AMERICA Goes to the Polls 2014

A Report on Voter Turnout in the 2014 Midterm Election
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AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS 2014
A Report on Voter Turnout in the 2014 Midterm Election

Prepared by George Pillsbury, Founder and Senior Consultant
and Julian Johannesen, Director of Research and Training

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 Research Center, CIRCLE: the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, and the National Election Pool Exit Poll by Edison Research. The presentation, content and voter turnout highlights are entirely our own.
INTRODUCTION

High voter turnout and civic participation are central to a healthy democracy. This year, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that swept away a host of practices that barred or discouraged many from the polls. In its wake nonpartisan voter registration drives have been organized across the nation by engaged nonprofits, civic community groups, and others. While these actions have propelled our nation forward, the work of building democracy is never truly done.

In 2014, just under 37% of eligible voters turned out to vote, the lowest level of voter turnout seen in a midterm since World War II. This should be a wake up call for policy makers and all of us to examine the causes and consequences of low voter turnout, and begin charting a course for greater voter participation in our elections, for the health of our nation and the communities we call home.

With low-turnout, the broad public opinion on issues fails to be represented, as campaign strategies and ground games target a limited number of base voters that can more easily turn elections in their favor. It contributes to a more polarized politics and leaves out the important voices of youth or new citizens who are disproportionately overlooked by campaigns and not encouraged to participate.

At a local level, the act of voting grows from and helps foster healthier and more engaged communities. Compared to non-voters, voters are more likely to volunteer, contact their elected officials, and stay informed about local affairs. Additionally, they are more likely to contribute to their neighborhood’s “social capital” and live in communities where neighbors are in contact with one another.

This 5th biannual “America Goes to the Polls” report from Nonprofit VOTE takes a close look at voter turnout across the nation. By ranking the voter turnout of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, coupled with outside sources and research, we shed valuable light onto the more important, underlying questions:

- Why do some states have higher voter turnout than others?
- What can we learn from these states to increase voter turnout nationally?

We call upon citizens, community leaders, and policy makers across the nation and join us in our effort to foster a vibrant, healthy democracy based on the active participation of all the governed.

Brian Miller
Executive Director
Nonprofit VOTE
METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Voter Turnout

This report is based on the official voter turnout data reported by state election offices and collected by the U.S. Elections Project (USEP) directed by Dr. Michael McDonald, Associate Professor at University of Florida. The USEP also provides the most up-to-date estimate of the voting eligible population (VEP) for each state, using current data from the U.S. Census and other government sources.

The USEP reports voter turnout data in two ways: by the vote for “highest office” (the votes cast in a statewide race for U.S. Senate, Governor, etc. that attracted the highest number of votes) and “total ballots counted” (the total number of ballots cast and counted including those of voters who didn’t vote in or whose ballot was for some reason not counted in the highest office race). To more closely reflect the actual number of people voting, America Goes to the Polls uses total ballots counted. Most states report this figure. For the states that don’t, we provide an accurate estimate of their total turnout by using a multiplier based on the average difference between the highest vote turnout and total ballots cast (known as the residual vote) reported by the 42 states that report both.

Other Primary Sources

Pew Research Center: The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan organization that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world with a focus that includes politics, elections and Hispanic population and voting trends. To learn more, visit www.pewresearch.org.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE): CIRCLE conducts research on civic education and on young Americans’ voter and 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.

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 November survey includes questions about voting and registration in federal elections. Census data used in charts for this report is for 2012 and earlier. The Census will release its 2014 voting and registration supplement later this year. To learn more, visit www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting.

National Election Pool Exit Poll: Exit polling was conducted by Edison Research on behalf of the National Election Pool, a consortium of major news outlets. To learn more, visit the New York Times’ interactive exit poll results. To learn about the poll’s methodology visit Edison Research’s FAQ.

Other: Political competition in 2014 statewide races for U.S. Senate, Governor and Congress were determined using vote totals compiled by David Leip’s Election Atlas and the pre-election competition ratings of the Cook Political Report. To learn more, visit uselectionatlas.org and cookpolitical.com.

