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Iowa Voting Series, Paper 4: An Examination of Iowa Turnout Statistics Since 2000 by Party and Age Group

Timothy M. Hagle
University of Iowa

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© Timothy M. Hagle
Department of Political Science
The University of Iowa

Abstract

This is the fourth paper in a series examining aspects of voting in Iowa. In this paper I examine Iowa's turnout in presidential and midterm elections since 2000 with a focus on party and age group. Iowa's election statistics are reported for five age groups: 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65 and over. The different age ranges covered by the groups makes direct comparisons difficult, but changes during the period examined are evident as those registered to vote move from one age group to the next. The mix of registered Democrats and Republicans remains relatively stable across age groups during the period. Most striking in terms of voter registration is how No Party registrants go from more than 50% of those in the youngest age group to only about 20% of those in the oldest group. Looking at election turnout, the data show that there is a clear progression in improved turnout as voters age. In addition, older voters are more reliable, meaning differences in turnout between midterm and presidential elections are less pronounced for older age groups. Turnout differences between Democrats and Republicans are generally small across all age groups, with Republicans nearly always having a slight advantage. Although the turnout percentage of No Party registrants also improves with age, they are always well below Democrats and Republicans.

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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, March 2014 (fixed date)

Iowa Voting Series, Paper 4: An Examination of Iowa Turnout Statistics Since 2000 by Party and Age Group

Timothy M. Hagle
Department of Political Science
The University of Iowa

In the second paper in this series¹ I examined Iowa's turnout statistics in midterm and presidential elections since 2000, in general and by party.² In the third paper in the series I examined the turnout statistics by party and gender. In this paper I examine a different aspect of the turnout statistics by focusing on party and age group. 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 absentee⁵ is also indicated.

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 would like each to stand on its own, the papers tend to build on each other so I will make references to prior papers in the series. In addition, 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.

Before proceeding, I need to make an additional comment about the data for this paper. The information contained in the Statewide Statistical Reports links is not entirely complete with respect to party identification. The reports contain divisions for Democrat, Republican, and No Party voters, but do not include an “Other” category as they do for the registration statistics. Although this was not a problem for the 2000 through 2006 elections, for 2008 and beyond it means that the grand total of registrants and voters in any particular age group cannot be achieved by simply adding the Democrats, Republicans, and No Party voters in that age group. In the first paper in this series I simply added registrants in the Other category to No Party registrants. I cannot do that for this paper, however, as I have neither an exact count of such Other registrants on election day nor an indication of how many voted. Nevertheless, although this number varies from about one to several hundred registrants or voters depending on the category or election, that number is small, relatively speaking, and I will only focus on the three main political categories.

Iowa Registered Voters

I begin by repeating Figure 1⁶ from the third 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.

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. Interestingly, although 2012 was also a post-census adjustment year, the registration losses earlier in the year were made up by the time of the general election in November. As I mention in a different context below, this is an example of the difference in resources for get out the vote efforts in midterm (2002) and presidential (2012) election years.

The third 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 third 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 to other states in terms of turnout.

Iowa Registered Voters by Age Group

Figure 1 showed the overall voter registration numbers for Iowa. Figure 2 breaks out those numbers by age group as of the seven election days included in the period. The age groups used in reporting the statistics are 18-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50-64, and 65 and over. Two points need to be made about these groups before proceeding. First, quite obviously the age range covered by each group varies. The youngest group only covers seven years. The next up covers 10 years, the next two cover 15 years each. The final group covers the largest range, but has no set length. This means that direct comparisons between age groups, at least in terms of raw numbers, are not appropriate. For example, we can see from Figure 2 that for the 2000 election there were 221,021 registrants in the 18-24 group, but more than twice that number in the 35-49 group. Given that the range of ages included in the 35-49 group is over twice that of the 18-24 group the much larger number of registrants in the older group is not particularly surprising.

A second factor to consider is the “generational” or time aspect of the data. For example, even over the 12 years examined here every person registered in the 18-24 group for the 2000 election had moved to at least the 25-34 group with some in the 35-49 group by 2012.⁹ This gradual movement is something to be considered when examining the data. As an example, notice that for the 2000 election those in the 35-49

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 who are not yet registered. Identifying and registering those who are eligible is an additional process that requires treatment separate from the focus of this paper.

⁹ Obviously some people move away, die, or lose their voting rights, and some people move to the state or register to vote later in life, but the point is that there is a regular change to the composition of the age groups over time.

group had 145,952 more registrants than the 50-64 group. By 2012, however the older group had surpassed the younger by 66,567. Of course, during this 12-year period nearly everyone in the younger group in 2000 had moved to the older group. By 2012 most of those in the 35-49 group had been in one of the two youngest groups in 2000.

Focusing more specifically on the results in Figure 2, it is no surprise that the 18-24 group has the fewest registrants of the five for all seven elections. Aside from the fact that this group covers the smallest age range, younger voters are also the least politically engaged on average. Several factors account for the lesser political engagement of young citizens. A detailed explanation of those factors is beyond the scope of this paper, but those just reaching adulthood will have less political experience to draw on and are likely still in the process of formulating their political views. Thus, it often takes more work on the part of campaigns and parties to get those in the youngest age group to register and vote.

One interesting aspect of the registration numbers for the 18-24 group is how they rise and fall based on whether the election is presidential or midterm. The period starts with the 18-24 group having 221,021 registrants for the 2000 election. That number increases slightly to 221,763 for 2002. A more substantial increase occurs for the 2004 presidential election, then we see how the number decreases for 2006, surges to its highest level in 2008, decreases again in 2010, and increases once more in 2012. Although in prior papers we have seen this type of cyclical pattern for turnout, it seems a little odd for registration numbers. The basic explanation is the emphasis campaigns and parties place on reaching out to those young citizens who have just reached voting age. Democrats are well-known for this emphasis on young voters, but Republicans recognize their importance too. This is particularly true on college campuses where there are usually student groups associated with each major party that help to register their fellow students.

The existence of student political groups, however, does not explain the rise and fall of registration numbers in the 18-24 group. Rather, the explanation lies in the resources and coordination available in presidential campaigns. It is certainly true that the greater resources available during presidential election years affects turnout, but registration is affected as well. Campaigns and parties want to find supporters among those not registered and youngest age group has the highest percentage of such potential voters. Thus, substantial resources are expended on registering those who have recently become eligible. The greater media attention during a presidential campaign also encourages potential voters to register in ways that a midterm election campaign does not.

The cyclical registration pattern between presidential and midterm elections is not present in the 25-34 age group. Although there is a slight dip in registrations from 2000 to 2002, the number rises throughout the period, except for another slight decrease in

the presidential year of 2012 where we might expect an increase. The registration numbers for the 25-34 group are reliably above those of the 18-24 group. Again, this is not surprising given the three additional years included in the range. What is somewhat surprising, however, is that the number registered does not exceed what we would expect given the larger range. More specifically, a basic cut at what we might expect for registration numbers for the 25-34 group would be $10/7$ of the 18-24 numbers. This just divides the 18-24 group's registration numbers by the number of years in that range then multiplies it by the number in the 25-34 range. Thus, for example, given the 221,021 registrants in the 18-24 group for 2000 we might expect 315,744 registrants in the 25-34 group. As Figure 2 shows, however, the actual number is only 294,450. Using this calculation for the remaining years the number of registrants in the 25-34 group is below expectations through 2008. In 2010 the number of registrants in the 25-34 group finally surpassed the basic expectation by about 33,000. The 25-34 group was still above the expectation for 2012, but only by about 3,000.

There are, of course, several reasons why we cannot place too much emphasis on such a simple calculation for the expected number of registrants in the 25-34 group. For example, as previously noted campaigns and parties emphasize registration on college campuses, but upon graduation many college graduates leave the state. This includes both those originally from out of state who came to Iowa for college and then leave afterward as well as Iowans leaving to seek job opportunities elsewhere. Of course, there are some in the 25-34 group who move to Iowa, but (without looking at detailed survey or census data) it seems there is a net population loss between the two groups.

A second reason why registrants may not be as high as expected in the 25-34 group is that under Iowa law a person who does not vote in two consecutive general elections will be placed on "inactive" status and eventually removed from the voter rolls.¹⁰ This is another instance where the emphasis on college students comes into play. As much as a particular campaign or candidate can spark the interest of such students, there may be a lessening of interest in later elections, particularly after the student graduates or leaves college to begin a career, family, etc.

On the other hand, voter registration efforts of the campaigns and parties do not stop at the edge of the college campus. Active grassroots organizations regularly work to register new voters at a variety of locations, events, and gatherings. Thus, those who managed to not register to vote while in the 18-24 group may do so while in the 25-34 group.

Moving to the 35-49 group we see that at the start of the period there is a very large gap between the number of registrants in this group and the 25-34 group. Again, part of this is simply due to the larger range for this group, but the 35-49 registration numbers

¹⁰ I discuss this in a bit more detail in the first paper in this series.

are well above expectations based on this simple calculation through 2006. Beyond that, however, the number is below the expectation. One reason for this is the surge in registrants in the 25-34 group for the 2008 election. In addition, the high point for the 35-49 group was actually for the 2000 election. The number shrank a bit for 2002, then rose again for 2004, but still 3,547 registrants below the 2000 mark. From 2004 on the 35-49 group lost registrants in each successive election. It was the only age group to have fewer registrants at the end of the period than at the beginning.

Because the 50-64 group covers the same number of years as the 35-49 group a more direct comparison is possible. At the beginning of the period the 35-49 group has 145,952 more registrants, but by the end the 50-64 group leads by 66,567. Unlike the steady decline in the 35-49 group, the 50-64 group increased its size in every election in the period. Generational change likely accounts for most of this reversal between the two groups. Most of those in the 35-49 group in 2000 will have moved to the 50-64 group by 2012. The size of the 35-49 group in 2000 helps to explain the regular increases in the 50-64 group. For the 35-49 group, the size of the 25-34 group was apparently not sufficient for the 35-49 group to maintain its size as the younger voters entered the older group.

The indefinite range of the 65 & Over group does not allow for direct comparisons with the other groups. This group did, however, show steady gains during the period. There were very slight reductions in the number of registrants in this group for 2002 and 2006, but steady increases in 2008, 2010, and 2012.

Iowa Registered Voters by Age Group and Party

The next step is to examine the party affiliation for each age group. Figure 3 is divided into five parts, one for each of the five age groups.

Figure 3a shows the party (Democrat, Republican, and No Party) distribution of registered voters in the 18-24 group. The first thing one notices in this figure is how many more are registered as No Party than either Democrat or Republican. In fact, until 2008 No Party registrants made up over 50% of those in this age group. By way of comparison, although for all age groups combined there are more No Party registrants than those in either party, the total percentage was never over 41% with a low during the period of about 35%. (See the first paper in the series for more details.) In 2008 and 2010 the percentage of No Party voters dipped slightly below 50%, but in 2012 was slightly over it again.

In looking at election to election changes, we see both Democrats and Republicans gained registrants in 2002, though No Party voters decreased. It was no surprise that all

three parties gained registrants for the 2004 presidential year.¹¹ In 2006 both Democrats and Republicans lost about 7,000 registrants, but No Party registrants lost almost 20,000. The 2008 election saw registrations of Democrats surge, in large part due to the hotly contested 2008 caucuses. Republican registrations also rose, but only to just below what the 2004 figure had been. Interestingly, No Party registrations actually decreased in 2008. Again, this was due in part to the 2008 caucuses where many No Party voters apparently switched their registration to Democrat to participate in the Democratic caucuses. Although all three parties lost registrants for 2010, the drop was largest for Democrats at a bit over 16%. For 2012 both Republicans and No Party voters gained back all they had lost for 2010 and more. Democrats, however, actually lost a few hundred registrants.

Young voters were, of course, an important group for Democrats in 2008, and were highly targeted during the campaign. It was clear early in the 2012 cycle that the youngest voters, many of whom were now voting for the first time, were not as energized for Obama as had been the case in 2008. The Obama campaign worked hard to compensate for this loss of enthusiasm, but the loss of registrants for Democrats is a clear indication that the energy level of 2008 was not there for 2012.

