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AMERICA Goes to the Polls 2012

A Report on Voter Turnout in the 2012 Election

Prepared by

NonprofitVOTE

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AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS 2012

A Report on Voter Turnout in the 2012 Presidential Election

Prepared by George Pillsbury, Executive Director
and Julian Johannesen, Director of Training and Research

NonprofitVOTE
www.nonprofitvote.org

Founded in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. We are the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

Special thanks to the primary sources for this report – the U.S. Elections Project, Pew Hispanic Center, CIRCLE: the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement and the National Election Exit Poll by Edison Research. The presentation, content and voter turnout highlights are entirely our own.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *America Goes to the Polls 2012*, the fourth in a series of reports on voter turnout in midterm and presidential elections.

Nonprofit VOTE prepares *America Goes to the Polls* for our partners in the nonprofit and civic sector, as well as anyone interested in studying and encouraging voter participation. Active civic engagement is fundamental to our success as a democracy and voting is at the core of civic engagement. People who vote are more likely to be involved in their communities and to take part in other civic activities, and communities that vote are healthier and more likely to receive attention from elected officials. Nonprofits and community groups that help people vote are not only doing their civic duty, but are also promoting active citizenship and giving voice to their organization and the people they serve.

America Goes to the Polls 2012 profiles voter turnout in the 2012 presidential election using official voter turnout data reported by the 50 states and the District of Columbia (for more information, see Primary Sources on page 4). The report ranks voter turnout by state and notes the relative change in turnout for each state compared to the last presidential election.

Beyond the rankings, *America Goes to the Polls* documents the impact of factors like Election Day registration and "swing" or "battleground" status on voter turnout. It uses the most cited and reliable post-election analysis to report on key voting trends. Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of reforms that lead to greater voter participation and improve the voting experience for all voters, both new and old. These reforms include modernizing our voter registration system, expanding early voting, and others.

If you have questions or wish to obtain data related to this publication, please visit Nonprofit VOTE's voter turnout webpage, the website of the U.S. Elections Project, or others cited in this report.

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METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Voter Turnout

This report uses voter turnout data collected by the U.S. Elections Project at George Mason University and other primary sources listed below. The U.S. Elections Project provides an estimate of the voter eligible population (VEP) for each state, using the most current data from the U.S. Census and other government sources. After each national election, it collects official turnout data from each of the 50 states and District of Columbia including available data on early voting. For more on the U.S. Elections Project, visit elections.gmu.edu.

The U.S Elections Project reports voter turnout data in two ways: highest office turnout (in 2012 the presidential race) and total turnout – total ballots cast and counted. Many voters choose not to vote in the race for highest office and some voters make a mistakes marking their ballot, and their vote is therefore not counted for that race. The difference between highest office vote and total turnout is called the residual vote. In 2012, 38 states and District of Columbia reported both highest office and total turnout. The average residual vote percent was .96%.

To more closely reflect the actual number of people voting, *America Goes to the Polls* uses total ballots counted, as the majority of states report this figure. For the states that have not yet reported their total ballots cast and counted, we estimate their total turnout by factoring in the estimated residual vote, based on the average for states reporting both numbers.

Other Primary Sources

National Election Exit Poll, *National and State Exit Polls.* Exit polling was conducted by Edison Research on behalf of the National Election Pool, a consortium of major news outlets. The exit poll looks at the demographics of voter turnout, partisan choice, and voters' views on issues. To learn more, visit CNN's Election 2012: Results and the New York Times' 2012 Election: President Exit Polls. To learn about the poll's methodology visit Edison Research's FAQ.

CIRCLE, "Youth Turnout: At Least 49%, 22-23 Million Under-30 Voted," "Updated Estimate," "At Least 80 Electoral Votes Depended on Youth," "Diverse Electorate: A deeper look into the Millennial Vote." CIRCLE conducts research on civic education and on young Americans' civic engagement. It is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. To learn more, visit www.civicyouth.org.

Pew Research Hispanic Center, "Latino Voters in the 2012 Election," "An Awakened Giant." The Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve understanding of the U.S. Hispanic population and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. To learn more, visit www.pewhispanic.org.

U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement.* The CPS is a monthly survey of about 50,000 households conducted by the Bureau of the Census for more than 50 years. Every two years the survey also includes questions about voting and registration in federal elections. Any Census data in this report is for 2010 and earlier. The Census will release its 2012 voting and registration supplement later this year. Demographic data for 2012 in this report is from the NEP National and State Election Exit Polls.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All 50 states have certified their results. The 2012 presidential election is officially in the books. The election survived Hurricane Sandy and a blizzard of proposed or enacted state-level changes in voting procedures. An estimated 58.7% of eligible voters turned out to vote, below 2008's benchmark high but still above most presidential elections of the last 40 years in spite of a steep drop off in turnout in hurricane-impacted New York and New Jersey.

Minnesota first in turnout, Hawaii last

- Minnesota was number one in the country in voter turnout as it has been for eight of the last nine national elections. Wisconsin came in 2nd with Colorado rising to 3rd.
- The nation's most populous states – California (41st), New York (44th) and Texas (48th) – ranked in the bottom ten, dragging down national turnout.

Swing States and Election Day registration states are highest in turnout

- Seven of the top ten turnout states had Election Day registration or swing state status or both.
- In 2012 voter turnout in states with Election Day registration – where voters can register or update their registration on Election Day – was 12 points higher than in those without that option, a turnout advantage consistent over the last six national elections.
- Voter turnout in the ten swing states most targeted by campaigns was 65%, seven points higher than in non-swing states, which had an average turnout of 58%.

Presidential campaigns target just 10 states, ignore the other 40

- 96% of the spending on television ads between April 11th and November 6th by presidential campaigns and allied groups went to ten battleground states.
- Nearly six times as much ad money was spent in Florida alone than was spent in the 40 non-swing states and DC.
- 99% of campaigns stops by the presidential or vice presidential candidates were in these states.

Voters continue to embrace Early Voting

- National polls showed 33-40% of voters voted early in-person or by mail, up from 31% in 2008 and 23% in 2004.
- The rise in early voting came despite reductions in early voting hours in Florida and Ohio. Fewer early voting hours contributed to 225,000 fewer voters in Florida taking advantage of in-person early voting and long lines at the polls on Election Day.

Youth turnout grows in size and diversity

- Young voters ages 18-29 surprised observers by increasing their share of national voter turnout from 18% to 19%.
- The percent of eligible young voters whose ethnicity is Latino, black or other than non-Hispanic white grew to 42% last year. In comparison, the same population 30 and over formed a 24% share of the vote.

For the first time one in ten voters were Latino

- 10 percent of the electorate turning out to vote was Hispanic. That figure was even higher in some western states, including the battleground states of Colorado (14%) and Nevada (18%).
- Latinos will account for 40% of the growth in the eligible electorate in the U.S. between now and 2030, doubling in size.
- Black voters were 13% of the electorate and their turnout rate may have exceeded that of whites for the first time in 2012.

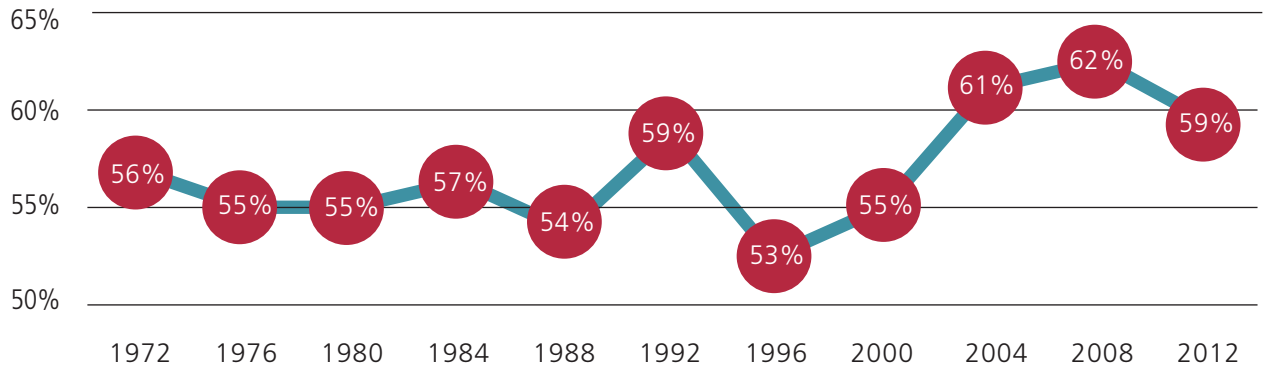
VOTER TURNOUT IN 2012 AND THE HISTORICAL TREND

