

AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS

Voter Participation Gaps in the 2012 Presidential Election

American democracy is challenged by large gaps in voter turnout by income, age, and other factors. Closing these gaps will require a sustained effort to understand and address the numerous and different reasons some citizens participate at lower rates than others.

Voter Participation Gaps in the 2012 Presidential Election documents the voter participation gaps in the 2012 general election and compares them to recent presidential elections. The report is based on data released in May 2013 from the U.S. Census biennial survey on voting and registration in midterm and presidential elections. (*See methodology.*)

The report illustrates voter turnout gaps by income, age, ethnicity, and residential mobility with simple line and bar graphs, highlighting some of the most pertinent facts and occasionally offering brief explanations. By covering these trends, we hope to further a conversation on ways to close participation gaps through better voter mobilization, civic education, and election reforms.

America Goes to the Polls: Voter Participation Gaps in the 2012 Presidential Election is a product of Nonprofit VOTE's *America Goes to the Polls* series—an ongoing effort to provide information about voter turnout trends in an accessible, friendly format. It follows our *Report on Voter Turnout in the 2012 Election* (March 2013), which features voter turnout rates and changes in turnout between and among various constituencies over time. It is the only report to rank states based on turnout rates and changes in turnout between comparable elections.

Visit our website to learn more about the *America Goes to the Polls* series or to download a report.

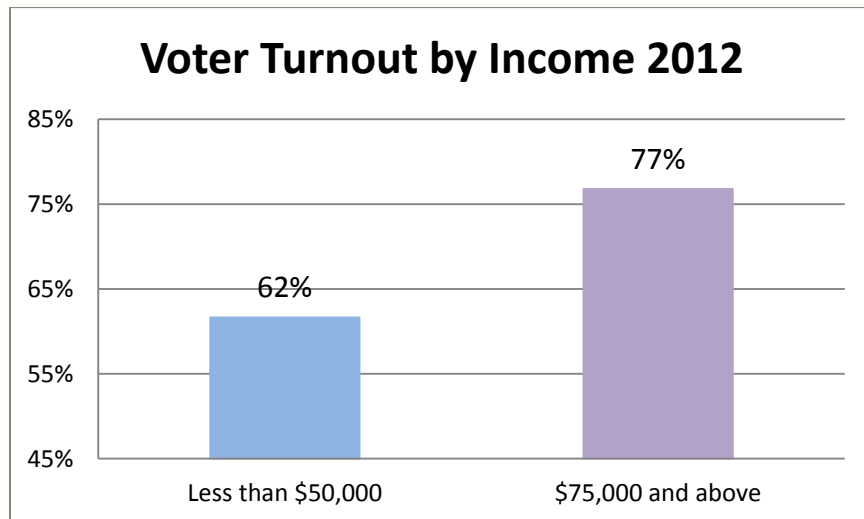
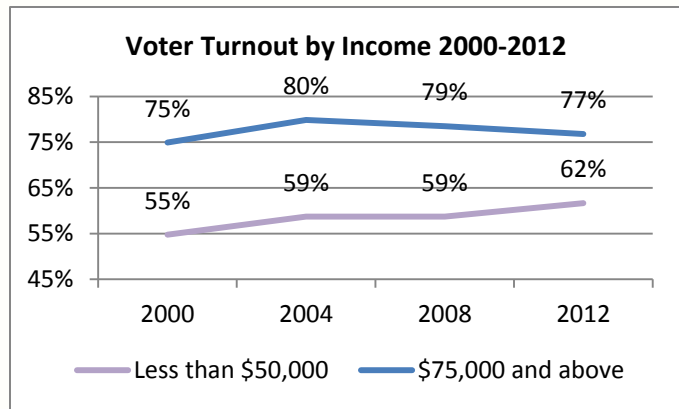
Charts show voter turnout as the percent turnout of citizen voting age population.

Voter Turnout by Income

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012 - Detailed Tables*
 Table 7 - Reported Voting and Registration of Family Members, by Age and Family Income

The disparity in voter turnout between members of lower and higher income households is one of the largest and most persistent gaps. Several factors contribute, including higher mobility among lower income households, inadequate transportation, lack of information about the voting process, and the lack of contact from traditional campaigns and political parties.