The final point to make about the 18-24 group is the near parity between Democrats and Republicans. Although this parity exists for all the age groups taken as a whole, the conventional wisdom is that younger voters are more liberal. It is true, of course, that many No Party voters may be casting ballots for Democrats, but at least in terms of voter registration the two political parties are relatively equal. Republicans start out the period with a slight advantage in 2000 and 2002. Democrats reverse that for 2004 and 2006. Registrations for Democrats surged for 2008, but losses for them in 2010 and 2012 and gains by Republicans have nearly returned the two parties to parity.

Figure 3b shows the party registration for the 25-34 group. In many ways the patterns here are quite similar to those of the 18-24 group. No Party voters again dominate the registrations and were larger than the combined registrations of Democrats and Republicans until the caucus surge of 2008. Also like the prior group, Republicans had more registrants at the start of the period, lost the lead, then fell far behind for 2008, and began to close the gap thereafter.

In terms of the party patterns, Democrats generally showed growth over the period, with only slight declines in 2002 and 2012. Of course, as noted previously a decline in the 2012 presidential year is unusual. The growth of Republican registrations during the period was slow, but steady with only the only decline for the 2006 election. No

¹¹ In prior papers I referred to Democrats, Republicans, and No Party voters as “groups” because it did not seem appropriate to refer to No Party voters as a political party. Unfortunately, given that I am referring to age “groups” in this paper I will need to refer to No Party voters as a “party” to be clearer as to whether I am referring to an age group or a political group.

Party registrations also showed overall growth during the period, but were a bit more up and down with losses in 2002 and 2012.

Figure 3c shows the party registration for the 35-49 group. Although No Party registrants are still the most numerous of the three, they do not dominate as with the prior two groups. The pattern between Democrats and Republicans is similar to that of the younger group in that Republicans had more registrants at the beginning of the period but were eventually overtaken by Democrats. There are, however, differences in that the initial Republican lead at the start of the period was larger, registrations for Democrats did not surge as much in 2008 as it did for the younger groups, and losses of registered Democrats allowed Republicans to retake the lead by the end of the period.

As mentioned previously, the 35-49 group is the only one of the five to have had fewer registrants at the end of the period than at the start. This reduction in registrations was present for all three parties. Although the greatest number of No Party registrants for this group was in 2000, after a substantial loss for 2002 the number climbed again in 2004 and 2006 before being reduced for each of the last three elections in the period. Republican registrations actually peaked in 2002, but then began a slow decline for every following election. Registrations for Democrats were up and down until the minor surge for 2008. Democrats then lost registrations at a faster pace than Republicans in 2010 and 2012 which put them slightly behind.

Contrary to the overall pattern for the 35-49 group, Figure 3d shows that the 50-64 group grew throughout the period, and for all three parties. This is also the first group for which the No Party registrants were not at least a plurality at any point during the period. The period begins with near parity between the three parties, with Democrats holding a fairly slight lead over Republicans. Registrations for Democrats grew steadily through 2008, but declined slightly in 2010 and 2012. Republican registrations grew more slowly, but did have a surge in 2010 and additional gains in 2012. Thus, by the end of the period the parties were on a nearly equal footing.

In Figure 3e we see that the changes found in the 50-64 group continued for the 65 & Over group. No party registrants in this group were barely half of those of either party, nearly the reverse of what we saw for the 18-24 group. As with the prior groups, Democrats and Republicans are nearly even throughout the period. As with other groups, Republicans had more registrations at the start of the period, Democrats surpassed them even before the surge of 2008, but Republicans regained the lead in 2010.

Voter Turnout by Age Group

Figure 4 is also divided into five parts, one for each age group. The parts are structured much like Figure 1 in that the height of the bars represents the number of registered

voters for that age group for each of the seven elections. The solid portion at the bottom represents the number that voted with the turnout percentage as indicated. The left axis is scaled the same so that the five parts of Figure 4 can be more easily compared.

Figure 4a shows the overall registrations and turnout out for the 18-24 group. The relatively small height of the bars is no surprise given how we saw in Figure 2 that this age group has the smallest number of registrants. Most striking in this figure are the exceptionally low turnout percentages. Compared to the overall turnout percentages shown in Figure 1 (which includes those for the 18-24 group) presidential election year turnout averages roughly 16% below the overall average for 2004, 2008 and 2012. In 2004 it is about 28% lower. As we saw in Figure 1 turnout in midterm election years is well below that of presidential years. This pattern holds for the 18-24 group, but to an even greater extent. The 18-24 group's turnout percentage is about 30% lower than the overall average. In fact, for all three midterm elections it is less than half the overall turnout percentage.

Figure 4b shows turnout percentages for the 25-34 group. The percentages for this group are higher than those of the 18-24 group for all seven elections. Even so, the percentages are only marginally higher for three of the four presidential elections (all but 2000 where turnout was over 10% higher). The increases were larger in the midterm elections. This was particularly so for 2002, where the jump was nearly 13%. For 2006 and 2010 the increases were more moderate.

Despite these increases, the turnout for the 25-34 group is still well below the overall averages shown in Figure 1. For presidential years turnout for the 25-34 group is 15.5% below the overall average. For the three midterm elections the percentage is 22.0% lower. Although it might seem encouraging that the additional drop for midterms is only 6.5% when looked at this way, we must remember that the 25-34 group is starting from a much lower turnout number for presidential years. On the other hand, the average turnout percentage for the 25-34 group for midterm elections is 31.97%, which represents a 45.44% drop from the presidential year average of 58.61%. In contrast, the overall average turnout percentage for midterm elections is 54.01%, which is a drop of only 26.37% from presidential years.¹²

Figure 4c shows the turnout percentages for the 35-49 group. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the turnout percentages here is how closely they are to the overall

¹² I think it would be useful to provide a simple example to illustrate the two ways of looking at these percentages. Suppose some group has an average turnout percentage for presidential years of 50%, but only 25% for midterm elections. One way of looking at these two percentages is to note that the midterm percentage is 25% lower, when considering the total number of those registered as 100%. On the other hand, if you think of the presidential year turnout as the starting point (understandable if you expect that those not voting in presidential elections are not likely to vote in midterm elections) then the reduction is 50%.

percentages. None of the turnout percentages for this group are more than 3.5% from the overall percentages. The 35-49 group has a slightly higher turnout percentage for three of the four presidential elections (all but 2012), but a slightly lower percentage for two of the three midterms (all but 2002).

Figure 4d shows the turnout percentages for the 50-64 group. Recall from Figure 2 how the number of registrants in this group grew during the period. This is reflected in the increasing height of the bars.

The first thing to notice in terms of turnout is that the percentages have increased substantially from the 35-49 group (or the overall percentages shown in Figure 1). For presidential years the average turnout percentage is nearly 10% higher (84.42% for the 50-64 group versus 74.89% for the 35-49 group). For midterm elections the increase is even larger at 16.89% (70.09% versus 53.20%).

In terms of patterns for this group, the average drop in the turnout percentage for midterm elections is smaller than the overall average at 14.33% (versus 19.35%). Although the turnout percentages are fairly consistent for each election type, the highest turnout percentages occurred for 2002 (midterm) and 2004 (presidential). The midterm turnout percentages declined slightly in 2006 and again in 2010. The presidential turnout percentages declined in 2008, but increased slightly in 2012.

The turnout percentages for the 65 & Over group are shown in Figure 4e. The percentages here are fairly consistent with the 50-64 group. For presidential elections the turnout percentages are slightly lower for all but 2012. That might be expected given the likely increasing infirmity of those in this age group. On the other hand, parties make a determined effort to get absentee ballots for many senior voters in nursing homes, retirement communities, etc. That effort may be one reason the midterm turnout percentages for this group are all higher than for the 50-64 group and all above 70%. Given the higher midterm turnout percentage, it comes as no surprise that the gap between presidential and midterm turnout percentages is the smallest of the five age group at only 10.67%.

Because it is a bit difficult to compare turnout percentages across age groups in the five parts of Figure 4, Figure 5 plots the percentages as lines showing turnout for the seven elections in the period.

The lines in Figure 5 show (and confirm conventional wisdom for) two basic propositions. The first is that younger registrants are the least likely to vote and that the likelihood of voting increases as age increases. It is interesting to see the separation between the lines for the first three age groups. Although the increased turnout of the 25-34 group is small compared to the 18-24 group, there is a substantial increase for the 35-49 group. Although there is another increase in turnout for the oldest two groups

(50-64 and 65 & Over) those final two lines are intertwined. As noted previously, the 50-64 group had slightly higher turnout for three of the four presidential elections, but the 65 & Over group had higher turnout for all three of the midterm elections.

The second proposition is that registrants are more reliable voters as they get older. This gets to the difference between midterm and presidential election turnout. The youngest group has the greatest swing in turnout between the two types of elections. The next group, 25-34, still has substantial variation in turnout between midterm and presidential elections, but the line is somewhat smoother, in that there is less variation in turnout from one election to the next. The same is true for the 35-49 group. The two oldest groups also increase their turnout while smoothing the differences between the two types of elections. Although we do not see an overall increase in turnout for the 65 & Over group, we can clearly see that the line for that group is smoother than for the 50-64 group.

What is particularly remarkable about this smoothing effect as the groups get older is that it occurs at the same time as turnout is increasing. From a statistical standpoint we might expect a smoothing effect if midterm turnout increased at the same time that presidential election turnout decreased. What we see, however, is that turnout for both types of elections increase until the last age group where we still see an increased turnout in midterm but not presidential elections (or at least not in three of the four).

Although it is a bit of a side note, the increased turnout for the 65 & Over group in midterm elections is interesting for another reason. As I previously noted, we might expect slightly reduced turnout for the oldest group due to infirmity or other problems in getting to the polls or casting ballots. Recognizing such problems, however, both parties make efforts to provide elderly registrants the opportunity to vote via absentee ballots, rides to the polls, etc. Thus, it is not surprising that presidential election turnout for the 65 & Over group is not much below that of the 50-64 group. Of course, such outreach efforts are most intense for presidential elections. That is one reason why turnout for midterm elections is lower than for presidential elections. With possibly greater difficulty in casting a ballot and reduced outreach it is a bit surprising that the 65 & Over group has had midterm turnout percentages higher than any other group.

Turnout by Age Group and Party

In the second paper in this series I examined turnout differences by party. (See Figure 3 in particular.) In the third paper I looked at the combination of gender and party. (See Figure 5 in particular.) For this paper I now look at turnout for the combination of age group and party. Figure 6 is divided into five parts based on the five age groups. For each age group the turnout for Democrats, Republicans, and No Party voters is on a separate line.

Figure 6a shows the turnout percentages for the 18-24 group. Although the 18-24 group has the lowest overall turnout percentages of the five age groups, they still fit the general pattern of Republicans having the highest turnout percentages, closely followed by Democrats, with No Party voters well behind. Unlike the general pattern (again, see Figure 3 of the second paper in the series), turnout for Democrats for 2008 was actually higher than that of Republicans in this age group. Overall, even though 2008 was a very strong year for Democrats, Republicans still had a higher turnout. Here, however, we see that the Democrats' emphasis on the youth vote managed to boost turnout of registered Democrats enough to surpass that of Republicans for this election. We also see that there is little separation for the 2004 and 2006 elections where Republican turnout for this age group only surpassed that of Democrats by 0.51% and 0.19%, respectively.

The gap in turnout from Democrats and Republicans to No Party voters is smaller for this age group than overall, but there is also less room to fall given the lower turnout of those in the two major parties. There are two observations worth making about the No Party turnout for this age group. First, the No Party turnout barely exceeds 50% even in presidential years and, surprisingly, not even that for 2008. Second, No Party turnout for this age group does not exceed 20% for any of the midterm elections. This means that less than one in five No Party voters in this age group vote in midterm elections.

Figure 6b shows turnout by party for the 25-34 group. Consistent with the overall party turnout results, as well as overall age group turnout, we see that turnout for this group is higher than the 18-24 group for all three parties, but not a lot. There is more separation between Democrats and Republicans for this age group though Democrats still have a slightly higher (by 0.21%) turnout for 2008.

