

Voters, Movements, and Money in U.S. Politics

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Lecture 6. September 23, 2020

Today

- **Money in politics: concepts & research**
- **Voting rights & access**
- **Who actually turns out?**
- **Explaining political participation**

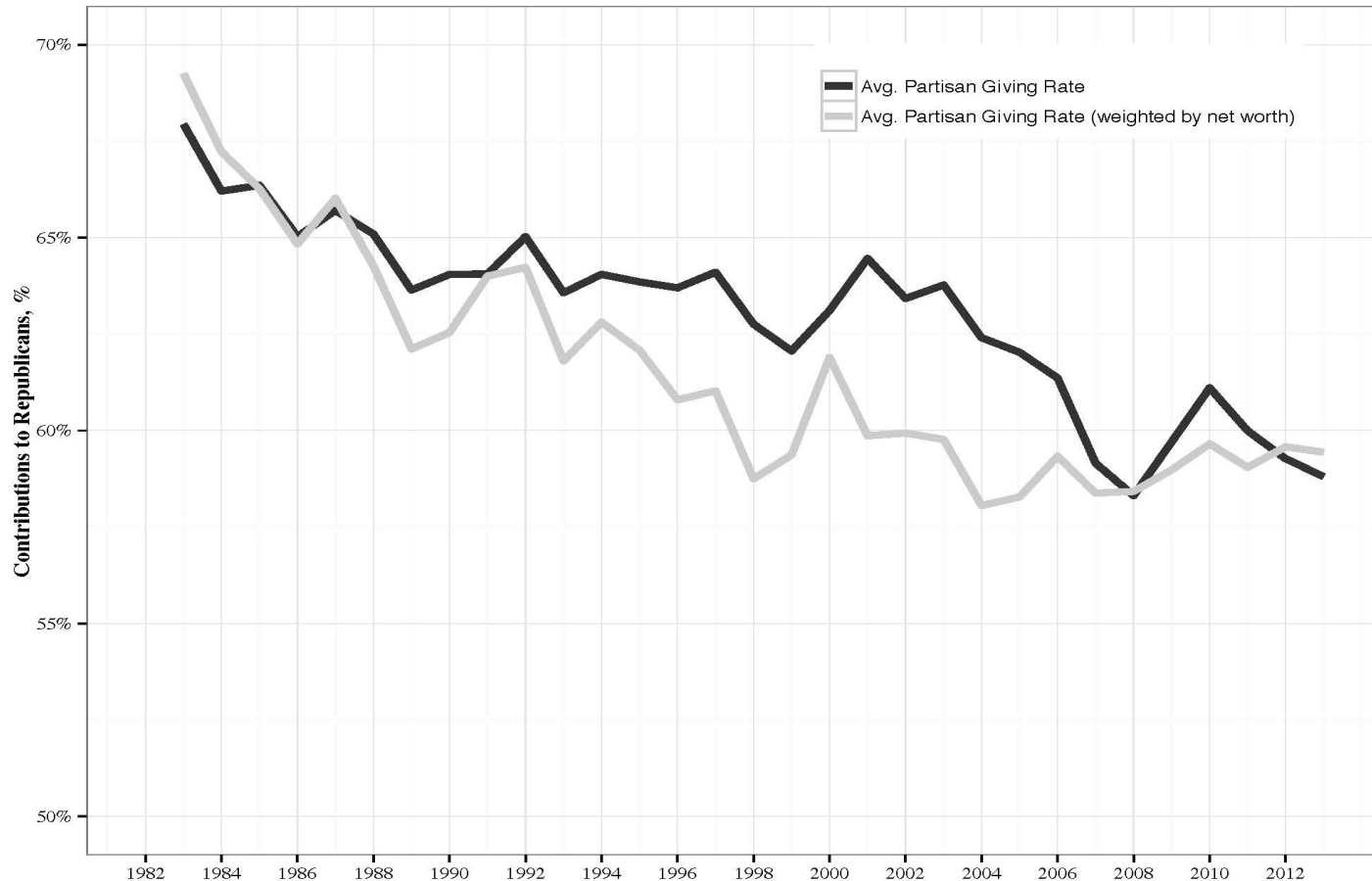
How do growing economic inequalities affect elections and governance?