- There was a 15 point gap in voter turnout between members of lower income and higher income households in 2012—the smallest it has been in the last four presidential elections. 62% of those with a household income of less than \$50,000 turned out, compared to 77% of those living in households earning more than \$75,000.
- Reforms like same day registration and early in-person voting have helped to reduce this gap. Learn more about the effects of these and other reforms in *America Goes to the Polls: Voter Turnout in the 2012 Election*, available on our website.

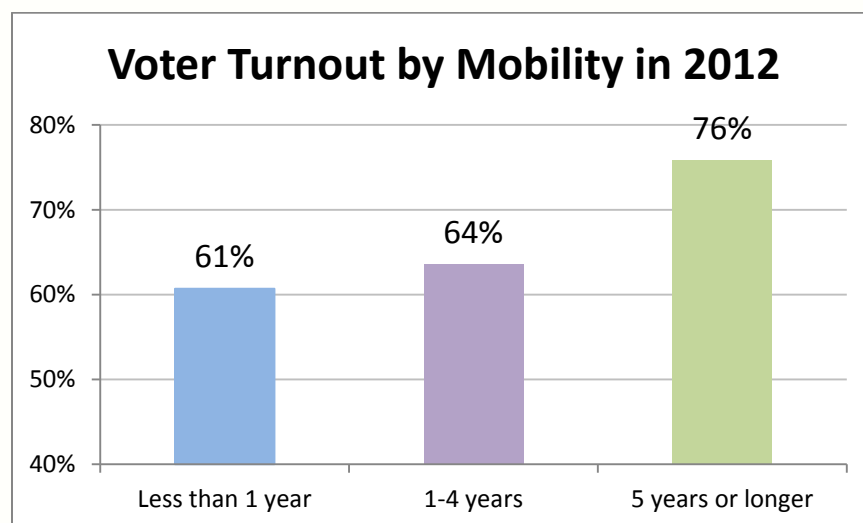
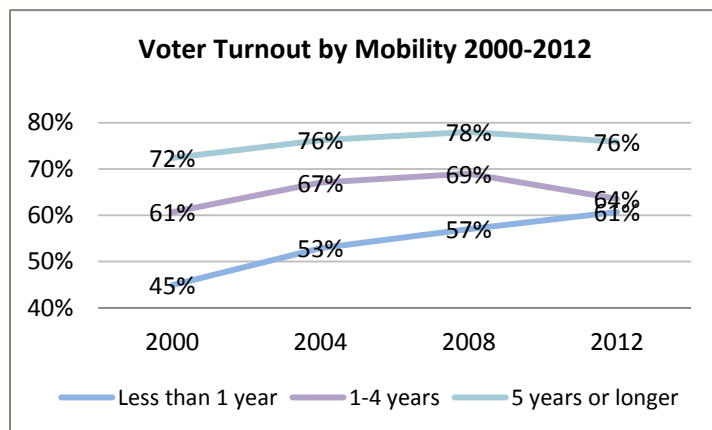


Voter Turnout by Length of Residency

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012 - Detailed Tables*
 Table 8 - Reported Voting and Registration, by Duration of Residence, and Tenure

The disparity in voter turnout between those who have been at their current address for less than a year and those who have resided at their current address for more than 5 years is another large and persistent gap. Voters who have recently moved must re-register, which requires obtaining, completing, and returning a form prior to the next registration deadline. Once registered, voters must still identify and find transportation to their new polling location. Younger voters and lower income voters, both highly mobile populations, are most affected by these challenges.

- In 2012, 15 points separated those who had resided at their current address for less than a year (61% turnout) from those who had resided at their current address for at least 5 years (76% turnout). This disparity has decreased over the last four presidential elections, though it remains steady at around 33-34% in recent midterm elections.
- This gap could be reduced dramatically through registration modernizations like same day registration, online registration, and the pre-registration of 16- and 17-year-olds.
- Technological innovations are making it easier for highly mobile populations to participate. Paperless online registration (available in 12 states and set to be implemented in six others) makes it possible to register anytime or anywhere.

