



Committee of Seventy

Fighting for Better Local Government

HOW PHILLY WORKS

Understanding Turnout

In last week's election, President Obama won the nation's popular vote by just under 3 percent. The president won Pennsylvania by about 5 percent, or 292,000 votes. He won Philadelphia, however, by a whopping *71 percent*, or about 467,000 votes, over his opponent, Gov. Mitt Romney. Philadelphia made the difference ... and then some.

No surprise, you say, given that there are six Democrats for every one Republican in Philly.

What is surprising is that, according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, not one voter in 59 city voting divisions pushed the button for Romney. Even in Utah – home to the nation's largest percentage of Mormons -- 74 voters in rural Piute County departed from 696 of their county neighbors in preferring the current president over a Mormon president.

No-votes-for-Romney in 59 divisions is one issue the City Commissioners, who run local elections, should take a hard look at. So is the mysterious case of voters, including many long-time voters, who were forced to vote by provisional ballot because their names were missing from the poll books. And the high numbers of credentialed minority inspectors who were ousted from polling places.

Over the next few weeks, the non-partisan Committee of Seventy will look more deeply at these issues in a series of **HOW PHILLY WORKS**. If you have other issues you think we should tackle – or have recommendations the City Commissioners should consider to improve your experience at the polls, let us know by e-mailing futureofthecity@seventy.org.

-- November 13, 2012

What does "turnout" mean, anyway?

Turnout is a function of two numbers in any election. First, there's how many citizens are registered to vote in a jurisdiction – the *voter registration* figure. Second, there's how many registered voters *actually cast ballots* in an election. You figure out turnout percentage this way: Actual votes cast divided by voter registration = *Turnout*.

So what *was* the turnout in Philadelphia last Tuesday?

There were 1,099,418 Philadelphians registered to vote in last week's election. Unofficial returns show that a total of 656,263 of them came out and voted for president. You do the math. Turnout in Philadelphia was 59.69 percent. (Again, the figures are still unofficial.)

Is that turnout figure high? What was the turnout the last time Philadelphians voted for President?

The last time Philadelphians voted for president was 2008, when 693,015 city voters cast a ballot for president. There were 1,126,760 registered voters that year, and turnout was 61.59 percent. So turnout actually *declined slightly* last Tuesday.

Yes, but how about President Obama's *margin* coming out of Philly? Was it a lot bigger this time?

President Obama won Philadelphia last week by about 467,000 votes – a pretty big number. However, Barack Obama won Philadelphia in 2008 by 461,670 votes – about the same margin – on his way to his first election as President.

Was turnout higher in Philadelphia than anywhere else? What happened in the suburbs last Tuesday?

The initial returns show that in Bucks County, 319,407 people turned out to vote for president – a 73.3 percent turnout. In Chester County, 248,295 residents voted – 73.5 percent of eligible voters. In Delaware County, 272,853 people voted, or 68.7 percent. In Montgomery County, our most populous suburb, 408,044 people came out to vote – 73.6 percent of all registered voters. So, turnout was *lower* in Philadelphia (59.69 percent) than in the suburbs.

How did turnout in Philadelphia compare with the rest of Pennsylvania?

There were 8,511,217 registered voters in Pennsylvania as of last week's election. About 5,551,310 state residents voted for president on November 6th. Turnout in Pennsylvania was roughly 65.0 percent. So Philadelphia's unofficial turnout (59.69 percent) was pretty comparable.

How do we know registration figures are right? There always seem to be different numbers floating around.

You raise a good point. According to a report released by the Pew Center on the States earlier this year, one in eight voter registrations are dead wrong – including, no pun intended, about 1.8 million dead people across the country who are active registrants. That makes accurate voter participation stats hard to come by.

Why are the voter rolls so far off?

It's a complicated story that you can read more about by going to:

http://www.pewstates.org/uploadedFiles/PCS_Assets/2012/Pew_Upgrading_Voter_Registration.pdf. Fixing the voter rolls takes time, money and up-to-date technology – three things states don't have in large supply.

How is it possible that Romney got zero votes in 59 city voting divisions?

Anything is possible but it does raise eyebrows. The 59 divisions were almost exclusively in North and West Philadelphia, dense, urban neighborhoods with large concentrations of African American Democrat voters and as importantly, nearly no white voters or Republican voters. President Obama received 93 percent of the African American vote nationally last week, according to exit polls. Overall, in Philadelphia, the president won all 66 wards. In a large, northeastern city where 54 percent of the population is non-white, that's not too surprising. But, again, it does raise eyebrows.

Is this the first time Philadelphia voters produced lopsided results?

No. In 2008, Sen. John McCain received zero votes in 57 divisions here. And Philly isn't alone with this phenomenon, either. In Cleveland last week, 9 precincts reported zero votes for Gov. Romney.

So what exactly are you saying the Commissioners should do?

They should take a hard look at the numbers. Just as they promised to take a hard look at why so many voters

who believed they were registered to vote were not in the poll books. And why we also think they should look carefully at the minority inspector issue.

When will we know some answers?

We'll know more when the official results are out. That should be by the end of November. We will keep you posted.

And, as we always say at the end of our [HOW PHILLY WORKS](#), if you have something you want to tell us, e-mail futureofthecity@seventy.org.