

# The Growing Electoral Clout of Blacks Is Driven by Turnout, Not Demographics

By Paul Taylor

Blacks voted at a higher rate this year than other minority groups and for the first time in history may also have voted at a higher rate than whites, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of census data, election day exit poll data and vote totals from selected cities and counties.

Unlike other minority groups whose increasing electoral muscle has been driven mainly by population growth, blacks' rising share of the vote in the past four presidential elections has been the result of rising turnout rates.

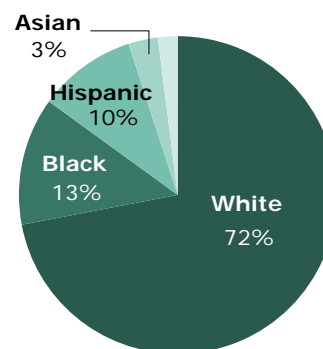
These participation milestones are notable not just in light of the long history of black disenfranchisement, but also in light of recently-enacted state voter identification laws that some critics contended would suppress turnout disproportionately among blacks and other minority groups.

In fact, according to census data and the election day exit polls, blacks made up 12 percent of the eligible electorate<sup>1</sup> this year but accounted for an estimated 13 percent of all votes cast—a repeat of the 2008 presidential election, when blacks “over-performed” at the polls by the same ratio. In all previous presidential elections for which there are reliable data, blacks had accounted for a **smaller share of votes than eligible voters.**

The candidacy in 2008 and 2012 of Barack Obama, the nation's first black president, is no doubt one of the main reasons for these new patterns. But there are other explanations as well, including the increased racial and ethnic diversity of the electorate, and a declining turnout rate among whites.

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## Share of Votes in 2012, by Race and Ethnicity



Notes: Blacks, whites, and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Other groups (2%) are shown, but not labeled.

Source: 2012 exit poll data from the National Election Pool

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, eligible electorate includes all non-institutionalized citizens ages 18 and older.

In 2012, **more Hispanics and Asian-Americans voted than ever before**, but the turnout rates among these groups (votes cast as a share of eligible voters), while rising, continues to lag that of the general public by a substantial margin. Their growing electoral muscle is mainly due to their rapid population growth.

As for whites, not only has their share of the eligible electorate been **falling for decades**, but their turnout rate appears to have declined in 2012 for the second presidential election in row.<sup>2</sup>

Did the turnout rate of blacks exceed that of whites this year for the first time ever? For now, there's circumstantial evidence but no conclusive proof. And there'll be no clear verdict until next spring, when the U.S. Census Bureau publishes findings from its biannual post-election survey on voter turnout.

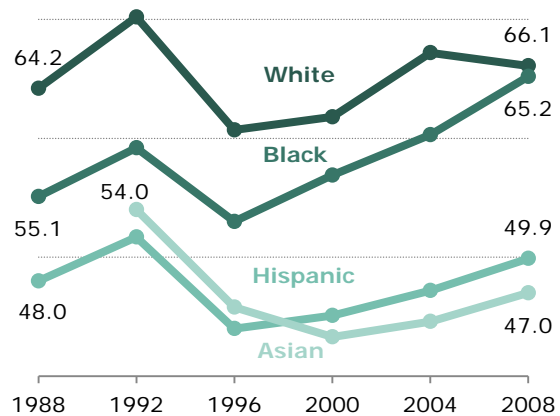
Even so, there's a good bit that's already known. Overall, about 129 million votes were cast for president in 2012, down slightly from 131 million in 2008. When one factors in a 9 million increase in the age and citizen eligible electorate due to normal population growth between those two elections, the turnout rate among all eligible voters fell by more than 3 percentage points—to about 60% in 2012 from more than 63% in 2008.

The most authoritative measure of turnout by racial and ethnic groups comes from the census survey known as Voting and Registration Supplement, which is conducted in late November after every federal election among a nationally representative sample of about 100,000 adults.

While the 2012 finding won't be made public for several months, a backward look at recent trends from this data set is instructive. In 2008, according to the post-election census survey, the gap between white and black turnout was the smallest on record. Some 66.1% of all age and

### Voter Turnout Rate, by Race and Ethnicity, 1988-2008

% of eligible voters



Notes: Blacks, whites, and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown. Voter turnout rate for Asians not available prior to 1992.