Additional sources are in the footnotes for each section.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the heels of a drop in voter turnout in the 2012 presidential election, turnout in the 2014 midterm was the lowest since World War II. Just 37% of eligible voters cast ballots, down five points from the 42% of eligible voters who voted in 2010. However, turnout among states varied widely. States with competitive races and Election Day Registration out-performed others by wide margins.

- **Voter turnout averaged 11 points or 33% higher in the 22 states with competitive statewide races** for U.S. Senate or Governor compared to states without a competitive statewide race.

- **Competition in House races did little to draw voters to the polls.** Only 39 of 435 House races were rated as electorally competitive in the lead up to the November midterm by the nonpartisan Cook Political Report. This was down from 100 in 2010 and 57 in 2012.

- **States with Election Day Registration (EDR) far outpaced states** that don’t allow voters to register or fix a registration problem on Election Day. Voter turnout in the EDR States averaged 48%, 12 points above voter turnout in non-EDR states. Four states used EDR for the first time in a midterm in 2014, bringing the total number of states using EDR to 13.

- **Maine led the nation in 2014 with 58.5% turnout among eligible voters,** follow by Wisconsin at 56.8%. Colorado rose from 9th place in 2010 to 3rd in 2014 with turnout of 54.5%.

- **Seven of the top ten states in voter turnout were Election Day Registration states.**

- **Nine of the top ten had competitive statewide races.** In contrast, the 19 states with the lowest turnout states in 2014 had no competitive statewide races. Nor did any of those bottom 19 states allow voters to correct a registration issue when they went to vote. Nevada, Tennessee, New York, Texas and Indiana made up the bottom five with barely more than a quarter of their state’s voters participating.

- **It was again a tale of two electorates between a presidential and a midterm,** the first much older and the second younger and more reflective of the general population. The share of the voting electorate of voters under age 40 dropped dramatically from a 36% share in 2012 to 26% in 2014.
36.6% of citizen eligible voters cast a ballot in the 2014 election, the lowest percentage in a midterm since World War II. Just 83.2 million voters turned out, down from 90.9 million in 2010.

- The drop in voter turnout can be attributed to many factors, including declining electoral competition in many states, record low approval ratings for Congress, and new restrictions on voting. Record spending by outside groups and the negative bias of their advertising likely didn’t help (see page 18).
- Midterm turnout is consistently 15 – 25 points lower than turnout in presidential years. As in other midterms, the biggest drop off was among voters under 40, yielding a much older, less diverse electorate.
- More than half the decline in votes between 2010 and 2014 came from four states: California, New York, Ohio, and Texas. Average turnout in these states was 30%, compared to 40% for the rest of the country. None of these large, populous states had competitive elections in 2014.
**STATE VOTER TURNOUT RANKINGS**

The strongest predictors of a state’s voter turnout are whether a state has a competitive, high-profile, statewide race and whether it has Election Day Registration (EDR), which allows eligible voters to register or fix a registration issue at the polls or their local election office on Election Day or during early voting. Demographics also predict lower turnout in states whose populations are younger, have lower education and income levels, or have greater new citizen populations (Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islander).

- Maine led the nation in voter turnout in 2014 with 58.5% turnout among citizen eligible voters. Wisconsin was a close second at 56.8%. In addition to being Election Day Registration states, both Maine and Wisconsin had very competitive gubernatorial races in 2014.
- Colorado rose from 9th place in 2010 to 3rd in 2014 with turnout of 54.5%. This was Colorado’s first midterm election since implementing both Election Day Registration and mail voting. Colorado’s mail voting program mails a ballot to every registered voter in the state 2-3 weeks in advance of Election Day.
- Seven of the top ten states in voter turnout were EDR states: Maine (1); Wisconsin (2); Colorado (3); Minnesota (6); Iowa (7); New Hampshire (8); and Montana (9).
- Nine of the top ten had competitive statewide races. None of the bottom 20 states did.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>TURNOUT '14</th>
<th>RANK '14</th>
<th>RANK '10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maine*</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin*</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>2 (7)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado*</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>3 (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon^</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota*</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>6 (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa*</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>7 (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire*</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>8 (17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana*</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>9 (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>10 (37)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota*</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>11 (15)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>12 (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>13 (11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>14 (25)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>15 (29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>16 (31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>43.2%</td>
<td>17 (23)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
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<th>RANK '14</th>
<th>RANK '10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington^</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>18 (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connecticut*</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>19 (19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>20 (22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>21 (14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>22 (41)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>23 (38)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois*</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>24 (27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>25 (43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho*</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>26 (28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming*</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>27 (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>28 (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>29 (34)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>30 (30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>31 (40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>32 (36)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>33 (16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>34 (24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**
35.8% 35 (51)