58.7% of voting eligible citizens turned out to vote in the 2012 presidential election.[1] While turnout was below 2008's benchmark high, it still exceeded turnout for most presidential elections over the last 40 years. In 2012, younger and minority voters made up a larger share of the electorate, retaining or exceeding gains made in 2008. (For more on the youth and minority vote, see pages 13-17)

- 130.3 million voters cast ballots in 2012, about 2.3 million less than in 2008. Well over half (57.4%) of the drop off was in three states – New York and New Jersey, which were impacted by Hurricane Sandy, and California, the state with the largest decline (see page 7)
- An estimated 222 million Americans were eligible to vote in 2012, an increase of about nine million over 2008. Of those eligible voters, 51 million were not registered and could not have voted except in the ten states that allow voters to register or update their registration on Election Day.[2] (For more on Election Day registration, see pages 11 and 18)
- As in previous elections, national voter turnout was dragged down by low turnout in the large states like California, New York, and Texas, which between them represent about a quarter of the nation's voting eligible population. They ranked 41st, 44th, and 48th respectively in turnout among the states.

VOTER TURNOUT IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTING ELIGIBLE POPULATION (VEP), 1972 - 2012



Source: U.S. Elections Project

[1] Primary sources used in this report are detailed on page 4. Other resources appear in footnotes.
[2] Pew Center on the States, "Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient: Evidence That America's Voter Registration System Needs an Upgrade"

STATE VOTER TURNOUT RANKINGS

In presidential elections, there are two strong predictors of state voter turnout: 1) If a state is a swing or battleground state, where the presidential race is expected to be particularly contested and the margin of victory small, and 2) If a state has Election Day registration, allowing voters to register or update their registration on Election Day. Although there are a number of other factors that influence turnout, particularly other competitive races on the ballot, none seem to have the effect that these two do.

- In 2012, Minnesota reclaimed its mantle as 1st in voter turnout, with an estimated 76% of eligible voters casting ballots. Maine, the 2010 title holder, slipped to 6th place with Wisconsin in 2nd, and Colorado in 3rd. Minnesota has now been 1st in turnout in eight of the last nine midterm and presidential elections.
- Five of the ten states with the highest turnout in 2012 (Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin) have some form of Election Day registration. (For more on EDR, see pages 11 and 18)
- Five of the ten states with the highest turnout in 2012 (Colorado, Iowa, New Hampshire, Virginia, and Wisconsin) were swing states, states where parties and interest groups invested extensive time and resources in media and mobilization. (For more on swing states, see page 9)
- In contrast, five of the lowest turnout states in 2012 (Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and West Virginia) have more burdensome registration requirements and are considered solidly Democratic or Republican. Of those five states, none had a margin of victory in the presidential race of less than 16 points, and Oklahoma had a spread of 34 points.[3]

STATE	TURNOUT	RANK '12 ('08)
Minnesota	76.1%	**1** (1)
Wisconsin	73.2%	**2** (2)
Colorado	71.1%	**3** (5)
New Hampshire	70.9%	**4** (4)
Iowa	70.2%	**5** (6)
Maine	69.2%	**6** (3)
Virginia	66.9%	**7** (11)
Maryland	66.8%	**8** (12)
Massachusetts	66.6%	**9** (20)
Michigan	65.3%	**10** (8)
North Carolina	65.2%	**11** (21)
Ohio	65.2%	**12** (16)
Washington	65.0%	**13** (15)
Oregon	64.3%	**14** (9)
Montana	63.6%	**15** (17)
Florida	64.0%	**16** (13)
DC	63.3%	**17** (22)

STATE	TURNOUT	RANK '12 ('08)
Missouri	63.1%	**18** (7)
New Jersey	62.6%	**19** (19)
Delaware	62.0%	**20** (37)
Connecticut	61.5%	**21** (14)
North Dakota	61.1%	**22** (23)
Louisiana	61.0%	**23** (32)
Idaho	60.9%	**24** (27)
Vermont	60.9%	**25** (18)
Nebraska	60.8%	**26** (30)
Mississippi	60.3%	**27** (35)
South Dakota	60.1%	**28** (25)
Pennsylvania	59.9%	**29** (26)
Alabama	59.5%	**30** (34)
Illinois	59.3%	**31** (29)
Wyoming	59.3%	**32** (24)
Alaska	59.2%	**33** (10)
Georgia	58.7%	**34** (36)

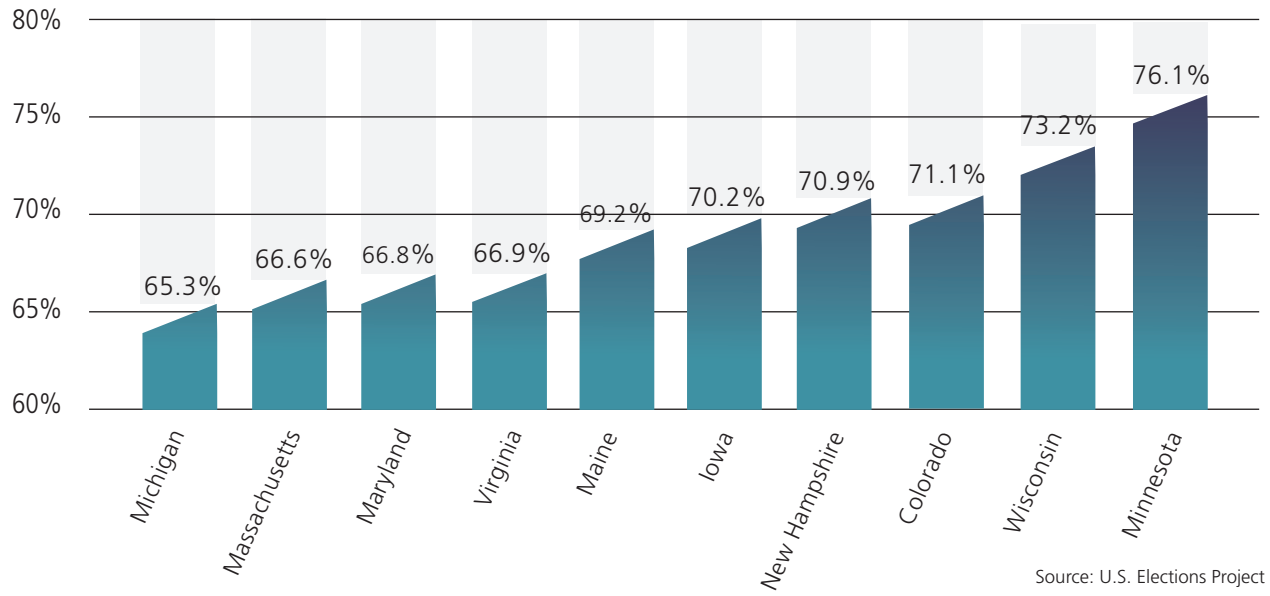
STATE	TURNOUT	RANK '12 ('08)
Rhode Island	58.6%	**35** (31)
Kansas	58.1%	**36** (28)
Nevada	57.2%	**37** (43)
South Carolina	57.1%	**38** (42)
Utah	56.0%	**39** (48)
Indiana	56.0%	**40** (38)
California	55.9%	**41** (33)
Kentucky	55.9%	**42** (40)
New Mexico	54.9%	**43** (39)
New York	53.6%	**44** (41)
Arizona	53.3%	**45** (46)
Tennessee	52.6%	**46** (44)
Arkansas	51.0%	**47** (49)
Texas	50.1%	**48** (47)
Oklahoma	49.6%	**49** (45)
West Virginia	46.8%	**50** (50)
Hawaii	44.5%	**51** (51)

Source: U.S. Elections Project. The table ranks states by total ballots cast as a percent of eligible voters in the 2012 general elections (see methodology page 4). 2008 turnout rank is in parenthesis.