Source: Pew Research tabulations of the Current Population Survey, November Supplements

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<sup>2</sup> Readers should note that this report analyzes racial and ethnic turnout patterns in two ways: (1) what share of the total vote was cast by each group; and (2) what share of the eligible electorate in each group voted. The second measure is generally referred to as the group's turnout rate.

citizen eligible whites voted that year, compared with 65.2% of blacks, 49.9% of Hispanics and 47% of Asian Americans. The survey found that the white turnout rate had declined by 1.1 percentage point between 2004 and 2008, while the rates for the other groups all rose—by 4.9 percentage points among blacks, 2.7 among Hispanics and 2.4 among Asians.

The post-election survey also showed that in 2008, young blacks (18 to 29 year olds) voted at a higher rate than young whites (58% versus 52%) – a difference that was almost certainly related to the historic nature of the Obama candidacy, but that might foreshadow patterns in political engagement among the Millennial generation that could persist throughout adulthood.

The political importance of turnout rates by race was brought into sharp focus by last month's election, in which Obama won 80% of the non-white vote (including 93% of blacks, 73% of Asian Americans and 71% of Hispanics) and just 39% of the white vote. That constellation of votes by race gave Obama a popular vote victory margin this year of 4.7 million and an Electoral College victory of 332-206.

For comparative purposes, consider the 1988 presidential race between GOP nominee George H.W. Bush and Democrat Michael Dukakis. Bush received the identical share of the white vote that GOP nominee Mitt Romney won this year – 59%. But 24 years ago, that share was good enough to give Bush a popular vote margin of 7 million and an Electoral College landslide of 426-111.

### Change in Voter Turnout Rates among Eligible Voters, 2008 and 2004

	2008	2004	Change (% points)
All	63.6	63.8	-0.2
White	66.1	67.2	-1.1
Black	65.2	60.3	4.9
Hispanic	49.9	47.2	2.7
Asian	47.0	44.4	2.6

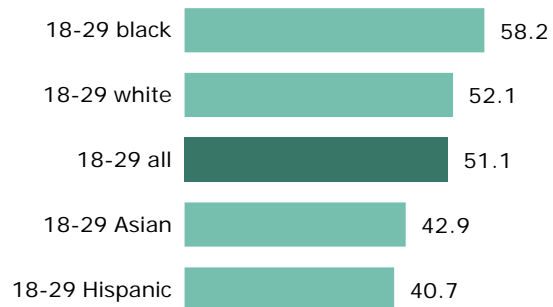
Notes: Blacks, whites, and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown.

Source: Pew Research tabulations of the Current Population Survey, November Supplement

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### Voter Turnout Rates among 18- to 29-Year-Olds in 2008 Election, by Race and Ethnicity

% of eligible voters



Notes: Blacks, whites, and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race. Native Americans and mixed-race groups not shown.

Source: Pew Research tabulations of the Current Population Survey, November Supplement

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The stark difference in those two outcomes is a reflection of the country's rapidly changing demographic makeup, driven mainly by the population growth among Hispanic and Asian American immigrants and their children.

Blacks, by contrast, have not seen their share of the population grow during this period. But their electoral clout has increased because their participation rates have risen steadily in the three presidential elections from 2000 to 2008.

As for 2012, the best available data for now on turnout by racial and ethnic groups are from the National Election Pool, an election day exit survey of more than 26,000 voters conducted by a consortium of major media organizations.