**Source:** U.S. Elections Project. The table ranks states by total ballots cast as a percent of eligible voters in the 2014 general elections (see methodology). 2010 turnout rank in parenthesis.

* Election Day registration state. Note that North Dakota does not have voter registration.
^ Vote by mail only state
TOP 10 STATES IN VOTER TURNOUT

TOTAL BALLOTS CAST AS A PERCENT OF VOTING ELIGIBLE POPULATION

- Louisiana: 45.1%
- Montana: 47.3%
- New Hampshire: 48.4%
- Iowa: 50.2%
- Minnesota: 50.5%
- Oregon: 53.5%
- Alaska: 54.4%
- Colorado: 54.5%
- Wisconsin: 56.8%
- Maine: 58.5%

Source: U.S. Elections Project

PERSISTENTLY LOW TURNOUT STATES

AVERAGE MIDTERM TURNOUT 2002-2014

- Indiana: 34.8%
- New York: 34.7%
- West Virginia: 33.6%
- Mississippi: 32.0%
- Texas: 31.9%
- U.S. Overall: 40.0%

Source: Analysis of U.S. Elections Project data by Nonprofit VOTE.
America Goes to the Polls 2014

CHANGE IN VOTER TURNOUT IN THE STATES

After adjusting for population growth, the District of Columbia, Louisiana, and Wisconsin had the largest increase in voter turnout, seeing increases of 21%, 13%, and 8%, respectively from the last midterm.

- Washington DC had a more competitive mayoral race in 2014 than in 2010. Although the winning candidate won easily, she did face real opposition unlike in 2010 when the winning candidate ran unopposed. The growth could also reflect interest in a ballot question on marijuana legalization and the recent implementation of Election Day Registration.
- Unlike 2010, the Louisiana midterm featured a high profile senate race (Landrieu-D, Cassidy-R) and two contested congressional races that all resulted in run offs. Similarly, Wisconsin, a perennial turnout leader and Election Day Registration state, had a particularly high profile race for Governor (Walker-R, Burke-D).
- With little competition on the ballot compared to 2010, California, Delaware, Missouri, and Nevada all saw turnout declines of more than 25%.
- California’s 2014 turnout, the lowest on record, is impacted by demographics. California has the nation’s largest Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations – populations which are also much younger than white or African American populations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>CHANGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dist of Columbia</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Analysis of U.S. Elections Project data by Nonprofit VOTE. The table ranks states by their percent change in the numbers of voters casting ballots from 2010 to 2014 adjusted to account for their change in voting eligible population.
THE IMPACT OF COMPETITION ON TURNOUT

Political competition is widely viewed as the biggest factor driving voters to the polls. 2014 was no different.

- Voter turnout in the 22 states with the most competitive statewide races for U.S. Senate or Governor was 11 points or 33% higher than that of states without a close race for one of these offices.
- Not surprisingly, 19 of the 20 states with the steepest declines in turnout compared to 2010 lacked a competitive statewide race. For example, Washington state, which had neither a gubernatorial nor Senate race and which is known for high turnout because of its all-mail elections, saw 21% fewer voters and dropped from 3rd to 19th place in turnout.
- Competition in House races reached its lowest level on record. In its pre-election ratings of the 435 House seats, the Cook Political Report listed only 39 House races as electorally competitive with 396 considered safe or very likely to go to one of the two major parties.1 This compares to 100 close or toss up races in 2010 and 57 in 2012.


Source: Analysis of election results reported by David Leap’s Election Atlas and state official election website.

