon it.