These surveys are best known for enabling an analysis of which groups voted for which candidate. They can also be used to estimate the share of all voters by race and ethnicity (as well as by other demographic characteristics). However, these estimates should be treated with caution. In 2008, as the accompanying tables show, the estimates derived from the election day exit poll were not the same as the estimates derived from the post-election survey

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### Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Eligible Electorate, 2012 and 2008

*% of eligible voters who are ...*

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
Oct. 2012 (Census)	71	12	11	4	2
Nov. 2008 (Census)	73	12	9	3	2

Notes: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks, whites, and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research tabulations of the Current Population Survey, October 2012 Monthly and November 2008 Supplement

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### Racial and Ethnic Composition of Voters, 2012 and 2008

*% of voters who are ...*

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
2012 (exit poll)	72	13	10	3	2
2008 (exit poll)	74	13	9	2	3
2008 (Census)	76.3	12.1	7.4	2.5	1.7

Notes: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Blacks, whites and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: 2008 and 2012 exit poll data from the National Election Pool; Census Bureau data from Pew Research tabulations of the Current Population Survey, November 2008 Supplement

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by the U.S. Census Bureau. There is no guarantee this will not be the case again in 2012.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There are a number of possible explanations for these differences. Compared with the election day exit survey done by media organizations, the post-election census survey has the advantage of a much larger sample size. On the downside, it is more vulnerable to an over-reporting bias (respondents reporting that they had voted even though they hadn't because voting is

Even with that caveat in mind, the exit poll is instructive. As the tables show, in 2012 blacks and whites both appear to have cast a slightly higher shares of votes (72% and 13%, respectively) than their share of eligible voters (71% and 12%), while Hispanics and Asians cast a lower share of votes (10% and 3%) than their share of eligible voters (11% and 4%).

That still leaves unanswered whether the black turnout rate in 2012 surpassed the white turnout rate. If so, it would be a notable denouement to the charged debate this year between state GOP leaders who pressed for tougher laws to deter voter fraud and black and other minority group leaders who accused them of trying to suppress the minority vote. This fall, black pastors, community leaders and elected officials across the country used these new identification laws as a spur to energize turnout.

In an effort to further explore whether black turnout exceeded white turnout in 2012, Pew Research asked voter turnout expert Rhodes Cook to analyze the number of votes cast in 2008 and 2012 in a sampling of heavily black and heavily white cities and counties across the country. Cook gathered the official counts from state election officials and relied on his extensive knowledge of the nation's demographic and political characteristics, down to the county level, to select the sample.

His findings are presented in Appendix A. They show a mix of turnout increases and decreases, with no clear pattern. In short, blacks may have achieved an historic turnout milestone at the polls last month – even in the face of what many black leaders said was an effort to suppress their vote. But for now, there's no conclusive proof.

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thought to be a socially desirable activity). In recent elections, as the chart in Appendix Two shows, the over-reporting bias has disappeared. And even if it were to arise again in 2012, it would only affect this turnout share analysis if different racial and ethnic groups were to have a differential tendency to over-report the fact that they had voted.

## APPENDIX A

### Presidential Vote in Selected Major African-American Jurisdictions, 2008-12

	Pop.	Total votes		Obama vote		Obama %		Change, 2008-12					
	% black ( '10)	2008	2012	2008	2012	2008	2012	Turnout (in votes)	Obama vote	Obama %			
Detroit, MI	82.7	335,635	288,586	325,534	281,382	97.0	97.5	-47,049	down	-44,152	down	0.5	up
Hinds Co., MS (Jackson)	69.1	108,902	106,491	75,401	76,112	69.2	71.5	-2,411	down	711	up	2.3	up
Prince George's Co., MD	64.5	374,026	387,744	332,396	347,938	88.9	89.7	13,718	up	15,542	up	0.8	up
Baltimore, MD	63.7	245,968	254,005	214,385	221,478	87.2	87.2	8,037	up	7,093	up	-	no change
New Orleans, LA	60.2	147,439	157,813	117,102	126,722	79.4	80.3	10,374	up	9,620	up	0.9	up
DeKalb Co., GA	54.3	322,301	305,908	254,594	238,224	79.0	77.9	-16,393	down	-16,370	down	-1.1	down
Newark, NJ*	52.4	83,069	82,204	77,112	78,352	92.8	95.3	-865	down	1,240	up	2.5	up
Washington, DC	50.7	265,853	293,764	245,800	267,070	92.5	90.9	27,911	up	21,270	up	-1.6	down
Richmond, VA	50.6	93,085	97,569	73,623	75,921	79.1	77.8	4,484	up	2,298	up	-1.3	down
St. Louis, MO	49.2	158,858	143,607	132,925	118,780	83.7	82.7	-15,251	down	-14,145	down	-1.0	down

Note: Votes from both elections are based on official returns, with the exception of the 2012 results from Detroit. They are nearly complete but unofficial. An asterisk (\*) indicates that the presidential vote from Newark in 2008 and 2012 is based on the major party vote. In other jurisdictions, the total is based on the overall vote including independent and third party candidates.