[3] David Leip, Atlas of U.S. Elections

TOP 10 STATES IN VOTER TURNOUT

TOTAL BALLOTS CAST AS A PERCENT OF VEP, 2012



Source: U.S. Elections Project

CHANGE IN VOTER TURNOUT IN THE STATES

While turnout was close to 2004 and 2008 levels, most states saw a decline in turnout compared to the last presidential contest in 2008. Turnout decline was noticeably higher in the non-swing states.

State	Change	Rank
Utah	2.6%	1
DC	1.8%	2
Colorado	1.0%	3
Wisconsin	0.5%	4
Massachusetts	0.1%	5
Iowa	0.0%	6
New Hampshire	-1.5%	7
Virginia	-1.7%	8
North Carolina	-2.0%	9
Maryland	-2.3%	10
Mississippi	-2.3%	11
Nevada	-2.4%	12
Minnesota	-2.9%	13
South Carolina	-2.8%	14
Louisiana	-2.9%	15
Ohio	-3.5%	16
Washington	-3.9%	17

State	Change	Rank
Nebraska	-4.2%	18
Alabama	-4.0%	19
Delaware	-4.6%	20
Maine	-4.8%	21
Georgia	-5.0%	22
Kentucky	-4.9%	23
Montana	-5.2%	24
Arkansas	-5.4%	25
Michigan	-5.8%	26
Idaho	-5.8%	27
Oregon	-6.1%	28
Arizona	-6.3%	29
Florida	-5.9%	30
New Jersey	-6.3%	31
Illinois	-6.7%	32
Rhode Island	-6.8%	33
South Dakota	-7.1%	34

State	Change	Rank
North Dakota	-7.1%	35
Pennsylvania	-7.3%	36
Indiana	-7.5%	37
Tennessee	-8.8%	38
New York	-8.9%	39
Kansas	-9.2%	40
Vermont	-9.2%	41
Missouri	-9.2%	42
New Mexico	-9.2%	43
Connecticut	-9.2%	44
Texas	-9.2%	45
Wyoming	-9.7%	46
West Virginia	-9.8%	47
California	-10.7%	48
Hawaii	-12.4%	49
Oklahoma	-13.1%	50
Alaska	-13.4%	51

Source: Analysis of U.S. Elections Project data by Nonprofit VOTE. The table above ranks states by change in voter turnout between the 2008 and 2012 general elections. Turnout changes are adjusted to account for change in the voting eligible population in each state between 2008 and 2012.

- After adjusting for the growth or decline in the number of eligible voters, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Utah, and Wisconsin all saw an increase in voters casting ballots compared to four years ago.[4]
- Utah, the home of the Mormon Church, saw the largest increase in turnout in 2012. The increase bumped Utah from 48th place in turnout in 2008, to 39th place in 2012.
- Four western, non-swing states saw double digit declines in percent of eligible voters turning out: Alaska, California, Hawaii, and Oklahoma. California's adjusted 10.7% decline amounts to the loss of 1,650,706 voters - more people than voted in Alaska, the District of Columbia, North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming combined.

THE SWING STATE FACTOR

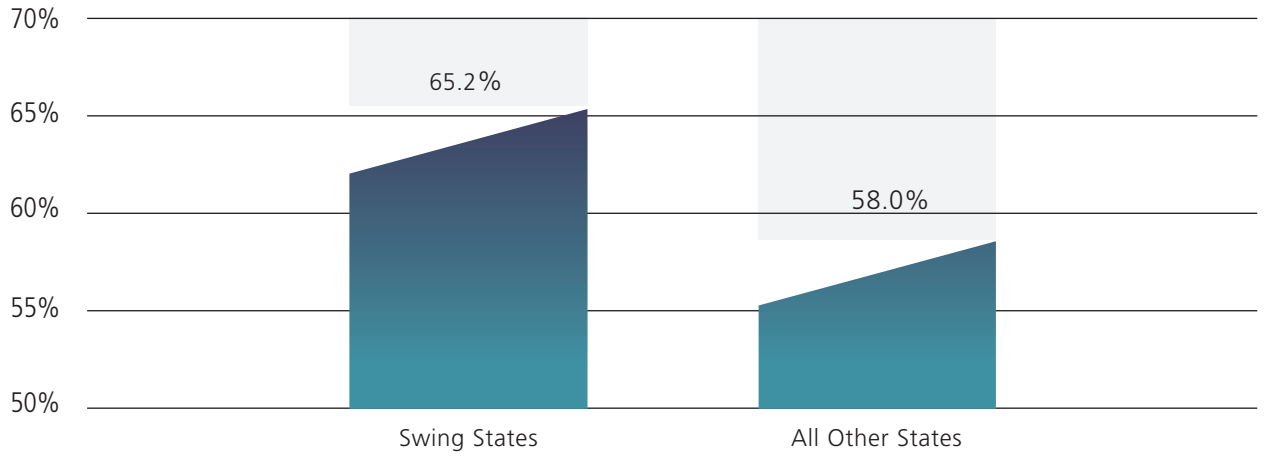
Because the president of the United States is selected by the Electoral College, not the popular vote, and because most states' electors are awarded to the plurality winner in that state, presidential campaigns almost exclusively concentrate their time, money, and other resources in a handful of swing states where enough extra effort could tip the state in their favor. As a consequence, most states, large and small, receive little or no attention from the candidates or their campaigns. One result is increased turnout in the swing states and depressed turnout in the others.

- In 2012, the spotlight was on just ten states: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin, with most resources and campaigning dedicated to just three of those states.
- Average turnout in the 10 swing states was 65.2%, 7.2 points higher than in non-swing states, which had an average turnout of 58%. (see chart on following page)
- The presidential campaigns and their allied groups spent $896 million on television ads between April 11th and November 6th, 2012. 96% ($862 million) was spent in the ten battleground states.[5] More money was spent in each swing state than was spent in the other 40 states and DC combined. Almost six times as much money was spent in Florida alone than was spent in the bottom 40 states and DC.
- This concentration of resources in swing states is also reflected in campaign stops. Of 253 campaigns stops by presidential and vice presidential candidates, only two took place outside of swing states. Ohio alone received 73 visits, or 29% of all of visits that occurred.[6]

[4] The percentage growth or decline in a state's voter turnout is adjusted for the four year change, up or down, in its voting eligible population as estimated by the U.S. Elections Project.
[5] Washington Post, "Mad Money: TV ads in the 2012 presidential campaign," updated Nov. 14th, 2012
[6] FairVOTE, Presidential Tracker. A "campaign event" is an event meant to woo voters in that area. A rally or town hall is a campaign event, but a national television appearance or fundraiser is not.