Competitive states had one or more statewide races for US Senate, Governor or Congress with margin of victory less than 10%.

Source: Cook Political Report. “Toss Up” and “Lean” races denote competitive races. “Likely” denotes races in which the victor was likely to be from a particular party. “Solid” denotes non-competitive races.
ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

States with Election Day Registration (EDR) have consistently higher voter participation rates, even after adjusting for all other turnout factors, a trend that continued in 2014.\(^2\) Election Day Registration 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.

- In 2014, states with Election Day Registration had average turnout of 48%, 12 points higher than the turnout in states without EDR which averaged just 36%.
- The number of states with Election Day Registration now stands at 13. Four – Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, and Illinois – used EDR for the first time in a midterm in 2014. The nine other EDR states include Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming as well as North Dakota which does not require voters to register.
- Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Maine first introduced Election Day Registration in the mid-1970s. Over the last 40 years, EDR has helped foster a culture of high voter participation in those states and elsewhere. The next two states to implement EDR are California, once the state has completed its statewide voter registration database, and Hawaii in 2018.
- In Colorado, EDR in combination with a variety of ways to submit a ballot (by mail or at voting centers, either early in-person or on Election Day) resulted in a 98% reduction of provisional ballots and a cost savings for counties over previous elections.

\(^2\) States that implement Election Day Registration could be expected to see an average increase of 3-5% in voter turnout in most elections, according to Jan Leighley and Jonathan Nagler in their book *Who Votes Now?: Demographics, Issues, Inequality and Turnout in the United States* (2014) and other sources.
EARLY VOTING IN 2014

Early voting in-person or by mail continues to grow in popularity. 29% of the voting electorate cast their ballot before Election Day in 2014, up four points over 2010.

- Early voting remains slightly more popular in higher turnout presidential years, but its growth is steady in all types of elections.
- Colorado joined Oregon and Washington to become the third state to mail a ballot to every registered voter. These states allow a ballot to be returned through the mail or at a drop off location. In 2014, Colorado still permitted voting at “vote centers” or local election offices on Election Day, in addition to letting voters register or update their registration on Election Day.
- Early voting continues to be more popular in the West than elsewhere. An estimated 51% of voters voted early in western states compared to just 8% in the East, according to a Pew Research post-election poll.  

**INCREASE IN EARLY VOTING**

![Graph showing increase in early voting from 1994 to 2014](image)

Source: US Census, CPS Voting and Registration Supplement

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YOUTH VOTE 2014

Of all demographics, the greatest drop off in voting from a presidential year to a midterm is among young voters under 40. The share of the electorate composed of voters under 40 fell ten points from 36% in 2012 to 26% in 2014. This creates two different electorates in national elections: one more reflective of the eligible voting population in presidential elections and the other skewing much older in midterm elections. In past years, those two electorates had little partisan difference between them. However, that has changed since 2006 as voters over 55 have swung strongly to Republicans and younger voters skew more Democratic, though the youth vote identifies more than any other group as independent and is less tied to one party.

- While the share of the electorate that turned out to vote fell among younger voters compared to 2012, it rose 10 points among voters over 50, from 44% in the 2012 presidential to 55% in the 2014 midterm.
- The drop off in youth voting was similar to past presidential to midterm drop offs, a reason why that demographic group continues to be the least targeted by political campaigns or advocacy organizations for voter mobilization. (See page 18).
- The turnout rate among young voters under 30 rose slightly from the last midterm election; from 20% in 2010 to 21% in 2014, as estimated by CIRCLE.5

4 National Election Pool Exit Poll, 2014
5 CIRCLE’s estimates of youth turnout closely track the Census estimates in their biennial Voting and Registration report.
LATINO VOTE 2014

Latinos are the fastest growing part of the electorate, but in 2014 had little opportunity to influence the outcomes of the most competitive statewide races. Half the Latino population lives in California, Texas, and New York – states that had no competitive races for Senate or Governor in 2014. Still Latinos now make up 11% of eligible voters with the potential for political clout at the ballot box, in running for office, and on a number of issues.  