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## 2008-12 Presidential Vote: Nation's Leading White Counties (Based on 2010 Census)

The 13 counties with the highest proportion of white citizens are all rural ones, virtually all in Appalachia or the Plains states. Twelve of the 13 counties were carried by McCain in 2008; all 13 were won handily by Romney this time. The 2012 voter turnout—in terms of the total number of ballots cast—was down from 2008 in virtually all of the leading white counties. The change this year in the volume of the Republican presidential vote, however, was a mixed bag. In some of these counties, Romney drew more votes than McCain. In others he did not. But in all of the leading white counties, the Romney percentage was higher than McCain's because of this year's lower turnout.

	Pop %	2008		2012			Change, 2008-12		Rep. vote change		
		Total vote	McCain	Rep. %	Total vote	Romney	Rep. %	Total vote	% gain or loss	R vote	Gain in % Rep.
Blaine Co., NE	99.2	<b>316</b>	266	84	<b>303</b>	268	88	<b>-13</b>	-4	2	4
Garfield Co., NE	99.2	<b>1,030</b>	800	78	<b>940</b>	769	82	<b>-90</b>	-9	-31	4
Keya Paha Co., NE	99.2	<b>533</b>	409	77	<b>484</b>	393	81	<b>-49</b>	-9	-16	4
Sherman Co., NE	99.0	<b>1,572</b>	950	60	<b>1,530</b>	927	61	<b>-42</b>	-3	-23	1
Lincoln Co., WV	99.0	<b>6,835</b>	3,637	53	<b>6,818</b>	4,383	64	<b>-17</b>	-0.2	746	11
Tyler Co., WV	99.0	<b>3,741</b>	2,415	65	<b>3,279</b>	2,314	71	<b>-462</b>	-12	-101	6
Calhoun Co., IL	98.9	<b>2,699</b>	1,221	45	<b>2,576</b>	1,440	56	<b>-123</b>	-5	219	11
Jackson Co., KY	98.9	<b>5,224</b>	4,407	84	<b>5,061</b>	4,365	86	<b>-163</b>	-3	-42	2
Lewis Co., KY	98.9	<b>4,791</b>	3,213	67	<b>4,769</b>	3,326	70	<b>-22</b>	-0.5	113	3
Hooker Co., NE	98.9	<b>438</b>	355	81	<b>395</b>	330	84	<b>-43</b>	-10	-25	3
Loup Co., NE	98.9	<b>393</b>	302	77	<b>358</b>	290	81	<b>-35</b>	-9	-12	4
Wells Co., ND	98.9	<b>2,377</b>	1,468	62	<b>2,379</b>	1,654	70	<b>2</b>	0.1	186	8
Faulk Co., SD	98.9	<b>1,192</b>	739	62	<b>1,127</b>	765	68	<b>-65</b>	-5	26	6

Notes: In this chart and the others, the white and black share of each county's population is based on that race alone. Turnout changes of five-tenths (0.5%) of a percentage point or less are indicated in tenths of a percentage point. Other changes are measured in whole percentage points.

