

AMERICA

Goes to the Polls 2010

A Report on Voter Turnout in the 2010 Election



Nonprofit VOTE

Engaging America's Nonprofits in Voting and Elections

MISSION AND GOALS

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. Our goals and services are to:

- Provide high quality resources for nonprofits and social service agencies to incorporate voter engagement activities into to their on-going work
- Build lasting capacity for nonpartisan, nonprofit voter participation
- Promote sustained increases in voter participation, especially among voters new to the process or with a recent history of lower participation
- Engage voters where they gather to work, learn, advocate and receive services
- Strengthen the nonprofit sector and encourage new civic leadership

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AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS

A Report on Voter Turnout in the 2010 Midterm Election

*Prepared by George Pillsbury –
Director and*

*Julian Johannesen –
Research Director*



www.nonprofitvote.org

Nonprofit VOTE

*A national program of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits,
St. Paul, Minnesota*

*This report was produced with support from the Ford Foundation,
Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, Open Society Foundations, Public
Interest Projects: Four Freedoms Fund, Surdna Foundation, Tides
Foundation and donors to Nonprofit VOTE*

Welcome to America Goes to the Polls 2010.

We are pleased to present the third
in a series of voter turnout reports from
the last three national elections.

INTRODUCTION

America Goes to the Polls is the only publication that ranks the voter turnout of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. It also ranks turnout growth for each state compared to the previous midterm election. To do so, it uses the certified voter turnout for the 2010 midterm election—as reported by state election offices—and estimates of voting eligible population from the U.S. Elections Project.

Beyond the rankings, *America Goes to the Polls* reports on key voting trends such as the wide gap in youth turnout between presidential elections and midterm elections, the rise in early voting, and the continued growth of the Latino electorate. The report concludes with a discussion of issues related to voter registration and early voting, and their potential to improve—or hinder—future voter participation.

Nonprofit VOTE prepares *America Goes to the Polls* as a key resource to inform our partners in the nonprofit and civic sector, as well as those interested in studying and encouraging voter participation. Higher voter participation builds stronger communities and more effective citizens. Voting is a core act of citizenship, and civic engagement is crucial to our success as a democracy: voters are more likely to be involved in their communities and to take part in other civic activities. Additionally, communities that vote have higher levels of community health, and are more likely to receive attention from elected officials.

If you have questions or wish to obtain data related to this publication, please visit the voter turnout section of www.nonprofitvote.org, the website of the U.S. Elections Project, or others cited in this report.

George Pillsbury, Director

Julian Johannesen, Research Director

Nonprofit VOTE

info@nonprofitvote.org

617.357.VOTE

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

VOTER TURNOUT

This report uses official voter turnout data from the 50 states and the District of Columbia that is collected by the U.S. Elections Project at George Mason University after each national election. The U.S. Elections Project has compiled voter turnout data dating back to 1980, and also 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 on age, citizenship, and felon status. (For more on the project estimates and the methodology of the U.S. Elections Project, visit <http://elections.gmu.edu>.)

The U.S. Elections Project reports the voter turnout data it collects from state election offices in two ways:

- Highest office turnout: Total votes counted in the race for the highest office on the ballot (such as Governor, President, U.S. Senate)
- Total ballots cast (total turnout): The total number of voters who cast a ballot in person or by mail that was certified as valid.

Many voters choose not to vote in the race for highest office. Or, in some cases, a voter makes a mistake marking their ballot, such as voting for more than one candidate, and their vote is therefore not counted for that race. This is why “highest office vote” is not an accurate measure of total turnout. The difference between highest office vote and total turnout is called the residual vote. In 2010, 33 states and District of Columbia reported both highest office and total turnout. The average residual vote percent was 1.8%.

To more closely reflect the actual number of people voting, America Goes to the Polls uses total ballots cast, as the majority of states report this figure. For the states that have not yet reported the number of actual ballots cast, we estimate their total turnout by adding the estimated residual vote (based on the average for the reporting states) to their highest office vote.

PRIMARY SOURCES FOR VOTER TURNOUT TRENDS

National Election Exit Poll – the election exit poll conducted by Edison Research and used by the major U.S. television news networks, the Associated Press, and all major news outlets for the last four national elections. The exit poll looks at the demographics of voter turnout, partisan choice, and voters’ views on issues. (To learn more, visit <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/>.)

U.S. Census Current Population Survey – 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 national elections. Any Census data in this report is for 2008 and earlier. The Census will release its widely used survey on the demographics of who voted in 2010 later this year. Demographic data for 2010 in this report is from the National Election Exit Poll. (To learn more, visit <http://www.census.gov/cps/>.)

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) - “Young Voters in the 2010 Elections.” CIRCLE is a comprehensive source on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. (To learn more, visit <http://www.civicyouth.org>.)

Pew Hispanic Center - “The Latino Vote in the 2010 Elections.” 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 <http://www.pewhispanic.org>.)