Figure 6c shows turnout by party for the 35-49 group. Again, the same pattern persists with minor differences. As expected, turnout is again higher for all three parties. We also see complete separation between Democrats and Republicans, with Republicans having higher turnout for all seven elections.

Figure 6d shows turnout by party for the 50-64 group. I am starting to sound like a broken record, but we again see the same pattern. Turnout for all three parties is higher than the 35-49 group. Republicans again had higher turnout than Democrats for all seven elections, though the separation between them is a bit smaller.

Figure 6e is the final figure (!) and it shows turnout by party for the 65 & Over group. We saw in Figure 5 that overall turnout for the 65 & Over group was the first to not have higher turnout percentages than the next younger group, in this instance the 50-64 group. By separating the group by party we see that No Party voters in the 65 & Over group produced the same mixed pattern as in Figure 5. Specifically, their turnout percentage was lower than No Party voters in the 50-64 group for three of the four

presidential elections, but higher for two of the three midterm elections. Compared to their colleagues in the 50-64 group Democrats in the 65 & Over group also had a mixed record. They have a lower turnout percentage for three of the four presidential years, but higher in all three midterm elections. Republicans in the 65 & Over group did not follow this trend as their turnout percentages were lower than Republicans in the 50-64 group for all seven elections. Interestingly, however, despite a reduction in the 65 & Over Republicans' turnout percentages from the younger age group, their percentages are still higher than that of Democrats in this group for all seven elections (though sometimes only barely as in 2006 when the difference was only 0.20%).

Concluding Comments

In addition to the details from the various figures there are several points worth noting about the registration and turnout data.

First, unlike the voter registration data examined in the first paper in this series there was not much of a difference in turnout percentages for the wave midterm elections of 2006 and 2010. For 2006 we might have expected Democrats to have increased their turnout percentage, but in looking at the five parts of Figure 6 that does not appear to be the case. In fact, for all five age groups Democrats' turnout percentage in 2006 was below that of 2002. On the other hand, Republicans turnout percentage was also down for all five age groups in 2006 compared to 2002. Thus, even though the Republican turnout percentage in 2006 was higher than that of Democrats in 2006 for all five age groups, the gap was sufficiently narrowed that it helps to explain Democrats' electoral success in Iowa that year.¹³

The turnout percentage for 2010 does show a bit more of a correlation with the surge in registrations for Republicans. Democrats had their lowest midterm turnout percentage for all five age groups in 2010. In contrast, 2010 had the highest turnout percentage for Republicans for only two of the five age groups (interestingly, for the youngest and oldest groups). It is for 2010 that we see the largest gap in turnout percentage between Democrats and Republicans of any of the seven elections.

Second, the increasing turnout percentages across the three parties as voters age may be a reflection of their greater knowledge of the importance of Congressional and state races. At one level this may simply mean older voters have had more time to learn about such offices. At another level the increases may reflect a greater understanding of the importance of such offices. As noted previously, both parties work hard to motivate younger voters, but those efforts diminish for midterm elections, so younger voters may simply not know about the offices and candidates, and often may not make an effort to

¹³ Aside from other offices, Democrats held on to the Governor's office in an open race and picked up two US House seats, one by defeating a long time incumbent.

find out. Aside from accumulated knowledge, as voters age they will have more contacts with various levels of government (licenses, taxes, permits, etc.) and may be more interested in government and office holders than when younger.

Third, and along similar lines, the reduction of No Party voters relative to those of either party as voters age (Figure 3) is consistent with the notion that younger voters may not yet have sorted out their ideological leanings, but do so as they age. Voters can change their official party identification at any time, but will have a tendency to move from No Party to either Democrat or Republican and then stay with that party except in extraordinary circumstances. The 2008 Iowa Caucuses are one example of an extraordinary circumstance. As detailed in the first paper in this series, the historic nature of the Obama and Clinton candidacies drove interest for the Democratic Caucuses and many No Party registrants switched to Democrat to participate. Similarly, though to a lesser extent, heated Republican primaries in 2010 seem to have caused many No Party registrants to switch to Republican. Over time some of those who switched might return to No Party status, but likely far fewer than initially switched.

Finally, although No Party registrants may start from a place of lesser interest in politics and government, campaigns certainly work to get their votes as well as those of their base. Nevertheless, No Party voters likely feel less connected to officeholders of either party. This might make it easier for them to ignore appeals to vote or support candidates who are not “one of them.”

Figure 1: Iowa Registered Voters, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage 2000 Through 2012 Elections

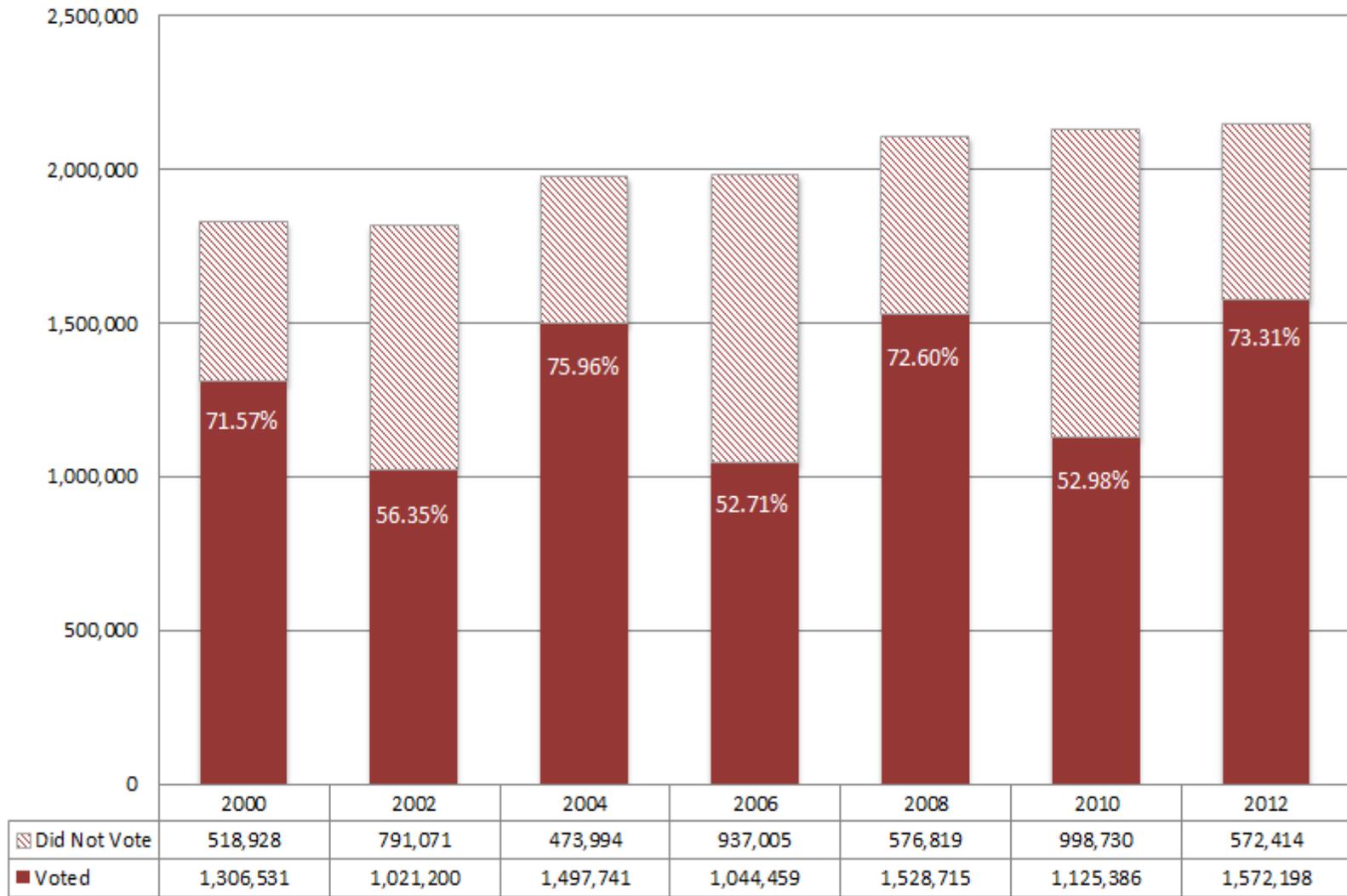
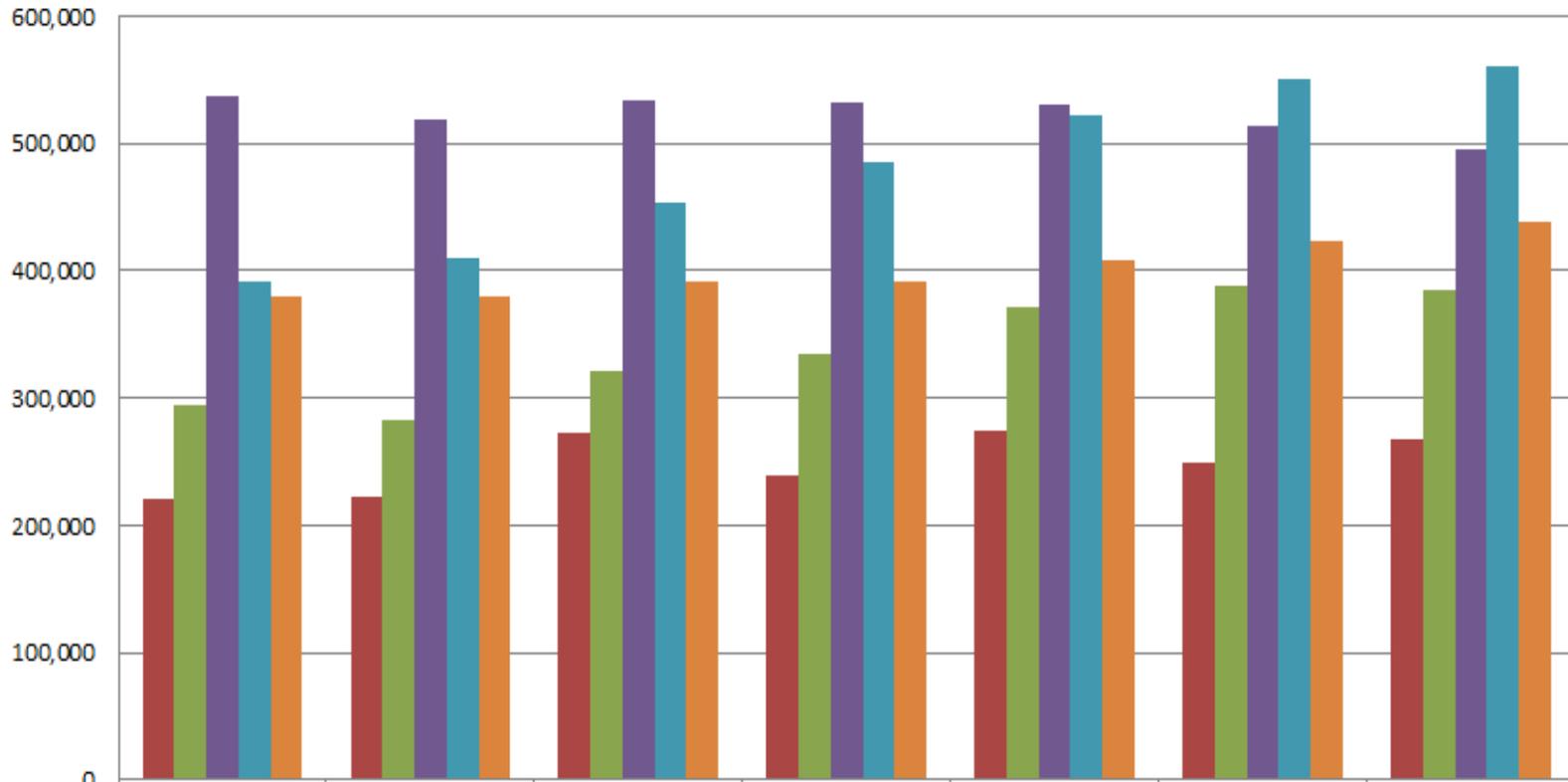