Source: 2008 returns are based on official totals published in *America Votes 28* (CQ Press); 2012 results are also official and are from the web sites of the various state election authorities. The racial composition of the counties in the chart are based on 2010 census data as published in *County and City Extra: Special Decennial Census Edition* (Bernan Press)

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## 2008-12 Presidential Vote: Nation's Leading Black Counties (Based on 2010 Census)

*The 13 most heavily black counties are also primarily rural, with all but one located in the Deep South. Obama swept the 13 counties decisively in both 2008 and 2012. In terms of votes cast, turnout in these counties was mixed this year when compared to 2008, although Obama's raw vote went up in nearly all of them. Much like Romney in the leading white counties, the Obama vote share stayed even or rose from 2008 in all the leading black counties. More examples, it seems, of the "big sort."*

	Pop %	2008		2012		Change, 2008-12					
		Total vote	Obama	% Dem.	Total vote	Obama	% Dem.	Total vote	% gain or loss	Rep. D vote	Dem. Gain in % Dem.
Jefferson Co., MS	85.7	<b>4,478</b>	3,883	87	<b>4,433</b>	3,951	89	<b>-45</b>	-1	68	2
Claiborne Co., MS	84.4	<b>5,453</b>	4,682	86	<b>5,484</b>	4,838	88	<b>31</b>	1	156	2
Holmes Co., MS	83.4	<b>9,543</b>	7,765	81	<b>9,288</b>	7,812	84	<b>-255</b>	-3	47	3
Macon Co., AL	82.6	<b>10,877</b>	9,450	87	<b>10,396</b>	9,045	87	<b>-481</b>	-4	-405	0
Greene Co., AL	81.5	<b>5,305</b>	4,408	83	<b>5,343</b>	4,521	85	<b>38</b>	1	113	2
Petersburg, VA	79.1	<b>15,540</b>	13,774	89	<b>15,908</b>	14,283	90	<b>368</b>	2	509	1
Coahoma Co., MS	75.5	<b>10,568</b>	7,597	72	<b>10,549</b>	7,792	74	<b>-19</b>	-0.2	195	2
Sumter Co., AL	75.0	<b>7,020</b>	5,264	75	<b>7,030</b>	5,421	77	<b>10</b>	0.1	157	2
Humphreys Co., MS	74.5	<b>5,126</b>	3,634	71	<b>5,212</b>	3,903	75	<b>86</b>	2	269	4
Hancock Co., GA	74.1	<b>4,344</b>	3,535	81	<b>4,088</b>	3,308	81	<b>-256</b>	-6	-227	0
Allendale Co., SC	73.6	<b>4,024</b>	3,029	75	<b>4,163</b>	3,297	79	<b>139</b>	3	268	4
Lowndes Co., AL	73.5	<b>7,278</b>	5,449	75	<b>7,523</b>	5,747	76	<b>245</b>	3	298	1
Tunica Co., MS	73.5	<b>4,332</b>	3,279	76	<b>4,382</b>	3,475	79	<b>50</b>	1	196	3

Notes: In this chart and those that follow, the white and black share of each county's population is based on that race alone. Turnout changes of five-tenths (0.5%) of a percentage point or less are indicated in tenths of a percentage point. Other changes are measured in whole percentage points.

Source: 2008 returns are based on official totals published in *America Votes 28* (CQ Press); 2012 results are also official and are from the web sites of the various state election authorities. The racial composition of the counties in the chart are based on 2010 census data as published in *County and City Extra: Special Decennial Census Edition* (Bernan Press)

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## Leading White Counties in Swing States (At Least 95% White)

Turnout this year in the heavily white counties in the swing states was mixed when compared to 2008. In seven of the 16 counties in the chart below, the actual number of votes cast was down from 2008. In eight of the 16 counties, the turnout rate of registered voters was down from four years ago. And in 11 of the 16 counties, the number of registered voters was less than the last presidential election. However, up in nearly all these "sample" counties from 2008 was the Republican share of the total presidential vote. As a result, five counties switched from Democratic in 2008 to Republican in 2012. The last time out, the tally of counties won was nine for McCain, seven for Obama. This time, it was 14 for Romney, two for Obama.

