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Iowa Voting Series, Paper 3: An Examination of Iowa Turnout Statistics Since 2000 by Party and Gender

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Abstract

This is the third paper in a series examining aspects of voting in Iowa. In this short paper I examine Iowa's turnout in presidential and midterm elections since 2000 with a focus on party and gender. Looking first at registration numbers I find that women lead men in voter registrations by a fairly consistent margin of about 110,000. Within political categories (Democrats, Republicans, and No Party voters) there are distinct differences in registration. Republicans have the most even division with women leading at the beginning of the period and then men overtaking them and opening a lead of about 18,500 by 2012. Women led No Party voters throughout the period by a fairly consistent margin averaging just over 33,000 voters. This difference was most reflective of the overall registration difference for all Iowa voters on a percentage basis. Women also led men in registered Democrats. The gap was large at the start of the period at 70,000 voters and widened to nearly 100,000 by the end of the period. In terms of turnout, the differences between men and women were relatively small. Republican women had the highest turnout percentage for all seven general elections during the period. Republican men come in second in all but 2008 where women Democrats surpassed them by half a percentage point. Women Democrats had a higher turnout percentage than their party's men in presidential elections, but the men had a slightly higher percentage in two of the three midterm elections. No Party voters, men and women, had much lower turnout percentages in both presidential and midterm elections than either Democrats or Republicans. For the most part, the gap between No Party men and women was larger than it was within the two parties. No Party women had a higher turnout percentage in presidential elections while men took the lead in midterm elections.

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Updates

Unlike most academic papers I plan to update the data for this paper as elections occur. Data updates might lead to changes in the text as well. Below is a list of the updates as they occur.

- Initial release, January 2014

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In the previous paper in this series[1] I examined Iowa's turnout statistics in midterm and presidential elections since 2000, in general and by party.[2] In this short paper I dig a bit deeper into the turnout statistics and examine them by both party and gender. As with the prior papers in this series my focus will be on the statistics involved rather than theorizing about the reasons for particular turnout percentages. Nevertheless, the goal of this paper, like the others in the series, is to examine aspects of voting in Iowa with an eye to future elections and to provide some background and context to discussions about Iowa voters.

Data

As with the prior papers, data for this examination were gathered from the Election Results & Statistics page of the Iowa Secretary of State's website.[3] This page provides links to election results for a variety of primary and election contests in Iowa, including those for presidential and midterm elections. The turnout statistics examined here are obtained from the Statewide Statistical Reports links.[4] The information in these reports is broken out by gender and party as well as by age group. For each subgroup, the number who voted absentee[5] is also indicated.

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[1] "An Examination of Iowa Turnout Statistics," currently available, along with other papers in the series, at http://www.uiowa.edu/~030116/papersframe.htm. Although I make references to prior papers in the series, I would like each to stand on its own. Thus, some explanatory material will be repeated from one paper to the next to provide background or context.

[2] When I refer to turnout in "presidential elections" or "midterm elections" it is a shorthand way of referring to turnout in that year in general, not for a particular contest. Certainly some who vote in a particular election do not do so for every contest. As noted below, the data considered here are from statewide turnout statistics not from any particular contest except when a particular race is used as an example.

[3] http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/results/index.html

[4] For example, the turnout statistics for the 2000 presidential election can be found at http://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/2000StateWithLinnDemo.pdf

[5] Without getting into the specifics, "absentee" voting in Iowa takes several forms, including traditional mail-in absentee voting plus early voting at satellite stations and at the offices of the county Auditors.

Iowa Registered Voters

I begin by repeating Figure 1[6] from the prior paper. This figure shows the number of registered Iowa voters and the turnout percentage in general elections from 2000 to 2012. This period covers four presidential elections and three midterm elections. The height of the bars represents the total number of registered voters. Except for a slight decline for the 2002 election (due to adjustments following the 2000 census), the number of registered voters in Iowa has slowly increased in the last dozen years.[7] The turnout percentage for the elections has been steady, though there is a clear difference between presidential and midterm years. The turnout in presidential elections has varied only a few percentage points between 71.57% and 75.96%. Although the turnout for midterm elections has also varied within a narrow range (52.71% to 56.35%), that range is substantially lower than for presidential elections. The average turnout in presidential years is 73.36%, but only 54.01% in midterm years. Those who follow politics are well aware of the much lower turnout for midterm elections, but it is worth knowing just how substantial the difference is. This is particularly true in a state that is fairly evenly balanced between the two major parties. More specifically, knowing who turns out, particularly in midterm elections, can aid parties and candidates in their get out the vote (GOTV) efforts.

The prior paper then examined turnout differences by party and found, in brief, that turnout for Republicans was consistently a few percentage points higher than that of Democrats for both midterm and presidential elections. In addition, turnout for both parties was several points lower in midterm elections. In contrast, turnout for No Party voters (what Iowa calls independents) was much lower than either Democrats or Republicans, particularly in midterm elections.

As I mentioned in the previous paper, it is worth noting that there are different ways of calculating turnout percentage. Some use as the baseline the voting age population. Others use the number of those who are eligible to vote (i.e., not counting those who have lost their voting rights). For present purposes I use the number registered to vote. How many Iowans are not registered, regardless of eligibility, is a separate matter.[8] I am also not considering how Iowa compares with other states in terms of turnout.

