

AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS

Voter Participation Gaps in the 2010 Midterm Election

American democracy is challenged by large gaps in voter turnout by income, educational attainment, length of residency, age, ethnicity and other factors. Closing these gaps will require a sustained effort to understand and address the numerous and complex reasons some citizens participate at lower rates than others. Recent attacks on the right to vote lend new urgency to this effort. Attempts to roll back early voting, same-day voter registration, Election Day Registration and other voting reforms threaten to further exacerbate voting gaps and drive down turnout among minorities, lower income citizens, and young voters.

This report illustrates some of these voter turnout gaps 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. The report is based on new data released in October 2011 from the U.S. Census biennial survey on voting and registration in midterm and presidential elections.

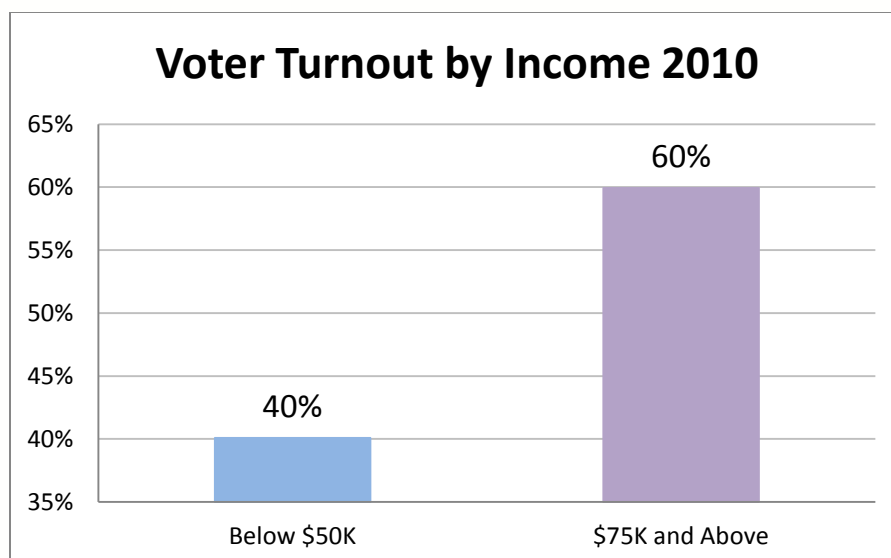
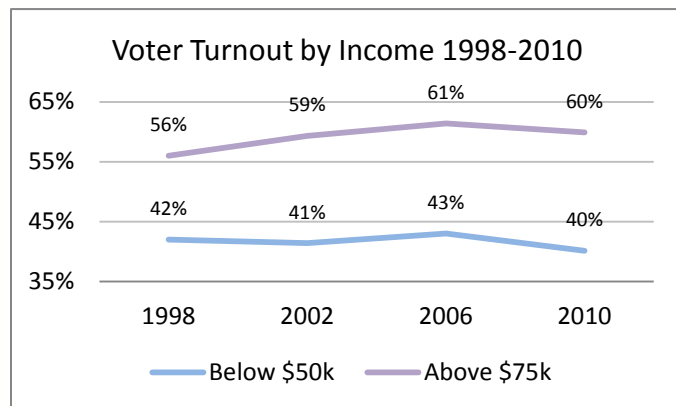
America Goes to the Polls: Voter Participation Gaps in the 2010 Midterm Election is a product of Nonprofit VOTE's ongoing effort to provide information about voter turnout trends and gaps in an accessible, friendly format. Our biennial report *America Goes to the Polls* compiles data on voter turnout rates and on changes in turnout between and among various constituencies. It is the only report to rank states based on turnout rates and on changes in turnout between comparable elections. It also examines the impact of electoral competition, campaign spending, Election Day Registration, and early voting on turnout. Visit our website to learn more about the *America Goes to the Polls* series or download a report.

Voter Turnout by Income

Source: U.S. Census 2010 Current Population Survey, Table 7

The turnout gap based on household income is one of the largest and most persistent gaps. Several factors contribute to this gap, including higher mobility among lower income households, inadequate transportation, lack of information about the voting process and the failure of traditional campaigns and political parties to reach out to lower income voters.

- There was a 20 point turnout gap between members of lower income and higher income households in 2010. Only 40% of those whose family income was less than \$50,000 turned out, compared to 60% of those from households earning more than \$75,000.
- In the survey, lower income voters cite transportation problems, registration issues, and lack of awareness of the election as reasons for not voting. The latter corresponds to research showing that lower income voters are less likely to be personally contacted by a campaign about voting.
- Reforms in many states, like same-day registration, Election Day Registration, and early in-person voting, have helped to reduce this gap. Learn more about these and other reforms in *America Goes to the Polls: Voter Turnout in the 2008 Election*, available on our website.