Figure2: Iowa Registered Voters by Age Group in Election Years Since 2000



	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
18-24	221,021	221,763	272,755	239,189	274,288	248,766	266,860
25-34	294,450	282,451	320,561	334,664	371,596	388,149	384,562
35-49	537,695	519,321	534,148	531,808	529,751	514,112	494,537
50-64	391,743	409,211	452,975	485,029	521,212	550,169	561,104
65 & Over	380,465	379,520	391,232	390,771	408,666	422,920	437,548

Figure 3a: Iowa Registered Voters by Party and Age Group 18-24 in Election Years Since 2000

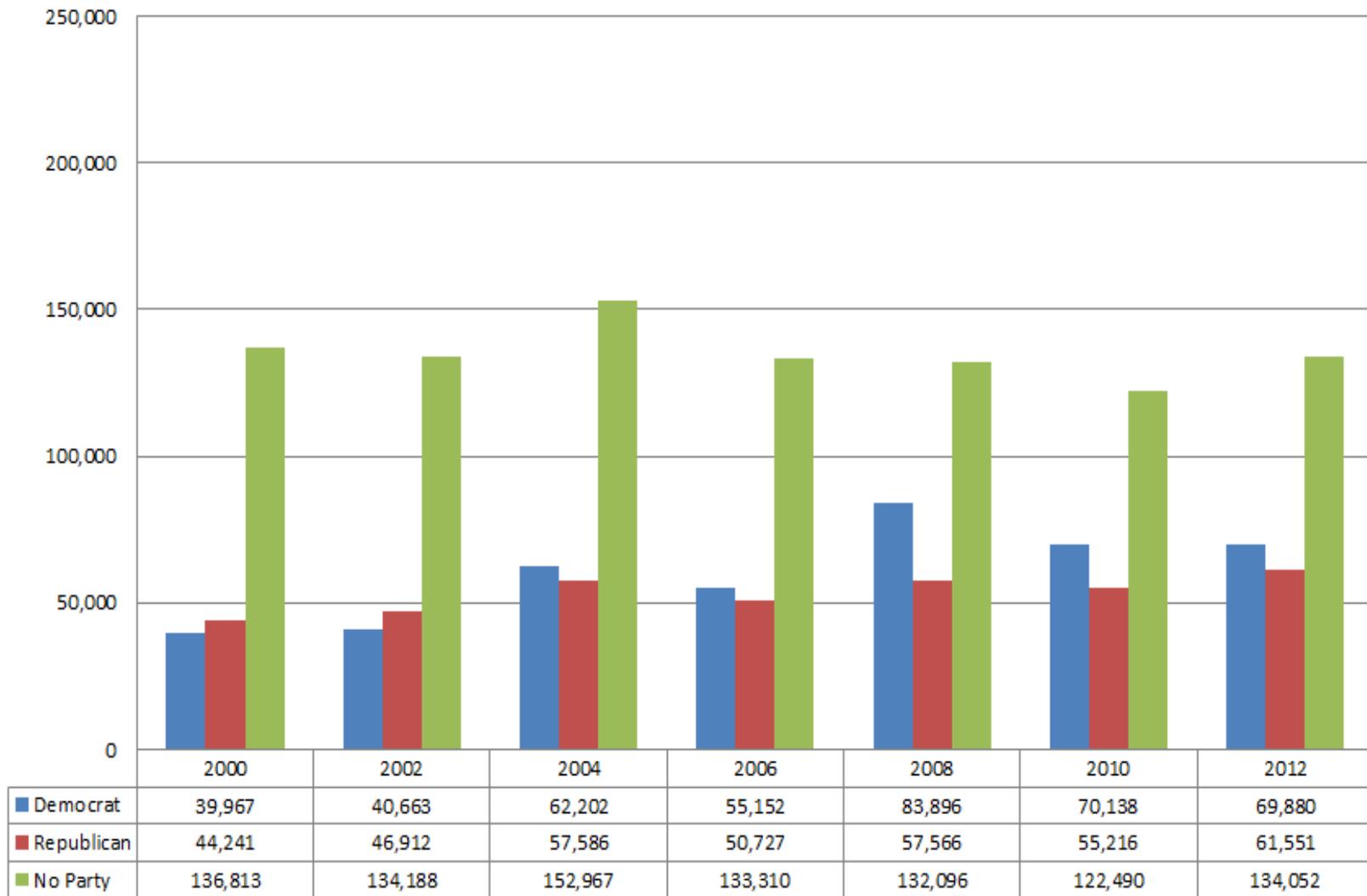


Figure 3b: Iowa Registered Voters by Party and Age Group 25-34 in Election Years Since 2000

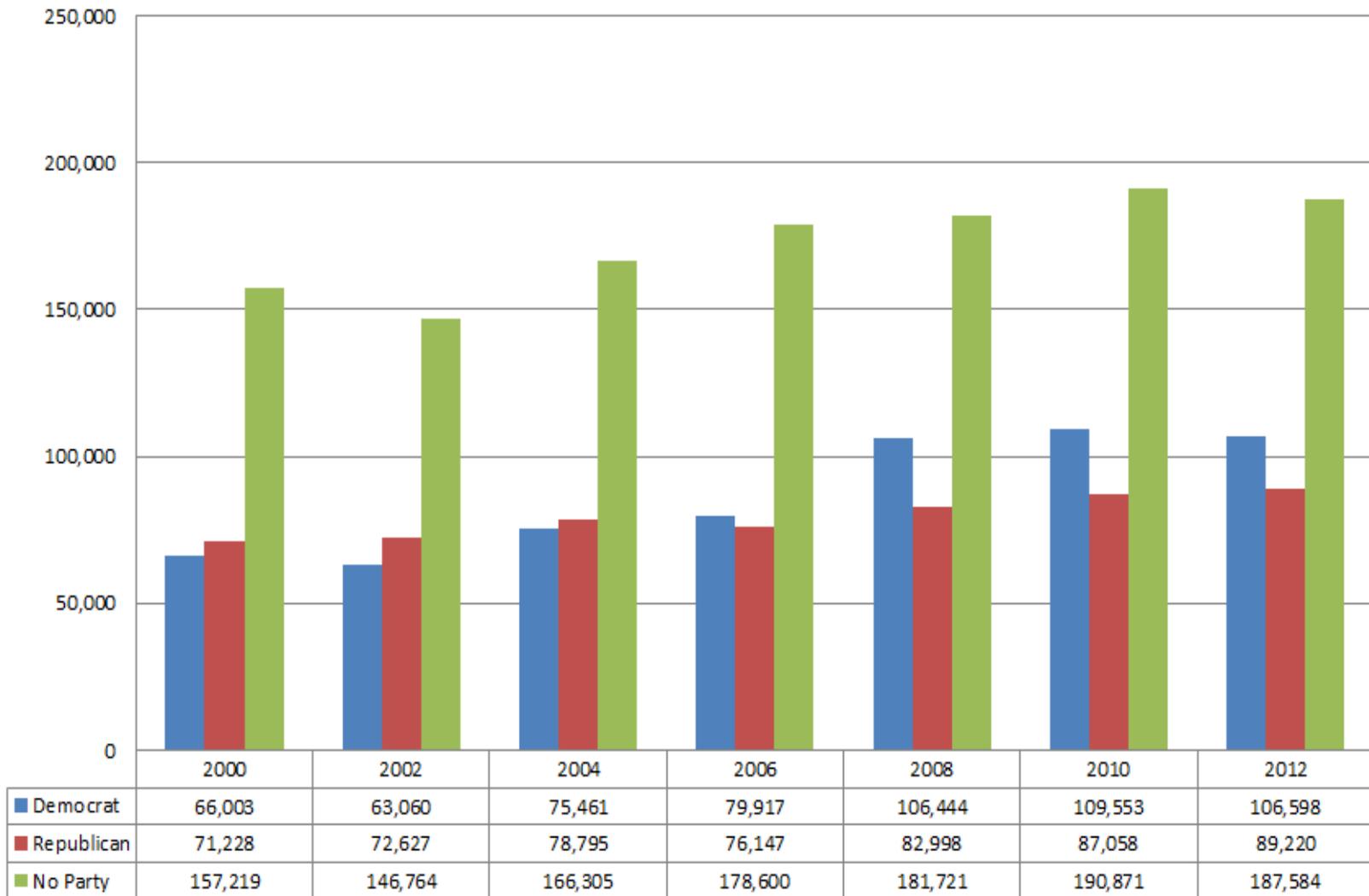


Figure 3c: Iowa Registered Voters by Party and Age Group 35-49 in Election Years Since 2000

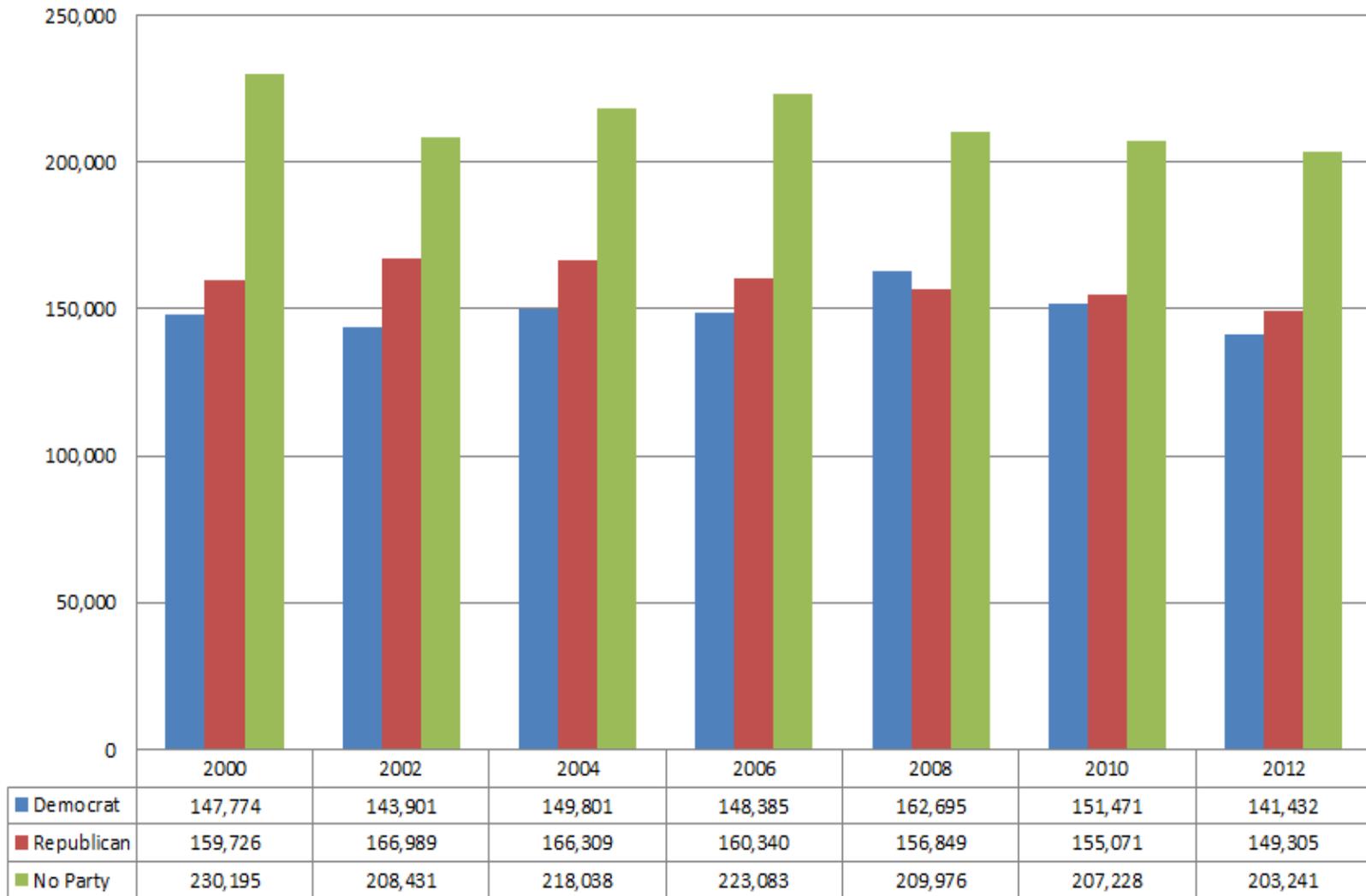


Figure 3d: Iowa Registered Voters by Party and Age Group 50-64 in Election Years Since 2000