Please note that primary sources for each chart or table in the report appear at the top of each page under the main heading or in the subtitle of the chart or table.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All 50 states have certified their results, and the 2010 midterm is officially in the books. Voter turnout dropped off steeply from the 2008 presidential election to the 2010 midterm election: Across the nation, one-third fewer voters chose to vote in 2010 than two years ago, even though 37 Governorships, 37 Senate seats, almost the entire House, and most state legislatures were on the ballot. Still, voter turnout was slightly higher than in 2006 and more states gained than lost voters, even after adjusting for growth in eligible voters. Among the turnout highlights and lowlights are:

- An estimated 90.7 million voters cast ballots in the 2010 midterm election. **This represents 42 million fewer voters** than the 132.6 million who voted in the presidential election of 2008.
- **The 41.6% turnout of eligible voters in 2010 was similar to the 41.3% turnout seen in 2006** and is comparable with other midterm elections.
- **Maine overtook Minnesota as the number one state** in voter turnout. Minnesota had been first in turnout for the previous seven straight national elections.
- **The number of statewide races on the ballot and the competitiveness of the races** seemed to drive voter turnout growth or decline in any particular state between 2006 and 2010.
- **Voter turnout was ten points higher in the nine states with Election Day Registration.** Two of the newest states to adopt Election Day registration are Iowa (2008) and Montana (2006).
- **Young voters ages 18-29 had the largest drop off** of any voting demographic between presidential and midterm elections. The turnout of eligible young voters was 28 points below their turnout rate in 2008, but comparable to their turnout in other recent midterm elections.
- **Early voting by mail or in person continues to rise.** It is estimated that 27-29% of voters cast ballots early in 2010, well above the 19% of the electorate who voted early in 2006.
- The Latino vote followed its upward trend as a share of the electorate, particularly in western states. **Almost one in four California voters in the 2010 midterm were of Hispanic descent.**
- The National Election Exit Poll showed **a much older electorate in 2010** than in 2008. Older voters age 65 and over also had by far the largest partisan shift, swinging 21 points towards House republicans in 2010 compared to 2006. (See chart p.12).

U.S. TURNOUT IN THE 2010 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

HISTORICAL TRENDS: 1980 - 2010

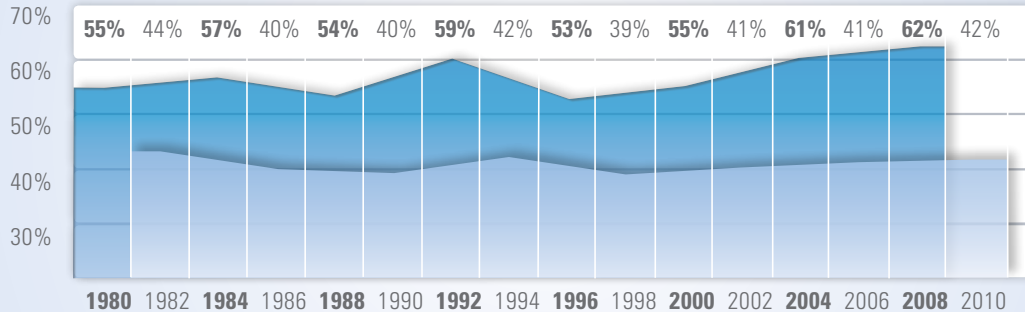
Primary Source: U.S. Elections Project

There is a large gap between voter turnout in presidential and midterm elections, generally around 20 points. This gap is persistent, despite the fact that the entire House and one-third of the Senate are up for election every two years and that there are far more gubernatorial elections in midterm cycles. The enormous amount of money spent by presidential campaigns, the increased focus on voter mobilization, and the expanded media coverage during presidential elections are just some of the factors that contribute to this gap. However, the most important factor is that no other election can produce sustained national interest quite like a presidential race.

- 41.6% of voting eligible citizens turned out to vote in the 2010 midterm elections. This matches turnout in 2006 and is comparable with other recent midterm elections.
- An estimated 90.7 million voters cast ballots in 2010, which is 42 million fewer than the 132.6 million who voted in 2008.
- The National Election Exit Polls show that in 2010, voters ages 18-44 suffered the largest drop off compared to 2008, as their share of the electorate fell about six points. (See chart p. 12)
- As in previous midterms, national voter turnout was also brought down by low turnout in the large states of New York and Texas,¹ as well as in the five states that hold important state elections for Governor and the state legislature in odd years, such as Virginia and New Jersey.²

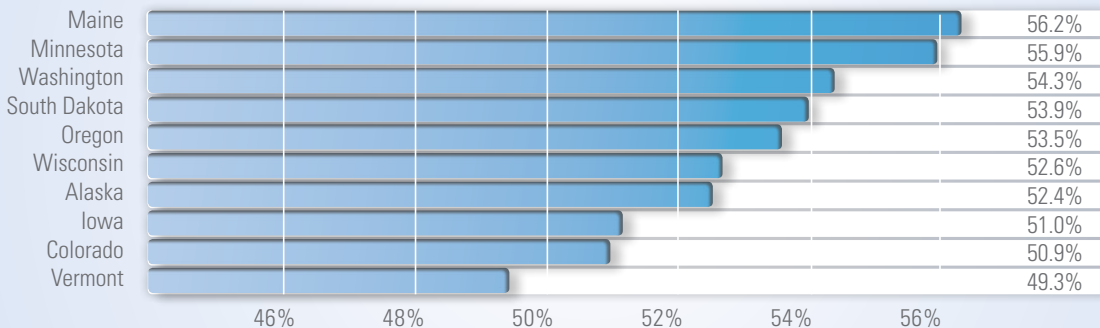
Voter Turnout in Midterm and Presidential Elections: 1980-2010

Total Ballots Cast as a Percent of Voting Eligible Population



Top Ten States in Voter Turnout 2010

Total Ballots Cast as a Percent of Voting Eligible Population



¹ Without New York and Texas, national turnout rates would be more than a point higher—closer to 42.7%.

² Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia hold their main state elections in odd years.

2010 STATE TURNOUT RANKINGS

Primary Sources: U.S. Elections Project

In midterm election years turnout in each state is driven by several factors, including the presence of high profile statewide offices on the ballot (such as Governor and U.S. Senator), the competitiveness of those and other Congressional races, as well as the ease of voting.

