

April 8, 2009

To: Interested Parties

From: Doug Hess, Research Consultant

**Re: Analysis of the 2008 Current Population Survey (CPS)
Voter and Registration Supplement**

Introduction

This memorandum offers a review of demographic changes in the populations that were eligible to vote, registered to vote, and that did vote in the 2004 and the 2008 general elections.

Historically, older and White Americans have been over-represented in the population that votes in U.S. elections. In the 2008 election, while the overall participation rate (the percent of those eligible to vote who did vote) did not increase significantly, and while the makeup of the population that voted in 2008 is still not exactly representative of the voter eligible population, this analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's November 2008 Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) finds that the composition of the 2008 voting population was markedly different from 2004.¹

In addition to finding an increase in the diversity of the population eligible to vote, the analysis shows that African-American, Latino, and other minority groups experienced substantial gains in participation, as did Americans under the age of 30. The lack of an overall increase in the turnout rate appears to be due to a slight drop in the participation of the much larger communities of White and older voters. The largest turnout rate gains were among young minority Americans, who turned out to vote at approximately 5 to 10 percentage points higher, depending on the group, than in 2004. While the CPS does not ask about partisanship, or for whom Americans voted, it seems likely that this difference would have had a real and powerful impact during the past election cycle.

Data

This analysis uses data from the November 2008 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement released by the Bureau of the Census this past week and data from the November 2004 CPS. The CPS is a monthly survey of tens of thousands of U.S. households conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In every federal election year since 1972 the November Supplement of the CPS has fielded questions related to voter registration and voting. The November 2008 CPS included almost 93,000 adult citizens; the November 2004 CPS included almost 97,000 citizens. Data in the CPS is self-reported, which raises the possibility of over reporting; survey respondents may tend to answer questions with socially desirable answers, for example, such as stating they voted when they did not. Thus, minor shifts in trends or slight differences between groups should be judged cautiously. Nonetheless, the estimate derived from the CPS of the total number of voters is remarkably close to the total number of ballots cast in 2008 as reported by election officials.² The tables show where comparisons between years are beyond the margin of error of difference with a 90 percent confidence interval.

Summary of Findings

Nationwide, as shown in Table 1, there were 4.2 million more registered voters in 2008 than in 2004, and 5.4 million more voters.

- The Voter Eligible Population (VEP) increased by nearly 9.1 million from 2004 to 2008, an increase of 4.6 percent. The increase in the number of individuals who are registered and who voted did not result in an increase in the aggregate voter registration rate or voter turnout rate.
- For those reasons, the percentage of the VEP voting stayed roughly the same between 2004 and 2008, at approximately 64 percent, and the percentage of eligible voters registered actually declined slightly, from 72 percent to 71 percent.

Despite the relatively insignificant changes in registration and voting rates nationwide, several states experienced significant changes. See Table 2.

- Most notably, the five states with the largest changes in turnout rates were all southern states with significant African-American populations: Mississippi, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Virginia all experienced increases in turnout ranging from 5.6 percentage points to 8 percentage points.

The most significant findings from the analysis are the gains made by minority Americans, particularly among minorities under 30, in 2008 compared to 2004.

- As Table 3 shows, registration among minority groups increased significantly, with more than 1.2 million African-Americans and more than 2.2 million Latinos registered to vote in 2008 compared to 2004.
- Absolute participation among Whites increased by 475,000, but a greater increase in the number of Whites eligible to vote meant that both the registration rate (falling from 75.1 percent to 73.5 percent) and the turnout rate (from 67.2 to 66.1 percent) declined slightly.
- African-American turnout, meanwhile, surged from 60.3 in 2004 to 65.2 percent (an increase of over 2 million voters) in 2008, Latino-American turnout increased by 2.5 points from 47.3 to 49.7 percent (also an increase of over 2 million), and Asian-American turnout increased about 3 percentage points from 44.5 to 47.8 percent (over 600,000 more voters).

These findings are significant in a number of ways:

- The percentage of African-Americans eligible to vote who cast a ballot on Election Day (65.2 percent) was within 1 percentage point of the turnout rate for Whites (66.1 percent) in 2008 compared to a 7 percentage point disparity in 2004.
- Americans under the age of 30—another historically underrepresented population—also experienced a sharp increase in participation in 2008 compared to 2004 (see Table 4). Overall, approximately 2.3 million

Nationwide, over 1.6 million more Americans of color under the age of 30 cast a ballot in 2008 than did in 2004. This is equal to 30 percent of the total increase in votes between 2004 and 2008. Indeed, the 4.9 million additional votes by people of color of all ages equal 91 percent of the 5.4 million additional voters between 2004 and 2008.

more voters under the age of 30 voted in 2008 than in 2004. The turnout rate for this population compared to the last presidential election increased by approximately 2 percentage points.