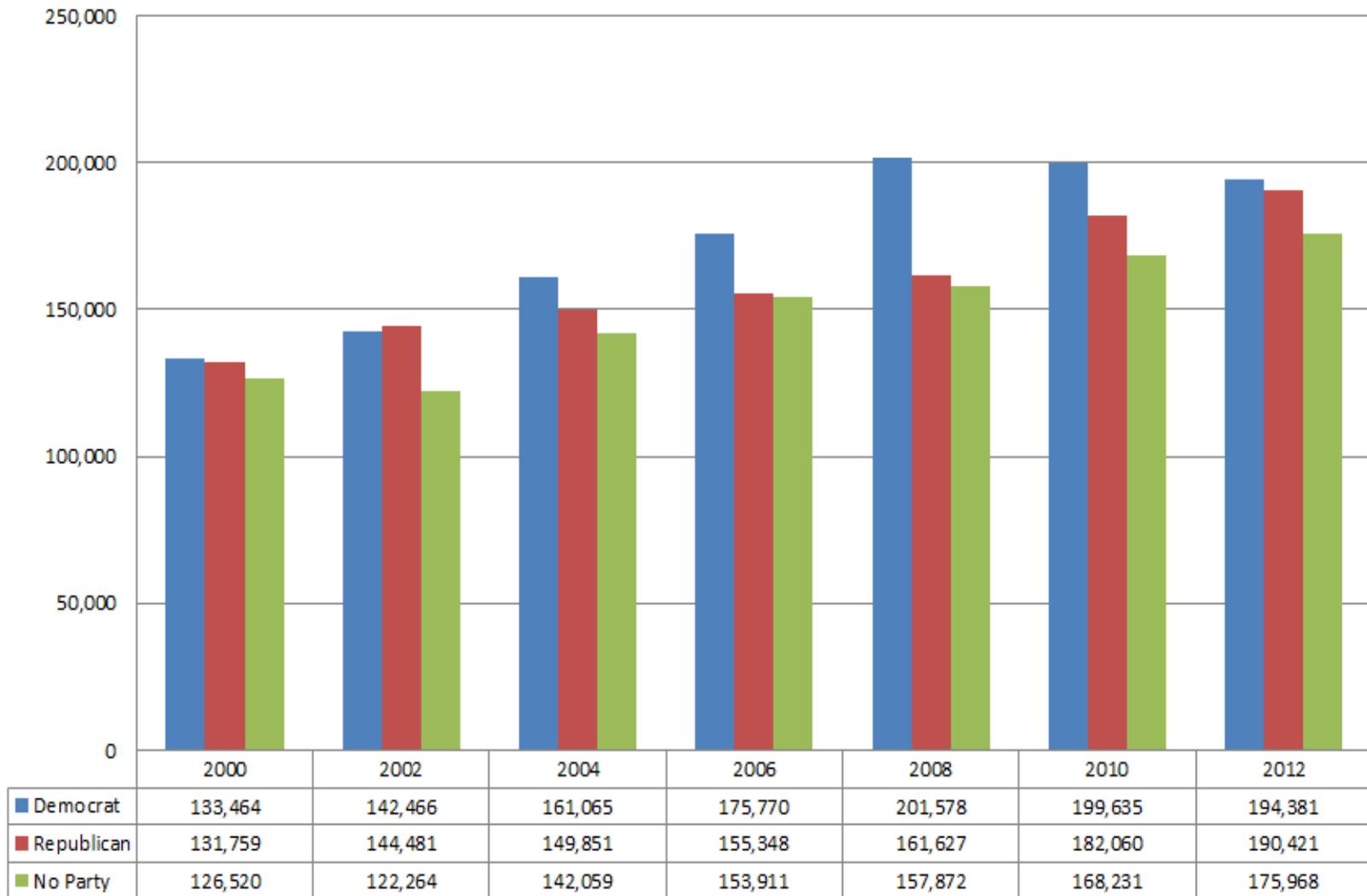


Figure 3e: Iowa Registered Voters by Party and Age Group 65 & Over in Election Years Since 2000

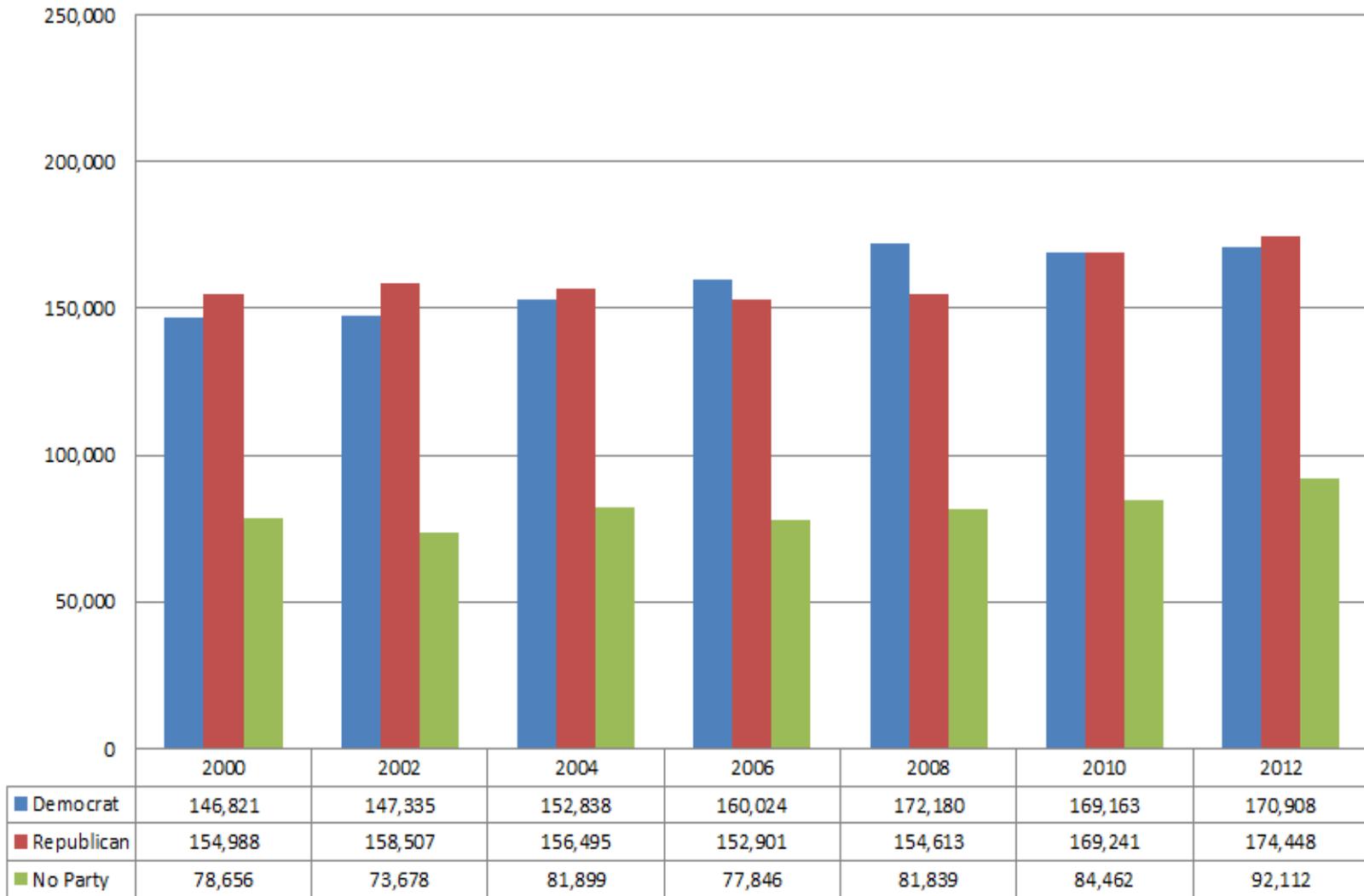


Figure 4a: Iowa Registered Voters 18-24, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000

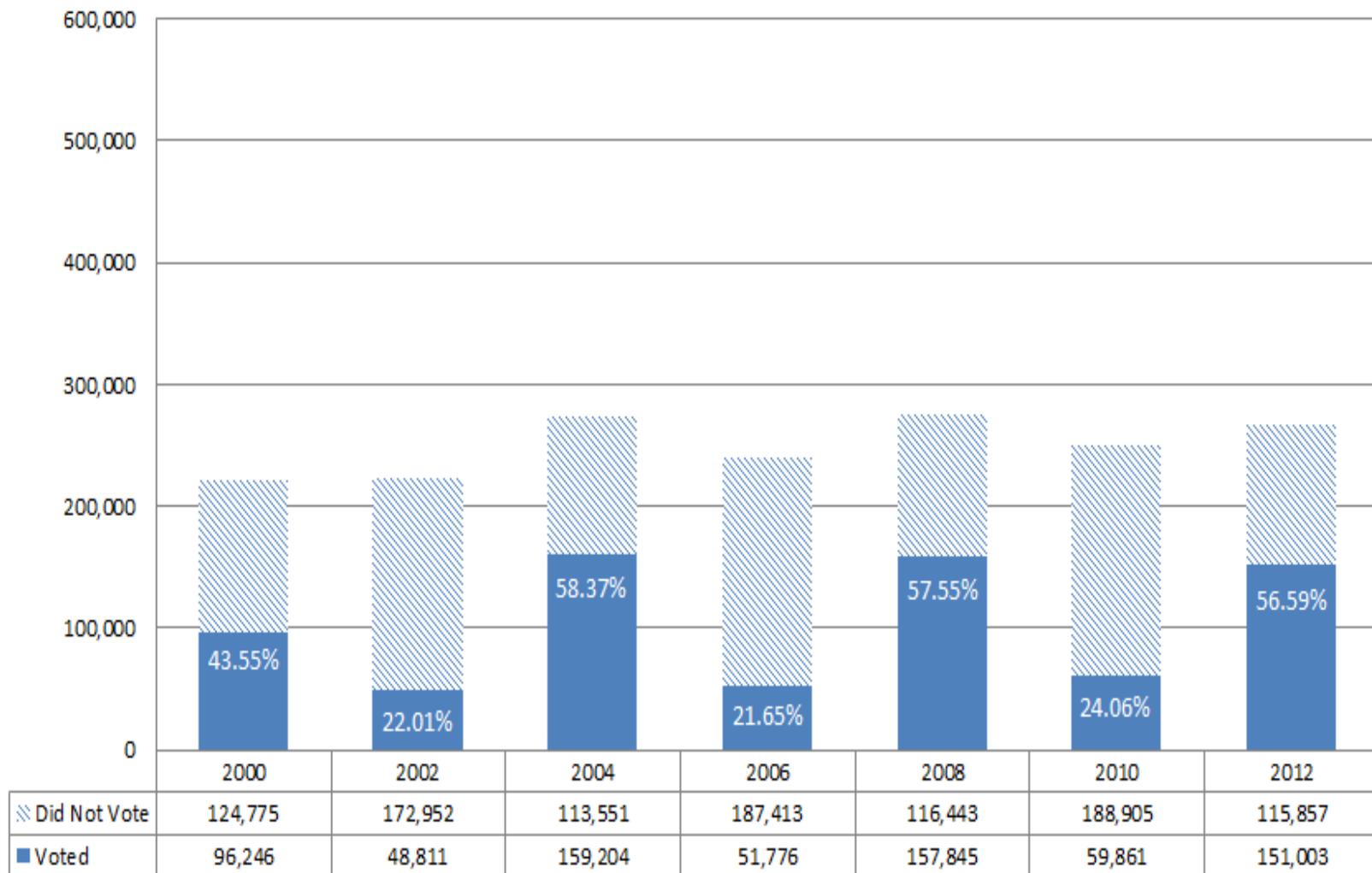


Figure 4b: Iowa Registered Voters 25-34, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000