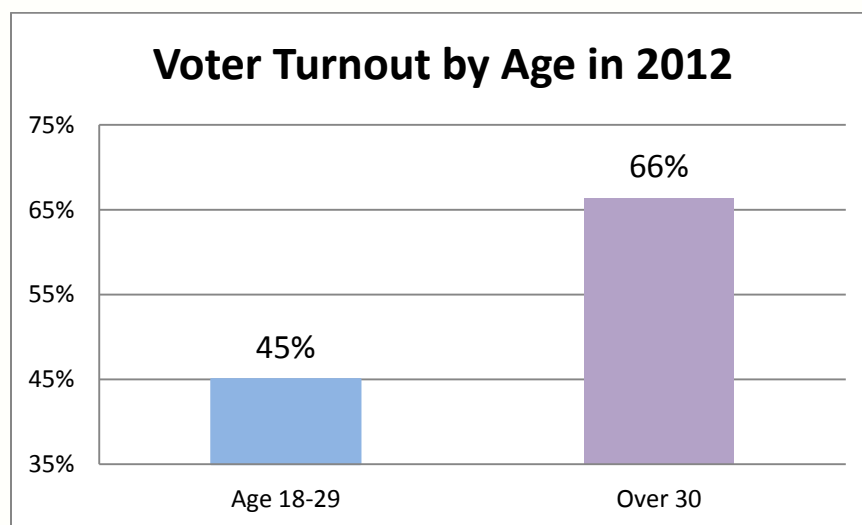
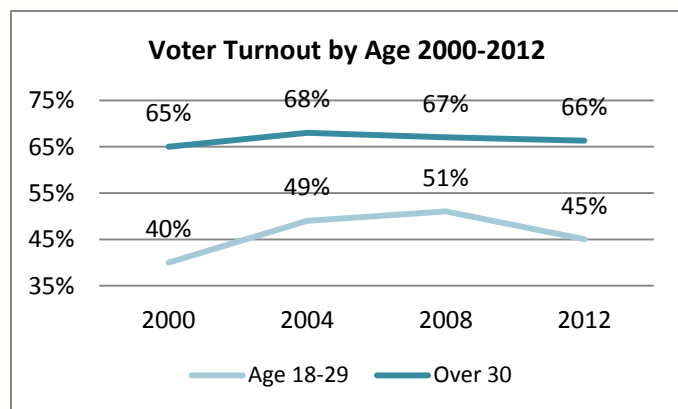


Voter Turnout by Age

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012 - Detailed Tables*
 Table 1 - Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex and Single Years of Age

In recent years turnout among youth aged 18-29 has increased in presidential elections, reaching a high of 51% of the citizen youth population in 2008. In 2012, the number dropped to 45%, lower than estimates had predicted.

- 45% of citizen youth aged 18-29 turned out in 2012, down from 51% in 2008.
- Registration and voting barriers disproportionately impact young voters, who tend to be much more mobile than other groups and are increasingly diverse. However, reforms such as pre-registration, online registration, and same day or Election Day Registration all have the potential to significantly increase turnout among young voters.
- CIRCLE calculated that in 2008, youth in states with Election Day Registration voted at a rate 9 points higher than the national youth turnout rate. In states that mailed sample ballots and information about polling places and extended polling place hours, youth turnout increased by about 10%. See CIRCLE's "State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout" for more information.