	Pop		2008		2012		Change, 2008-12				Winners		Diff. Rep. %, '08- '12
	% white	Reg. voters	Turnout	rate	Reg. voters	Turnout	rate	Reg. voters	Turnout	rate	2008	2012	
Dickenson Co., VA	98.8	11,444	6,753	59.0	10,532	6,904	65.6	<b>-912</b>	151	6.6	Rep. 49%	Rep. 62%	13
Holmes Co., OH	98.7	18,166	11,113	61.2	17,685 *	11,536	65.2	<b>-481</b>	423	4.0	Rep. 70%	Rep. 75%	5
Craig Co., VA	98.7	3,717	2,621	70.5	3,658	2,667	72.9	<b>-59</b>	46	2.4	Rep. 65%	Rep. 66%	1
Audubon Co., IA	98.6	4,601	3,436	74.7	4,332	3,457	79.8	<b>-269</b>	21	5.1	Dem. 51%	Rep. 52%	4
Delaware Co., IA	98.6	12,255	8,903	72.6	11,153	9,378	84.1	<b>-1,102</b>	475	11.5	Dem. 52%	Rep. 49%	3
Keweenaw Co., MI	98.5	1,890	1,410	74.6	1,946	1,392	71.5	56	<b>-18</b>	<b>-3.1</b>	Rep. 54%	Rep. 56%	2
Elk Co., PA	98.5	20,541	14,271	69.5	20,302	13,238	65.2	<b>-239</b>	<b>-1,033</b>	<b>-4.3</b>	Dem. 51%	Rep. 57%	10
Cameron Co., PA	98.3	3,734	2,245	60.1	3,651	2,111	57.8	<b>-83</b>	<b>-134</b>	<b>-2.3</b>	Rep. 59%	Rep. 64%	5
Pepin Co., WI	98.2	4,034	3,771	93.5	4,445	3,699	83.2	411	<b>-72</b>	<b>-10.3</b>	Dem. 56%	Dem. 51%	6
Monroe Co., OH	98.1	10,216	6,982	68.3	10,322 *	6,782	65.7	<b>-106</b>	<b>-200</b>	<b>-2.6</b>	Dem. 53%	Rep. 52%	8
Alcona Co., MI	97.9	9,817	6,420	65.4	9,510	6,104	64.2	<b>-307</b>	<b>-316</b>	<b>-1.2</b>	Rep. 53%	Rep. 59%	6
Iron Co., WI	97.9	4,385	3,432	78.3	4,340	3,632	83.7	<b>-45</b>	200	5.4	Dem. 56%	Rep. 49%	6
Mineral Co., CO	97.3	746	623	83.5	707	650	91.9	<b>-39</b>	27	8.4	Rep. 54%	Rep. 53%	-1
Clay Co., NC	96.6	8,489	5,543	65.3	9,089	5,642	62.1	600	99	<b>-3.2</b>	Rep. 67%	Rep. 70%	3
Madison Co., NC	96.5	16,533	10,379	62.8	16,683	10,113	60.6	150	<b>-266</b>	<b>-2.2</b>	Rep. 50%	Rep. 53%	3
Ouray Co., CO	96.4	3,291	3,060	93.0	3,307	3,202	96.8	16	142	3.8	Dem. 54%	Dem. 52%	1

## The Growing Electoral Clout of Blacks Is Driven by Turnout, Not Demographics

Notes: The number of registered voters is based on active voters only in states where a choice had to be made. Those include Colorado, Iowa and Virginia. In other states, registration totals were presented without definition.<sup>1</sup> The counties (and in the case of Virginia, independent cities) in the chart below are from swing states, including Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. "Leading white counties" are those with a population at least 95% white, according to the 2010 census. "Leading black counties" are those at least 55% black, a rather low standard that needed to be adopted here to have a representative number of counties for the chart. There is no dearth of heavily white counties. Generally, the top two white counties in each swing state that reach the 95% threshold are included. As for predominantly black counties, North Carolina and Virginia each have several jurisdictions at least 55% black. Florida has one county that reaches that mark. There are no black-majority counties in the other swing states, with Philadelphia (PA) the closest at 43%. Turnouts in 2008 and 2012 are based on official returns. The number of registered voters is based on election-eve totals in 2008 and 2012 as presented on the web site of the various state election authorities, with the exception of Ohio, where the 2012 numbers are from the March presidential primary. Because of the different date, the 2012 Ohio registration totals are indicated by an asterisk (\*) in the chart. The comparison of turnout rates from state to state can create a bit of an apples and oranges situation. Many states do not define how they compiled their registration totals, while a few give users an option by presenting totals for active registrants, inactive registrants and a combination of the two. In states such as Colorado, Iowa and Virginia, where there is a choice to made, the active total is used.