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[6] It is a bit inconvenient for readers, but to make the figures larger I will put them at the end of the paper rather than within the text.

[7] See the first paper in the series, "An Empirical Examination of Iowa Voter Registration Statistics" for more details.

[8] Clearly the turnout efforts of campaigns focus on registering people to vote as well as getting them to cast a ballot. Nevertheless, those already registered are likely to be more interested in the political process and therefore more likely to vote, on average, than those not registered. Identifying and registering those who are eligible is an additional process that requires treatment separate from the focus of this short paper.

Figure 1 showed the overall voter registration numbers for Iowa. Figure 2 shows the difference in registration between men and women.[9] There are two quick points to make about these registration numbers. The first is that women consistently outnumber men among Iowa's registered voters. Although I only examine elections since 2000 in this paper, according to the *Iowa Official Register* this difference existed at about the same size since at least 1988.[10] Second, notice the consistency of the gap. Despite the increase in Iowa's population and registered voters during the period, the gap between registered men and women was fairly steady at an average of nearly 113,000. The high came in 2004 when registered women outnumbered men by 117,555. The low occurred in 2012 when the difference was 105,405.

Of course, followers of politics are well aware of the differences between the political parties on various issues related to gender, real or alleged (e.g., "gender gap," "war on women"). Thus, the next step is to look at voter registration by party and gender. Before doing so, it is worthwhile to provide a bit more background on voter registration by party. In brief, No Party voters have consistently outnumbered registrants of either political party. The gap was fairly consistent between 2000 and 2007, but narrowed significantly in early 2008 so that by mid-2008 registered Democrats came within about 2,000 of those registered as No Party. Over the next few years No Party registrants remained relatively steady while Democrats lost and Republicans gained. By the start of 2014, Democrats and Republicans had a nearly equal number of registrants and there were roughly 100,000 more No Party registrants than in either party.[11]

In Figure 3 we see the voter registration numbers for men and women in Iowa's three political categories (Democrats, Republicans, and No Party voters)[12] for the seven general elections since 2000. There are several things worth noting about these numbers.

Let me start by looking at the differences within each party. We can see quite clearly that women always outnumber men for both Democrats and No Party voters. There were also more women Republicans than men registered for the 2000 and 2002 elections. Although Republican men became more numerous than Republican women for the 2004 election, the gap was small and remained so for 2006. The difference grew to 9,957 by the 2008 election and continued to expand through 2012 where it was 18,553.

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[9] The Iowa Secretary of State turnout statistics also include an "Unknown" category for gender. The number in this category is relatively small, ranging from a high of 222 in 2004 to a low of five in 2012. I will ignore this category for the discussion in this paper.

[10] 1989-1990 edition, pp. 498-499. Viewed online at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Redbook-1989-1990_(73GA).pdf.

[11] See the prior two papers in this series for more details, particularly Figure 2 in each paper. Figure 2 in the first paper shows monthly registration totals by party. Figure 2 in the second paper shows registration numbers by party for the general elections from 2000 to present.

[12] It seems inappropriate to refer to No Party voters as a political party, so I will use the (somewhat awkward) term "category."

The gap between men and women was the most consistent for those registered as No Party. The average difference was about 33,000 with a high of 39,733 and a low of 25,485. Unlike the two parties, the difference between the number of men and women registered as No Party rose and fell several times, even in such a short period. In 2000 the difference was 37,592 registrants. For the 2002 election that difference fell, but then surged to a high of 39,733 in 2004. The difference fell over the next three elections to its low of 25,485 for 2010, before rising slightly again in 2012. One explanation for this variability (though within a relatively narrow range) is that No Party voters may be more likely to switch their registration to one of the parties. Because Iowa caucuses and primaries are "closed" (i.e., you must be a registered member of a particular party to participate in a caucus or vote in a primary), No Party voters would need to change their registration if they wished to participate in a particular caucus or primary.

The voter registration gap between men and women is largest for the Democrats. It starts at 70,823 in 2000 and grows to 98,752 by 2008. There was a slight reduction for 2010, but the difference came within a few registrants of the prior high for 2012. Thus, although the gap between men and women is growing for both Republicans and Democrats, it is growing faster and is much wider for Democrats.

In looking at the individual categories, No Party women are the largest group for all but one of the election years. Similarly, Democrat men are the smallest, also with one exception. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the exception for both came in 2008. A huge surge in registrations for women Democrats allowed them to surpass No Party women in 2008. The lead was temporary, however, as the number of women Democrats fell by over 14,000 registrants by 2010 while the number of No Party women rose by about 3,500 to return them to a slight lead. For the Democrat men, although the gap between them and women Democrats was at its largest in 2008, they still surged sufficiently from 2006 to 2008 to go ahead of both Republican men and women, if only slightly.

The surge in registrations for Democrats in 2008 was not surprising given the intense interest in the caucus race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. As shown in Figure 2 from the first paper in the series, the caucus surge came largely at the expense of No Party voters. In other words, many No Party voters switched their registration to Democrat to participate in the Democratic caucuses. Iowa was considered a swing state for the 2008 election and intense voter registration efforts by both parties allowed No Party voter registration to again surge after the caucuses so that total No Party voters (men plus women) again rose well above that of Democrats, even if Democrat women still maintained a small lead over No Party women on election day 2008.