- While Americans aged 30-64 and 65 and over each cast roughly 1.5 million more ballots in 2008 than in 2004, both age groups actually experienced slight declines in voter turnout rates as a percentage of the VEP. This was due to the expansion in the size of the VEP for those populations exceeding the increases in voter participation.

By analyzing race and age together, as shown in Table 5, we find that the most significant story of this election was the phenomenal increase in turnout by young people of color.

- White turnout in the under-30 age group was essentially unchanged between the two elections, but turnout by African-Americans under 30 increased nearly 9 percentage points, which represents nearly 700,000 additional African-American voters under 30. Asian-American youth turnout also increased by an estimated 9.6 percentage points, and Latino youth turnout increased by 5.2 percentage points.
- Nationwide, over 1.6 million more Americans of color under the age of 30 cast a ballot in 2008 than did in 2004. This is equal to 30 percent of the total increase in votes between 2004 and 2008. Indeed, the 4.9 million additional votes by people of color of all ages equal 91 percent of the 5.4 million additional voters between 2004 and 2008.

A comparative analysis based on household income with 2004 is not readily available for technical reasons, but it is important to note that participation among low-income Americans—another historically underrepresented demographic—remained a significant problem for the American electorate.

- As Table 6 shows, there was a 20 point gap in 2008 in the registration rate between Americans from households earning \$25,000 or less per year and those earning over \$100,000, and a 25 point gap in voter turnout.

Moreover, although there were gains among young voters, only half of voters under the age of 30 voted in 2008, leaving over 21 million citizens in that group alone sitting on the sidelines on Election Day.

Notes

1 For an earlier analysis on the 2008 election using polling data, see “The Demographics of Voters in America’s 2008 General Election: A Preliminary Assessment” Jody Herman and Lorraine Minnite, <http://projectvote.org/reports-on-the-electorate-/125.html>

2 See Michael McDonald’s website http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html for data on ballots cast.

Table 1: Size of the Voter Eligible Population, and Numbers Registered and Voted, 2004 and 2008

	VEP <i>(in thousands)</i>	Registered <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted as % of Reg.
2004	197,005	142,070	72.1	125,736	63.8	88.5
2008	206,072	146,311	71.0	131,144	63.6	89.6
Change	9,067	4,241	-1.1*	5,408	0	1.1*

*Change surpasses the margin of error of difference for the two years (90%).

Source: Project Vote analysis of November 2008 Current Population Survey (Census Bureau)

Table 2: Size of the Voter Eligible Population, and Numbers Registered and Voted by State, 2004 and 2008