- In 2010, Maine overtook Minnesota as the number one state in voter turnout. Until then, Minnesota had held the turnout title for the previous seven straight national elections. One contributing factor was Maine's highly contested three way race for Governor.
- The ten states with the highest turnout in 2010 not only had competitive statewide elections, but also boast voting practices that facilitate higher voter participation. These include Election Day Registration—in states like Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa—and well-designed vote-by-mail programs in Washington and Oregon.
- In contrast, the five states with the lowest turnout in 2010 did not have any competitive statewide elections. New York is an extreme case of non-competitive elections: the winner in the Governor's race defeated his opponent by a margin of 27 points, while the winners in both U.S. Senate races also won by similar landslide margins.
- Many of the lower turnout states also place a heavy burden on voters by requiring that they register to vote far in advance of Election Day.

State	Voting Eligible Population	Total Ballots Cast	Turnout Percent	Turnout Rank 2010 (2006)
Maine*	1,032,820	580,538	56.2%	1 (4)
Minnesota*	3,799,328	2,123,369	55.9%	2 (1)
Washington†	4,728,332	2,565,589	54.3%	3 (19)
South Dakota	600,029	323,410	53.9%	4 (2)
Oregon†	2,780,456	1,487,210	53.5%	5 (7)
Wisconsin*	4,203,366	2,210,415	52.6%	6 (6)
Alaska	493,692	258,746	52.4%	7 (11)
Iowa*	2,220,718	1,133,429	51.0%	8 (15)
Colorado	3,578,616	1,819,909	50.9%	9 (17)
Vermont	493,696	243,617	49.3%	10 (5)
Delaware	631,634	310,946	49.2%	11 (29)
Montana*	753,666	367,096	48.7%	12 (3)
North Dakota^	496,664	240,876	48.5%	13 (22)
Massachusetts	4,783,819	2,319,963	48.5%	14 (14)
Maryland	3,944,006	1,891,322	48.0%	15 (20)
Wyoming*	405,861	190,822	47.0%	16 (10)
Connecticut	2,507,296	1,173,871	46.8%	17 (18)
Rhode Island	755,179	348,451	46.1%	18 (9)
Ohio	8,637,282	3,956,028	45.8%	19 (13)
New Hampshire*	1,011,125	461,423	45.6%	20 (28)
California	22,882,532	10,302,324	45.0%	21 (32)
Michigan	7,288,055	3,268,217	44.8%	22 (8)
Missouri	4,433,443	1,978,889	44.6%	23 (12)
Kentucky	3,197,471	1,411,695	44.2%	24 (26)
Alabama	3,457,019	1,521,170	44.0%	25 (37)
Idaho*	1,051,978	459,079	43.6%	26 (21)

State	Voting Eligible Population	Total Ballots Cast	Turnout Percent	Turnout Rank 2010 (2006)
New Mexico	1,400,217	607,700	43.4%	27 (27)
Kansas	1,995,927	853,888	42.8%	28 (25)
Nevada	1,692,499	723,515	42.7%	29 (41)
Florida	12,812,802	5,460,573	42.6%	30 (34)
Illinois	8,934,072	3,792,770	42.5%	31 (31)
Pennsylvania	9,565,259	4,059,327	42.4%	32 (23)
Hawaii	930,624	385,385	41.4%	33 (36)
South Carolina	3,375,958	1,365,480	40.4%	34 (43)
Arizona	4,331,851	1,750,840	40.4%	35 (35)
North Carolina^	6,760,227	2,700,383	39.9%	36 (47)
Louisiana	3,256,637	1,297,150	39.8%	37 (48)
Georgia	6,596,556	2,622,532	39.8%	38 (44)
Oklahoma	2,653,821	1,053,393	39.7%	39 (40)
Nebraska	1,271,875	497,248	39.1%	40 (16)
Virginia	5,689,910	2,214,503	38.9%	41 (24)
Indiana	4,678,739	1,786,213	38.2%	42 (38)
West Virginia	1,418,691	539,487	38.0%	43 (46)
New Jersey	5,811,886	2,200,974	37.9%	44 (33)
Mississippi	2,129,092	802,743	37.7%	45 (50)
Arkansas	2,079,647	779,957	37.5%	46 (39)
New York	13,355,984	4,756,679	35.6%	47 (42)
Utah	1,843,282	653,274	35.4%	48 (45)
Tennessee	4,659,865	1,630,377	35.0%	49 (30)
Texas	15,407,666	5,069,508	32.9%	50 (49)
Dist of Columbia*	470,144	135,846	28.9%	51 (51)

* State has EDR.

† State uses vote-by-mail almost exclusively.

^ North Carolina uses same day registration during its early voting period. North Dakota does not have voter registration.

Primary source: U.S. Elections Project.

GROWTH IN VOTER TURNOUT IN THE STATES: 2006–2010

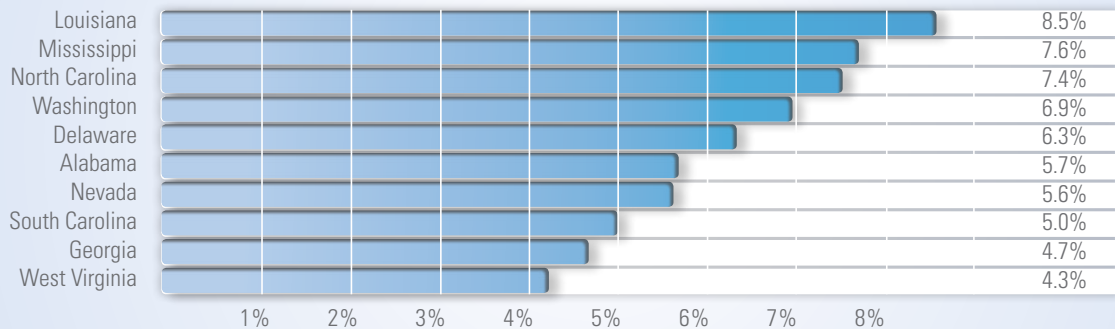
Primary Sources: U.S. Elections Project

Voter turnout generally goes up most in states that have greater electoral competition and an extra statewide race that wasn't on the last midterm ballot. 2010 was no exception. Election reforms such as same day registration or expansive early voting can also lead to higher levels of voter participation.