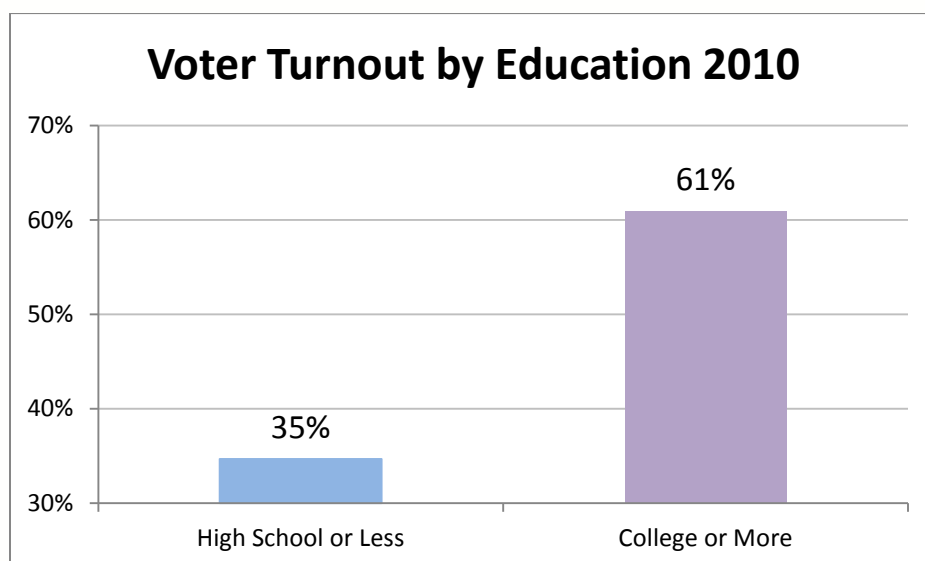
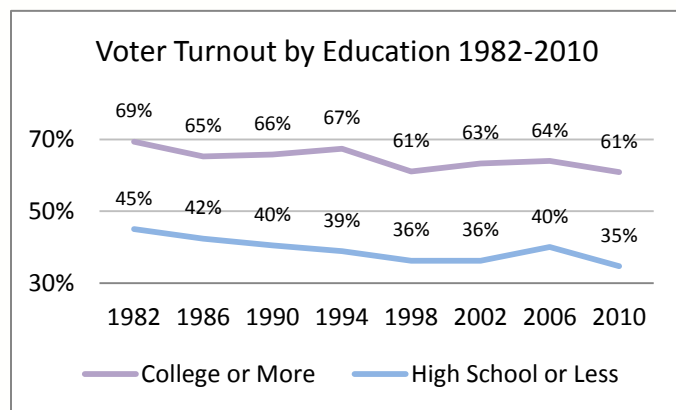


Voter Turnout by Educational Attainment

Source: U.S. Census 2010 Current Population Survey, Table 5a

The gap between voters with a college degree and those with a high school diploma is one of the larger turnout gaps. Lower educational attainment correlates with other factors that also reflect lower turnout rates, like lower income levels and increased mobility.

- Only 35% of those with a high school diploma or less turned out to vote in 2010, compared to 61% of those with a college degree or more – a 26 point gap.
- Lower educational attainment often translates to less familiarity with the voting process, knowledge of the candidates and issues, and less trust in government. States and jurisdictions can promote voter education by providing voters with sample ballots, opportunities to try out voting machines before Election Day, and by making greater efforts to incorporate voter education into schools and adult education and literacy programs.
- The educational attainment gap makes it clear that we must do more to engage voters through innovative and non-traditional strategies – particularly outreach and registration efforts that reach non-college youth at alternative locations like nonprofits, community centers, and places of worship.