2004						2008				
State	VEP	Registered	Voted	Total		VEP	Registered	Voted	Total	
	(in thousands)	(in thousands)	%	(in thousands)	%	(in thousands)	(in thousands)	%	(in thousands)	%
Alabama	3,257	2,418	74.2	2,060	63.2	3,404	2,438	71.6	2,126	62.4
Alaska	434	334	77.0	293	67.6	468	345	73.7	304	65.0
Arizona	3,508	2,485	70.8	2,239	63.8	4,169	2,874	68.9	2,497	59.9
Arkansas	1,942	1,328	68.4	1,140	58.7	2,030	1,317	64.9	1,092	53.8
California	20,693	14,193	68.6	12,807	61.9	21,816	14,885	68.2	13,828	63.4
Colorado	3,109	2,307	74.2	2,097	67.5	3,374	2,437	72.2	2,308	68.4
Connecticut	2,409	1,695	70.3	1,524	63.2	2,396	1,761	73.5	1,610	67.2
Delaware	579	415	71.6	385	66.4	606	447	73.8	408	67.3
Dist. of Columbia	390	293	75.2	270	69.2	413	324	78.3	306	74.1
Florida	11,469	8,219	71.7	7,372	64.3	2,462	8,774	70.4	7,951	63.8
Georgia	5,866	3,948	67.3	3,332	56.8	6,515	4,624	71.0	4,183	64.2
Hawaii	852	497	58.4	433	50.8	883	522	59.1	457	51.8
Idaho	948	663	69.9	585	61.6	1,049	723	68.9	644	61.4
Illinois	8,640	6,437	74.5	5,672	65.6	8,681	6,151	70.9	5,436	62.6
Indiana	4,435	3,031	68.3	2,598	58.6	4,562	3,105	68.1	2,758	60.5
Iowa	2,136	1,674	78.4	1,522	71.3	2,137	1,630	76.3	1,501	70.2
Kansas	1,851	1,338	72.3	1,188	64.2	1,926	1,343	69.7	1,219	63.3
Kentucky	2,969	2,231	75.1	1,930	65.0	3,094	2,259	73.0	1,952	63.1
Louisiana	3,218	2,413	75.0	2,067	64.2	3,056	2,393	78.3	2,149	70.3
Maine	1,007	824	81.8	736	73.1	1,005	801	79.7	716	71.2
Maryland	3,678	2,676	72.7	2,413	65.6	3,824	2,828	73.9	2,611	68.3
Massachusetts	4,497	3,483	77.5	3,085	68.6	4,533	3,293	72.6	3,044	67.1
Michigan	7,177	5,364	74.7	4,818	67.1	7,176	5,531	77.1	4,865	67.8
Minnesota	3,645	3,080	84.5	2,887	79.2	3,678	2,931	79.7	2,759	75.0
Mississippi	2,049	1,510	73.7	1,263	61.7	2,064	1,589	77.0	1,439	69.7
Missouri	4,106	3,336	81.2	2,815	68.5	4,326	3,224	74.5	2,846	65.8
Montana	687	519	75.5	482	70.2	724	516	71.3	473	65.4
Nebraska	1,215	918	75.5	793	65.3	1,253	939	74.9	844	67.3
Nevada	1,477	965	65.3	871	58.9	1,714	1,147	66.9	1,027	59.9
New Hampshire	948	716	75.6	677	71.5	994	756	76.0	708	71.2
New Jersey	5,591	4,085	73.1	3,693	66.0	5,675	4,022	70.9	3,637	64.1
New Mexico	1,301	936	72.0	837	64.4	1,352	937	69.3	846	62.6
New York	12,779	8,624	67.5	7,698	60.2	12,849	8,458	65.8	7,559	58.8
North Carolina	5,923	4,292	72.5	3,639	61.4	6,477	4,902	75.7	4,370	67.5
North Dakota	462	412	89.3	330	71.5	476	399	83.7	321	67.5
Ohio	8,305	6,003	72.3	5,485	66.1	8,367	6,108	73.0	5,483	65.5
Oklahoma	2,476	1,781	71.9	1,541	62.3	2,566	1,798	70.1	1,507	58.7
Oregon	2,600	2,049	78.8	1,924	74.0	2,687	1,961	73.0	1,818	67.6
Pennsylvania	9,055	6,481	71.6	5,845	64.5	9,206	6,451	70.1	5,747	62.4
Rhode Island	732	522	71.3	467	63.7	752	568	75.5	507	67.4
South Carolina	3,002	2,238	74.6	1,899	63.2	3,202	2,385	74.5	2,100	65.6
South Dakota	554	425	76.8	378	68.3	575	442	76.9	390	67.8
Tennessee	4,250	2,739	64.4	2,319	54.6	4,529	2,921	64.5	2,516	55.5
Texas	13,925	9,681	69.5	7,950	57.1	15,040	10,123	67.3	8,435	56.1
Utah	1,508	1,141	75.7	1,022	67.8	1,768	1,056	59.7	939	53.1
Vermont	469	354	75.6	316	67.3	476	345	72.5	308	64.7
Virginia	4,971	3,441	69.2	3,134	63.1	5,316	3,950	74.3	3,650	68.7
Washington	4,220	3,133	74.2	2,851	67.6	4,600	3,299	71.7	3,073	66.8
West Virginia	1,394	935	67.1	798	57.2	1,387	917	66.1	741	53.4
Wisconsin	3,928	3,225	82.1	3,010	76.6	4,053	3,095	76.4	2,887	71.2
Wyoming	370	265	71.6	247	66.9	389	270	69.3	250	64.3
Total	197,005	142,070	72.1	125,736	63.8	206,072	146,311	71.0	131,144	64.3

Source: Project Vote analysis of November 2008 Current Population Survey (Census Bureau)

Table 3: Size of the Voter Eligible Population, and Numbers Registered and Voted by Race/Ethnicity, 2004 and 2008