AVERAGE TURNOUT IN SWING STATES VS. NON-SWING STATES IN 2012

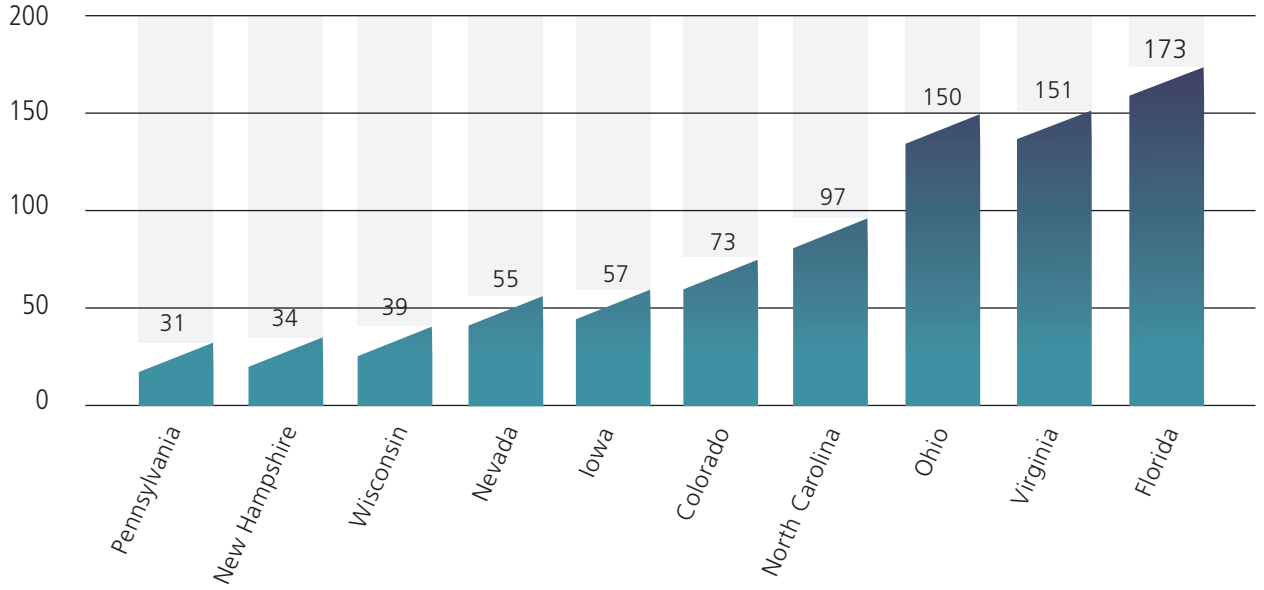
TOTAL BALLOTS CAST AS A PERCENT OF VEP



Source: Analysis of U.S. Elections Project data by Nonprofit VOTE

TOP 10 STATES IN AD SPENDING IN 2012

IN MILLIONS OF DOLLARS



Source: Washington Post Online, "Mad Money: TV ads in the 2012 presidential campaign"

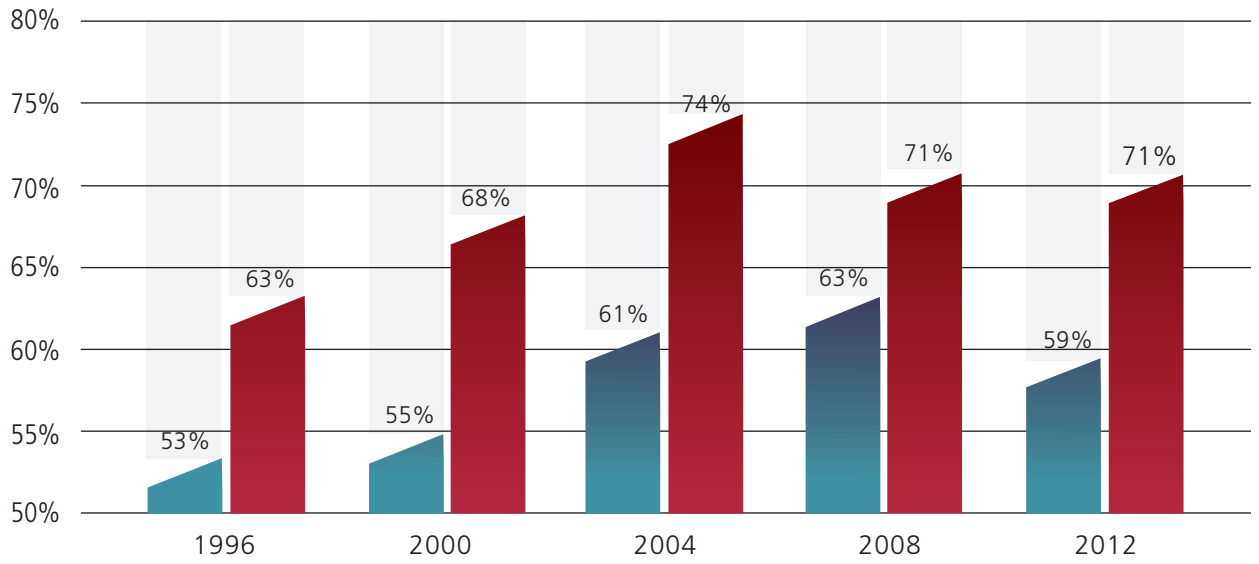
ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

Election Day registration (EDR) allows voters to register or update their registration at the polls or at their local election office on Election Day and then cast a regular ballot. States with EDR have consistently higher voter participation rates, even after adjusting for all other turnout factors, a trend that continued in 2012.

- In 2012, states with Election Day registration had average turnout of 71.3%, 12.5 points higher than the turnout in states without EDR. Those states had an average turnout rate of 58.8%.
- In 2012, there were nine jurisdictions with Election Day registration: Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia. North Dakota does not have voter registration and is included here as an EDR state.[7] In 2012, both Connecticut and California enacted new laws to implement Election Day registration. EDR in Connecticut goes into effect with the municipal elections in 2013. California will start in 2015, once it has implemented its statewide voter registration database.
- All EDR states had voter turnout above the national average and five were in the top ten in turnout overall. EDR states that were also swing states performed especially well, particularly Iowa (70.2%), New Hampshire (70.9%) and Wisconsin (73.2%).

ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION'S BENEFIT OVER TIME

TURNOUT IN STATES WITH EDR VS. THOSE WITHOUT 1996-2012



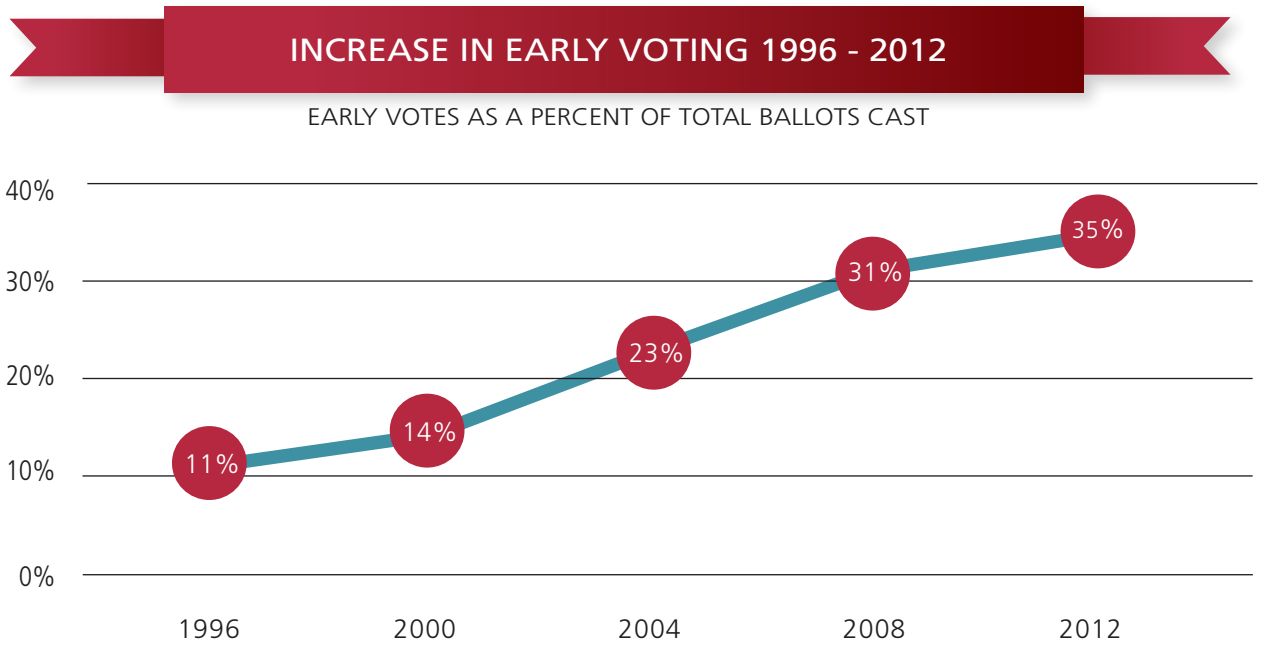
Source: Analysis of U.S. Elections Project data by Nonprofit VOTE

[7] North Carolina's one-stop early voting program allows voters to register and vote at the same time during the early voting period beginning 19 days before Election Day and ending three days before Election Day. North Carolina allows same day registration but not Election Day registration, and thus is not included in our calculations for the chart above.