Source: Presidential vote returns from 2008 are based on official totals published in *America Votes 28* (CQ Press); 2012 results are based on official figures posted on the state election web sites. The racial composition of the counties in the chart is based on 2010 census data as published in *County and City Extra: Special Decennial Census Edition* (Bernan Press)

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## Leading Black Counties in Swing States (At Least 55% Black)

There was a turnout uptick in 2012 in the predominantly black counties of the swing states, which were mainly located in North Carolina and Virginia. In at least nine of the 11 counties (and in the case of Virginia, independent cities), turnout was up from 2008 both in terms of actual votes cast and the turnout rate as a reflection of registered voters. As in heavily white counties, a majority of the leading black jurisdictions (six) saw a decline from four years ago in the number of registered voters. As in 2008, Obama swept all 11 locales by decisive margins, and in most of the locales his share of the total presidential vote went up incrementally - a single percentage point being the most common increase.

	Pop		2008		2012		Change, 2008-12				Winners		Diff. % '08-'12
	% black	Reg. voters	Turnout	rate	Reg. voters	Turnout	rate	Reg. voters	Turnout	rate	2008	2012	
Petersburg, VA (city)	79.1	20,587	15,540	75.5	19,394	15,908	82.0	-1,193	368	6.5	Dem. 89%	Dem. 90%	1
Bertie Co., NC	62.5	14,388	9,763	67.9	14,828	10,123	68.3	440	360	0.4	Dem. 65%	Dem. 66%	1
Emporia, VA (city)	62.5	3,641	2,617	71.9	3,675	2,696	73.4	34	79	1.5	Dem. 65%	Dem. 67%	2
Hertford Co., NC	60.5	15,396	10,650	69.2	15,352	10,918	71.1	44	268	1.9	Dem. 71%	Dem. 72%	1
Greensville Co., VA	59.8	6,615	4,887	73.9	6,299	4,926	78.2	-316	39	4.3	Dem. 64%	Dem. 64%	-
Northampton Co., NC	58.4	15,266	10,618	69.6	15,537	10,756	69.2	271	138	-0.4	Dem. 65%	Dem. 67%	2
Sussex Co., VA	58.1	6,991	5,363	76.7	6,669	5,440	81.6	-322	77	4.9	Dem. 62%	Dem. 62%	-
Edgecombe Co., NC	57.4	38,885	25,930	66.7	39,904	26,972	67.6	1,019	1,042	0.9	Dem. 67%	Dem. 68%	1
Brunswick Co., VA	57.3	10,958	7,914	72.2	10,524	8,037	76.4	-434	123	4.2	Dem. 63%	Dem. 62%	-1
Franklin, VA (city)	56.9	5,888	4,427	75.2	5,363	4,360	81.3	-525	-67	6.1	Dem. 64%	Dem. 65%	1
Gadsden Co., FL	56.0	30,128	22,510	74.7	29,625	22,499	75.9	-503	-11	1.2	Dem. 69%	Dem. 70%	1

Notes: The number of registered voters is based on active voters only in states where a choice had to be made. Those include Colorado, Iowa and Virginia. In other states, registration totals were presented without definition.<sup>1</sup> The counties (and in the case of Virginia, independent cities) in the chart below are from swing states, including Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. "Leading white counties" are those with a population at least 95% white, according to the 2010 census. "Leading black counties" are those at least 55% black, a rather low standard that needed to be adopted here to have a representative number of counties for the chart. There is no dearth of heavily white counties. Generally, the top two white counties in each swing state that reach the 95% threshold are included. As for predominantly black counties, North Carolina and Virginia each have several jurisdictions at least 55% black. Florida has one county that reaches that mark. There are no black-majority counties in the other swing states, with Philadelphia (PA) the closest at 43%. Turnouts in 2008 and 2012 are based on official returns. The number of registered voters is based on election-eve totals in 2008 and 2012 as presented on the web site of the various state election authorities, with the exception of Ohio, where the latest 2012 numbers are from the March presidential primary. Because of the different date, the 2012 Ohio registration totals are indicated by an asterisk (\*) in the chart. The comparison of turnout rates from state to state can create a bit of an apples and oranges situation. Many states do not define how they compiled their registration totals, while a few give users an option by presenting totals for active registrants, inactive registrants and a combination of the two. In states such as Colorado, Iowa and Virginia, where there is a choice to make, the active total is used.