2004							2004 Column Percents		
Race/ Ethnicity	VEP (in thousands)	Registered (in thousands)	%	Voted (in thousands)	%	Voted as % of Reg.	VEP %	Registered %	Voted %
White	148,159	111,318	75.1	99,567	67.2	89.4	75.2	78.4	79.2
Black	22,866	15,773	69.0	13,799	60.3	87.5	11.6	11.1	11.0
Asian/PI	6,677	3,487	52.2	2,968	44.5	85.1	3.4	2.5	2.4
Latino	15,938	9,225	57.9	7,532	47.3	81.6	8.1	6.5	6.0
Other	3,366	2,267	67.3	1,870	55.6	82.5	1.7	1.6	1.5
Total	197,005	142,070	72.1	125,736	63.8	88.5	100	100	100

2008							2008 Column Percents		
Race/ Ethnicity	VEP (in thousands)	Registered (in thousands)	%	Voted (in thousands)	%	Voted as % of Reg.	VEP %	Registered %	Voted %
White	151,321	111,215	73.5	100,042	66.1	90.0	73.4	76.0	76.3
Black	24,322	17,059	70.1	15,857	65.2	93.0	11.8	11.7	12.1
Asian/PI	7,550	4,182	55.4	3,608	47.8	86.3	3.7	2.9	2.8
Latino	19,334	11,459	59.3	9,606	49.7	83.8	9.4	7.8	7.3
Other	3,545	2,396	67.6	2,031	57.3	84.8	1.7	1.6	1.5
Total	206,072	146,311	71.0	131,144	63.6	89.6	100	100	100

Change							Change in Column Percents		
Race/ Ethnicity	VEP (in thousands)	Registered (in thousands)	%	Voted (in thousands)	%	Voted as % of Reg.	VEP %	Registered %	Voted %
White	3,163	-104	-1.6	475	-1.1	0.5	-1.8	-2.3	-2.9
Black	1,456	1,286	1.2	2,058	4.9	5.5	0.2	0.6	1.1
Asian/PI	874	695	3.2	639	3.3	1.1	0.3	0.4	0.4
Latino	3,397	2,234	1.4	2,074	2.4	2.2	1.3	1.3	1.3
Other	179	129	0.3	161	1.7	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.1
Total	9,067	4,241	-1.1	5,408	-0.2	1.1			

Note: All changes in the percent registered and percent that voted surpass the margin of error of difference (90%) for all groups except "Other".

Source: Project Vote analysis of November 2008 Current Population Survey (Census Bureau)

Table 4: Size of the Voter Eligible Population, and Numbers Registered and Voted by Age Groups, 2004 and 2008

2004

Age Group	VEP <i>(in thousands)</i>	Registered <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted as % of Reg.
Under 30	41,084	24,663	60.0	20,125	49.0	81.6
30 to 64	122,229	90,701	74.2	81,686	66.8	90.1
65 & Over	33,692	26,706	79.3	23,925	71.0	89.6
Total	197,005	142,070	72.1	125,736	63.8	88.5

2008

Age Group	VEP <i>(in thousands)</i>	Registered <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted as % of Reg.
Under 30	43,844	26,794	61.1	22,385	51.1	83.5
30 to 64	125,934	91,417	72.6	83,239	66.1	91.1
65 & Over	36,294	28,100	77.4	25,519	70.3	90.8
Total	206,072	146,311	71.0	131,144	63.6	89.6

Change

Age Group	VEP <i>(in thousands)</i>	Registered <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted as % of Reg.
Under 30	2,760	2,131	1.1*	2,261	2.1*	1.9
30 to 64	3,705	716	-1.6*	1,553	-0.7*	1.0
65 & Over	2,602	1,395	-1.8*	1,594	-0.7	1.2
Total	9,067	4,241	-1.1*	5,408	-0.2	1.1

*Change surpasses the margin of error of difference for the two years (90%).

