



FACT SHEET

AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTING FACT SHEET

African American voting disenfranchisement has a long and sordid history. Although the U.S. Congress ratified the 15th Amendment in 1870, guaranteeing the right to vote to African American men, literacy tests and poll taxes systematically denied African American people their constitutional rights. Nearly 100 years later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 allowed African Americans to step forward and participate in the American political process. Although the act did not eliminate all of the evils of racist opposition to blacks' participation in the process, it represented a large step forward.¹ The election of Barack Obama in 2008 marked monumental gains for African Americans and demonstrated the power of the black vote.

Registered and Voter Turnout, 2000–2008

Year	Total Citizen Population	Total Registered	Voter Turnout	% Voted (Citizen 18+)
2008	206,072,000	146,311,000	131,144,000	63.6%
2006	201,703,000	135,847,000	96,119,000	47.8%
2004	197,005,000	142,070,000	125,736,000	58.3%
2002	192,656,000	128,154,000	88,903,000	42.3%
2000	186,366,000	129,549,000	110,826,000	54.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration (2000–2008).²

U.S. Voter Turnout, 2008

- Approximately 131 million people voted in the 2008 U.S. presidential election (a record high in U.S. history).³
- Approximately five million more people voted in 2008 than in 2004, which included two million more African American voters, two million more Latino voters, and about 600,000 more Asian voters.⁴

Reported Voting and Registration (in thousands), 2008

Race of 18 Years and Over	Total Population	U.S. Citizen				Total Population		
		Total Citizen Population	Reported Registered		Reported Voted		Reported Registered Percent	Reported Voted Percent
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
Total U.S. Population	225,499	206,072	146,311	71.0	131,144	63.6	64.9	58.2
White	183,169	169,438	122,020	72.0	109,100	64.4	66.6	59.6
African American	26,528	24,930	17,375	69.7	16,133	64.7	65.5	60.8
Latino	30,852	19,537	11,608	59.4	9,745	49.9	37.6	31.6
Asian	10,455	7,059	3,901	55.3	3,357	47.6	37.3	32.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Voting and Registration, 2008 Election.⁵

Youth Voter Turnout in the 2008 Election

- The 2008 presidential election marked the second largest youth voter turnout in American history, the largest being the 1972 election, the first year 18-year-olds could vote in a presidential election.⁶
- Between 22 and 24 million young Americans ages 18–29 voted in 2008, resulting in an estimated youth voter turnout of between 49.3 and 54.5 percent.⁷
- Overall, 18-to-24-year-old turnout saw a 2 percent increase over 2004, reaching 49 percent. However, African Americans had the highest turnout rate among 18-to-24-year-old voters, 55 percent, an 8 percent increase from 2004.⁸

¹ Andrew L. Shapiro, “Challenging Criminal Disenfranchisement under the Voting Rights Act: A New Strategy,” *Yale Law Journal* 103 (November 1993): 537–66.

² U.S. Census Bureau. Voting and Registration in the Election of 2008. Table 4a. Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008. Available at: www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html (accessed, August 26, 2009).

³ Ibid.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. “Voter Turnout Increases by 5 Million in 2008 Presidential Election, U.S. Census Bureau Reports,” July 20, 2009, Available at: <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/voting/013995.html> (accessed, August 21, 2009).

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. “Voting and Registration, 2008.” Available at: www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html (accessed, August 21, 2009).

⁶ Project Vote Smart. “Voting Records.” Available at: http://www.votesmart.org/official_five_categories.php?dist=voting_category.php (accessed August 28, 2009).

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, “Voter Turnout Increases by 5 Million.”

⁸ Ibid.