

The Decline of Presidential Competitive States, 1960-2008

FairVote, November 2011

The winner-take-all election rules used by most states to allocate their votes in the Electoral College divide our nation primarily into safely Democratic states and safely Republican states. Doing so reduces the great majority of voters to irrelevancy in presidential races. Only the small percentage of Americans living in a shrinking number of competitive states is able to cast meaningful ballots in presidential elections.

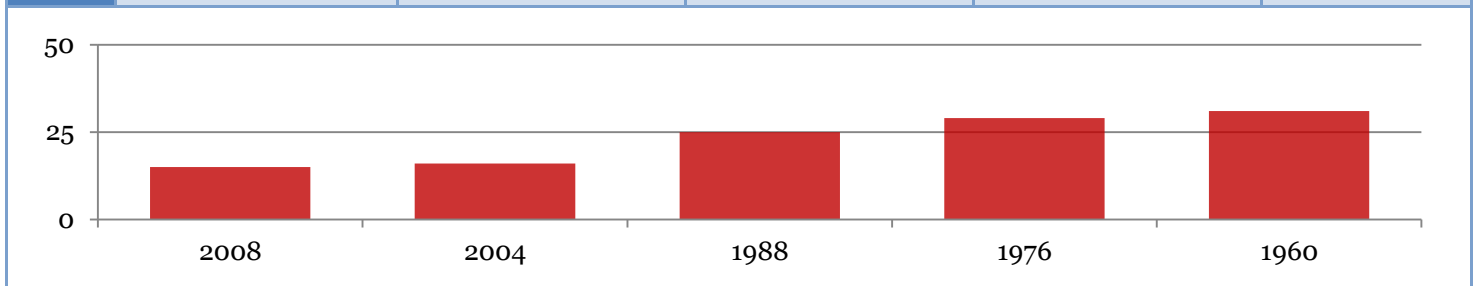
Since 1988, the number of states within this “competitive band” (defined as states projected to be won by less than 9% in elections in which the major parties split the national popular vote) has declined sharply, especially among the smallest and largest population states. As a result, the number of voters participating in a meaningful presidential election, already low, has declined even further.

For example, in 2008, only one of the 13 smallest states and only four of the 27 smallest states were competitive “battlegrounds,” which is far fewer than in the 1980s. At the other end of the population spectrum, fewer than half of the 11 largest states were competitive in 2004 and 2008 – down from 10 out of 11 such states in 1960 and 1976 and eight of 11 in 1988. We do not see this imbalance changing soon. In 2008, ten of the smallest 13 states had a partisanship disparity of greater than 15%, making them landslide states in a nationally competitive year.

Looking forward to 2012, none of the 2008 non-swing states are expected to become swing states, yet at least some 2008 swing states may well move into non-swing state status. This decline would continue a 50-year trend summarized in the tables below.

Swing States by Number of 2008 Electoral Votes, 1960 – 2008 *

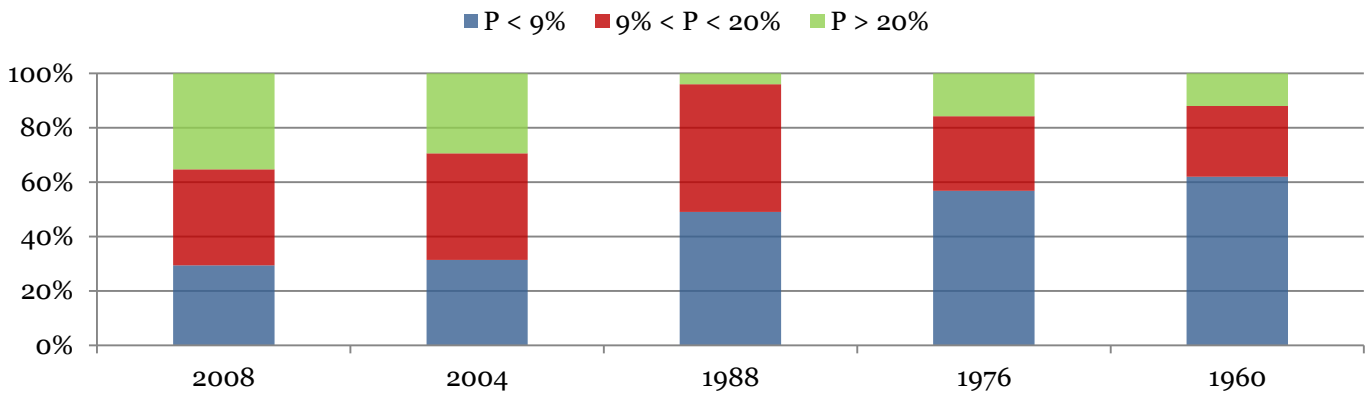
Year	Competitive states among states with 15 or more electoral votes	Competitive states among states with 9 - 14 electoral votes	Competitive states among states with 5 - 8 electoral votes	Competitive states among states with 3 or 4 electoral votes	Total number of swing states
2008	5 of 11 (45%)	6 of 13 (46%)	3 of 14 (21%)	1 of 13 (8%)	15 of 51 (29%)
2004	4 of 11 (36%)	6 of 13 (46%)	5 of 14 (36%)	1 of 13 (8%)	16 of 51 (31%)
1988	8 of 11 (73%)	5 of 13 (38%)	6 of 14 (43%)	6 of 13 (46%)	25 of 51 (49%)
1976	10 of 11 (91%)	6 of 13 (46%)	8 of 14 (57%)	5 of 13 (38%)	29 of 51 (57%)
1960	10 of 11 (91%)	7 of 13 (54%)	8 of 14 (57%)	6 of 12 (50%)	31 of 50 (62%)