- Seven of the top 10 states with the greatest improvement in turnout (compared to 2006) had one additional statewide office on the ballot in 2010. For example, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina all had a U.S. Senate race in 2010, but not in 2006. Among turnout growth leaders, Washington, Delaware and Nevada had tight, high profile U.S. Senate races.
- Conversely, seven of the bottom 10 states with the least improved voter turnout had one less statewide office on the ballot in 2010 than in 2006. For example, Michigan, Montana, and Nebraska had U.S. Senate races in 2006 but not in 2010.
- Two of the top growth states, North Carolina and Washington, had recently adopted election reforms. North Carolina started its one-stop early voting program in 2008, enabling voters to register and vote at the same time when voting prior to Election Day. Washington state has continued to make improvements to its relatively new statewide vote-by-mail system, such as increasing opportunities for voters to return their ballots in-person as well as through the mail.

Ten States with Largest Turnout Gains over 2006

Adjusted for change in Voting Eligible Population



GROWTH IN VOTER TURNOUT IN THE STATES: 2006–2010

Primary Sources: U.S. Elections Project

State	Gain over 2006	Increase in Voters over 2006	Growth Rank	State	Gain over 2006	Voters over 2006	Growth Rank
Louisiana	8.5%	342,254	1	New Mexico	0.3%	39,103	27
Mississippi	7.6%	177,771	2	Oregon	0.2%	87,560	28
North Carolina	7.4%	663,932	3	Dist of Columbia	0.2%	13,490	29
Washington	6.9%	480,515	4	Kentucky	0.0%	41,633	30
Delaware	6.3%	52,893	5	Arkansas	-0.2%	24,418	31
Alabama	5.7%	242,010	6	Massachusetts	-0.8%	76,128	32
Nevada	5.6%	137,241	7	Connecticut	-0.9%	11,480	33
South Carolina	5.0%	248,169	8	New York	-0.9%	52,849	34
Georgia	4.7%	478,687	9	Wisconsin	-1.1%	27,260	35
West Virginia	4.3%	66,473	10	Kansas	-1.6%	-10,195	36
California	3.8%	1,403,265	11	Idaho	-2.6%	152	37
North Dakota	3.1%	20,397	12	Pennsylvania	-2.7%	-130,960	38
Hawaii	3.0%	36,397	13	New Jersey	-2.7%	-114,669	39
Colorado	2.8%	233,804	14	Ohio	-3.6%	-228,044	40
New Hampshire	2.7%	42,873	15	Minnesota	-4.6%	-94,183	41
Florida	2.5%	576,029	16	Wyoming	-4.7%	-5,395	42
Oklahoma	2.5%	105,622	17	South Dakota	-4.9%	-17,695	43
Iowa	1.8%	61,920	18	Virginia	-5.6%	-184,086	44
Texas	1.3%	569,261	19	Vermont	-5.7%	-19,408	45
Alaska	1.2%	20,439	20	Rhode Island	-5.9%	-44,431	46
Illinois	1.1%	206,478	21	Missouri	-6.6%	-199,389	47
Arizona	0.8%	197,808	22	Tennessee	-7.2%	-237,986	48
Maine	0.8%	17,003	23	Michigan	-8.0%	-583,791	49
Maryland	0.8%	82,085	24	Montana	-8.3%	-43,965	50
Indiana	0.5%	66,862	25	Nebraska	-9.7%	-113,251	51
Utah	0.4%	70,713	26				

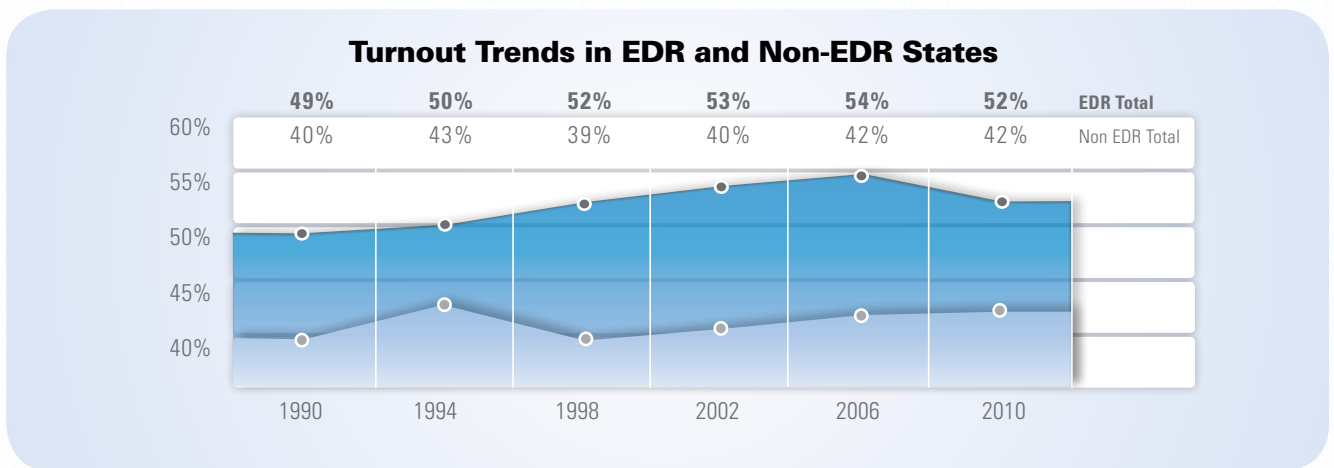
ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

Primary Sources: U.S. Elections Project

States that have Election Day registration and allow voters to fix a registration problem or register on Election Day have had consistently higher voter participation rates, even after adjusting for all other turnout factors. This trend continued in 2010.