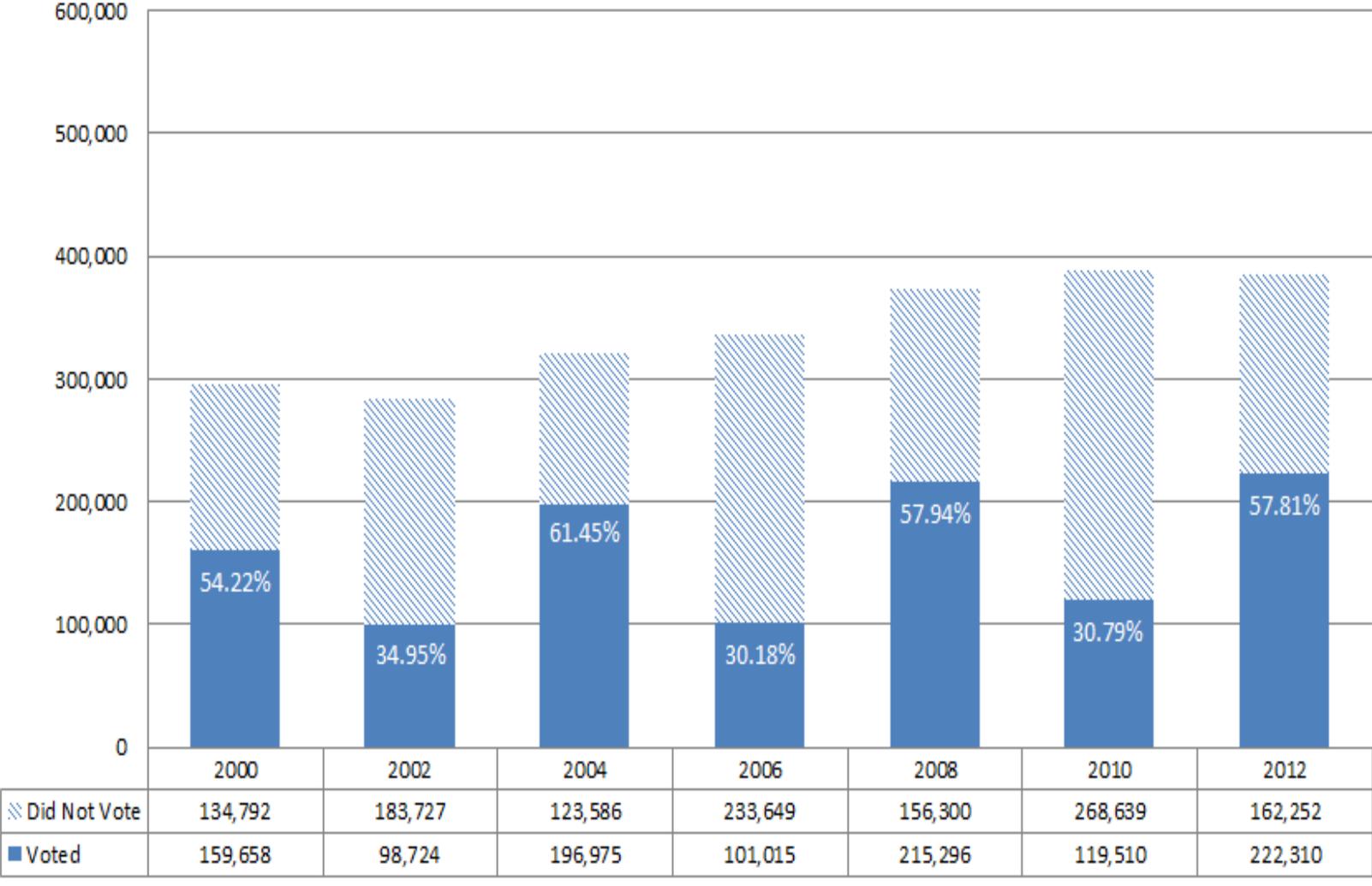


Figure 4c: Iowa Registered Voters 35-49, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000

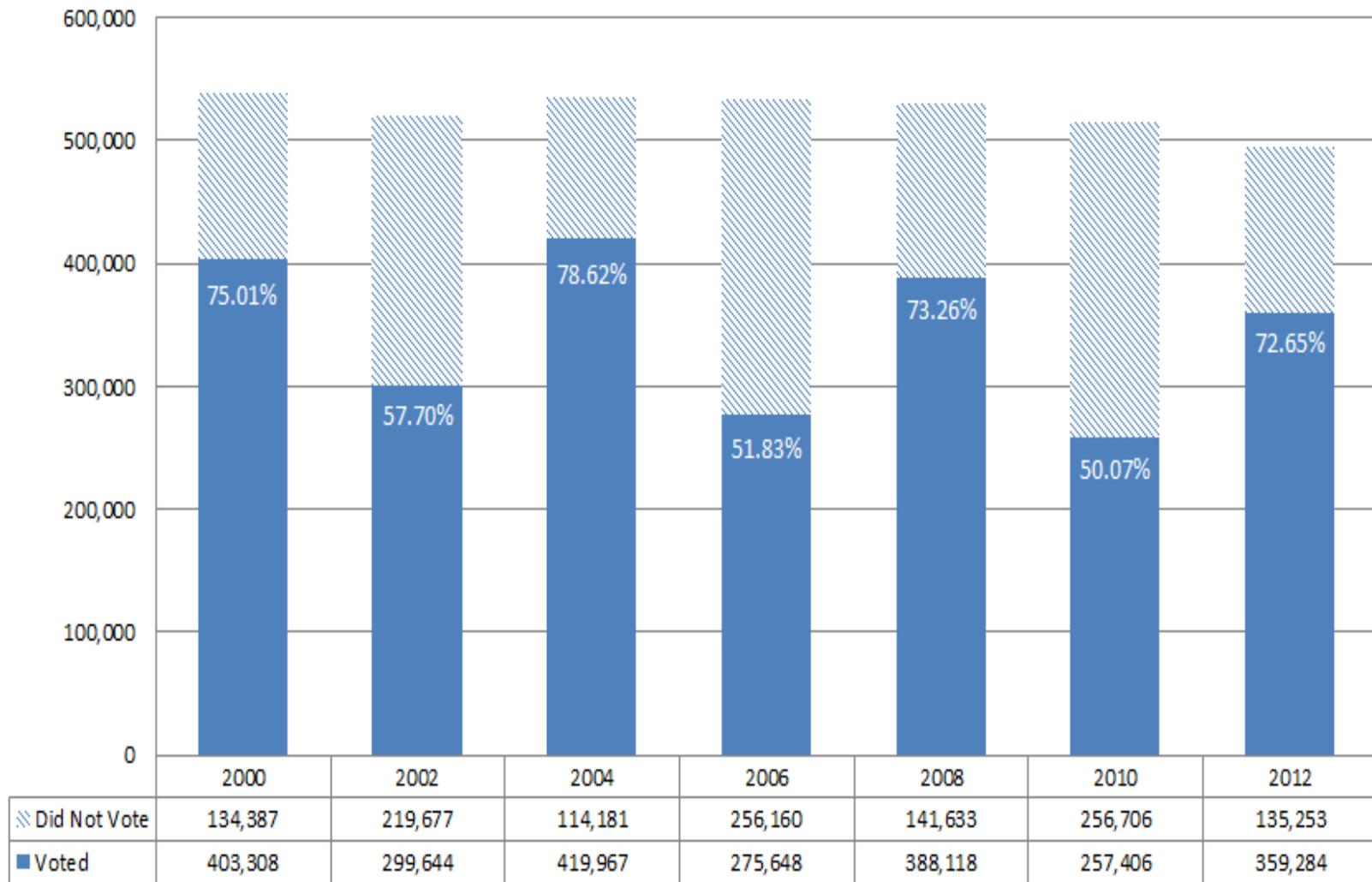


Figure 4d: Iowa Registered Voters 50-64, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000

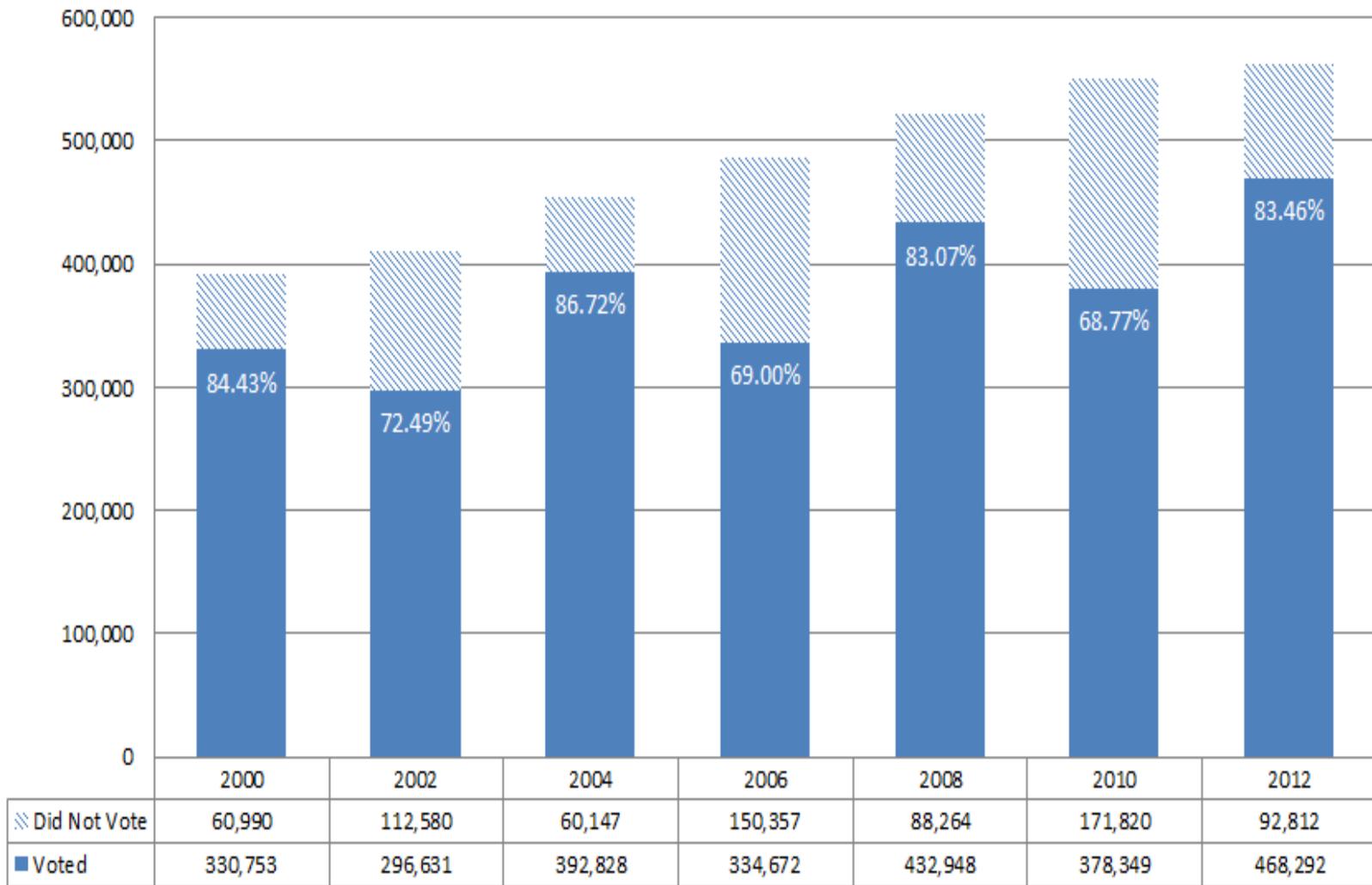


Figure 4e: Iowa Registered Voters 65 & Over, Number Voting, and Turnout Percentage in Election Years Since 2000