Figure 4 is divided into two parts by gender and charts the number registered, the number voting, and turnout percentage. The height of the bars is the same as in Figure

2 in that it represents the total number of registered voters for men (Figure 4a) and women (Figure 4b). The solid portion of the bars in Figures 4a and 4b indicates how many of that number voted and the overall turnout percentage for each of the general elections in the period.

For the most part the turnout percentages of men were very similar to the overall turnout percentages seen in Figure 1. The turnout in presidential elections ranged from a low in 2000 of 70.65% to a high of 74.76% in 2004. Also like overall turnout, the turnout percentages for men in midterm elections were substantially lower, ranging from a low of 52.81% in 2006 to a high of 56.46% in 2002. Despite the lower turnout in midterm years, it was in these elections that the turnout for men was the closest to the overall turnout. In fact, for all three midterm elections the turnout percentage for men was slightly higher than the overall percentage.

The turnout percentages for men provide an indication of what to expect in the turnout for women. In Figure 4b we see a similar pattern in that the lowest turnout percentage in presidential elections occurred in 2000 and the highest in 2004. For the midterm elections, the highest turnout percentage for women occurred in 2002 (as it did for men). In addition, like men the turnout percentages for women in 2006 and 2010 were nearly identical.

One interesting point of comparison between Figures 4a and 4b is that in presidential elections women's turnout percentages are roughly two to three percentage points higher than men. Conversely, in midterm elections men turnout at a higher percentage than women, but the difference is less than one percent in all three years.

Before turning to the final figure it is worth a reminder that one cannot look at turnout without considering overall registration. For example, although the 2004 turnout percentage was the highest for both men and women (and thus overall) of the four presidential years, the higher number of registered voters in 2008 meant more actually voted even though the percentage was slightly lower than in 2004. As another example, although the turnout percentage for women was nearly identical in 2006 and 2010, over 35,000 more women voted in 2010 because there were about 67,000 more women registered for the latter election.

Having looked at the turnout differences between men and women in Figures 4a and 4b, the next step is to examine differences within each party. Figure 5 plots the turnout percentage by both party and gender.

Like overall turnout by party (see Figure 3 of the prior paper), we see that Republicans have a higher turnout percentage than those registered as Democrat or No Party. Republican women had the highest turnout percentage in all seven elections. Similar to the overall turnout differences between men and women, the difference between

Republican men and women was largest in presidential election years and very similar for midterm elections. Republican men had the second highest turnout percentage in all but the 2008 presidential election when women Democrats surpassed them by about half a percentage point.

As noted in the prior paper, turnout for Democrats generally tracked just below that of Republicans, with the exception of 2010 where it was several percentage points lower. The turnout difference between Democrat men and women follows a pattern similar to that of Republicans. Democrat women have a higher turnout percentage in presidential elections, but are nearly equal to Democrat men in midterm elections. Unlike Republican women, however, the turnout of Democrat women actually falls slightly below that of Democrat men for both 2002 and 2006.

The overall turnout percentage for No Party voters is much lower than those registered to either political party, particularly in midterm elections. As with Republicans and Democrats, women registered as No Party turned out at a higher percentage in presidential elections than No Party men. In midterm elections, however, the turnout of No Party women fell below that of the men in all three years. Although the difference in the midterms was still close, it was greater than the difference for either of the political parties.

Concluding Comments

According to US Census estimates for 2012 women made up 50.4% of Iowa's roughly three million citizens.[13] That results in about 25,000 men than women. Given that the registration gap between men and women has been fairly consistent at 100,000 or more since at least 1988, it is clear that women register at a higher percentage than men.

At a party level, registration is the most even among Republicans. The gap between men and women registered as No Party is the most reflective of the overall difference in registrations. There is a wide and growing gender gap among Democrats with the difference between men and women nearly equal to the entire difference across all parties.

Of the six groups (by party and gender), all experienced a net gain in voter registrations during the period. Democrat women had the largest gain with 88,545 additional registrants. That was followed by Republican men (63,139), Democrat men (60,641, Republican women (39,902), No Party men (37,490), and finally No Party women (26,115). As a percentage of Iowa voters, Democrat women increased their percentage the most, rising to 18.26%, but they are still behind No Party women who are at 19.13%.

[13] See this Census QuickFacts on Iowa: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/19000.html.