- In the 2010 midterm elections, the average voter turnout rate in the ten states with Election Day Registration was 10 points higher than in the 40 states without EDR. In addition, four of the top 10 turnout states in 2010 (Maine, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa) are states that allow for Election Day registration.
- Two of the newest states to adopt Election Day registration—Iowa and Montana—continued to have great success, even though Montana had less electoral competition in 2010 than in 2006.
- Election Day Registration also promises to help close the widest gap in voter turnout in the U.S. today—the gap between those who have resided in their home for more than a year and those who have not—a 20 point gap in 2008. This gap persists even when controlling for other demographic factors, indicating that advance registration itself is a barrier to voting for recent residents.

Election Day registration represents an important step towards universal and automatic voter registration for all eligible citizens. For more, see the section on voter registration on page 13.



The chart does not include the District of Columbia or North Carolina in either category. The District of Columbia has Election Day registration (adopted in 2010) but is not comparable to the 50 states as it does not have a comparable state or federal election. North Carolina falls between the two categories since it adopted a version of same day registration. North Carolina law does allow voters to register and vote at the same time in the early voting period, but not on Election Day.

Election Day Registration States

Election Day Registration allows voters to update their registration or register for the first time on Election Day at either the polls or their local election office.

Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia have Election Day Registration. North Dakota is considered an Election Day Registration state as well because it does not have voter registration. North Carolina has same day voter registration during its early voting period, but not on Election Day.

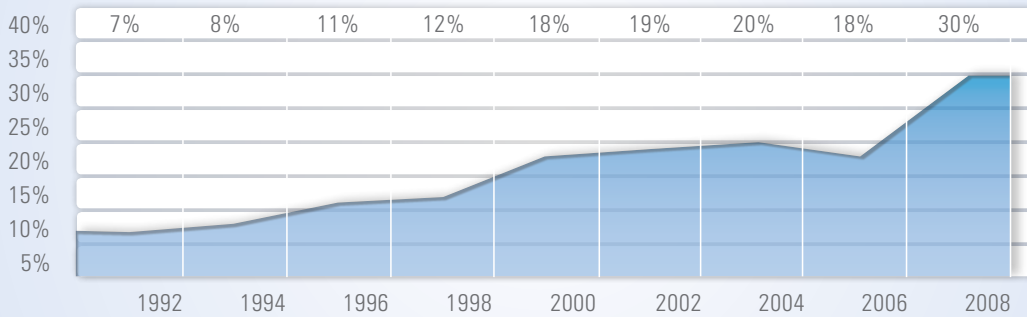
EARLY VOTING

Primary Sources: U.S. Census Current Population Survey, U.S. Elections Project, Gallup/USA Today Poll

Early voting is on the rise as more voters cast their ballot before Election Day either by mail or in-person at a local election office or vote center. According to the U.S. Census, early voting in-person and by mail has steadily grown since 1992, approaching a third of all votes cast in 2008.

- It is estimated that 27-29% of voters cast ballots early in 2010, much higher than previous midterms, and just below 2008. (Gallup/USA Today Poll, U.S. Elections Project projections)
- Early voting is highest in the West. In a pre-election Gallup/USA Today poll, 60% of voters in the West voted or planned to vote early, as compared to just 6% in the East. Western states have the most liberal mail and in-person early voting laws. Examples include Oregon and Washington which conduct all vote-by-mail elections.
- The poll showed a decided age skew in early voting, with 18% of those 65 and older saying they had voted early, and another 18% saying they planned on voting early. By contrast, only 4% of 18- to 29-year-olds had already voted, with another 12% saying they planned on voting early. This is line with studies that have shown that all vote-by-mail elections tend to bias voter turnout towards older voters.

Early Voting as a Portion of Overall Voting



Source: US Census, Current Population Survey

Early Voting in the 2010 Election

Pre-election survey of registered voters conducted Oct. 21-24, 2010

	Already Voted	Plan to vote before Election Day	Plan to vote on Election Day	Do not plan to vote / Don't know
All registered voters	11%	16%	63%	10%
18 to 29	4%	12%	56%	28%
30 to 49	10%	15%	65%	11%
50 to 64	9%	18%	66%	7%
65 +	18%	18%	58%	6%
East	3%	3%	81%	13%
Midwest	7%	3%	78%	12%
South	11%	17%	60%	12%
West	20%	39%	34%	7%

Source: USA Today/Gallup Poll

YOUTH VOTE

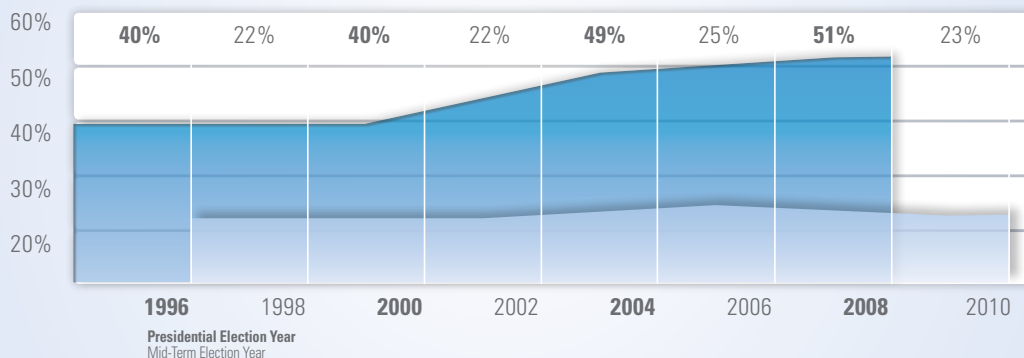
Primary Sources: CIRCLE, National Election Exit Poll

In 2010 young voters ages 18-29 continued their pattern of low turnout in midterm elections, when the turnout rate is usually half of what it is in presidential years. Young voters have the largest drop off of any voting demographic between presidential and midterm elections.