EARLY VOTING IN 2012

Early voting remains popular and continues to grow. More than one in three voters are estimated to have voted early in-person or by a mail ballot in 2012.[8]

- 32 states and the District of Columbia have some form of early voting in-person. 27 states and DC offer "no-excuse" absentee voting and two states, Oregon and Washington, provide voters a mail ballot to send in or drop off.[9]
- Early voting is more prevalent in western states. In a Gallup poll one week before the election, 55% of voters in western states reported having voted early or were planning to vote early. That compares to 9% in the east.[10]
- Older voters prefer to vote early, while younger voters prefer to vote in-person on Election Day. The same poll revealed that nearly half of voters 65 and over had either cast their votes in advance or were planning to, compared to a quarter of young voters aged 18-29.[11]
- Both Florida and Ohio reduced their early voting periods in 2012. In Florida, the reduction of the early voting period from 14 days to 8 days and the elimination of early voting on the Sunday before Election Day, contributed to a drop in the early voting rate from 32% of all votes cast in 2008 to 29% in 2012. Because African Americans are a disproportionately high percentage of early voters, it is likely the reduction in the early voting period led to a reduction in African American turnout.[12] In addition, a reduced early voting period may also have contributed to longer lines at the polls on Election Day. It is estimated that more than 200,000 Florida voters gave up on voting, due to long lines on Election Day.[13] Ohio experienced similar problems.[14]



Source: U.S. Elections Project, Census Voting and Registration Supplement, estimated for 2012

[8] Gallup Polls, In U.S., 15% of Registered Voters Have Already Cast Ballots, Romney 49%, Obama 48% in Gallup's Final Election Survey
[9] National Conference of State Legislatures, Absentee and Early Voting
[10] In 2008, the same Gallup poll found that 33% of voters had voted or planned to vote before Election Day. Post-election analysis by the US Election Project found 31% did vote early in 2008. Figures are not yet available for 2012.
[11] Gallup Polls, Ibid
[12] Michael C. Herron and Daniel A. Smith, "Florida's 2012 General Election under HB 1355: Early Voting, Provisional Ballots, and Absentee Ballots"
[13] Professor Theodor Allen of Ohio State University , the Orlando Sentinel, "201,000 in Florida Didn't Vote Because of Long Lines"
[14] Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates, "Analysis of Early In-Person and Mail-In Absentee Voting in the Ohio 2012 General Election Compared to 2008"

Category	Already voted	Plan to vote before Election Day	Total Early Vote
All Registered Voters	**15%**	**18%**	**33%**
Region			
East	4%	5%	9%
Midwest	13%	10%	23%
South	17%	23%	40%
West	25%	30%	55%
Age			
18 to 29	7%	19%	26%
30 to 49	11%	17%	28%
50-64	16%	17%	33%
65 +	26%	18%	44%

Source: Gallup Poll, "In U.S., 15% of Registered Voters Have Already Cast Ballots"

YOUTH VOTE 2012

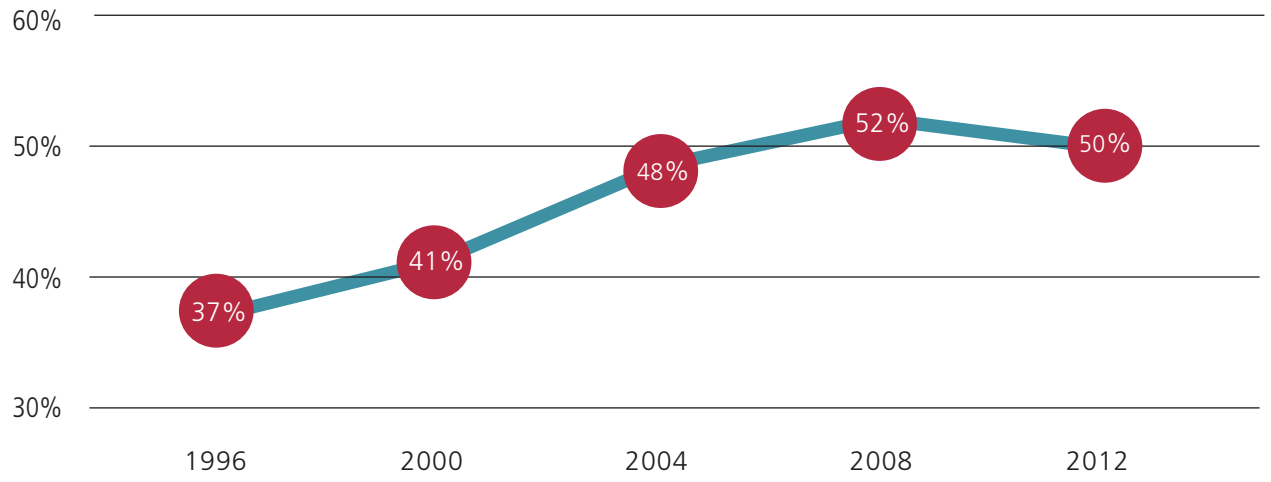
Surprising forecasters of lower turnout, young voters between the ages of 18 and 29 turned out to vote at a rate similar to the last two presidential elections. 23 million young people cast ballots, the third election in a row in which roughly half of the eligible youth voting population has turned out.[15]

- In addition to maintaining recent gains in turnout, young voters increased their share of the electorate by one point, from 18% in 2008 to 19% in 2012.[16]
- The youth vote was a determining factor in four swing states: Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. If the youth vote in those states had been evenly split, Governor Romney would have won all 4 states and therefore the presidential election. (A more even split of the youth vote between the parties has good precedent. The average gap between Democratic and Republican candidates among young voters from 1976 through 2004 was only about two percentage points.[17])
- Youth turnout was especially high in swing states–an estimated 58%, compared to just 47% in non-swing states.[18]
- Young voters were the most racially and ethnically diverse segment of the electorate. Non-white voters comprise 42% of the voting eligible population among 18 to 29 years olds, but only 24% among voters aged 30 and over.[19]

[15] CIRCLE, "Youth Turnout was 50% in 2012; Youth Turnout in Battleground States 58%"
[16] CNN, National Election Exit Poll
[17] CIRCLE, "At Least 80 Electoral Votes Depended on Youth"
[18] CIRCLE, "Youth Turnout…" op. cit.
[19] CIRCLE, "Diverse Electorate: A deeper look into the Millennial Vote"

YOUTH VOTING 1996-2012

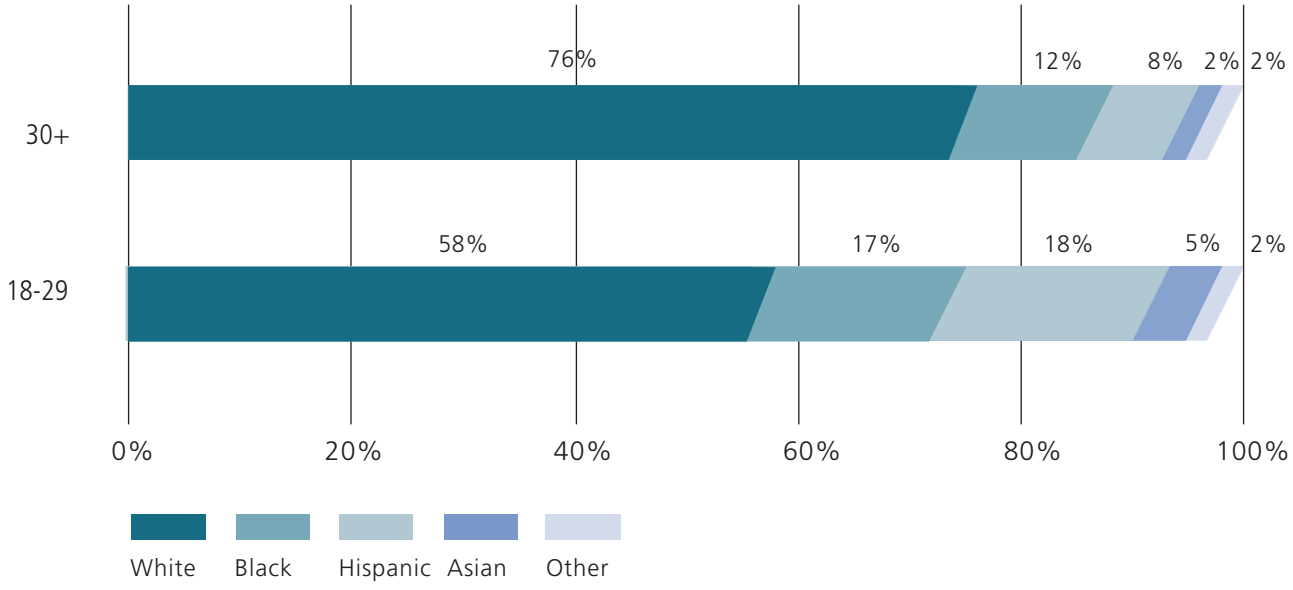
TURNOUT AS A PERCENT OF YOUTH VEP



Source: CIRCLE

COMPARATIVE DIVERSITY OF YOUTH ELECTORATE 2012

RACIAL & ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THOSE UNDER 30 AND THOSE ABOVE

