WHO VOTES NOW: Demographics, Issues, Inequality and Turnout in the United States

Presented by NonprofitVOTE
ABOUT US

Founded in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote.

We are a leading source of nonpartisan training, materials and other resources for nonprofits doing voter engagement work.

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TODAY’S PRESENTER

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Professor of Politics
New York University
WHO VOTES NOW

WHO VOTES NOW?
DEMographics, issUes, inequaLity, and turnouT in the United States

Jan E. Leighley and Jonathan Nagler
DOES IT MATTER?

• If everyone voted, would the same candidate win?
• If everyone voted, would we get the same policies enacted?
WHO VOTES NOW - DEMOGRAPHICS?

• Vote More:
  • Rich
  • High Education
  • Older

• Vote Less:
  • Poor
  • Low Education
  • Young
Figure 2.2. Turnout by Income, 1972–2008.

Figure 2.1. Turnout by Education, 1972–2008.

Figure 2.5. Turnout by Age, 1972–2008.

Figure 2.4. Turnout by Ethnicity, 1976–2008.

Do Hispanics vote as often as Anglos?

Do Hispanics and Anglos of otherwise identical demographic characteristics vote at equal rates?

- Or, if we observe two people, one Hispanic and one Anglo, who are identical on all other demographic measures (income, education, age, etc), are they equally likely to vote?
• And we could ask the same question comparing a poor person to a rich person:

• If we observe two people, one rich, one poor, who are otherwise identical (same education, same age, etc): would the rich person vote more than the poor person?
We estimate a statistical model of the probability that someone votes considering their age, education, income, gender, marital-status, ethnicity, and region.

Use that model to calculate the difference in probability of two otherwise identical individuals voting who differ on only one of those characteristics.

Next: Some graphs comparing hypothetical voting rates for otherwise identical individuals.
Estimated difference in the probability of voting between otherwise identical individuals in the bottom versus middle third of the education distribution.

(a) Bottom Third → Middle Third

Estimated difference in the probability of voting between otherwise identical individuals in the bottom versus top third of the education distribution.

(b) Bottom Third → Top Third

Estimated difference in the probability of voting between otherwise identical individuals in different Quintiles of the income distribution.

Figure 3.4. Marginal Effect of Ethnicity as a Predictor of Turnout, 1976–2008.

WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE?

• Who Knows?
  • Civic Duty?
  • Social Activity?
  • Peer Pressure (shaming)?
  • Mobilization?
WHAT MAKES PEOPLE MORE LIKELY TO VOTE?

• Even if we don’t know ‘why’ people vote, can we identify factors that make people more likely to vote in a given election?
  – Closer election
  – Perceiving a large difference between candidates
  – Lower cost of voting
DOES IT MATTER (AGAIN!)?

- If everyone voted, would the same candidate win?
- If everyone voted, would we get the same policies enacted?
• Obama might think he was elected to pursue:
  • A liberal **Social** Agenda
  • OR, a liberal **Economic** Agenda
• It matters which he decides to pursue
We expect voters to be more excited (‘have higher utility’) about voting when they really like one candidate, and do not like the other candidate.

Or - when one candidate is much closer to them in the issue space than the other candidate!
Figure 5.1. Perception of Democratic Candidate Ideology.

Figure 5.2. Perception of Republican Candidate Ideology.

Figure 5.9. Perceived Policy Difference (Ideology) by Income, 1972–2008.

Figure 5.10. Perceived Policy Difference (Government Jobs) by Income, 1972–2008.

Does this have anything to do with difference in turnout between rich and poor?
• Poor people are less likely than rich people to realize that the Democrats are substantially more liberal than the Republicans.

• We show in the book that perceiving differences between the candidates makes people more likely to vote: by as much as 10 percentage points.
DOES IT MATTER??

- Do the poor have different policy preferences than the rich?
- On what issues might we expect the poor to have different preferences than the rich?
Table 6.5. Political Attitudes of Nonvoters and Voters (NAES 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>% of Nonvoters</th>
<th>% of Voters</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party ID</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>−7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>−14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>(18,885)</td>
<td>(62,537)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideology</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>−0.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>−5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>(18,885)</td>
<td>(62,537)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.1. Differences between Voters’ and Nonvoters’ Attitudes on Redistributive Policies, 1972–2008.

Figure 6.2. Differences between Voters and Nonvoters on Ideology, Partisanship, and Vote Preference.

Figure 6.3. Differences between Voters’ and Nonvoters’ Attitudes on Values-Based Issues.

Table 6.3. Preferences of Nonvoters and Voters on Redistributive Issues (NAES 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>% of Nonvoters</th>
<th>% of Voters</th>
<th>Difference$^d$</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government Health Insurance for Workers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(4,959)</td>
<td>(16,795)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Health Insurance for Children</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(5,140)</td>
<td>(17,378)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Making Union Organizing Easier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>65.9</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(2,663)</td>
<td>(9,146)</td>
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<tr>
<td>More Federal Assistance to Schools$^b$</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(7,559)</td>
<td>(24,559)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Increasing the Minimum Wage</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Favor</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(1,105)</td>
<td>(3,851)</td>
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CONCLUSION

- It matters who votes.
- The non-voters want different things from government than the voters want.
STAYING NONPARTISAN

501(c)(3) nonprofits may not support or oppose candidates for public office. However, your organization can conduct a broad range of activities on a nonpartisan basis to help your community participate and vote. Find out more.
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