- It is estimated that 23% of eligible voters ages 18-29 voted in 2010, 28 points below their turnout rate in 2008, but on par with 2006 and other midterms.
- In 2010, just 15% went to the polls for the first time while 85% were repeat voters. This contrasts with 2008, when 43% of the youth vote was comprised of first-time voters. This underscores just how important presidential years are for bringing new, younger voters into the electorate. Young people who vote in a presidential election are far more likely to vote in the next midterm or in other future elections.
- Younger voters are the most racially and ethnically diverse age group in the electorate. Among younger voters in 2010, 65% were white, 16% Black, 14% Hispanic, and 5% Asian-American or “other” (Native, mixed race, etc.). Voters 30 and older were 80% white, 10% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 3% Asian-American and “other.”

The Disparity of the Youth Vote from Presidentials to Midterms

Youth vote as share of the eligible youth voting population, from the National Election Exit Poll



LATINO VOTE

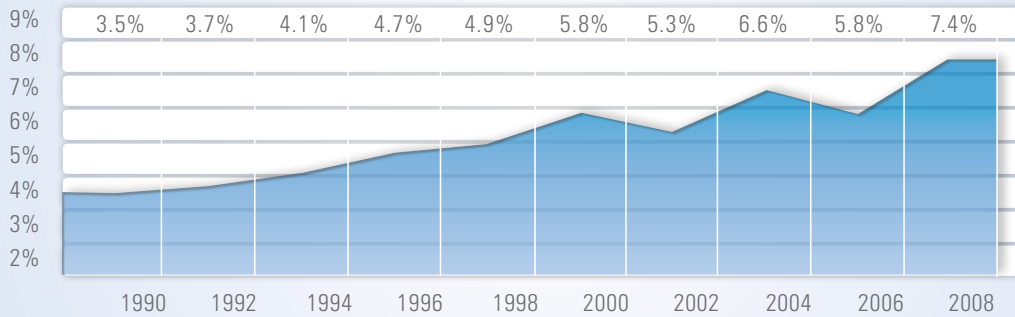
Primary Sources: U.S. Census Current Population Survey, Pew Hispanic Research, National Election Exit Poll

U.S. citizens of Latino heritage are the fastest growing demographic among eligible voters.

- U.S. Census surveys show that the share of the electorate represented by Latino voters has doubled in the last 20 years.
- The national exit polls show that the Latino share of the vote may be higher than that reported by the Census. The exit polls found Latino voters made up 8% of the electorate in 2006, 9% in 2008 and 8% again in 2010.
- The growth of the Latino vote was highest in western states. Almost one in four California voters is of Hispanic descent. The growth reflects both population growth as well as mobilization around high profile elections and salient issues like immigration reform. In the past, overall turnout rates for Latino voters in midterms have been well below average.
- Latino turnout in 2006 (32.3%) was a full 9 points below national average (41.3%), in part because it is a comparatively younger population. The Census survey election data to be released later this year will provide evidence of whether or not that gap is closing.

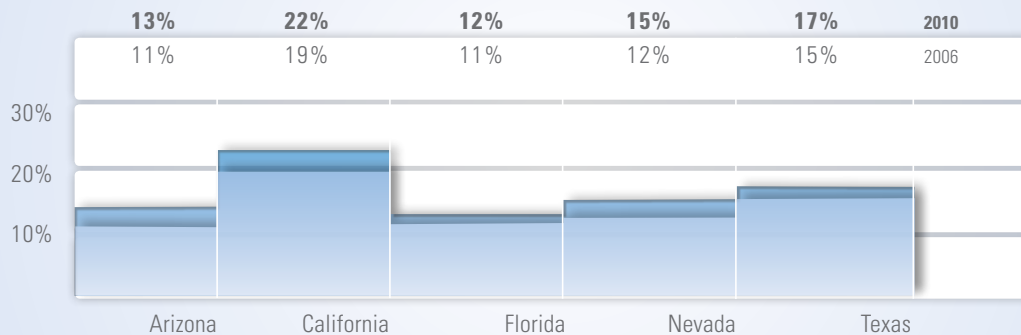
The Growing Latino Vote

As a share of the overall voting population, from U.S. Census, Current Population Survey



Rise in Latino Share of the Electorate in Selected States

2006 - 2010



Source: 2010 National Election Exit Poll

SHARE OF THE VOTE BY DEMOGRAPHIC AND PARTISAN CHOICE

2006, 2008 and 2010 National Exit Polls

Demographically, 2010 midterm voters were similar to 2006 midterm voters. However, the makeup of the midterm electorate remains far different than that of the presidential electorate in both size and demographics. In 2010, voters under age 45 saw a large drop off from 2008 (about 6 points), while voters over 45 saw a corresponding increase (about 5 points). The drop off among minority ethnic groups was less dramatic, but in aggregate made for a much whiter electorate than in 2008.

The larger trend was the partisan swing toward Republican candidates among older, white, and higher-income voters. The age swing was most pronounced: Voters 65 and over went from a 2% gap in favor of Democrats in 2006 to a 21 point gap in favor of Republicans in 2010. Voters 45-64 had a similar shift. These shifts are not uncommon in midterms, especially among “independent voters” with a history of higher anti-incumbent volatility from election to election. For most other voters, the shift was relatively small and similar to the swing in favor of Democratic candidates that occurred between 2002 and 2006.