Keep these common misconceptions in mind:

- Wrong to assume that all big money influence is on the right – in fact **increasing shares of big donors and donations are from the center or left.**
- Wrong to assume that there are many truly “small” donors – **mostly there are wealth donors vs. repeat salaried donors.**
- Wrong to presume that Supreme Court decisions have been the primary drivers of change – in fact **money flows to elections and lobbying have grown for many years.**
- Wrong to think that political donations are like bribes for votes – more importantly, **donors groom careers, influence governing agendas, and divert the time and attention of elected representatives.**

Declining Share of Forbes 400 Donations Go to Republicans

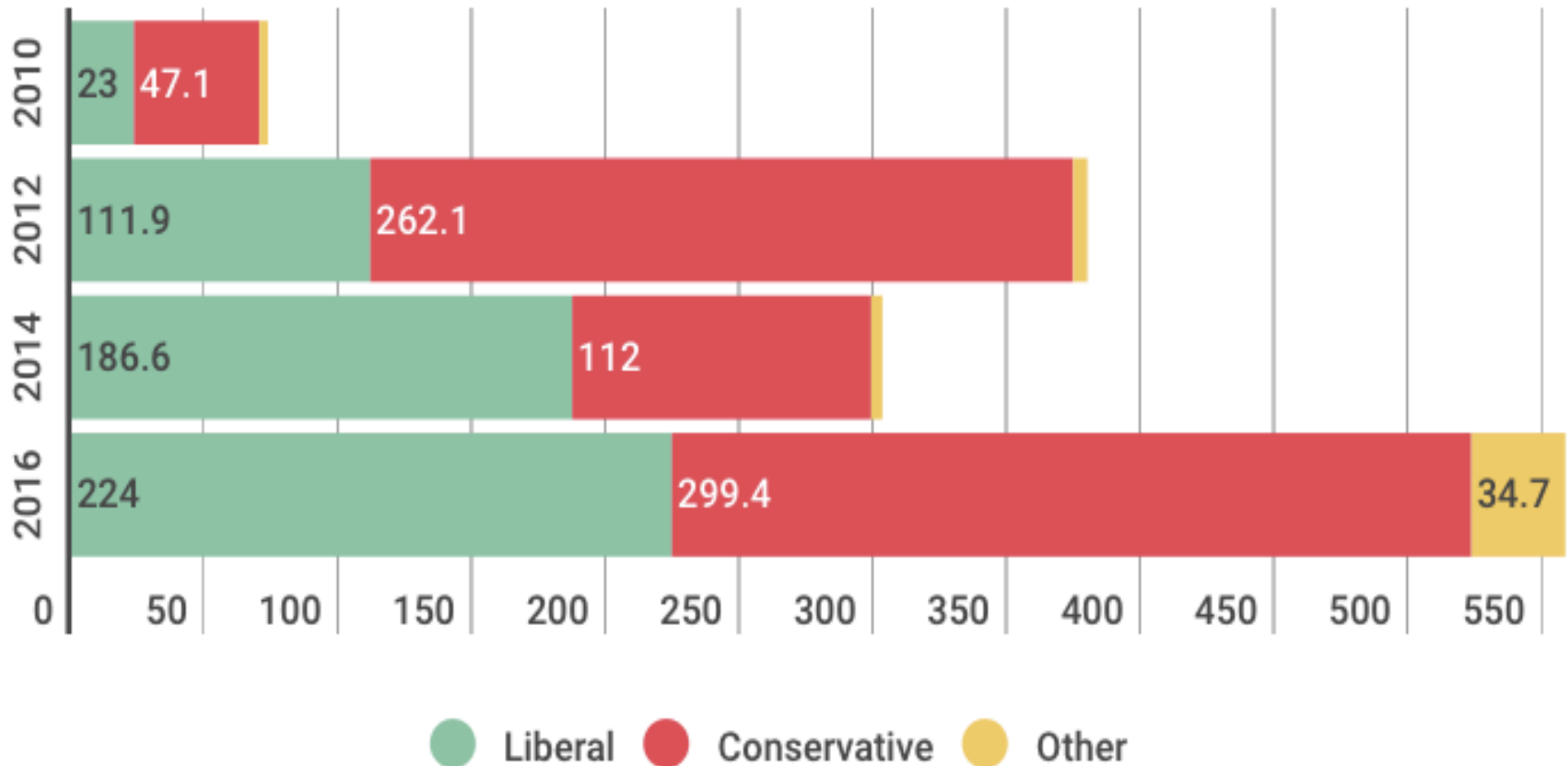
Average Percentage Given to Republicans



FROM Adam Bonica and Howard Rosenthal. "The Wealth Elasticity of Political Contributions by the Forbes 400" (September 26, 2015). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstracts=2668780> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2668780>.

Top 100 megadonors

* Contributions in millions of dollars



Source: OpenSecrets.org

The Supreme Court's limits on campaign finance laws

Year	Case	Limits	Vote
1976	Buckley v. Valeo	Overall campaign spending, candidate personal spending, and independent expenditures can't be capped.	5-3
2007	Wisconsin Right to Life v. FEC	The government can't halt outside group political advertising in the period before an election.	5-4
2008	FEC v. Davis	The government can't let opponents of self-financed candidates exceed the usual contribution limits	5-4
2010	Citizens United v. FEC	No limits on the amount of outside spending are permissible, and corporations can spend directly on campaigns	5-4
2011	Arizona Free Enterprise Club's Freedom PAC v. Bennett	Public financing systems can't use escalating matching funds	5-4
2014	McCutcheon v. FEC	A donor's overall spending on federal campaigns can't be capped	5-4

Limits of standard research approaches

- Most studies focus on publicly reported individual election donations or publicly reported corporate lobbying expenditures -- even though **a lot of resource flows are secret and much influence is behind the scenes.**
- Big data compilations can end up driving research questions – such as the “Database on Ideology, Money in Politics and Elections” (DIME data base) of 130 million+ contributions in local, state, and federal elections since 1979, led by Adam Bonica at Stanford.