- In 2014 25.2 million Latinos were eligible to vote. Latinos have added one million new voters to the electorate each year since 2010.  
- According to national exit polls, the Latino share of the electorate – 8% – remained the same as four years earlier. In the 2012 presidential election, the Latino share of the electorate was 10%.  
- Comparatively low Latino turnout could be attributed to many factors, among them:  
  - **Age.** Young voters turn out at much lower rates than older voters, particularly in midterms, and the Latino population is a young population, with an average age of 27 years compared to 42 years for non-Hispanic whites.  
  - **Contact and competition.** 55% of Latinos reported never being contacted by a party or campaign about voting or registering to vote in 2014, partly because many were seen as less likely voters due to age and residence outside of states with the most competitive races for Senate, governor, or House.  
  - **Immigration.** Latinos rated immigration as their number one issue in the 2014 election. Frustration over a lack of progress on immigration reform in the lead up to the 2014 election may also have had a negative effect on turnout.

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7 Ibid  
8 Ibid  
9 http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/11/14/an-awakened-giant-the-hispanic-electorate-is-likely-to-double-by-2030/  
10 Latino Decisions Election Eve Poll, October 2014  
11 Latino Voters and the Midterm Elections, Pew Research Center, October 2014  
12 Ibid
LATINO SHARE OF THE MIDTERM ELECTORATE

1994-2014

GROWTH IN LATINO ELIGIBLE VOTERS

MILLIONS OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS, 1986-2014

ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE 2014

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have the fastest growing voting eligible population in the nation.¹³

- In 2014, AAPI voters saw the largest increase in share of the electorate of any demographic, going from one percent to three percent of the electorate in the National Election Pool exit poll.
- AAPI eligible voters now represent more than five percent of the voting eligible population in seven states – Hawaii, California, Nevada, Washington, New Jersey, New York, and Alaska.¹⁴

GROWTH IN AAPI ELIGIBLE VOTERS


OTHER FACTORS IN VOTER TURNOUT

The report has already highlighted how voter turnout could be higher with more political competition or if all states allowed voters to register or fix registration issues on Election Day. There are numerous other factors that contribute to high or low voter turnout. Here are just a few more data points reported in the wake of the election that relate to turnout and that are only partially addressed by competition and Election Day Registration.

- Voters often cite being too busy to vote, though the real reason for not voting may be lack of information on what’s on the ballot or lack of interest in non-competitive races. More and better opportunities to register to vote, to become educated about voting and what’s on the ballot, and to vote early could all help.

(SOME) REASONS FOR NOT VOTING

- Too Busy, Out of Town, Sick, or Forgot: 34%
- Didn’t Like Candidates, Didn’t Know Enough or Didn’t Care: 20%
- Missed Registration Deadline, Recently Moved, or No Transportation: 10%
- Schedule Conflicts with Work or School: 35%
- Structural Reasons: 45%
- Personal Reasons: 54%

Source: Pew Research Center via Washington Post Wonkblog
America Goes to the Polls 2014

• Negative ads sway voters, but also feed cynicism. At the same time, removing limits to campaign donations and the explosion of negative ads appear to correspond with a drop in turnout in the last two national elections. Sheila Krumholz, Executive Director of the Center for Responsive Politics noted, “As the post-Citizens United campaign finance system matures, we’re seeing evidence that the traditional campaign apparatus has been overtaken by shadow counterparts. These unaccountable actors give lie to the notion that they are independent of the candidates, and the negative nature of their participation will likely further suppress turnout that is already (expected to be) low.”

![Growth in Independent Expenditures in Midterm Elections](image)

2002-2014

- 2002: $27.6
- 2006: $69.5
- 2010: $309.8
- 2014: $565.1

Source: Center for Responsive Politics (Open Secrets)

• As much as any activity, political scientists agree personal contact is a powerful force in voter turnout. Yet registered voters are getting harder to find through traditional methods at home or on the phone. This speaks for the need to reach voters in public settings where they go for work, to attend school or to receive services, and through peer to peer social communication methods.