Share of the Electorate in 2006, 2008 and 2010

	Share of the Electorate			Change from		2006		2010	
	2006	2008	2010	2006	2008	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep
Vote by Gender									
Male	49%	47%	47%	-2%	0%	50%	47%	42%	55%
Female	51%	53%	53%	+2%	0%	55%	43%	49%	48%
Vote by Ethnicity									
White	79%	75%	78%	-1%	+3%	47%	51%	38%	60%
African-American	10%	13%	10%	0%	-3%	89%	10%	90%	9%
Latino	8%	9%	8%	0%	-1%	69%	30%	65%	33%
Asian	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	62%	37%	56%	40%
Other	2%	3%	2%	0%	-1%	55%	42%	54%	42%
Vote by Age									
18-29	12%	18%	12%	-1%	-7%	60%	38%	55%	42%
30-44	24%	29%	24%	0%	-5%	53%	45%	46%	50%
45-64	42%	37%	42%	0%	+5%	53%	46%	45%	53%
65 and over	22%	16%	21%	1%	+5%	50%	48%	38%	59%
Vote by Income									
Below \$50 K	40%	38%	37%	-3%	-1%	59%	40%	54%	43%
Above \$50 K	60%	62%	63%	3%	+1%	49%	51%	43%	55%

Source: National Election Exit Polls 2006, 2008 and 2010

EXPANDING VOTER REGISTRATION

Every Election Day, several million Americans are unable to vote because of a problem with their voter registration. Some may have missed their state's registration deadline. Others may have submitted their registration card to their Secretary of State or Board of Motor Vehicles, who then failed to forward it on to the local election clerk in time. Still others may have been unaware of particular voter registration rules and procedures in their jurisdiction.

Voters in the United States face a patchwork of voter registration laws, procedures, and deadlines in 50 states and 3,000 counties. Registering to vote requires not only obtaining, filling out and returning a registration card, but also a working knowledge of the local jurisdiction's registration procedures. This approach contrasts with other democracies, where governments use existing contacts with their citizens to ensure citizens are registered to vote and that their registrations are updated when they move or change their name, an approach known as automatic or universal registration.

Several U.S. states have found an effective way to achieve the goal of automatic or universal voter registration, helping to ensure every eligible voter who wants to vote can do so. It's called Election Day Registration (EDR). EDR has worked well for decades in states like Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, all of whom adopted the practice in the 1970's. Five other states—Idaho, Iowa, Montana, New Hampshire and Wyoming—followed their lead in the last quarter century. More recently, North Carolina adopted a version of EDR called same day registration that allows voters to register or update their registration at the same time they cast their ballot. This “one-stop” voting was one of the main reasons why North Carolina led the nation in voter turnout growth in 2008. Just last year, Washington D.C. adopted EDR.

MODERNIZING VOTER REGISTRATION

Election Day registration has proven successful in every state where it has been adopted, and should be the foundation of a national standard for Universal Voter Registration. In 2012, there is no reason for a state not to provide some kind of Election Day registration, whether it's at polling sites or county election offices. Not only does EDR promise citizens a more successful voting experience, but it can also cut costs for local government by reducing the number of oft-faulty registrations submitted by third party groups, the processing of which wastes valuable election board time and money. States with EDR also save money on processing and counting provisional ballots, because far fewer provisional ballots are cast when voters can update their registration at their polling place.

Beyond EDR, there are other valuable proposals that would make voter registration more universal and encourage higher levels of participation.

- Register high school students at graduation or when signing up for selective service.
- Register new citizens at swearing in ceremonies
- Implement the parts of the 1993 National Voter Registration Act that ask federal and some state agencies to register people receiving government services.
- Make voter registration opt-out rather than opt-in with the application for or renewal of a driver's license or other state ID.

Every Election Day,
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IMPROVING EARLY VOTING

Early voting whether by mail or in-person continues to rise. Three of ten voters voted early in 2008 and again in 2010 (see page 9). Voters like early voting because of the convenience and flexibility it provides, and it may help election officials lower costs. Early voting can increase voter participation, especially in otherwise lower turnout elections.

However, early voting, if not implemented properly, can make it harder for some voters to vote, bias turnout, and increase ballot spoilage. It also has voters making decisions far ahead of the actual election, possibly missing important shifts that can occur in the final few weeks of any campaign.

VOTE BY MAIL

While mail voting is often easier and more convenient for older voters, it can be harder for younger or lower-income voters who move frequently and don't use mail. Studies¹ provide evidence that mail-only voting can depress turnout among younger, lower income, or urban populations, tilting election turnout towards older and more suburban voters where mail is more convenient. Beyond the potential bias of all mail elections, mail ballots have higher spoilage rates and are more prone to voter error or problems with postal delivery. To address these issues, states implementing early voting can:

- Expand in-person early voting options.
- Mitigate the bias of all-mail elections by ensuring replacement ballots are easily available and creating convenient drop-off locations where a mail-in ballot can be returned in-person (like in Oregon and Washington).

- Take measures to reduce voter or delivery mistakes and use technology that permits the voter to track their ballot online, ensuring it was received and counted.

EARLY VOTING IN-PERSON

Early voting in-person at a local election office or designated early voting location offers voters convenience and security. It gives voters juggling work and other weekday commitments the chance to vote on the two weekends leading up to Election Day. Disparities could arise if early voting locations aren't reasonably available to all populations. Many have questioned the length of the early voting period, as there can be unexpected shifts in the final weeks of an election. Some best practices adopted by many localities are to:

Provide multiple and accessible in-person early voting options

Limit early voting to the two weeks before Election Day, and include time of the weekends to vote, such as the two Saturdays before the election

Allow voters to register or update their registration and vote at the same time during the early voting period, as done in North Carolina

¹ Elizabeth Bergman, Philip Yates and Elaine Ginnold et al (2010) "How Does Vote By Mail Affect Voters? A natural experiment examining individual-level turnout", Pew Center on the States, Making Voting Work

Paul Gronke, Eva Galanes-Rosenbaum, Peter A. Miller and Daniel Toffey (2008) "Convenience Voting." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 437-455.