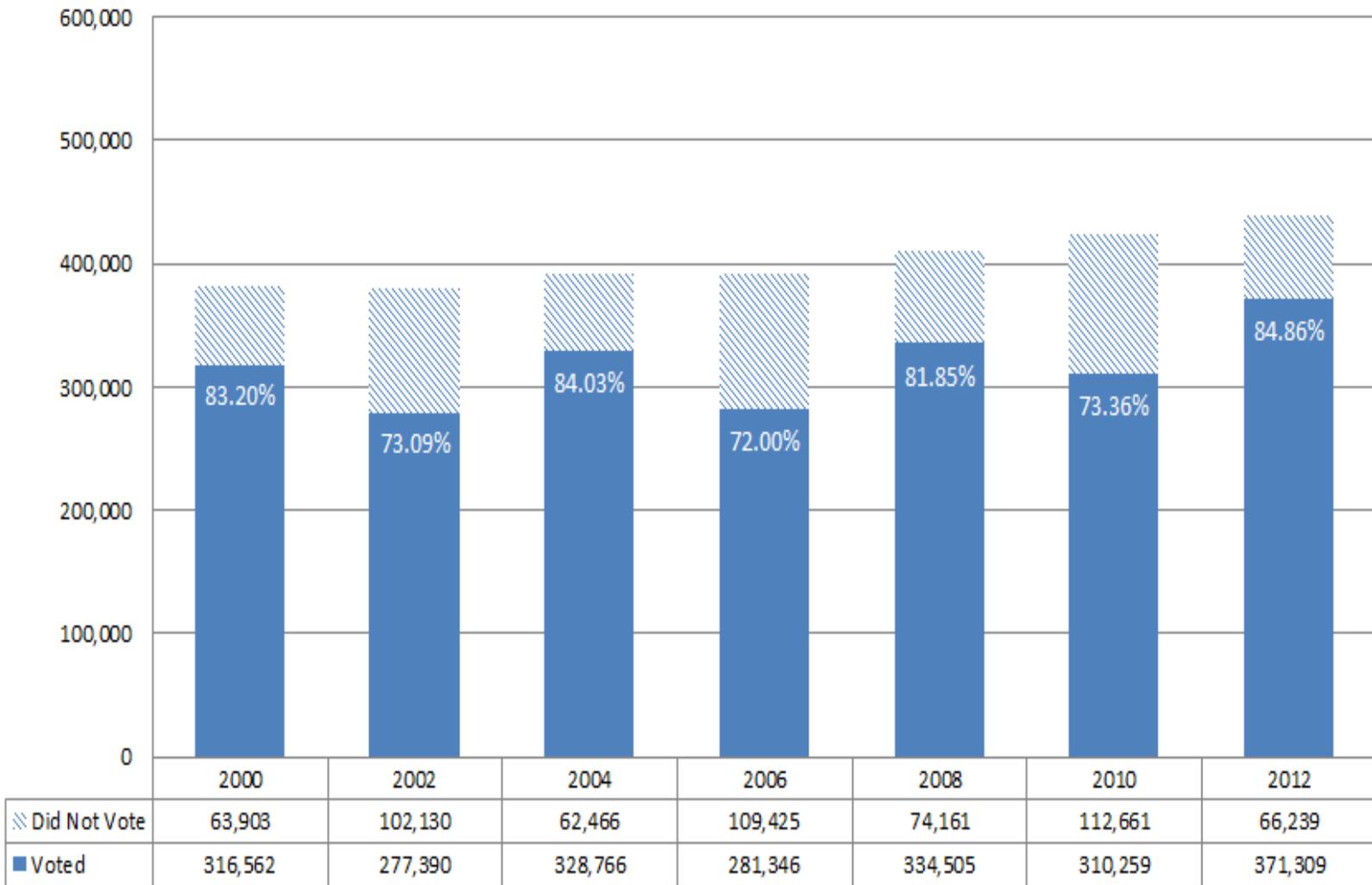


Figure 5: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage by Age Group in Election Years Since 2000

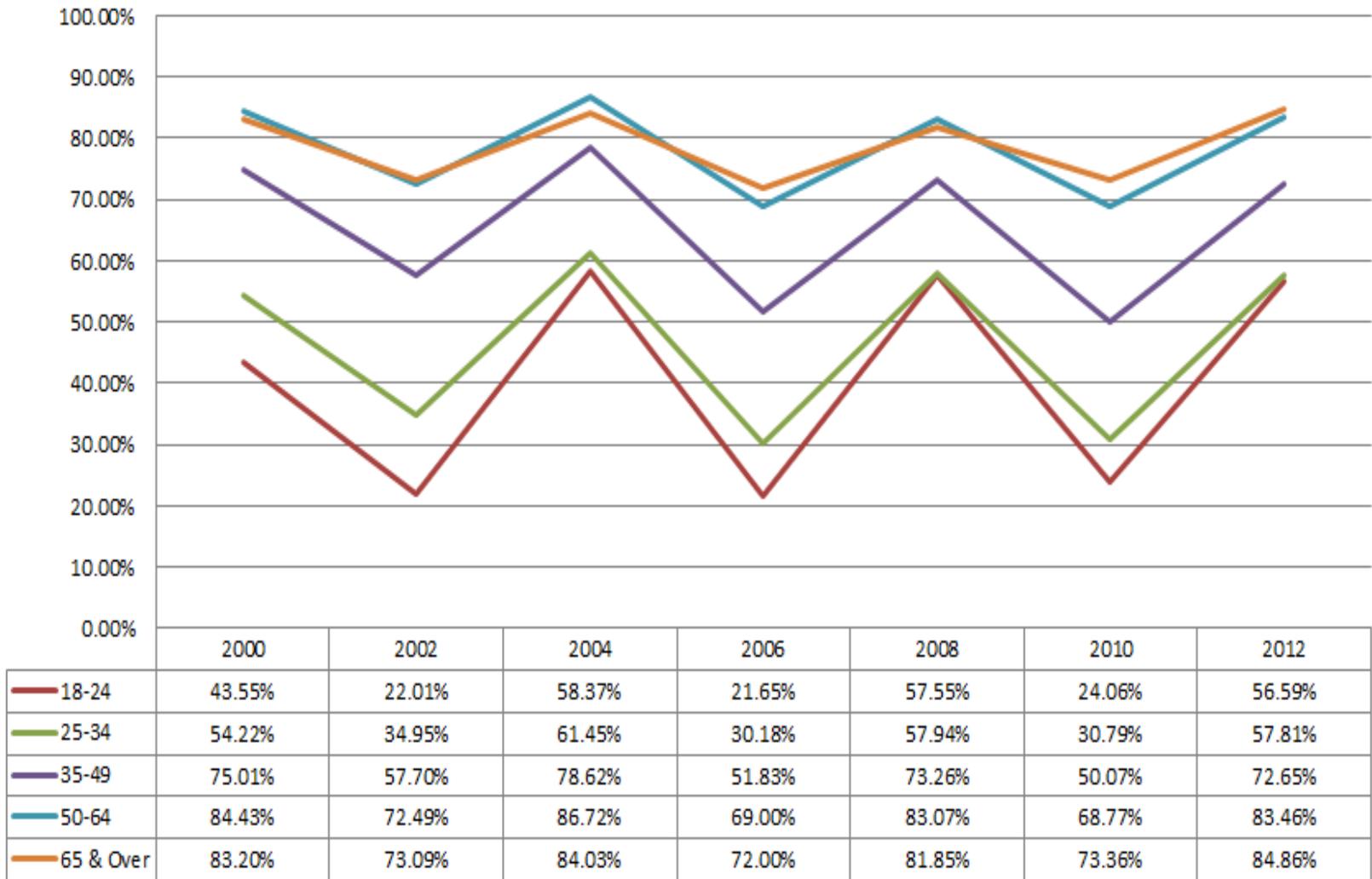
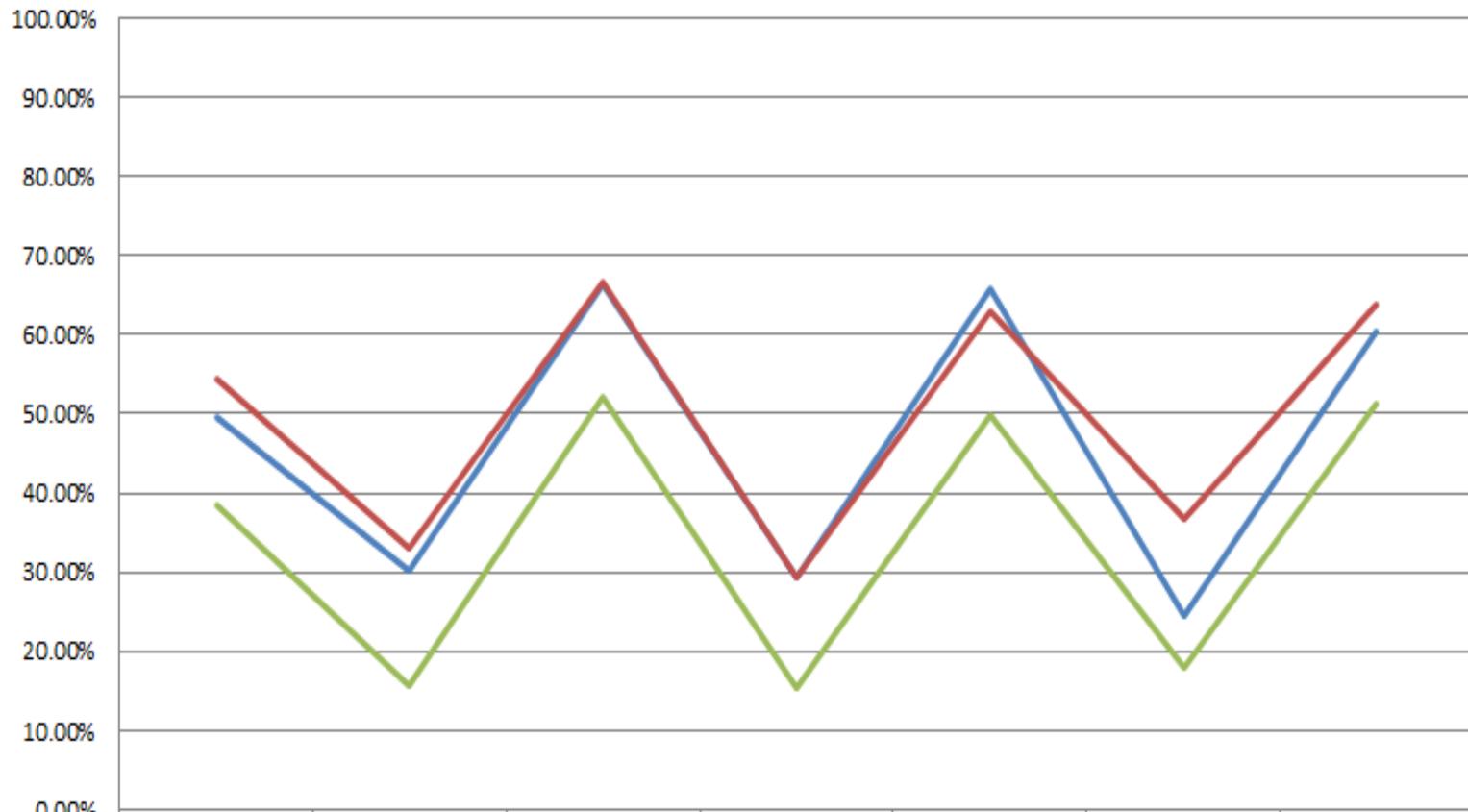
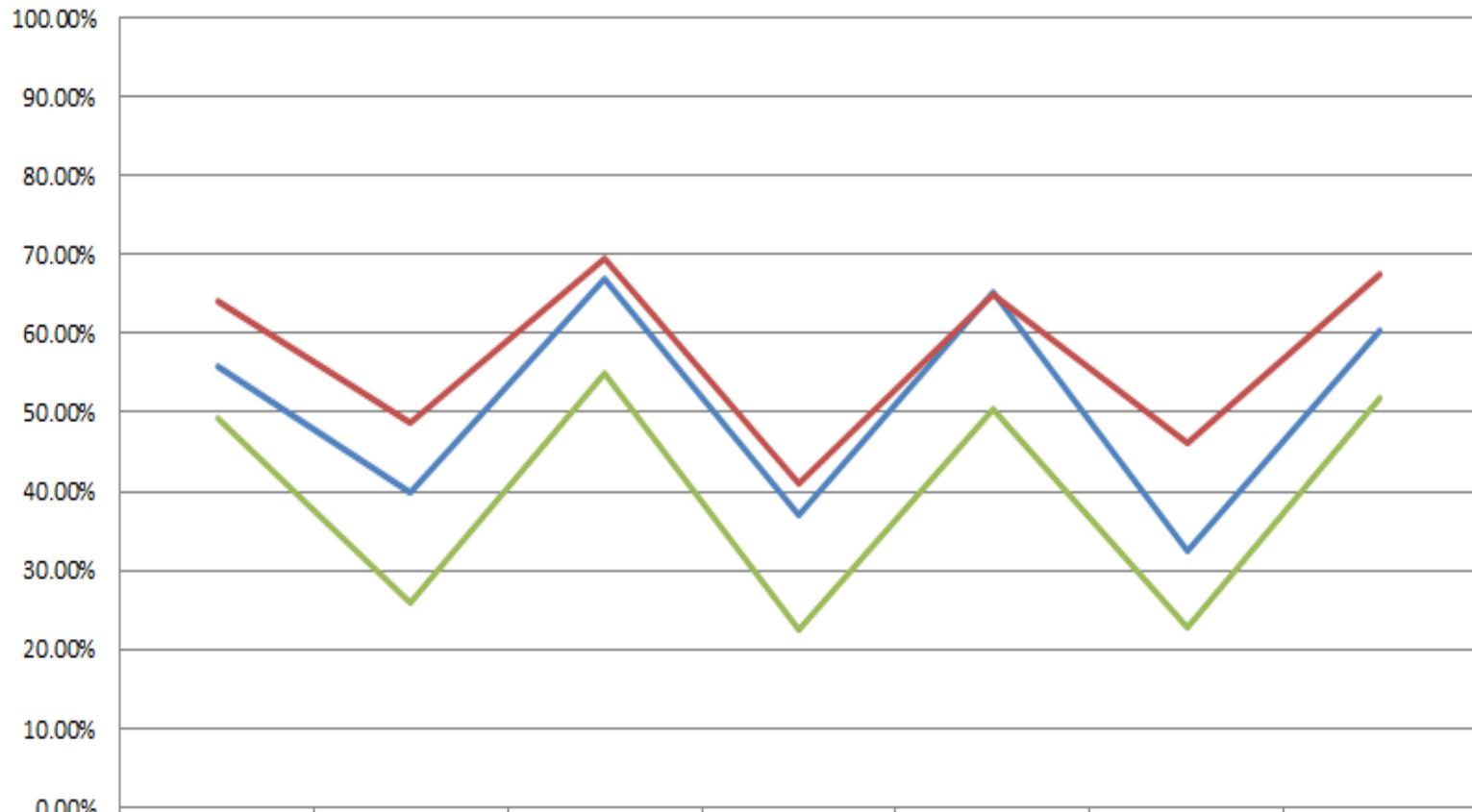