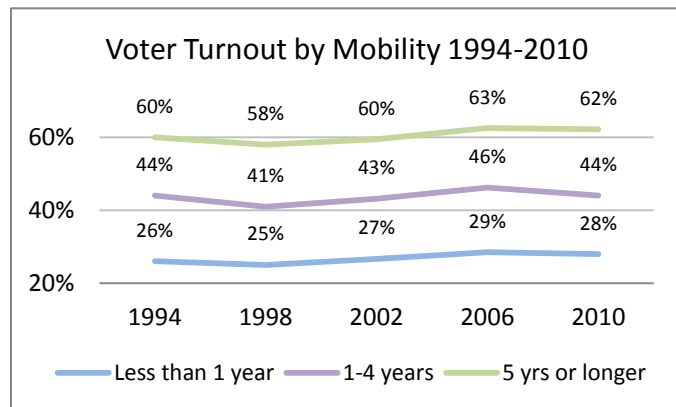


Voter Turnout by Length of Residency

Source: U.S. Census 2010 Current Population Survey, Table 8

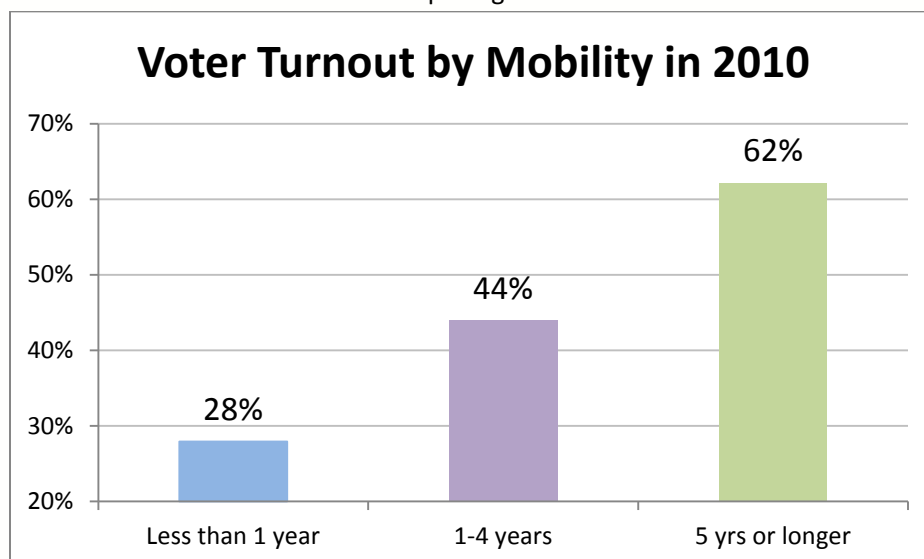
The turnout gap between those who have been in their home for less than a year and those who have resided in their home for more than 5 years is enormous. Voters who have recently moved face special challenges because they must re-register, which requires obtaining, completing, and returning a form prior to the registration deadline. Once registered, voters must still locate and get to their new polling location. Younger voters and lower income voters, both highly mobile populations, are most severely affected by these challenges.

- There was a 34 point turnout gap between individuals who had resided in their home for less than a year (28% turnout) and those who had resided in their home for at least 5 years (62% turnout).



- The severity of this gap could be reduced dramatically through registration modernization, including same-day and Election Day Registration, online registration and pre-registration.

- Technological innovations are making it easier for highly mobile populations to participate. Online registration makes it possible to register anytime or anywhere, while online poll locators guide voters to the correct location on Election Day. It may also be possible in the near future for state or local elections offices to send voters polling information and directions via text message.

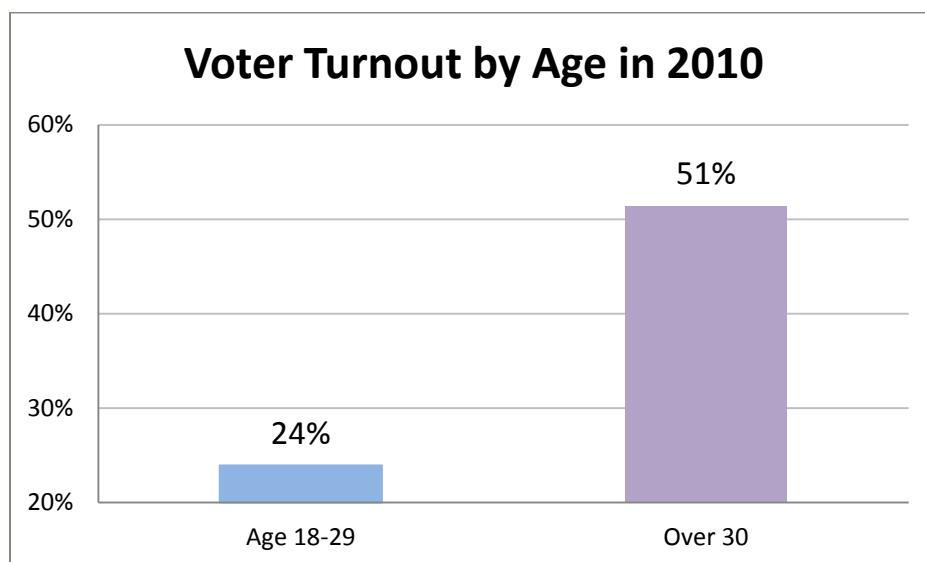
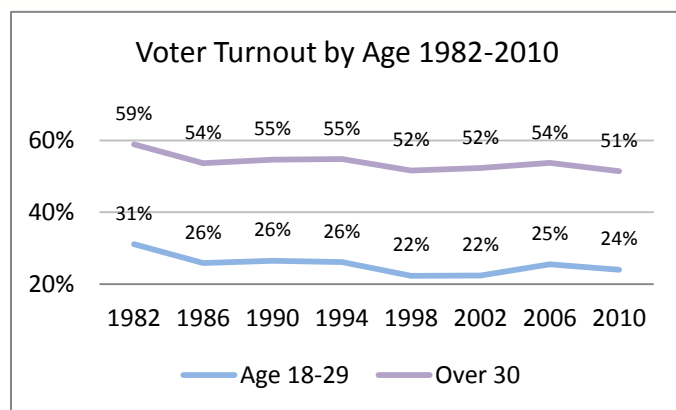


