

## FairVote's Top Ten List: The Breakdown of Winner-Take-All Elections

Geography has become an increasingly rigid indicator of which political party will win a state or legislative district in the United States. Voters are far more likely to vote only for candidates from a single political party, and to vote for that same party from election to election.

Fortunately, we can ditch the winner-take-all voting laws that have impaired our electoral process. With simple changes to federal and state statutes, the US can be on its way to better and fairer elections. FairVote has made this top ten list of the biggest indicators that winner-take-all elections have contributed to the polarization and stagnation that plagues our political process.

*Definitions: A **swing** state or congressional district is one that voted within three points of the national popular vote for president (47%-53% partisanship), meaning that their partisanship leaning is similar to the nation's as a whole. A **safe** state or congressional district is one that voted at least 8 percentage points more Democratic or Republican than the national popular vote for president (42%-58% partisanship).*

### Presidential Elections

1. **Decreasing state competition:** In 1988, safe states collectively held only 40 electoral votes. In 2012, they held 247 electoral votes. In that time the number of electoral votes held by swing states has shrunk by nearly half, from 272 to 140.
2. **Consistent voting patterns:** Between 2000 and 2012, 41 states voted for the same party in every presidential election. In both 2008 and 2012, 35 of these states received less than 1/100th of the attention from the presidential campaigns that they would have received if every state received attention in proportion to its population.
3. **More partisan rigidity:** The number of states where partisanship shifted by 5 or more percentage points between elections has decreased from an average of 23 states between 1960 and 1976 to an average of three between 2000 and 2012.

### Congressional Elections

4. **Decreasing district competition:** Between 1998 and 2012, the number of swing districts decreased from 121 to 47. There are now 284 safe congressional districts, up from 179 in 1998.
5. **Increasing dominance of partisanship over local factors:** Only six incumbents remain in seats that favored the other party by a margin of more than 8% in the 2012 presidential election, down from 34 such incumbents after the 2006 election and down

from 47 after the 1992 election. Only six percent of districts (26) voted for different parties for president and Congress in 2012.

6. **More partisan rigidity:** Comparing partisanship in current congressional districts based on the 2008 presidential elections and 2012 presidential elections, only 30 districts (7%) experienced a partisanship shift of five or more percentage points – and all but four of those districts trended in the direction of the previous majority party, making them less competitive.
7. **More regional domination:** In 2012, Democrats swept all 21 House seats in New England while Republicans won all 22 seats in the belt of states running from Arkansas through Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. In 1992, Republicans held 10 House seats in New England and Democrats held 14 House seats in that line of Midwestern and western states.
8. **More racial connection to partisanship:** White Republicans represent 66 of 70 majority-white U.S. House districts in the adjoining nine states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. In 1991, 50 white Democrats represented these states.

### State Elections

9. **More monopoly control states:** In 38 states, one party controls the governor's mansion and both state legislative houses – and in 2012 the presidential candidate of the same party won 31 of those states. This is the largest number of states with monopoly governments since World War II.
10. **More partisan rigidity:** In North Carolina's 2012 elections for its 120-seat House of Representatives, 119 seats were won by the candidate with a partisan advantage in the district. In New Jersey's elections in two-member legislative districts drawn by a commission in 2011, all 40 assembly districts elected two members of the same party.

As we can see, the phrase "all politics is local" has been replaced with "all politics is partisan." To see how we can fix presidential and congressional elections, visit:

- President: [www.fairvote.org/national-popular-vote](http://www.fairvote.org/national-popular-vote)
- Congress: [www.fairvoting.us](http://www.fairvoting.us)

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