- Most research focuses on individual donors and one-off donations – even though **sustained activity by organizations and organizational networks may be more important than individual actions.**

Important Long-term Organizational Players

- **Labor unions, especially public sector unions (teachers for Dems, police for GOP)**
- **ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), founded in 1973 to build bridges between mostly Republican state legislators and business and conservative interests.**
- **Federalist Society, working since 1982 to orient and foster the careers of law students and lawyers committed to ultra-free-market principles and Constitutional “originalism”**
- **Foundations, conservative and center-left, donating to public interest projects**

Consortia of billionaires & millionaires – especially the Koch Seminars and Democracy Alliance – reshaped the 2000s organizational terrain

Key features:

- **Sustained concerted giving by wealthy member donors since 2003/4**
- **A time horizon beyond individual election cycles**
- **Focus on a wide range of political endeavors and policy issues**
- **Focus on supporting fields of organizations, not just candidates**
- **A major social component**

In principle, voters and organized citizens can outweigh the wealthy ...

Milestones in U.S. Voting Rights

1790s-1830s	Removal of property requirements; expansion of voting rights to most Whites
1870	Fifteenth Amendment recognizes Black male voting rights
1890s-1910s	Literacy rules, poll taxes, etc. disenfranchise Blacks and poor Whites, especially in the South
1890s -	Territories and state gradually extend White female voting rights, especially in the West
1920	Nineteenth Amendment legalizes female suffrage
1965	Voting Rights Act empowers federal action to remove obstacles to Blacks in the South, and to “preclear” changes in all discriminatory jurisdictions
1971	Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowers voting age to 18 years.
2013	In <i>Shelby County v. Holder</i>, Supreme Court majority undercuts voting rights enforcement

Legal rights to vote can be reversed or limited or become too cumbersome to exercise – as Professor Carol Anderson of Emory University explains in the *Vox* interview we assigned and in this video.