* Washington, D.C. is included in all years except 1960

Partisanship Disparity (P) Across All States, 1960 – 2008 *

Year	States with P value < 9%	States with 9% < P value < 20%	States with P value > 20%	Notes
2008	15 of 51 (29%)	18 of 51 (35%)	18 of 51 (35%)	14R & 4D landslide states
2004	16 of 51 (31%)	20 of 51 (39%)	15 of 51 (29%)	10R & 5D landslide states
1988	25 of 51 (49%)	24 of 51 (47%)	2 of 51 (4%)	1R & 1D landslide states
1976	29 of 51 (57%)	14 of 51 (27%)	8 of 51 (16%)	5R & 3D landslide states
1960	31 of 50 (62%)	13 of 50 (26%)	6 of 50 (12%)	2R & 4D landslide states



* Washington, D.C. is included in all years except 1960

Of the 11 states with 15 or more electors in 2008 [GA, NJ, NC, MI, OH, IL, PA, FL, NY, TX, CA]

- **2008:** 5 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (FL, PA, OH, NC, NJ)
- **2004:** 4 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (FL, PA, OH, MI)
- **1988:** 8 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (PA, OH, MI, NC, NJ, IL, TX, CA)
- **1976:** 10 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (FL, PA, OH, MI, NC, NJ, IL, TX, CA, NY)
- **1960:** 10 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (FL, PA, OH, MI, NC, NJ, IL, TX, CA, NY)

Of the 13 states with 9 to 14 electors in 2008 [AL, CO, LA, AZ, MD, MN, WI, IN, MO, TN, WA, MA, VA]

- **2008:** 6 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (VA, MO, MN, WI, CO, IN)
- **2004:** 6 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (VA, MO, MN, WI, CO, AZ)
- **1988:** 5 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (MO, CO, LA, MD, TN)
- **1976:** 6 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (VA, MO, WI, LA, MD, WA)
- **1960:** 7 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (VA, MO, MN, WI, MD, TN, WA)

Of the 14 states with 5 to 8 electors in 2008 [NE, NV, NM, UT, WV, AR, KS, MS, CT, IA, OK, OR, KY, SC]

- **2008:** 3 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (IA, NV, NM)
- **2004:** 5 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (IA, NV, NM, OR, AR)
- **1988:** 6 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (NM, AR, KS, CT, OK, KY)
- **1976:** 8 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (IA, NV, NM, OR, CT, MS, OK, KY)
- **1960:** 8 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (NV, NM, WV, AR, CT, OR, KY, SC)

Of the 13 states with 4 or fewer electors in 2008 [AK, DE, DC, MT, ND, SD, VT, WY, HI, ID, ME, NH, RI]

- **2008:** 1 state within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (NH)
- **2004:** 1 state within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (NH)
- **1988:** 6 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (DE, MT, ND, SD, VT, ME)
- **1976:** 5 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (DE, ND, SD, ME, HI)
- **1960:** 6 states within 9% partisan range of 45.5% to 54.5% (NH, DE, MT, ID, AK, HI)