![Contacted by Candidates and Political Groups](image)

Registered Voters Contacted at Home or by Phone, 2014

- 18-29: 25%
- 30-39: 34%
- 50-64: 36%
- 65+: 43%

Source: “Campaign Outreach and Involvement in 2014 Midterms”, Pew Research Center

15 Center for Responsive Politics, Open Secrets.org, October, 2014
The National Election Pool exit poll is conducted for each national election by Edison Research on behalf of a consortium of major media outlets. In 2014, the poll included 19,441 voters and asked questions about their gender, age, ethnicity, choice of candidate, and issue concerns. The poll offers the most reliable profile of the American electorate until the U.S. Census releases its biennial Voting and Registration report in the spring of 2015.16 

The table below shows the composition of the voting electorate by demographics like age and gender, as well as partisan choice for 2014, 2012, and 2010.

- The share of the vote by demographic group was mostly the same as the last midterm. However, there was a notable increase in the share of the vote represented by Asian American voters. The share of the vote also rose for youth and black voters.
- There was a large difference between the composition of the 2012 presidential electorate and the 2014 midterm electorate. The most striking differences were in age and income: Particularly the six point drop in the share of the electorate of young voters under 30 and a related five point drop for those earning less than $50,000.
- The partisan polarization among demographics has grown in recent years between older, non-Hispanic white men and younger voters or voters of color. In contrast, as recently as 2002 young and old voters were evenly split between the parties. Likewise, men favored Democrats by six points in 2008, but have now given Republicans a large advantage in the last three cycles.17
- The exit poll reported rising support among Asian American voters for Republicans but relied on a very small sample size for this demographic. Other polls with larger sample sizes showed no change in their partisan leanings from 2010 or 2012.18

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOTE BY GENDER</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>VOTE BY ETHNICITY</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>VOTE BY AGE</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and over</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOTE BY INCOME</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below $50 K</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td><strong>38%</strong></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above $50 K</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See the fourth bullet above chart.
** Estimated based on income breakdowns.

Source: National Election Pool Exit Poll

16 U.S. Census, Voting and Registration
18 See Asian American Decisions Election Eve Poll, November 2014
MODERNIZING VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration is the first step to voting. It confirms a voter’s eligibility and determines which candidates and offices will appear on their ballot. Many states use it to determine political party preference for the purpose of voting in primaries or participating in party activities.

As such, voter registration is the foundation of how we hold elections. Yet despite recent advances in technology, registration remains the most likely part of the voting process to disenfranchise eligible voters. More than 51 million citizens, or 25 percent of those eligible, remain unregistered. One in eight voter registration records in the U.S. contain a serious error. With voters changing addresses frequently, the inevitable mistakes in data entry and list maintenance make it challenging to keep current and accurate rolls for America’s 230 million eligible voters.

Moreover, all 50 states have a different procedure for registering voters. North Dakota doesn’t require registration, and instead builds its voter list from voters who have voted in previous elections or present identification on Election Day. Twenty states have online voter registration, but most still use paper forms. Fourteen states allow voters to register or update their registration on Election Day. While 36 still maintain advance deadlines, the growing number of Election Day Registration states has shown it to be unnecessary.

**Election Day Registration**

Enacted in the 1970s by Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, Election Day Registration (EDR) allows voters to register or update their registration on Election Day. Ten additional states and the District of Columbia have since adopted EDR. In some states, voters may register or update their registration at the polls. Other states require registrants to go to their county board or local election office. Each state has developed effective methods to verify registrations and count ballots cast that same day.

Election Day Registration 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. It also greatly reduces the need for provisional ballots, allowing ballots to be counted faster and for results to be certified sooner. Election Day Registration also leads to increased voter turnout: States that allow voters to register and update their registration information on Election Day have turnout that averages over time to at least 10 points above states that do not.

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20 Ibid
Online Voter Registration

Twenty four states have implemented or passed legislation to allow for online paperless voter registration. Online voter registration offers several advantages over traditional paper-based registration, including:

Cost savings: It eliminates some of the printing, distribution, and data entry costs associated with paper registration forms. In Arizona in 2010, the costs associated with a paper registration were 83 cents per registration while online registration was just 3 cents per registration. In California during the month before the registration deadline for the 2012 general election, nearly 900,000 Californians conducted online registration transactions. The Secretary of State's office estimated savings of $2.34 per online registration—or about $2 million—compared with paper processing costs.