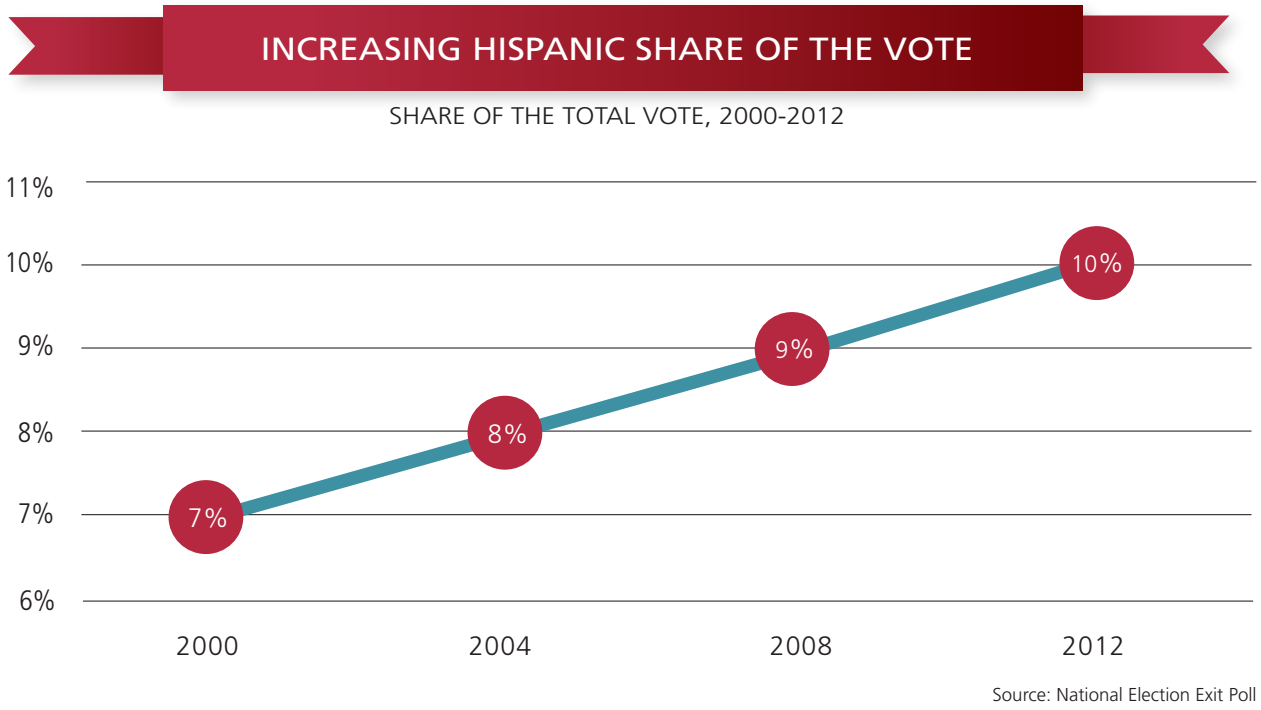


Source: CIRCLE, "Diverse Electorate: A deeper look into the Millennial Vote"

LATINO VOTE 2012

The Latino vote continued to rise as a share of those who turned out to vote. According to the Pew Hispanic Center the Hispanic voting bloc is likely to double in size within a generation.[20]

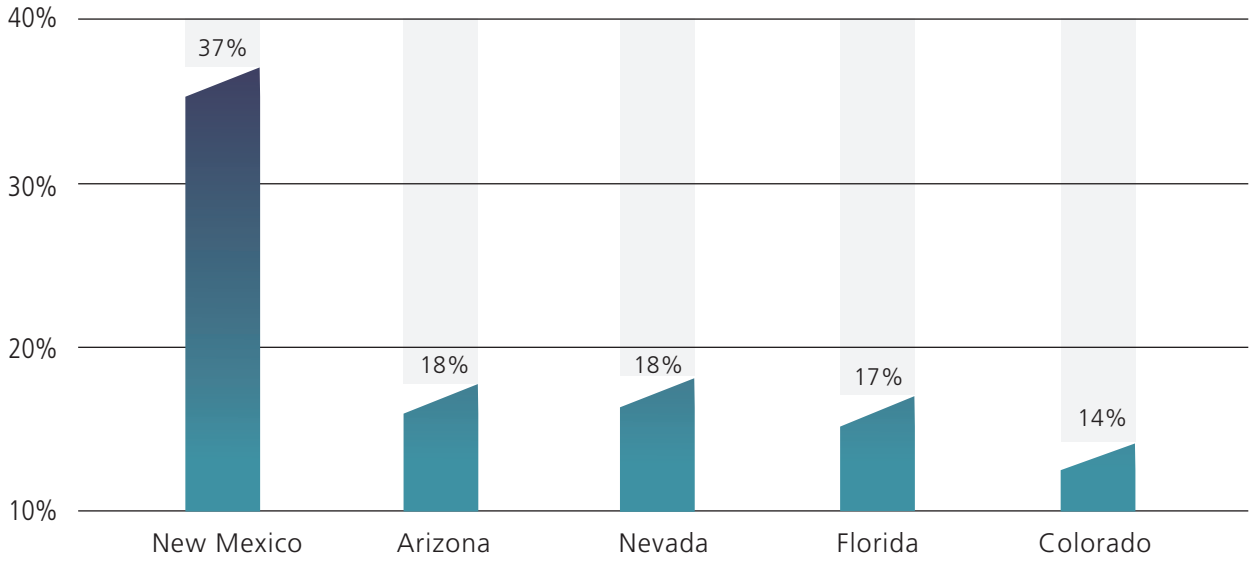
- In 2012, the Latino share of the vote rose to 10%.[21] Exit polls showed similar growth among emerging Asian-American and API voters.
- Latino voters are a crucial voting bloc in many states, including swing states like Colorado, Florida, and Nevada. In Colorado the Latino share of the vote was 14%, in Florida 17%, and in Nevada 18%, all higher than in 2008.[22]
- The Hispanic population is also growing in areas that at present have a very small Hispanic population. In Ohio, for example, between 2000 and 2012, the Hispanic population has increased dramatically, particularly in urban areas.[23]
- The turnout rate of the 23.7 million eligible Latino voters was an estimated 53%, six points below the national average.
- Latinos favored the Democratic presidential candidate by a margin of 44 points, an increase over the 2008 margin of 36 points.[24]



[20] Pew Research Hispanic Center, An Awakened Giant
[21] National Election Exit Poll, op. cit.
[22] Pew Research Hispanic Center, Latino Voters in the 2012 Election
[23] United States Census, ST-EST00INT-SEXRACEHISP: Intercensal Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin for States and the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2010. Further estimated for 2012.
[24] National Election Exit Poll, op. cit.

HISPANIC SHARE OF THE VOTE IN SELECT STATES

SHARE OF THE TOTAL VOTE, 2012



Source: National Election Exit Poll. Only certain states were included in the poll. For example, California was not included.

PROFILE OF THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE 2012

The National Election Exit Poll is conducted after each presidential and congressional election by Edison Research on behalf of a consortium of major media outlets. In 2012, the poll included 25,000 voters, each of whom was asked questions about their gender, age, race, ethnicity, and choice of candidate, among other questions. It offers the most reliable profile of the American electorate until the U.S. Census releases its Voting and Registration Supplement in the spring of 2013.