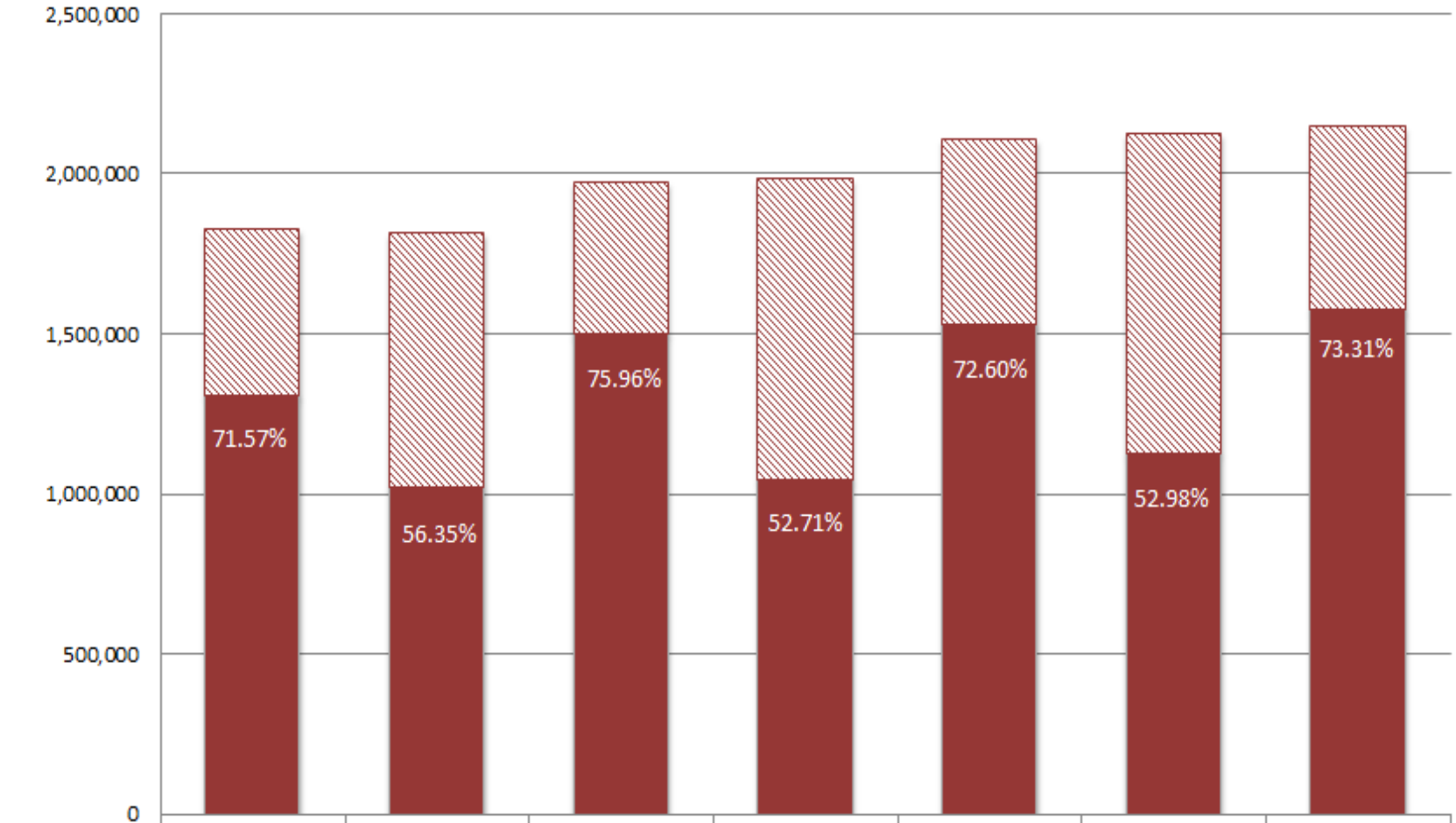
Although No Party voters (men and women) experienced the biggest decline in their percentage of Iowa voters, they still make up 37.03% of Iowa voters (as of the 2012 election). Nevertheless, as the most numerous group and given that the remaining voters are nearly evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, No Party voters continue to be critical to Iowa election outcomes.

In the previous paper we saw that Republicans generally vote at a slightly higher rate than Democrats, but registrants of both parties have a much higher turnout rate than those registered as No Party, particularly for midterm elections. Within each category women tend to turnout at a higher rate than men. This is true for all four of the presidential elections in this period. It is also in the presidential elections where the difference in the turnout percentage is the greatest between men and women. The turnout difference between men and women is much smaller in midterm elections and this is where we see slight differences among the parties. Republican women still have a higher turnout percentage in all three midterm elections. For Democrats, men actually have a very small lead in two of the three midterm elections. The midterm difference between men and women is greatest (though still small) for No Party voters where men have a higher turnout percentage for all three elections.

The importance of No Party voters to the outcomes of Iowa elections highlights the importance of get out the vote efforts. This is because No Party voters, have the lowest turnout among the three categories (Democrat, Republican, and No Party) as well as the greatest variability between presidential and midterm elections (i.e., the greatest drop in turnout percentage from presidential to midterm elections).

