

## *Increasing Participation in Maryland's Elections*

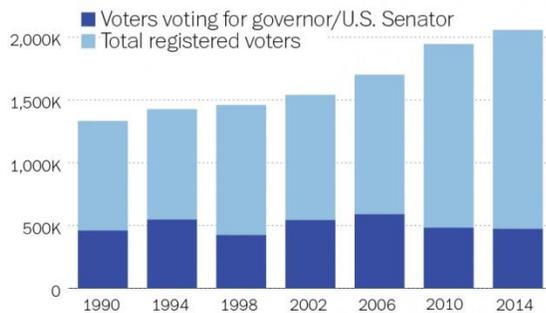
Maryland's 2014 Primary Election saw a 23% voter turnout. **Committee for Montgomery (CFM) believes that more must be done to encourage broader voter participation.**

However, the root causes behind low voter turnout are not fully understood or fleshed out. There are many theories and practices across the United States designed to achieve greater voter turnout such as open primaries, non-partisan redistricting, and many other efforts. Maryland should consider revisions, reforms, and modernizations to how it approaches voter participation in our democracy. We applaud the state for expanding early voting, as one example, but CFM believes there is much more to be done.

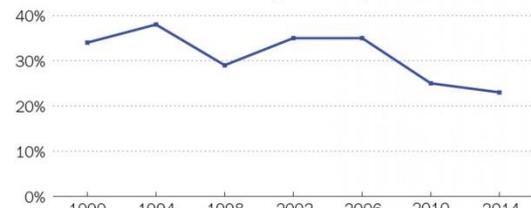


## *Recent Trends in Maryland Primary Voting*

### Democratic primaries

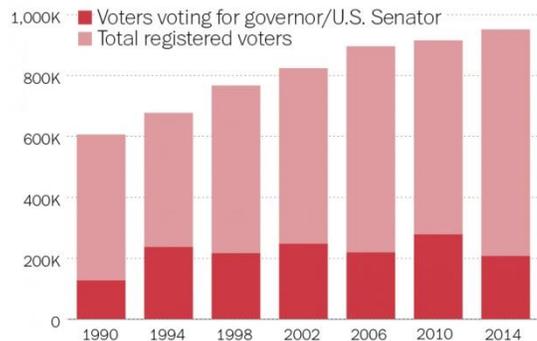


Percent turnout for governor/U.S. Senator

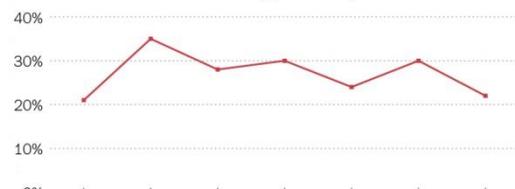


Source: Maryland State Board of Elections

### Republican primaries



Percent turnout for governor/U.S. Senator



Source: Maryland State Board of Elections

Source: Maryland State Board of Elections via The Washington Post<sup>1</sup>

**In addition, during the 2014 primary, over 10% of the electorate, the 363,859 unaffiliated voters had almost no say in the primary election<sup>2</sup>.**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/local/wp/2014/07/02/marylands-declining-primary-voter-turnout-in-four-graphs/>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Maryland Board of Elections Website. Some unaffiliated voters were able to vote for local school board candidates

## ***Selected Ideas for Further Study***

- **Non-partisan Redistricting** – One theory suggests that voters will turn out in greater numbers if it is clear that their vote, “matters”. Maryland is currently known as one of the most gerrymandered states for its Congressional districts and State legislative districts largely reflect a similar trend of decreasing competitiveness through safe partisan seats. In fact, a recent analysis by David Lublin in “The Seventh State” blog shows that 39/47 MD State Senate Seats are “safe” seats for either party<sup>3</sup>. Many voters feel their vote will not help dictate the outcome of the election because many seats are determined exclusively in the primary.
- **Engaging New Voting Populations** – It is important for Maryland to encourage voter turnout and engagement among young voters, immigrant populations and new citizens.
- **Open vs. Closed Primaries** – Currently, Maryland has a *closed* primary, meaning only registered partisans can vote using a particular party’s ballot. Open primaries allow any registered voter to participate in any party primary by selecting the desired ballot on Election Day.<sup>4</sup>
- **The Top-Two Approach (Similar to California)** – In the *Top-Two* System, all candidates appear on a single ballot. The top-two vote getters, regardless of party, will be allowed to compete for the seat in the general election. In Maryland, the top six candidates for a House of Delegates seat would advance.<sup>5</sup>
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- **Public Financing of Campaigns** – Public financing of campaigns, such as the system that Montgomery County recently adopted, should be investigated for practicality at the State level.

## ***Form a Blue Ribbon Study Commission***

- **Form a Blue-Ribbon Commission to Increase Election Participation in Maryland** – There is no issue more important to the founding principles of our democracy than ensuring voter engagement and participation. This issue merits a comprehensive study to analyze and make recommendations for ways in which Maryland can enhance voter turnout in primary elections. ***The Blue Ribbon Commission should:***
  - ***be composed of a diverse cross-section of experts, stakeholders, and community groups. Hearings should be conducted across the State.***
  - ***examine all potential solutions including open primaries, the Top-Two approach, and make recommendations for non-partisan redistricting, public campaign financing, as well as examine any other relevant topic areas.***
  - ***complete its work and implemented its recommendations through legislation enacted by the General Assembly for the next primary election.***

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*Committee for Montgomery (CFM) is a coalition of leaders representing a broad cross-section of Montgomery County business, labor, education, civic, arts and humanities, and community-based organizations. Through its membership, CFM represents more than 350,000 Montgomery County residents. CFM supports policies, programs and laws that promote development of our economy and infrastructure, the education and health of our citizens, and increased opportunities for Montgomery County’s 1,000,000 diverse residents.*

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<sup>3</sup> The Seventh State, Senate Projections - <http://www.theseventhstate.com/?p=4124>

<sup>4</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, “The Primary Puzzle”, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/the-primary-puzzle.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, “The Primary Puzzle”, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/the-primary-puzzle.aspx>

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