- The 2012 electorate was the most diverse ever. 28% of voters were black, Latino, Asian-American or other "minority" populations, up from 26% in 2008.[25] The non-Hispanic white electorate continues to shrink: In 1980, 81% of all voters were non-Hispanic whites, but that percentage has steadily fallen over the last three decades and is now 72%.[26]
- Demographic changes are most notable when comparing the racial and ethnic composition of voters aged 18-29 with that of those over 30. Only 58% of young voters aged 18-29 were white, compared with 76% of voters over 30. 18% of young voters were Hispanic, compared to 8% of voters over 30.[27]

[25] Pew Hispanic Center, "Latino Voters in the 2012 Election," op. cit.
[26] National Election Exit Poll, op. cit.
[27] CIRCLE, "Diverse Electorate" op. cit.

- Black turnout as percentage of the eligible black population may have exceeded white turnout for the first time in the 2012 presidential election. Pew Research notes that black turnout has risen in each presidential election since 1996, reaching 65.2% in 2008. At the same time, white turnout declined between 2004 and 2008 by 1.1%, falling to 66.1%. Currently available data suggest these trends continued in 2012. The Census Voting and Registration Supplement will shed more light on the subject when released in the spring of 2013.[28]
- Gains made by blacks in share of the electorate were due to higher turnout, not demographic changes. Blacks "over-performed" in 2012 by casting a higher share of votes than their share of the eligible electorate. Black voters accounted for an estimated 13% of all votes cast, but make up only 12% of the eligible electorate. In contrast Hispanic and Asian voters cast a lower share of votes (10% and 3%, respectively) than their share of eligible voters (11% and 4%, respectively).[29]
- In 2012, black, Hispanic, and Asian-American voters supported President Barack Obama by large margins. Asian-Americans supported president Obama by a 49 point margin and Hispanics by 44 points. White voters, on the other hand, supported Governor Mitt Romney by a 20 point margin.

	Share of the Electorate				Partisan Choice			
	2000	2004	2008	2012	2008	2008	2012	2012
					Dem	Rep	**Dem**	**Rep**
Male	48%	46%	47%	**47%**	49%	48%	**45%**	**52%**
Female	52%	54%	53%	**53%**	56%	43%	**55%**	**44%**
White	81%	77%	75%	**72%**	43%	55%	**39%**	**59%**
Black	10%	11%	13%	**13%**	95%	40%	**93%**	**6%**
Latino	7%	8%	9%	**10%**	67%	31%	**71%**	**27%**
Asian	2%	2%	2%	**3%**	62%	35%	**73%**	**26%**
Other	0%	2%	2%	**2%**	66%	31%	**58%**	**38%**
18-29	17%	17%	18%	**19%**	66%	32%	**60%**	**37%**
30+	83%	83%	82%	**81%**	52%	46%	N/A	N/A
< $50 K	47%	45%	38%	**41%**	60%	38%	**60%**	**38%**
> $50 K	53%	55%	62%	**59%**	49%	49%	**45%**	**53%**

Source: National Election Exit Poll

[28] Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends, "The growing electoral clout of blacks is driven by turnout, not demographics"
[29] Ibid.

VOTER REGISTRATION MODERNIZATION

In every state except North Dakota, voters must be registered to vote in order to cast a ballot. Because of advance deadlines, data entry errors, and other miscues many voter rolls are not current on Election Day. However, there are a number of advancements that can improve list accuracy, verify voter information quickly, and ultimately increase voting opportunities.

Online Registration

Sixteen states have implemented or passed legislation to allow for online paperless voter registration.[30] Arizona pioneered online registration in 2002 and today over 70% of the state's voter registrations are performed online.[31] In addition to making registration easier for voters, online registration allows Arizona to save money by eliminating data entry and has increased the accuracy of its voter rolls. In 2010, the costs associated with a paper registration were 83 cents while online registration was just 3 cents.[32]

In 2012, five states rolled out online registration statewide for the first time.

- In California, during the five weeks leading up to the registration deadline, more than one million voters submitted online registration applications or updates. More than 60% of users were under 35.[33]
- In Ohio, previously registered voters were allowed to update their registration information online and more than 100,000 individuals did so in the two months before the registration deadline–one-third in the week prior to the deadline and 13,000 alone on the day before registration closed.[34]
- In Oregon, which has allowed online registration since 2010, nearly 20,000 voters registered online on the state's deadline.[35]

States with Online Voter Registration and the year enacted or implemented:

Arizona	2002	Delaware*	2006	Louisiana	2009	Oregon	2009
California	2012	Hawaii**	2012	Maryland	2011	South Carolina	2012
Colorado	2009	Indiana	2009	New York*	2012	Utah	2009
Connecticut**	2012	Kansas	2009	Nevada	2012	Washington	2007

* Not fully paperless
** Not implemented yet

Source: National Council of State Legislatures

As of February 2013, at least nine states had proposed bills to adopt online registration.[36]

[30] National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Electronic or Online Voter Registration
[31] Pew Research Center on the States, Online Voter Registration Update
[32] Brennan Center for Justice, Voter Registration Modernization
[33] Pew Research Center on the States, op. cit.
[34] Pew, Research Center on the States, op. cit.
[35] Pew, Research Center on the States, op. cit.
[36] NCSL op. cit.

Election Day Registration

Election Day registration allows voters to register or update their information on Election Day. Some states allow same-day registration, but not on Election Day: Since 2007, North Carolina has offered One-Stop Early Voting which allows voters to register and vote at the same time at early voting locations. Other states, like Ohio, offer similar opportunities to register during the early voting period and cast an absentee ballot.

Election Day registration (EDR) provides an immediate solution to voters who missed the registration deadline or who arrive at the polls but find that they are not on the rolls or that their information is outdated. As a result, EDR ensures that all eligible voters who wish to cast a ballot can. In Ohio, the most common reason voters are required to cast provisional ballots is because they need to update their address information. EDR greatly reduces the need for provisional ballots, allowing ballots to be counted faster and results to be certified sooner.

Election Day registration leads to increased voter turnout: States who let voters register or update their registration on Election Day have turnout that averages ten points above states that do not. Minnesota estimates that Election Day registrations account for five to ten percent of voter turnout.

States with Election Day Registration and the year enacted:

California*	2012	Idaho	1994	Montana	2005	Wyoming	1994
Connecticut**	2012	Iowa	2007	New Hampshire	1996		
District of Columbia	2010	Maine	1973	Rhode Island***			
		Minnesota	1974	Wisconsin	1975		

*California's Election Day registration will take effect on January 1 of the year following the certification of a statewide voter registration database--no sooner than January 2014.
**Connecticut's Election Day registration takes effect July 1, 2013.
***Rhode Island only offers Election Day registration for presidential elections.

Source: National Council of State Legislatures

As of February 2013, Election Day registration legislation had been proposed in 14 states.[37]

Pre-Registration

Pre-registration allows youth to complete the registration process (but not vote) before they turn 18, welcoming young people to the political process and building enthusiasm early on that can turn voting into a lifelong habit.

Pre-registration is important because many young people visit the DMV for the first time years before they're eligible to vote. According to the Delaware Division of Motor Vehicles, more than 26,800 16- and 17-year-olds applied for their driver's license from 2007 to 2009. During the same three-year period, the state Department of Elections reported that about 14,000 18-year-olds registered to vote.[38]

[37] NCSL, Same Day Registration
[38] Milford Beacon, New voter pre-registration law encourages youths' civic participation

By allowing youth to pre-register to vote, states can take advantage of opportunities like DMV visits to help close the gap between youth and adult registration rates. The registration rate among eligible voters is 71%, but when looking at eligible voters aged 18-24, that number falls to just 59%.[39] When they are registered, young people do vote. In 2008, 83% of registered 18-24 year olds voted.[40] By taking care of the registration requirement early, pre-registration prepares young people for active citizenship as soon as they turn 18 and can support and drive positive civic habits.

Active Voter Registration

Because voter registration is required – but not automatic – in every state except North Dakota, national, state, and local government should be working to actively register voters.