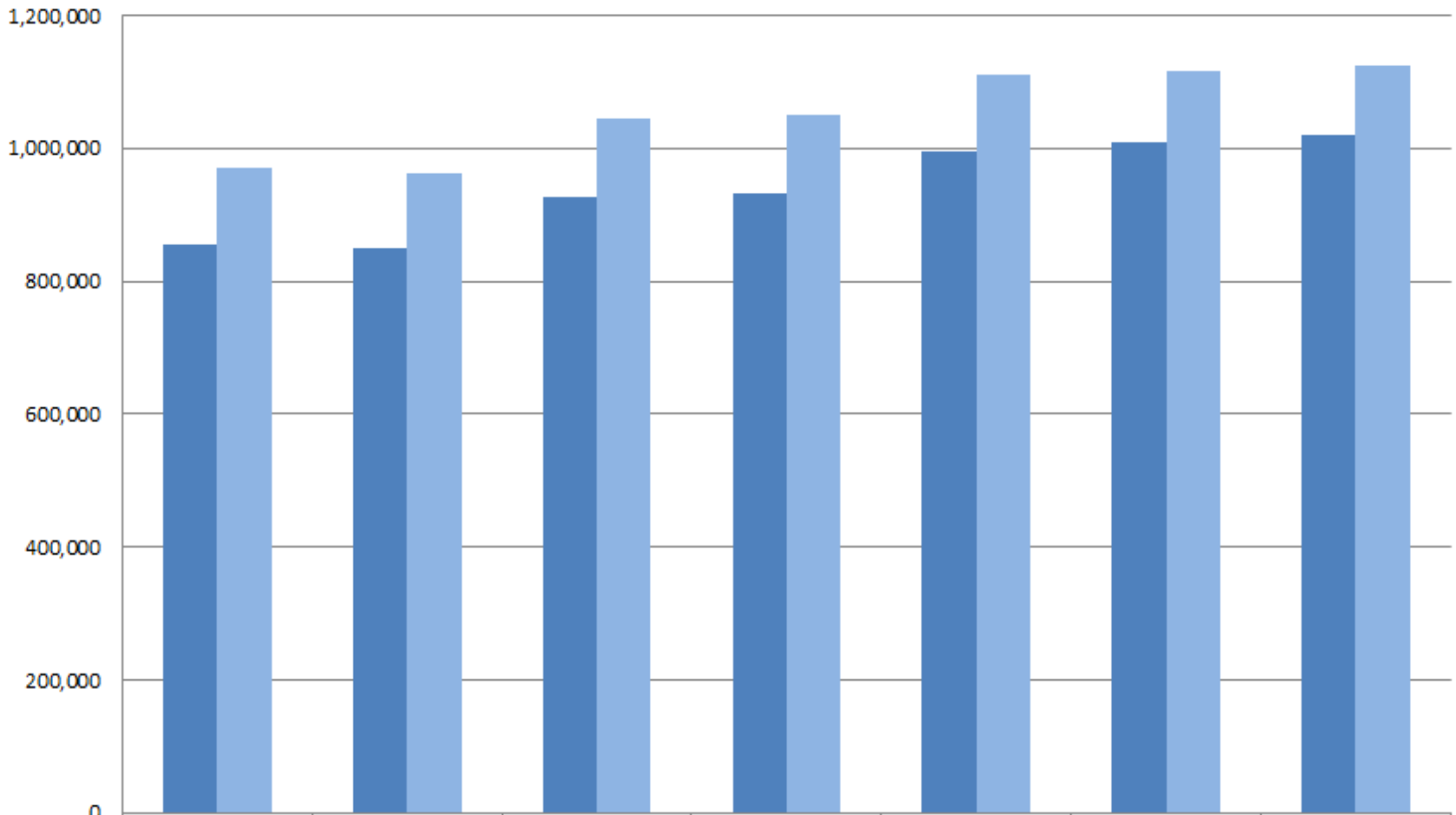
Along these lines, one final point is worth mentioning. In the prior paper I noted the consistency of voting for No Party voters in midterm elections. Even though the No Party turnout percentage is much lower than that of the other parties, and the drop in turnout from presidential election years is larger, it is more consistent across the three midterm elections. For Democrats and Republicans we might expect their turnout to rise or fall depending on whether the base is energized or dispirited, particularly in midterm elections. Thus, it is not surprising that Republican midterm turnout was a bit down in 2006 (a wave year for Democrats), but up in 2010 (a wave year for Republicans). Although the Democrats' turnout in 2006 was not as high as we might have expected, it was certainly down in 2010. The consistency of No Party midterm turnout is contrary to this pattern. This is particularly noteworthy given the much closer turnout rates between men and women in midterm elections. Of course, general turnout statistics cannot tell us whether the same people are voting in each of the midterm elections, but the fact that the turnout is more consistent for No Party voters than those of either political party reminds us that for these unaffiliated voters it is not just a matter of how many vote, but who they vote for.

Figure 1: Iowa Registered Voters, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000