RESTORING VOTING RIGHTS FOR EX-OFFENDERS

Felon disenfranchisement laws came into being after the Civil War and were designed to limit the newly acquired voting rights of former slaves. A conviction may have meant little jail time but it did mean the loss of voting rights for years, if not for life.

Today the United States is the only advanced democracy that does not restore the right to vote to people leaving prison. An estimated 3.5 million Americans with a felony conviction are barred from voting after completing their prison term.

A DEMOCRACY STANDARD

Preventing a free person from voting after leaving prison runs counter to all we know about civic participation how to encourage positive and law abiding behavior. For federal elections, the

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

For voter turnout, this national standard would enfranchise the more than three million voters who have completed their prison term and encourage ex-offenders to become more involved citizens by participating and voting. For democracy, voting is rehabilitative. 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.

OTHER REFORMS

There are numerous other election reforms that merit attention, however only three will be mentioned below. For each we will present the problem the reform is intended to address. To learn more about the reforms themselves, please visit our website at www.nonprofitvote.org/election-reform.html. There you will find detailed descriptions of both the problems and ideas for change.

A Small Donor Public Campaign Finance System – Candidates get over 80% of their campaign funds from big donors who put their interests before the government's. Elections are awash in outside donations to campaigns, giving large donors a disproportionate opportunity to influence law, policy, government contracts and more. Several solutions have been proposed. To learn more visit our site's election reform pages and click on "Campaign Finance."

Ranked Choice Voting/IRV – The majority of U.S. elections feature very little competition between viable candidates. Candidates can "win" with less 50% of the votes where the majority of voters cast ballots for others. The primary reason is our reliance on a form of plurality voting that limits competition to the two major parties. Anyone outside the two major parties is

immediately labeled a "spoiler" because, without a runoff mechanism, whenever more than two candidates contest a seat, support for the two most similar candidates is split. This can also lead to elections where the "winner" has the support of only a small minority of voters. Ranked Choice Voting is one solution.

Nonpartisan Redistricting – This year (as is done every ten years), election districts will be redrawn based on the 2010 U.S. Census. Thus begins a kind of reverse democracy where incumbents use sophisticated software to choose their voters by re-drawing their own district lines to include some voters and exclude others. The party in power inevitably seeks safe districts for their own incumbents and less opportunity for opponents. Neighborhoods, minority voting populations or low voting groups like students and non-citizens are packed and cracked into districts, giving voters fewer truly contested races and less reason to turnout to vote. Nonpartisan redistricting is a part of the answer.

Visit our website to learn about these and other election reforms.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Toolkits

A Voter Participation Starter Kit for Nonprofits and Social Service Agencies

Nonprofits, Voting and Elections: A Guide to Nonpartisan Voter Engagement

A Nonprofit’s Guide to Hosting a Candidate Forum

A Nonprofit’s Guide to Voter Registration

Factsheets

“501(c)(3) Permissible Activities Checklist”

“Ballot Measure Advocacy”

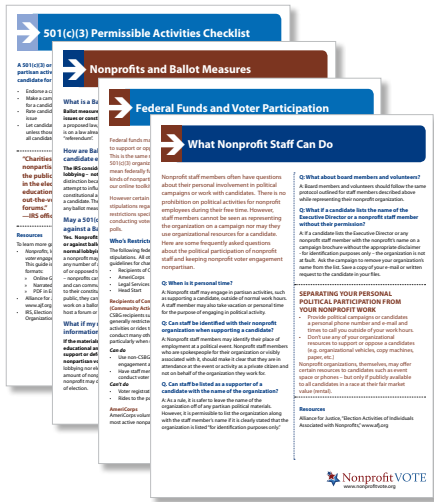
“Nonprofits, Staff and Elections”

“State Felon Disenfranchisement Laws”

“Federal Funds and Voter Participation”

“Working with Candidates”

“Become a Poll Worker”



More from the America Goes to the Polls Series

2008 General Election

2008 Presidential Primaries

2006 General Election

State Partners

Protecting Arizona’s Families Coalition

California Participation Project (Los Angeles)

Colorado Participation Project

Colorado Nonprofit Association

Connecticut Association of Nonprofits

Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington

Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations (LANO)

Maine Association of Nonprofits

Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers and MassVOTE

Michigan Nonprofit Association - Michigan Participation Project

Minnesota Council of Nonprofits - Minnesota Participation Project

Mississippi Center for Nonprofits

Montana Nonprofit Association

New York Council of Nonprofits

North Carolina Center for Nonprofits

Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO)

United Way of Greater Cleveland 2-1-1

Nonprofit Association of Oregon

Greater Pittsburgh Nonprofit Partnership – Everybody Vote

Wisconsin Nonprofit Association

National Partners (partial list)

Alliance for Children and Families

AAPD – Disability Vote Project

APIAVote

Girls Inc.

Independent Sector

League of Women Voters

Lutheran Services in America

NAACP

NALEO Education Fund

National Association of Secretaries of State

National Association of Community Health Centers

National Congress of American Indians

National Council of La Raza

National Council of Nonprofits

National Human Services Assembly

National Low Income Housing Coalition

N-TEN

Points of Light Institute

Rock the Vote

United Negro College Fund

VolunteerMatch

Center for Nonprofits and Philanthropy

Voto Latino

YMCA



89 South Street, Suite 203, Boston, MA 02111