



# OKPOLICY.ORG

## Oklahoma Policy Institute

### REPAIRING OKLAHOMA'S BROKEN DEMOCRACY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by David Blatt, Ph.D.

Electoral participation is a cornerstone of our representative democracy. The vote allows citizens to participate freely and fairly in the political process and ensures that elected officials stay accountable to their constituents.

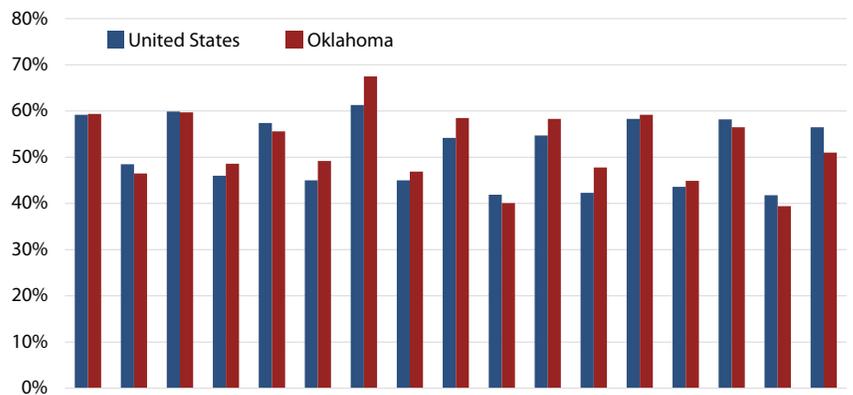
Yet in Oklahoma we are seeing growing signs of the breakdown of electoral participation. For example:

- In this year's midterm elections, less than 30 percent of eligible voters made it to the polls to cast a ballot for Governor and other offices. This was the lowest turnout in at least 50 years and perhaps in state history.
- In 65 of 101 seats for the state House of Representatives, the winner was decided without voters casting a ballot in the general election.
- In primary runoff elections this fall, average turnout was 18 percent, and for the two statewide Democratic runoff contests, barely one in ten registered party members cast a ballot.
- In the 2012 November Presidential election Oklahoma's voter turnout was just 52.4 percent, third worst in the nation.
- Only 66 percent of voting-age citizens in Oklahoma are even registered to vote, the nation's eighth lowest registration rate.

It hasn't always been like this. As late as 2004, Oklahoma's voter registration rate and turnout rate remained on a par with or just above the national average.

Many voices have lamented Oklahoma's declining electoral participation, but often the only solution offered is to urge our friends, neighbors, and colleagues to be better citizens. But in reality, the electoral rules and practices established by Oklahoma's state lawmakers and officials are part of the reason why electoral participation is so low. And there are many reforms Oklahoma could adopt that would help repair of broken democracy by boosting voter turnout and electoral competition.

Percentage of Total Population Voting, OK and US, 1980-2012



Note: This chart reflects voter turnout for the entire voting-age population, not just citizens. State-level data for citizen turnout is unavailable for non-Presidential years before 1988.

[www.okpolicy.org](http://www.okpolicy.org)

## SUMMARY OF OPTIONS FOR BOOSTING ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

Each of these reforms has the potential to create a better informed and more engaged electorate. Most importantly, policymakers and opinion leaders should acknowledge the serious problem of declining political participation in Oklahoma. Unless we can find a way to reinvigorate our democracy, we will have little chance of solving the great challenges we face as a state.

### Make Voters More Informed

**PUBLISH AND DISTRIBUTE VOTER INFORMATION PAMPHLETS**

### Make Voting Easier

**ALLOW FOR ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION**

**ALLOW SAME-DAY VOTER REGISTRATION**

**EXTEND EARLY VOTING PERIOD**

**ALLOW FOR PERMANENT ABSENTEE-BALLOT STATUS**

**ADOPT ALL-MAIL ELECTIONS**

**ELIMINATE VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS**

**ALLOW POST-INCARCERATION FELONY OFFENDERS TO VOTE**

### Make elections more competitive

**EASE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ALLOWING POLITICAL PARTIES AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES TO GET ON THE BALLOT**

**OPEN UP PRIMARY ELECTIONS TO INDEPENDENT VOTERS**

**LOWER THE SIGNATURE THRESHOLD FOR INITIATIVE PETITIONS**

### Reform the Electoral System

**ADOPT AN INSTANT RUN-OFF, OR SINGLE-TRANSFERABLE BALLOT, FOR PRIMARY ELECTIONS**

**ADOPT MULTI-MEMBER DISTRICTS ELECTED BY PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION**

**ADOPT THE NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

### Limit the role of money

**ADOPT PUBLIC FUNDING OF ELECTIONS**

*Download the full issue brief at [www.okpolicy.org/brokendemocracy](http://www.okpolicy.org/brokendemocracy).*