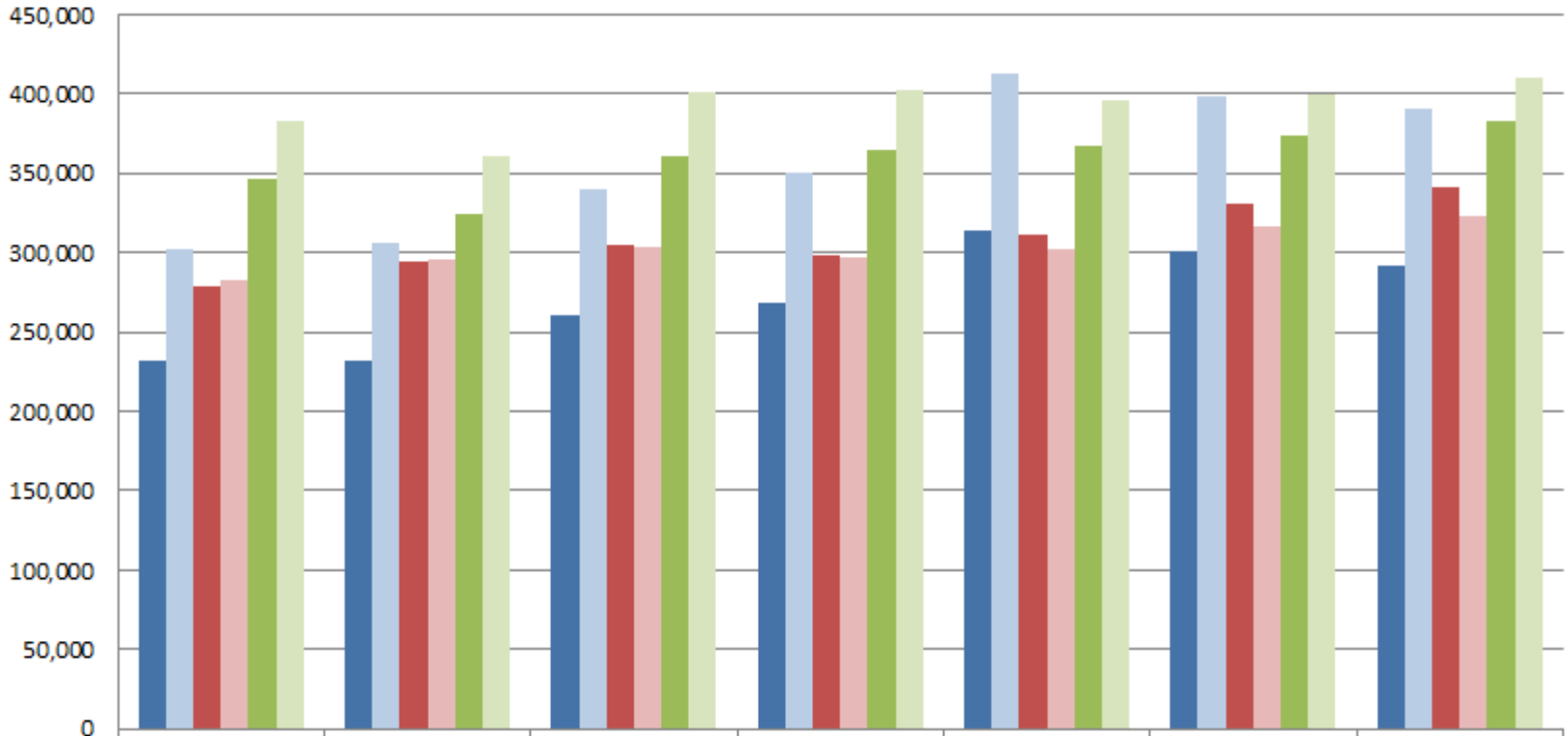
	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Did Not Vote	518,928	791,071	473,994	937,005	576,819	998,730	572,414
Voted	1,306,531	1,021,200	1,497,741	1,044,459	1,528,715	1,125,386	1,572,198

Figure 2: Iowa Registered Voters by Gender in Election Years Since 2000



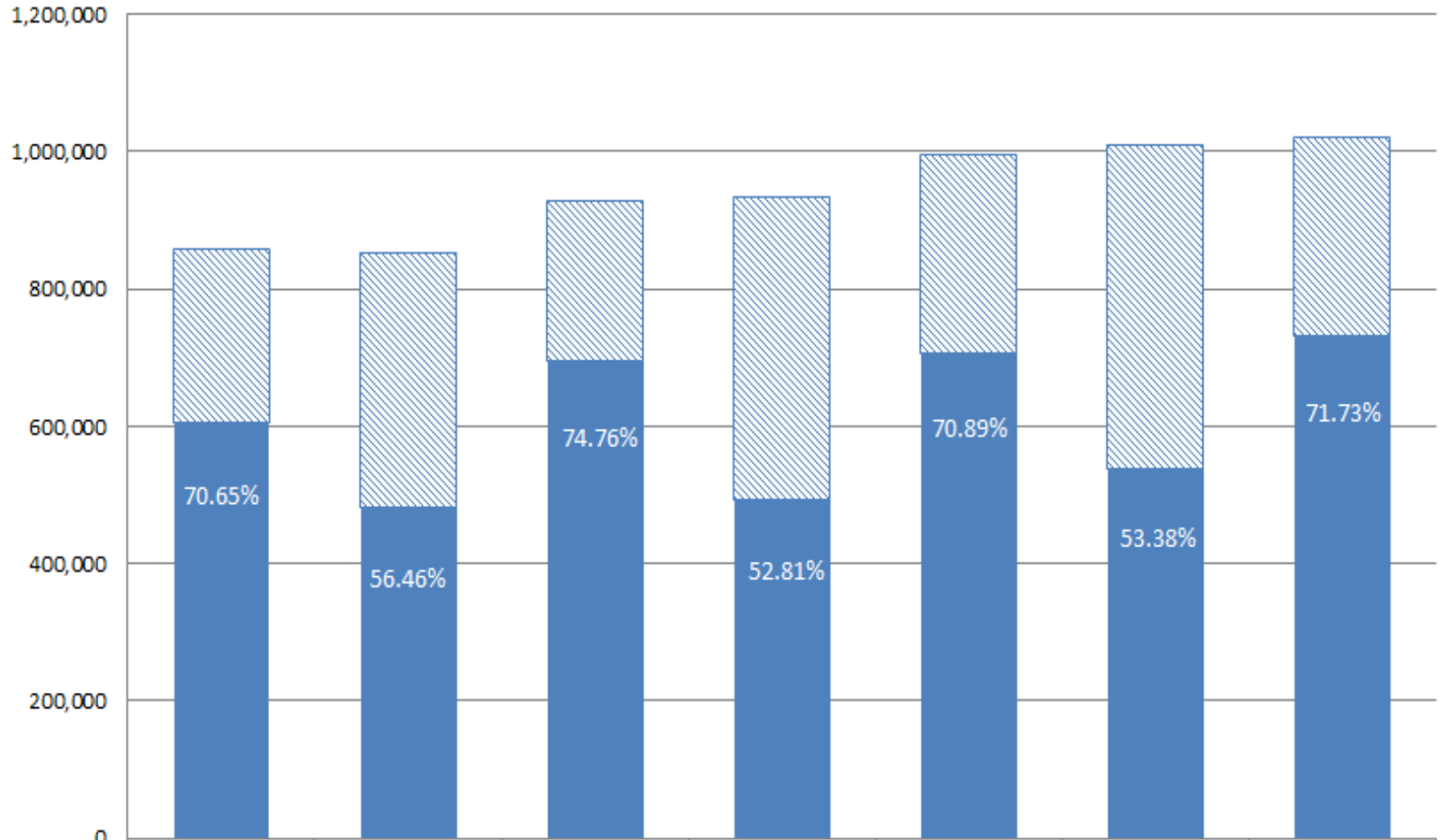
	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Men	856,083	850,172	926,979	932,050	994,514	1,007,485	1,019,601
Women	969,182	962,028	1,044,534	1,049,370	1,111,009	1,116,622	1,125,006