The National Voter Registration Act (1993) requires that departments of motor vehicles and public assistance offices that administer food stamps, welfare, Medicaid, disability assistance, and child health programs proactively register voters. Until recently, adherence to NVRA among public assistance offices has been lax but over the last few years, lawsuits have brought a number of states into compliance. The results have been overwhelming: in Ohio in the first six months of 2010, more than 100,000 low-income residents applied to register to vote at public assistance offices. That number (17,000 applications per month) is almost a ten-fold increase in the number of registration applications public assistance offices collected before the lawsuit (1,775 per month).[41]

In 2011, the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) revised its guidelines on voter registration applications at naturalization ceremonies. For the first time ever, the USCIS committed to providing new citizens the opportunity to register at every administrative naturalization ceremony in the country. While many elections officials and local community organizations have worked to register new citizens at naturalization ceremonies, this directive heralded a concerted effort to reach new voters as soon as they are eligible. This can help close the registration gap between native born and naturalized citizens who are registered at 71.8% and 60.5%, respectively.[42]

Recommendations

Improve the registration experience and streamline the process for elections officials by:

- Implementing online, paperless voter registration.
- Allowing Election Day registration or same-day registration during early voting periods.
- Enabling young people to pre-register to vote.
- Actively registering voters during all interactions with government agencies.

[39] FairVote, Youth Pre-Registration
[40] Ibid
[41] U.S. Department of Justice, NVRA FAQ
[42] Demos, Voter Registration for New Americans

EXPANDING AND IMPROVING EARLY VOTING

Early voting, both in-person and by mail, continues to grow in popularity. (see page 12) More than half of states now offer "no-excuse" absentee voting, and others allow individuals to register as permanent absentee voters, automatically receiving a mail ballot for every election. Other states are adding early voting in-person at local election offices and satellite locations.[43] Voters tend to like early voting because of the convenience and flexibility it provides. Election officials like it because it helps manage costs and can reduce long lines on Election Day. Early voting also leads to increased voter participation, especially in otherwise lower turnout elections.

As early voting grows, so do the associated issues, particularly with mail ballots.[44] Elections conducted entirely by mail can lead to lower turnout among younger, lower income, and urban populations who move frequently and use traditional mail less.[45] Mail ballots are more prone to spoilage and voter error. They are also subject to problems with postal delivery. Finally, mail ballots are more vulnerable to fraud than ballots cast in-person.[46]

Recommendations

Expand and improve early voting by:

- Increasing in-person early voting during the two weeks leading up to Election Day and offering multiple locations convenient to as many voters as possible.
- Taking measures with mail ballots to reduce voter error or delivery mistakes and allow voters to track their ballot online, ensuring it was received and counted.
- Allowing more voters to sign up as a permanent absentee voter and automatically receive their mail ballot.
- Using all-mail elections selectively – in lower turnout contests and in rural areas – and mitigate their bias by ensuring ballots are easily available and designating drop-off locations where mail ballots can be returned in-person as in Oregon and Washington.
- Allowing voters to register or update their registration and vote at the same time during the early voting period, as is done in North Carolina.

[43] National Conference of State Legislatures, Absentee and Early Voting
[44] New York Times, Early Voting is a Crucial Fix, but It's Not Flawless
[45] Elizabeth Bergman et al, How Does Vote By Mail Affect Voters?: A natural experiment examining individual-level turnout, Pew Center on the States
[46] New York Times, Error and Fraud at Issue as Absentee Voting Rises

RESTORING VOTING RIGHTS FOR EX-OFFENDERS

After the Civil War, states created laws taking the franchise away from people with a felony conviction. These laws aimed to limit the new voting rights of former slaves. A conviction often meant little jail time, but it did mean the loss of voting rights for years, if not for life.

The United States is one of the only democracies that do not automatically restore the right to vote to people leaving prison. An estimated 4.4 million Americans in 35 states are barred from voting *even after* completing their prison term and returning to their communities to live, work, and raise a family.[47] Today 15 states and the District of Columbia allow citizens to vote immediately upon release. Because these laws vary widely from state to state, untold numbers of ex-offenders are disenfranchised by misinformation, believing they can't vote when, in many states, they can.

Preventing people from voting once they have left prison runs counter to all we know about civic participation and how to encourage positive and law abiding behavior. Voting is rehabilitative. A recent report from the Florida Parole Commission found that ex-offenders whose civil rights had been restored were three times less likely to return to prison than others in the released prisoner population.[48] Individuals who vote are far more likely to be positively involved in community life. Society risks permanently alienating citizens from the political process when it revokes voting rights as a punishment – one reason why no other advanced democracy does so after prisoners are released.

Recommendation

For federal elections, the United States should adopt the democratic standard already used in 15 states and virtually all other democracies: Allow and encourage citizens to register and vote after leaving prison and upon reentry into society.

NONPARTISAN REDISTRICTING

2012 was the first election in new legislative districts drawn after the decennial U.S. Census. Reapportionment by partisan elected officials is democracy in reverse. Incumbents use sophisticated software to choose their voters before voters get to choose them. The party in power cracks and packs communities into districts that are safe for incumbents and that make meaningful opposition much more difficult.

[47] New York Times, The Great Gerrymander of 2012

[48] Florida Parole Commission, Status Updated: Restoration of Civil Rights' (RCR) Cases Granted 2009 and 2010

2012 was no different. Republicans did what Democrats have done artfully in the past. In seven states where Republicans redrew the districts, voters were relatively evenly split between Republicans and Democrats, 16.7 million to 16.4 million. Despite this, these seven states elected 73 Republicans and only 34 Democrats to Congress.[49] Whoever is doing the gerrymandering, whether the party in power or both parties colluding, the bottom line is still fewer choices for voters and disproportionate results.

Recommendations

No democracy in the 21st century should have incumbent partisan officials designing their own districts. Drawing districts that are the building blocks of our representative process should be as nonpartisan as possible. Many states have already adopted nonpartisan commissions made up of respected officials with a range of views.[50] The results can create more competitive districts with results more fairly reflecting the views of voters.

YOUTH TURNOUT: AN ESSAY

Most people expected youth turnout to decline in 2012. Signs of diminished enthusiasm were hard to miss. For instance, the Pew Research Center reported that just 28% of young people were following the election closely, down from 40% at the same point four years ago.

My organization, CIRCLE, asked a random sample of young Americans whether Barack Obama or Mitt Romney was a "typical politician." The largest group, 36%, said "both." Another 19% chose President Obama alone. That means that an outright majority of young people saw the President as a typical politician, not as an inspirational leader, as they might have said in 2008.

But young people (18-29) actually turned out at almost exactly the same rate this year as they had in 2008: 50%. They preferred Barack Obama by a lopsided 23-point margin and were numerous enough to determine the outcome of the campaign. If Governor Romney had drawn half of the youth vote in Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, he would have won their 80 electoral votes and would now be president.

Since young people voted at the same rate in 2012 despite showing less enthusiasm than four years ago, I think we can conclude that they weren't moved by excitement or hope as much as by commitment and persistence. That is good news because we should want young people of all backgrounds and ideologies to participate in civic life, by voting and also by serving in their communities, following the news, discussing issues, and informing themselves. Civic participation is a habit formed during youth, so the future of our democracy depends on engaging young people today. From that perspective, the increase in youth turnout is heartening, and it's good news that young people have amassed political power by voting–that means that the parties, interest groups, and the news media will compete to engage, persuade, and educate young people.

[49] New York Times, op. cit.
[50] Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission

But fifty percent turnout is still not impressive. The United States routinely posts the lowest voter turnout rates of any true democracy in the world, and young Americans lag 15 points or more behind older Americans in voting. Also, the "new normal" of massive youth voting is in some ways just a return to the "old normal." In seven of the 10 elections since 1976, youth turnout has been just about 50%. One way to read the trend is to say that youth turnout is stuck at about half of eligible young citizens.

Equally stubborn are disparities in voting by social class. Whereas young people with some college experience voted at a rate of about 63% this November, the turnout of non-college-educated young people was just 36%. Those non-voters were diverse ideologically and included a substantial proportion who liked Mitt Romney better than Barack Obama. But they failed to vote for any candidate.

The whole infrastructure of churches, grassroots political parties, local newspapers, and unions that once introduced working-class young people to politics is now shattered. And the sophisticated turnout operations of modern presidential campaigns focus on likely voters, meaning that college campuses get lots of attention but no one reaches young people who work in retail, service industries, and manufacturing. The hyper-efficient Obama campaign contacted just 5.8% of youth without college experience.

Young voters are back. They turn out in good years and bad and make the difference in close elections. But half of our young people are still non-voters, and their detachment from politics reflects their general alienation from civic life. We can't be satisfied until we reengage them.

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