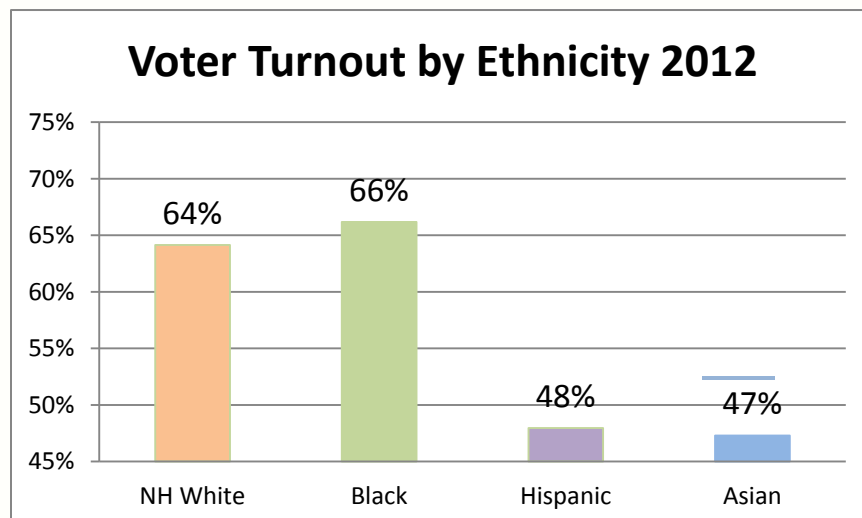
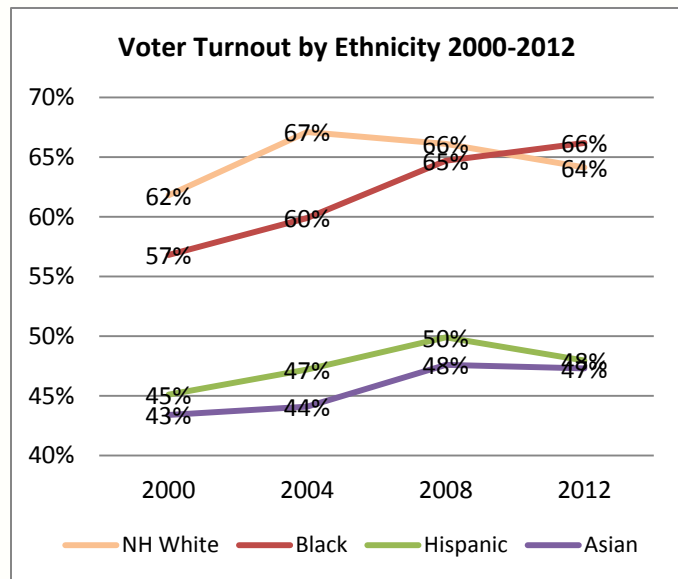


Voter Turnout by Ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012 - Detailed Tables*
 Table 4b - Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2012

Ethnicity continues to be an important predictor of voter turnout. Black and non-Hispanic white voters continue to turn out at much higher rates than Latino and Asian-American voters, a trend that has not changed in recent years. Demographic factors such as income, mobility, and age often exacerbate this gap.

- Black turnout—66% in 2012—exceeded non-Hispanic white turnout for the first time in a federal election.
- Latino and Asian-American turnout, at 48% and 47% respectively, continues to trail white and black turnout by 16 to 19 points.
- Both the Latino and Asian-American voting populations are markedly younger than the white and black voting populations. As these populations age, turnout rates are expected to rise.



Methodology and Source

This report is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012, a set of tables that compares voting and registration patterns by demographic, social, and geographic characteristics. The data is collected through the Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of about 50,000 households conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Learn more at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/>.

The CPS has collected data for every presidential and midterm election since 1964. It is a longstanding and widely cited survey used by scholars for demographic analysis of voter participation. Because the data is collected via survey, respondents do over (and under) report their voting and registration behavior. However, because of the sample size and consistent methodology, the CPS is particularly useful for comparing turnout rates among demographic groups in a particular election and over time.

Voter Participation Gaps in the 2012 Presidential Election summarizes the detailed information from the tables into general groupings to make comparisons—i.e. contrasting lower income voters and higher income voters by breaking down annual household income into categories of \$50,000 or less and \$75,000 or more. Turnout by ethnicity uses the Census categories of non-Hispanic white voters, black alone, Asian-American alone, and Hispanic. Figures for black and Asian-American voters include those who also identify as Hispanic. In each case, voter turnout is measured as a percent of the group's citizen voting age population.

The CPS now accounts for survey respondents who either quit the survey before being asked if they voted, or who responded 'don't know' or 'refused to answer.' Previously, these respondents had been grouped together with those who 'reported did not vote.' To maintain consistency, this report continues to calculate voting rates as a percentage of eligible voters who reported voting divided by the total of those who reported being citizens over the age of 18, including non-respondents. While there is strong evidence that most people in the 'no response' category did not in fact vote, this allows us to continue to make comparisons among demographic groups because the data is developed using an identical methodology for each group and with similar margins of error within each group.

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 programs, activities, and services. Visit www.nonprofitvote.org to learn more or contact us at info@nonprofitvote.org.