Figure 6a: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage for Age Group 18-24 by Party in Election Years Since 2000



	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Democrat	49.45%	30.15%	66.26%	29.27%	65.78%	24.49%	60.39%
Republican	54.31%	32.98%	66.77%	29.46%	62.84%	36.80%	63.85%
No Party	38.34%	15.71%	52.00%	15.52%	49.91%	17.96%	51.21%

Figure 6b: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage for Age Group 25-34 by Party in Election Years Since 2000



Democrat	55.79%	40.01%	66.93%	37.01%	65.16%	32.50%	60.40%
Republican	63.95%	48.80%	69.64%	41.04%	64.95%	46.10%	67.44%
No Party	49.16%	25.93%	55.08%	22.50%	50.46%	22.77%	51.72%

Figure 6c: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage for Age Group 35-49 by Party in Election Years Since 2000

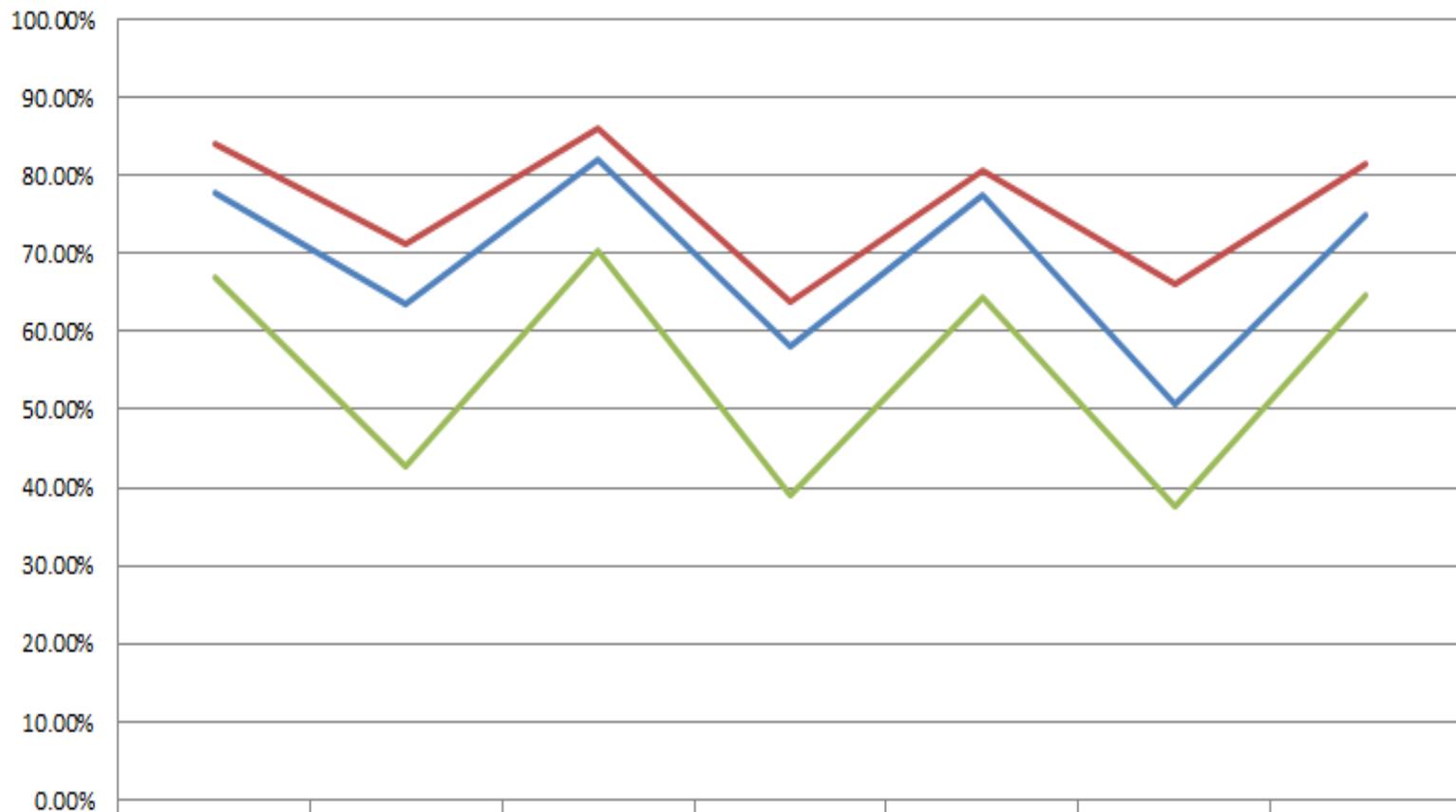
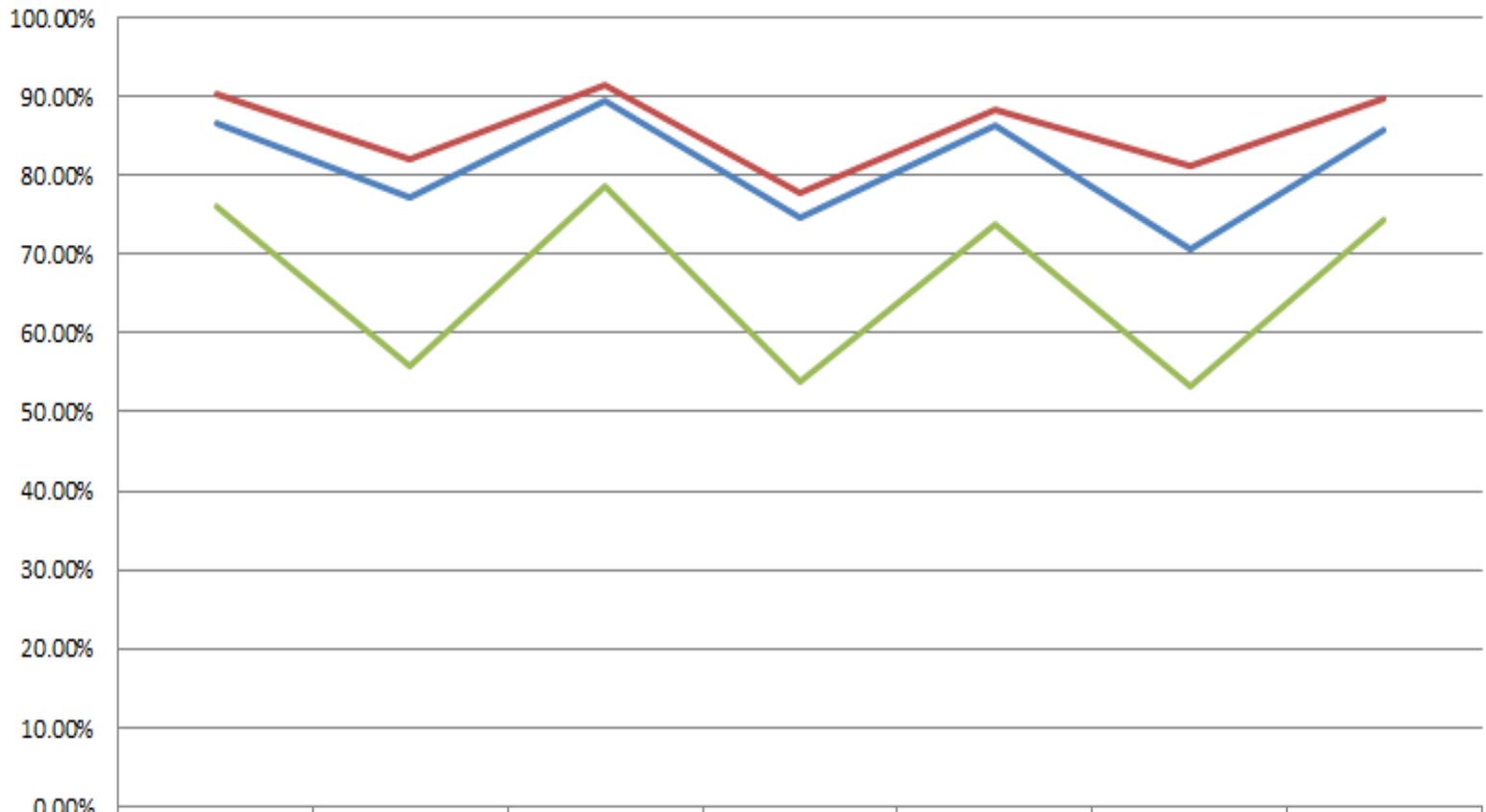


Figure 6d: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage for Age Group 50-64 by Party in Election Years Since 2000



	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Democrat	86.52%	77.12%	89.53%	74.68%	86.25%	70.51%	85.62%
Republican	90.34%	81.96%	91.52%	77.73%	88.28%	81.07%	89.61%
No Party	76.08%	55.90%	78.47%	53.71%	73.66%	53.40%	74.41%

**Figure 6e: Iowa Voter Turnout Percentage for Age Group 65 & Over
by Party in Election Years Since 2000**