Figure 3: Iowa Registered Voters by Party and Gender in Election Years Since 2000



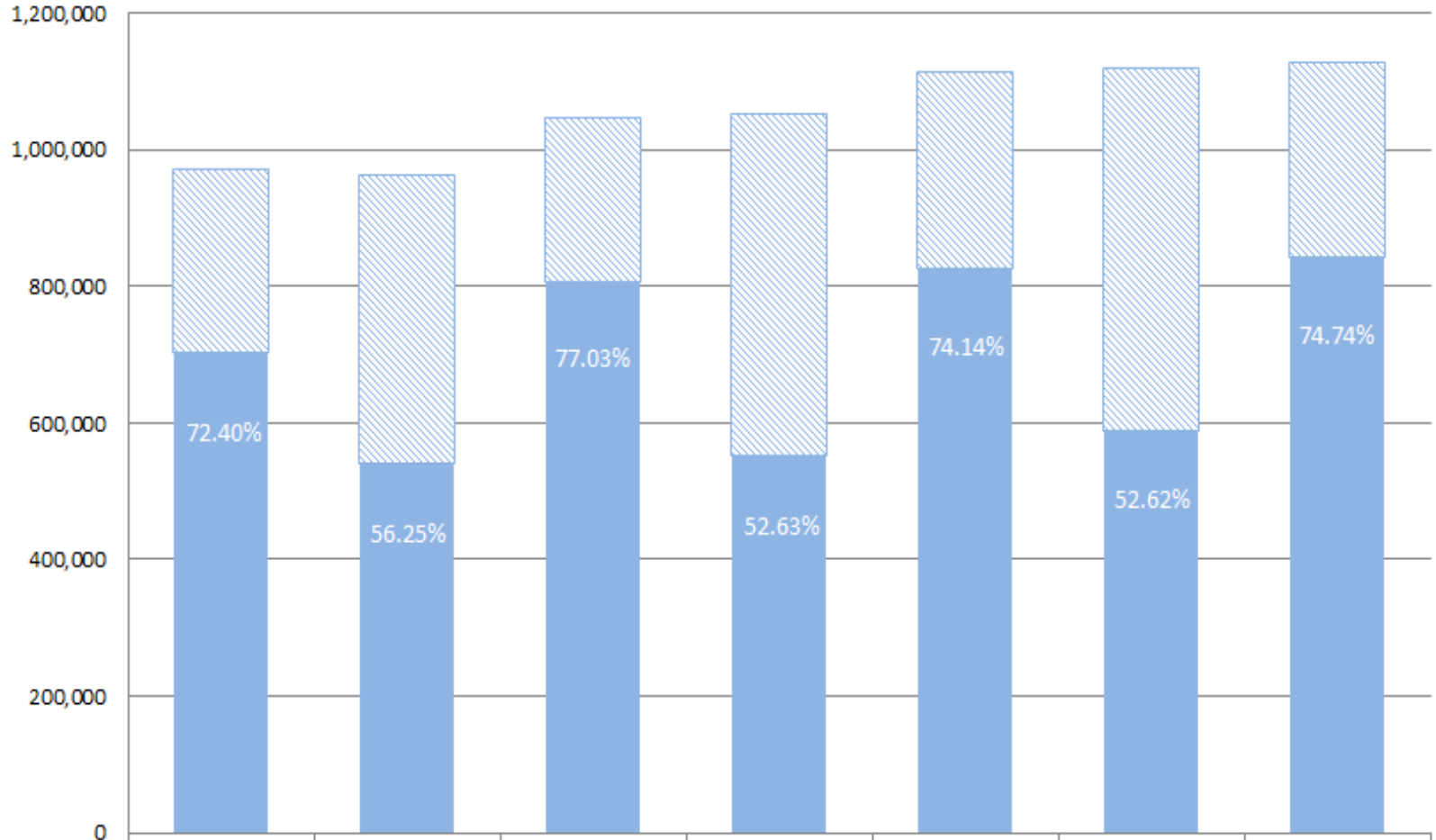
	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
D-Men	231,595	231,631	261,091	268,811	314,021	301,500	292,236
D-Women	302,418	305,779	340,241	350,427	412,773	398,462	390,963
R-Men	278,610	294,088	305,170	298,671	311,805	330,631	341,749
R-Women	283,294	295,410	303,842	296,788	301,848	315,894	323,196
NP-Men	345,878	324,453	360,718	364,568	367,645	373,895	383,368
NP-Women	383,470	360,839	400,451	402,155	395,868	399,380	409,585