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21 National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Online Voter Registration
22 Understanding Online Voter Registration, Pew Research Center, Jan. 2014
23 Brennan Center for Justice, Voter Registration Modernization
Reduction in the use of provisional ballots: In 2008, half of the provisional ballots issued to voters nationwide were attributable to problems with the voter rolls. Online registration helps reduce errors made by individuals during the registration process and eliminates the possibility of transcription errors by data entry personnel, leading to more accurate, cleaner voter lists.

Increased registration and turnout among young voters: Studies of online registration show that younger voters are more likely to register when online tools are available. In Arizona, registration rates increased from 29 percent to 53 percent among voters aged 18 to 24 with the adoption of an online system.\(^{24}\) In California, 30 percent of the voters who registered online in 2012 were under 25. And those who did so were significantly more likely to turn out on Election Day, according to a University of California-Davis study, helping increase youth turnout by eight percent in 2012 over four years earlier.\(^{25}\) Similarly, in Arizona in 2008, 94 percent of online registrants voted compared to 85 percent of those who registered by paper.\(^{26}\)

States with Online Voter Registration and the year implemented or enacted\(^ {27}\):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year Implanted or Enacted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts*</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska*</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nebraska*</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York**</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{24}\) The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations, Presidential Commission on Election Administration, 2014, p. 26
\(^{25}\) Online Voting States, Politico, 2013
\(^{26}\) The American Voting Experience, op. cit. p. 26
\(^{27}\) Online Voter Registration, The National Conference of State Legislatures
Pre-Registration

Pre-registration allows young people to complete the registration process (but not vote) before they turn 18, welcoming them to the political process and building enthusiasm early on that can turn voting into a lifelong habit.28

Many young people visit the DMV for the first time years before they become eligible to vote. Pre-registration allows them to use that visit to register. Pre-registration also creates broader opportunities for youth to register in high school or through other civic youth activities. By tackling 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. Jurisdictions in 10 states – Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Rhode Island – and the District of Columbia allow or have enacted legislation allowing 16 or 17 year-olds to pre-register to vote even if they will not turn 18 before the next election.29

Active Voter Registration

Because voter registration is required but not automatic, national, state, and local governments should do more to actively register voters. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA) was a start, requiring departments of motor vehicles and public assistance offices to proactively register voters. However, adherence to the NVRA has been lax and has increased largely because of recent lawsuits to bring states into compliance. In 2011, the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) revised its guidelines on voter registration applications to provide new citizens the opportunity to register at every administrative naturalization ceremony in the country.

Oregon is about to become the first state to make voter registration automatic as part of the application for a driver’s license or state ID. Instead of depending on DMV staff to make a separate ask about voter registration, eligible voters will be automatically registered when they apply. The individual will be notified of their new voter registration and offered the opportunity to enroll in a political party or to opt out of registering altogether.

Electronic Registration Information Center

ERIC—the Electronic Registration Information Center—is another innovation that is expanding and improving the quality of state voter lists. Started in 2012, 11 states and the District of Columbia have joined. These states share technologies and tools to match current voter registration lists with other government databases like agencies that issue drivers licenses and state IDs. This allows them to create cleaner more accurate lists and identify and reach out to eligible voters who are not yet registered. In its first three years, ERIC has identified more than 12 million potential eligible but unregistered voters. For more information visit www.ericstates.org/faq.

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28 Voter Pre-Registration Programs. Michael McDonald, Associate Professor, University of Florida, 2010
29 Pre-Registration, The National Conference of State Legislatures
Recommendations
Simplify and improve the registration experience and streamline the process for elections officials by:

- Implementing online, paperless voter registration.
- Allowing Election Day Registration or including same-day registration during early voting periods.
- Enabling young people to pre-register to vote.
- Actively registering voters during interactions with government agencies.
- Having more states join ERIC to locate and reach out to unregistered voters.