Source: Presidential vote returns from 2008 are based on official totals published in *America Votes 28* (CQ Press); 2012 results are based on official figures posted on the state election web sites. The racial composition of the counties in the chart is based on 2010 census data as published in *County and City Extra: Special Decennial Census Edition* (Bernan Press)

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## APPENDIX B

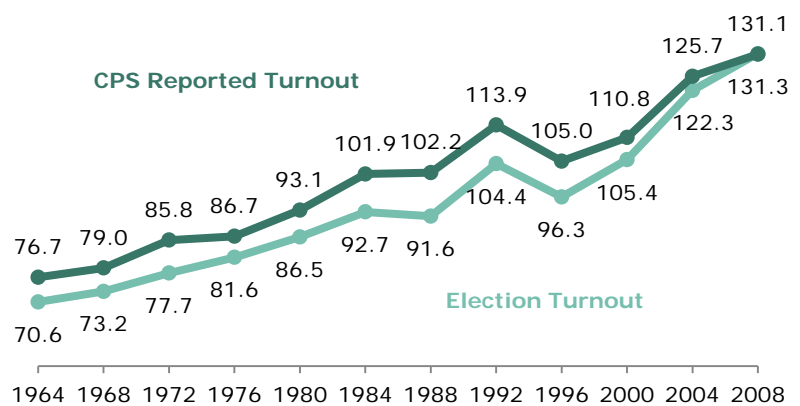
### Comparing the Census Bureau's Turnout Estimate with the Reported Vote Tally

The Census Bureau's biannual Current Population Survey November Voting and Registration Supplement is the most comprehensive data source available for examining the demographic composition of the electorate in federal elections. However, because it relies on post-election self-reporting by survey respondents in some 55,000 households, these weighted CPS estimates of turnout never match up precisely with the actual number of votes tallied in the 50 states. According to the CPS, an estimated 131.1 million U.S. citizens voted in the 2008 presidential election – slightly less than the 131.3 million votes cast for president, as reported by the Center for the Study of the American Electorate ([Gans, 2008](#)) and other sources ([McDonald, 2009](#)).

This is the first time since the Census Bureau began taking a post-election survey in 1964 that its estimate is smaller than the number of votes tallied by the states. Prior to 2008, the gap had always run in the opposite direction, with variances ranging between a low of 2.8% (in 2004) and a high of 11.6% (in 1988). Since the 1996 presidential election, the gap has narrowed steadily, and in 2008, the lines crossed for the first time.

#### Election Turnout Tallies and CPS Reported Turnout, Presidential Election Years, 1964-2008

*in millions*



Sources: CPS Reported Turnout Series 1964 to 2004 from Census Bureau (<http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/tabA-9.xls>). CPS Reported Turnout for 2008 from Pew Research Center tabulations of Current Population Survey November 2008 Supplement data. Election Turnout series from 1964 to 2004 from Pew Research Center (2005). Election turnout for 2008 from Gans (2008).

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#### Election experts and scholars

who have examined this gap over the years have theorized that it stems, at least in part, from a tendency of some Census Bureau survey respondents to report that they had voted even if they had not (Bernstein, Chadha and Montjoy, 2001). Another possible explanation is that in every election, some small portion of ballots are improperly cast and do not become a part of the

official count—but the voters who cast such ballots report to the Census Bureau that they had voted.

There is no consensus among experts to explain the recent convergence in the number of votes tallied by the states and those reported by the Census Bureau. One possibility is that there has been a decline in spoiled, uncounted ballots in recent elections. Another possibility is that there has been an increase in voting by U.S. citizens living abroad – a group that is not included in the CPS survey ([McDonald, 2009](#)). A third possible explanation is that the accuracy of the CPS itself may have improved.