Figure 4a: Iowa Registered Men, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000



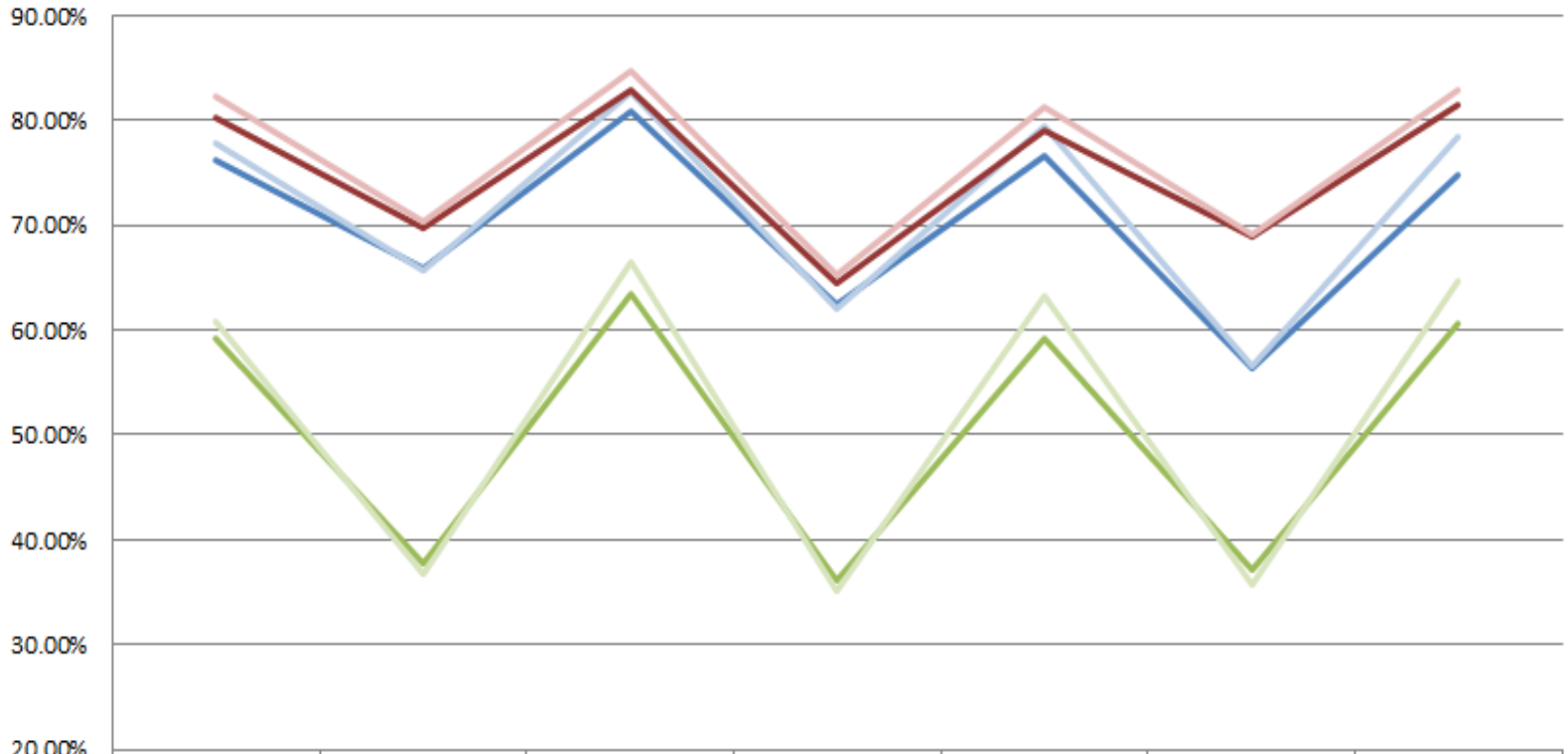
	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
M-Did Not Vote	251,298	370,136	233,937	439,852	289,511	469,661	288,280
M-Voted	604,785	480,036	693,042	492,198	705,003	537,824	731,321

Figure 4b: Iowa Registered Women, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000



	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
W-Did Not Vote	267,473	420,883	239,960	497,110	287,297	529,061	284,129
W-Voted	701,709	541,145	804,574	552,260	823,712	587,561	840,877

Figure 5: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage by Party and Gender in Election Years Since 2000



	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
D-Men	76.17%	65.88%	80.80%	62.41%	76.60%	56.40%	74.81%
D-Women	77.87%	65.72%	82.60%	61.99%	79.42%	56.53%	78.52%
R-Men	80.31%	69.73%	82.91%	64.52%	78.95%	69.01%	81.50%
R-Women	82.22%	70.34%	84.64%	65.26%	81.22%	69.12%	82.99%
NP-Men	59.16%	37.72%	63.50%	36.13%	59.15%	37.14%	60.69%
NP-Women	60.84%	36.69%	66.51%	35.15%	63.23%	35.73%	64.66%