Voter Turnout by Age

Source: U.S. Census 2010 Current Population Survey, Table 1

In recent years turnout among youth aged 18-29 has increased in presidential elections, reaching a high of 51.1% of the citizen youth population in 2008. Youth turnout in midterm elections however, has remained relatively low.

- 24% of citizen youth aged 18-29 turned out in 2010, down from 25% in 2006.
- 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, portable registration, online registration, same-day or Election Day Registration, and early in-person voting 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.

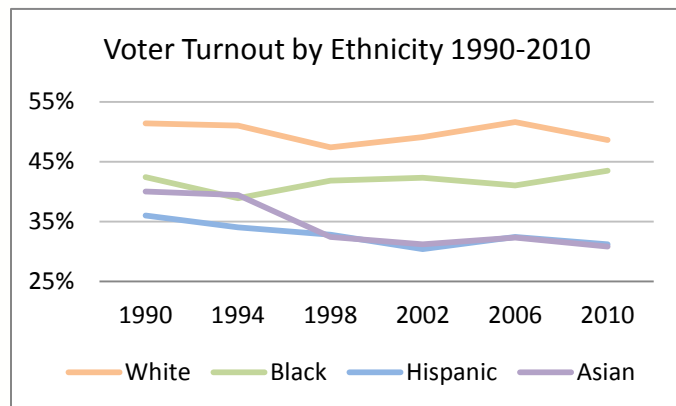


Voter Turnout by Ethnicity

Source: U.S. Census 2010 Current Population Survey, Table 2a, 4b

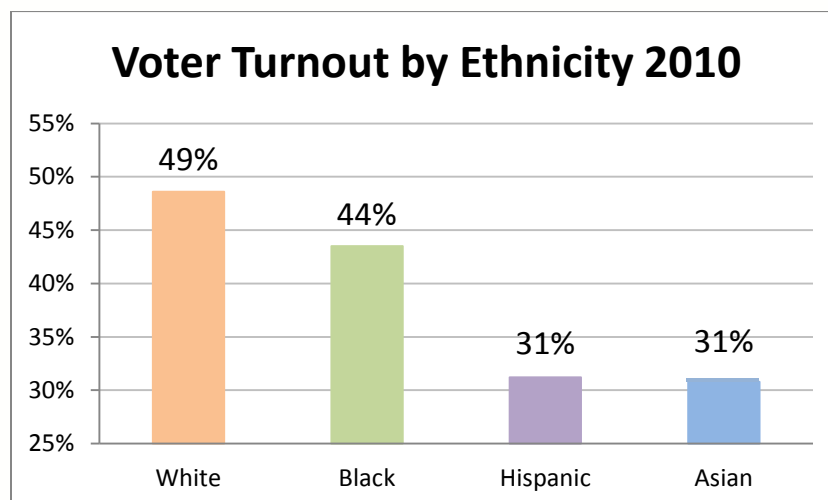
Ethnicity continues to be an important predictor of voter turnout. Non-Hispanic white and black voters continue to turn out at much higher rates than Latino and Asian-American voters, a trend that has not changed in recent midterms. Demographic factors such as income, mobility and age often exacerbate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

- Black turnout – 44% in 2010 – continues to trail white turnout, with the gap widening during midterm elections.
- In several states, most notably Georgia and Alabama, the black turnout rate exceeded the white turnout rate.
- Latino and Asian-American turnout, at 31% each, continue to trail white and black turnout. Florida, however, was an exception, where Latino turnout was 41.4%, and approached white turnout at 45.7%. California and Arizona also saw



higher than average Latino turnout, while in Texas, Latino turnout was just 23.1% – far lower than white turnout at 43.8% – dragging down the national Latino turnout rate. Overall, the Latino share of the electorate continues to increase as the Latino population grows. In 2010 the Latino share of the electorate was 7.0%, up from 5.8% in 2006.

