

50 YEARS OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

The State of Race in Politics

This report is critical to understanding the impact of the Voting Rights Act over the last 50 years, and the future of voting rights. The report examines minority voter registration and turnout, racially polarized voting, policy outcomes by race, and the number and share of minority elected officials from the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 until today.

The report was written by Professors Khalilah Brown-Dean, Zoltan Hajnal, Christina Rivers, and Ismail White. Read the full 46-page report at [JointCenter.org](https://www.jointcenter.org).

Key findings show:

- **Since 1965, the black/white racial gap in voter turnout has decreased dramatically in presidential elections.** Turnout among black Southerners exceeded that of their white counterparts in four of the twelve presidential elections since 1965, and nationwide black turnout clearly exceeded white turnout in presidential elections in 2012 and perhaps in 2008.
- **Local election turnout is lower and possibly less diverse.** Presidential general election turnout is generally 60% of the voting-age population, but local election turnout averages 27% and in some cases is less than 10%. As overall turnout declines in local elections, the electorate may become less representative of the racial diversity of the community as a whole.
- **Latino and Asian American turnout increased but remains low.** Turnout rates among both Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans in presidential elections remain 10 to 15 percentage points below black Americans and 15 to 20 points below white Americans.

- **Party politics is increasingly polarized by race.** Since 1960, the party identification and partisan voting patterns of blacks and whites have become sharply divided.
- **Race is the most significant factor in urban local elections.** In urban local elections, race is a more decisive factor than income, education, political ideology, religion, sexual orientation, age, gender, and political ideology. The 38 point racial gap exceeds even the 33 point gap between Democratic and Republican voters.
- **Based on available data from 1972 to 2010, blacks were the least successful group in America in terms of policy outcomes.** Blacks were policy winners only 31.9% of the time, compared with 37.6% for whites. This difference seems small, but it is ten times larger than the 0.5 point difference between high- and low-income earners.
- **Since 1965, the number of elected officials of color has grown enormously.** Over this period, African Americans went from holding fewer than 1,000 elected offices nationwide to over 10,000, Latinos from a small number of offices to over 6,000, and Asian Americans from under a hundred documented cases to almost 1,000.
- **People of color remain underrepresented in elected office.** Based on the most recent data, African Americans are 12.5% of the citizen voting age population, but they make up a smaller share of the U.S. House (10%), state legislatures (8.5%), city councils (5.7%), and the U.S. Senate (2%). Latinos make up 11% of the citizen voting age population, but they are a smaller share of the U.S. House (7%), state legislatures (5%), the U.S. Senate (4%), and city councils (3.3%). Asian Americans are 3.8% of the citizen voting age population but a smaller share of the U.S. House (2%), state legislatures (2%), the U.S. Senate (1%), and city councils (0.4%).