Source: Project Vote analysis of November 2008 Current Population Survey (Census Bureau)

Table 5: Size of the Voter Eligible Population, and Numbers Registered and Voted by Race and Age Groups, 2008

	2004						2008						Change	
	VEP (in thousands)	Registered (in thousands)	%	Vote (in thousands)	%	Voted as % of Reg.	VEP (in thousands)	Registered (in thousands)	%	Vote (in thousands)	%	Voted as % of Reg.	% Reg.	% Voted
White														
Under 30	27,842	17,624	63.3	14,571	52.3	82.7	29,181	18,257	62.6	15,215	52.1	83.3	-0.7	-0.2
30 to 64	92,384	71,062	76.9	64,574	69.9	90.9	92,536	69,350	74.6	63,346	68.5	91.3	-2.0*	-1.4*
65 & Over	27,932	22,633	81.0	20,422	73.1	90.2	29,603	23,608	79.7	21,482	72.6	91.0	-1.3*	-0.5
	148,159	111,318	75.1	99,567	67.2	89.4	151,321	111,215	73.5	100,042	66.1	90.0	-1.6*	-1.1*
Black														
Under 30	5,856	3,504	59.8	2,897	49.5	82.7	6,284	4,018	63.9	3,658	58.2	91.0	4.1*	8.7*
30 to 64	14,210	10,140	71.4	9,050	63.7	89.2	14,994	10,766	71.8	10,108	67.4	93.9	0.4	3.7*
65 & Over	2,800	2,129	76.0	1,852	66.2	87.0	3,044	2,275	74.7	2,091	68.7	91.9	-1.3	2.5
	22,866	15,773	69.0	13,799	60.3	87.5	24,322	17,059	70.1	15,857	65.2	93.0	1.2*	4.9*
Asian/PI														
Under 30	1,497	643	42.9	492	32.9	76.6	1,495	779	52.1	635	42.5	81.5	9.2*	9.6*
30 to 64	4,313	2,375	55.1	2,063	47.8	86.9	4,958	2,866	57.8	2,479	50.0	86.5	2.7*	2.2
65 & Over	866	470	54.2	413	47.7	88.0	1,097	538	49.0	494	45.0	91.9	-5.2*	-2.7
	6,677	3,487	52.2	2,968	44.5	85.1	7,550	4,182	55.4	3,608	47.8	86.3	3.2*	3.3*
Latino														
Under 30	4,873	2,307	47.4	1,724	35.4	74.7	5,811	3,098	53.3	2,361	40.6	76.2	6.0*	5.2*
30 to 64	9,335	5,734	61.4	4,820	51.6	84.1	11,381	6,978	61.3	6,046	53.1	86.6	-0.1	1.5
65 & Over	1,730	1,183	68.4	988	57.1	83.5	2,142	1,384	64.6	1,199	56.0	86.6	-3.8	-1.1
	15,938	9,225	57.9	7,532	47.3	81.6	19,334	11,459	59.3	9,606	49.7	83.8	1.4*	2.4*
Other														
Under 30	1,016	585	57.8	440	43.3	75.2	1,072	642	59.9	516	48.1	80.3	2.3	4.8*
30 to 64	1,986	1,391	70.0	1,180	59.4	84.9	2,065	1,457	70.6	1,261	61.1	86.5	0.6	1.7
65 & Over	364	291	79.8	250	68.7	86.0	408	296	72.6	254	62.3	85.9	-7.3*	-6.4
	3,366	2,267	67.3	1,870	55.6	82.5	3,545	2,396	67.6	2,031	57.3	84.8	0.3	1.7
Total	197,005	142,070	72.1	125,736	63.8	88.5	206,072	146,311	71.0	131,144	63.6	89.6	-1.1*	-0.2

*Change surpasses the margin of error of difference (90%) between the two surveys.

Source: Project Vote analysis of November 2008 Current Population Survey (Census Bureau)

Table 6: Size of the Voter Eligible Population, and Numbers Registered and Voted by Income Groups, 2008

2008						
Household Income	VEP <i>(in thousands)</i>	Registered <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted <i>(in thousands)</i>	%	Voted as % of Reg.
less than \$25,000/year	32,982	21,520	65.2	17,831	54.1	82.9
\$25,000 to \$39,000	28,060	20,130	71.7	17,412	62.1	86.5
\$40,000 to \$59,000	29,795	22,445	75.3	20,058	67.3	89.4
\$60,000 to \$99,999	39,548	31,836	80.5	29,377	74.3	92.3
\$100,000 and over	33,245	28,112	84.6	26,391	79.4	93.9
Total	163,631	124,044	75.8	111,069	67.9	89.5

Note:

Because approximately 20 percent of respondents do not provide their income, totals do not add up to the entire VEP.

Source: Project Vote analysis of November 2008 Current Population Survey (Census Bureau)

About Project Vote

Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in historically underrepresented communities. Project Vote takes a leadership role in nationwide voting rights and election administration issues, working through research, legal services, and advocacy to ensure that our constituencies are not prevented from registering and voting. Project Vote's headquarters are in Washington, D.C.



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