- Both the Latino and Asian-American voting populations are markedly younger than the white and black voting populations. However, as these populations age, turnout rates are expected to rise.

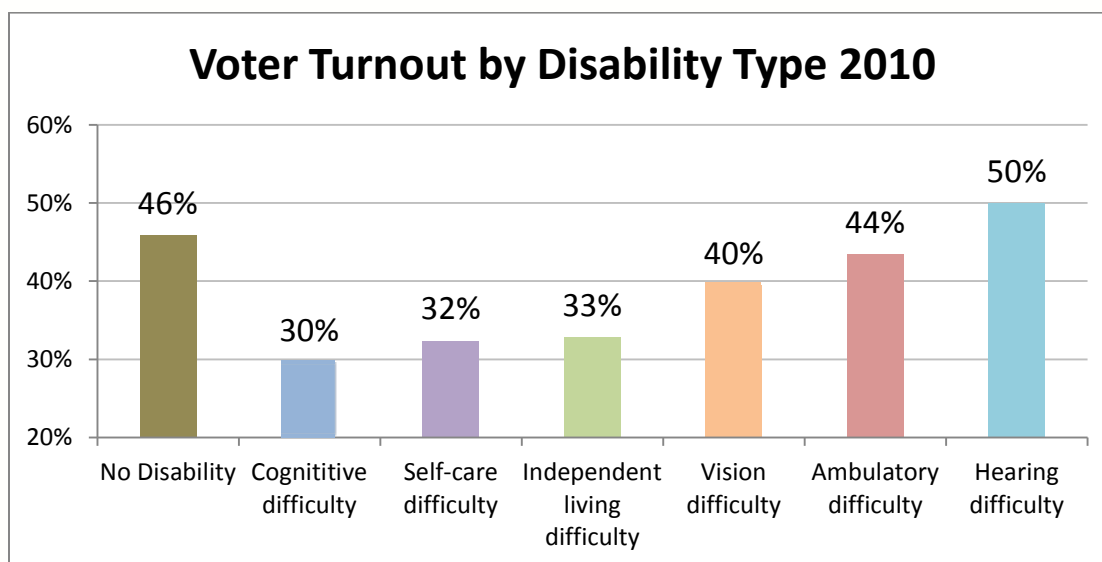
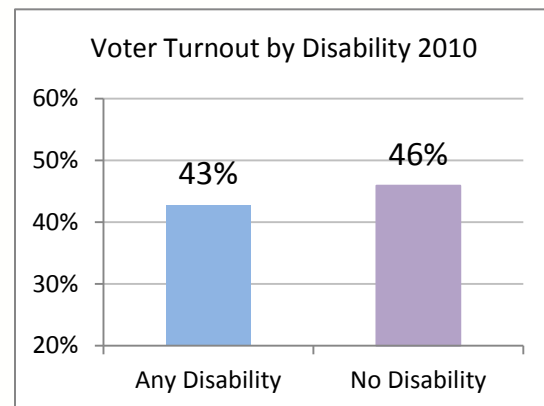


Voter Turnout by Disability

Source: U.S. Census 2010 Current Population Survey, Table 6

Over the last three decades new regulations and systems have been enacted to increase opportunities for those with a disability to successfully register to vote and cast a ballot on or before Election Day. However, data on the topic has been limited. The 2008 Current Population Survey was the first time the Census included questions about voting behavior among those with a disability. Future data will allow us to better track and more fully understand these gaps, while painting a fuller picture of what it means to vote with a disability in America. The 2010 survey reveals some stark gaps and at least one surprise.

- Turnout among those with a disability was 3 points lower than for those with no disability.
- Interestingly, turnout among voters with hearing difficulty exceeded turnout among those with no disability by 4 points.
- Voters with a cognitive, self-care or independent living difficulty seem to face the greatest challenges, turning out at rates far lower than those with other disabilities.
- People with disabilities represent 12% of the citizen voting age population – 25.7 million voting age citizens.



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2010 GAPS REPORT

Methodology

This report is based on the U.S. Census Bureau's release on Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2010, 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.

America Goes to the Polls 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 household earnings into \$50,000 or less per year and \$75,000 or more per year. The same is done for turnout by educational attainment where voters are categorized as having a high school diploma or less or a bachelor's degree or more—leaving out those with some college or an associate's degree. 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.

2010 is the first time the CPS accurately 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 those who reported voting divided by 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 activities and services. Visit us at www.nonprofitvote.org to learn more or email us at info@nonprofitvote.org.