EARLY VOTING IN-PERSON AND BY MAIL

Early voting continues to grow in popularity (see page 12). Almost two-thirds of states now offer “no-excuse” absentee or in-person voting. Others allow individuals to register as a permanent absentee voter, automatically receiving a mail ballot for every election. Voters like early voting because of the convenience and flexibility it provides beyond a 12-13 hour window on a workday. Election officials like it because it helps manage costs and can reduce long lines on Election Day. Early voting has also been associated with increased voter participation, especially in otherwise lower turnout elections.

Early voting does have issues, particularly when it comes to mail ballots. Mail ballots are more prone to spoilage, voter error, and problems with postal delivery. Elections conducted entirely by mail will lower turnout among younger and lower income populations who move frequently and rarely use traditional mail – if at all.

Recommendations
- Increase in-person early voting during the two weeks leading up to Election Day with weekend hours and locations convenient to as many voters as possible.
- Allow voters to sign up as a permanent absentee voter and automatically receive a ballot by mail in every election.
- For vote by mail elections ensure ballots are easily available and designate drop-off locations where mail ballots can be returned in-person (as in Oregon and Washington) to mitigate the bias of mail elections on populations that don’t use the mail.
- Use all-mail elections selectively, mainly in lower turnout contests and in rural areas.
RESTORING VOTING RIGHTS FOR EX-OFFENDERS

After the Civil War, states created laws denying the franchise to people with a felony conviction. These laws were largely intended to limit the new voting rights of former slaves. A felony 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 established democracies that does not automatically restore the right to vote to people leaving prison. Among 45 advanced democracies, only Armenia, Belgium, Chile and the U.S. restrict voting as part of sentencing or punishment post-release from jail or 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. Today only 15 states and the District of Columbia automatically allow citizens to vote upon release. Because these laws vary widely from state to state, many ex-offenders are disenfranchised by misinformation, believing they cannot vote when in many states they can.

Preventing people from voting once they are out of 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. 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 virtually no other advanced democracy does so after prisoners are released.

Recommendations

The United States should adopt the democratic standard already used in 15 states and all other democracies:

- Allow (and encourage) voting eligible citizens to register and vote after leaving prison and upon reentry into society.
- Create a single standard for all 50 states—ending the denial of voting and civic participation as a form of punishment, the unnecessary confusion around eligibility for ex-offenders, and the discrepancies between states using different standards to define who can (and cannot) vote in federal elections.

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33 Among 45 advanced democracies, only Armenia, Belgium, Chile and the U.S. restrict voting as part of sentencing or punishment post-release from jail or prison. ProCon.org, felon voting
34 Brennan Center for Justice, Restoring Voting Rights
35 Status Updated: Restoration of Civil Rights' (RCR) Cases Granted 2009 and 2010, Florida Parole Commission
NONPARTISAN REDISTRICTING

Every ten years legislative incumbents choose their voters long before voters get the chance to choose them. Legislators use increasingly sophisticated software and detailed data on voting histories and demographics to divide communities into districts that are safe for incumbents and make meaningful opposition much more difficult. Reapportionment by partisan elected officials is quite simply democracy in reverse.

In 2014, only 39 of the nation’s 435 Congressional seats were considered electorally competitive. The story is no different for state legislatures and local councils. A broken system born of the original “gerrymander” in the 19th century by Massachusetts Governor Gerry (after which the system is named), it has become increasingly contentious in the 21st century. Advances in technology and today’s hyper partisanship have seen the number of competitive districts drop dramatically in the last four decades. Whoever is doing the gerrymandering, whether a single party in power or both parties colluding, the bottom line is fewer choices for voters if any choice at all.

Recommendations

No democracy should have incumbent partisan officials designing their own districts.

- Adopt nonpartisan commissions made up of a cross-section of respected community leaders, judges, or others similar to Arizona and California, or the boundary commissions used in the UK to draw political districts after the Census. Or, at a minimum, employ the type of bipartisan legislative commissions used by Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Jersey, and Washington.

- Have commissions use criteria that encourage political competition and keep communities together where possible.

- Replace with “Use public hearings and ensure transparency, allowing voters to have input into the redistricting process.

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36 Cooks Political Report, November 3, 2014
37 Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission
38 National Conference of State Legislatures, Redistricting Commissions