Felon Disenfranchisement

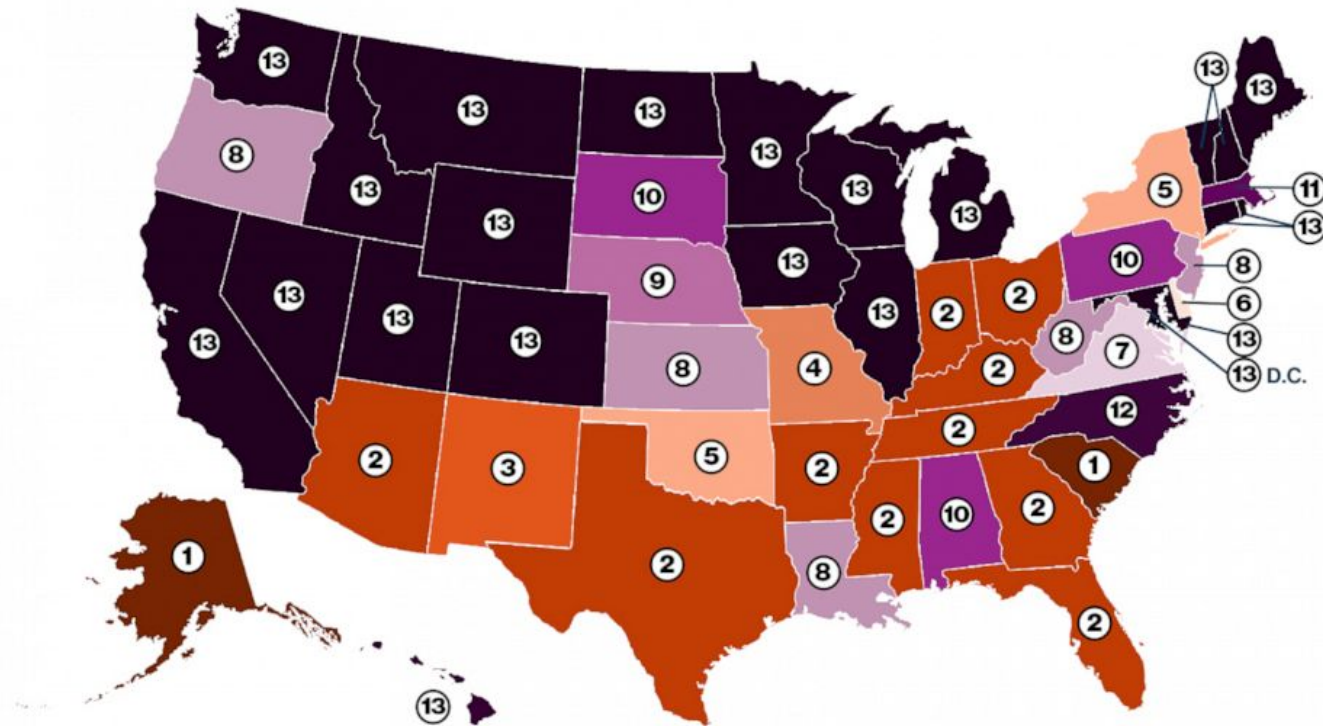
- Felon disenfranchisement has grown in the United States since the mid-1970s – disproportionately removing poor and minority people, especially men, from the electorate.**
- Most of those not allowed to vote have fully completed prison and parole, and the numbers accumulate over time.**
- Public opinion favors restoring rights to those who have completed sentences. But politicians often oppose changes.**
- Florida's Constitution permanently disenfranchises some 1.4 million felons. November 2018 referendum tried to change that, but GOP state legislature and 11th Circuit with have pushed back, requiring fines to be paid first.**

Sources: Uggen, Shannon, and Manza, "State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement... 2010," *The Sentencing Project*, 2012; and Uggen, "What Americans Believe About Voting Rights for Criminals," *Scholars Strategy Network* brief, April 2012.

Registration rules often make voting a two-step process; & limits can be placed on days, hours and polling places

- **GOP officials or legislatures in key states like Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, and Wisconsin have eliminated voting days – such as Sundays before elections – when minority voters like to go to the polls in groups.**
- **Polling places have been strategically opened in some areas and closed in urban poor neighborhoods or near colleges.**
- **Many states situate polling places in churches, which researchers have found tends to boost conservative turnout.**
- **Eliminating early voting or early/late hours on Election Day makes it difficult for workers in low-wage jobs or parents of young children to get to the polls.**

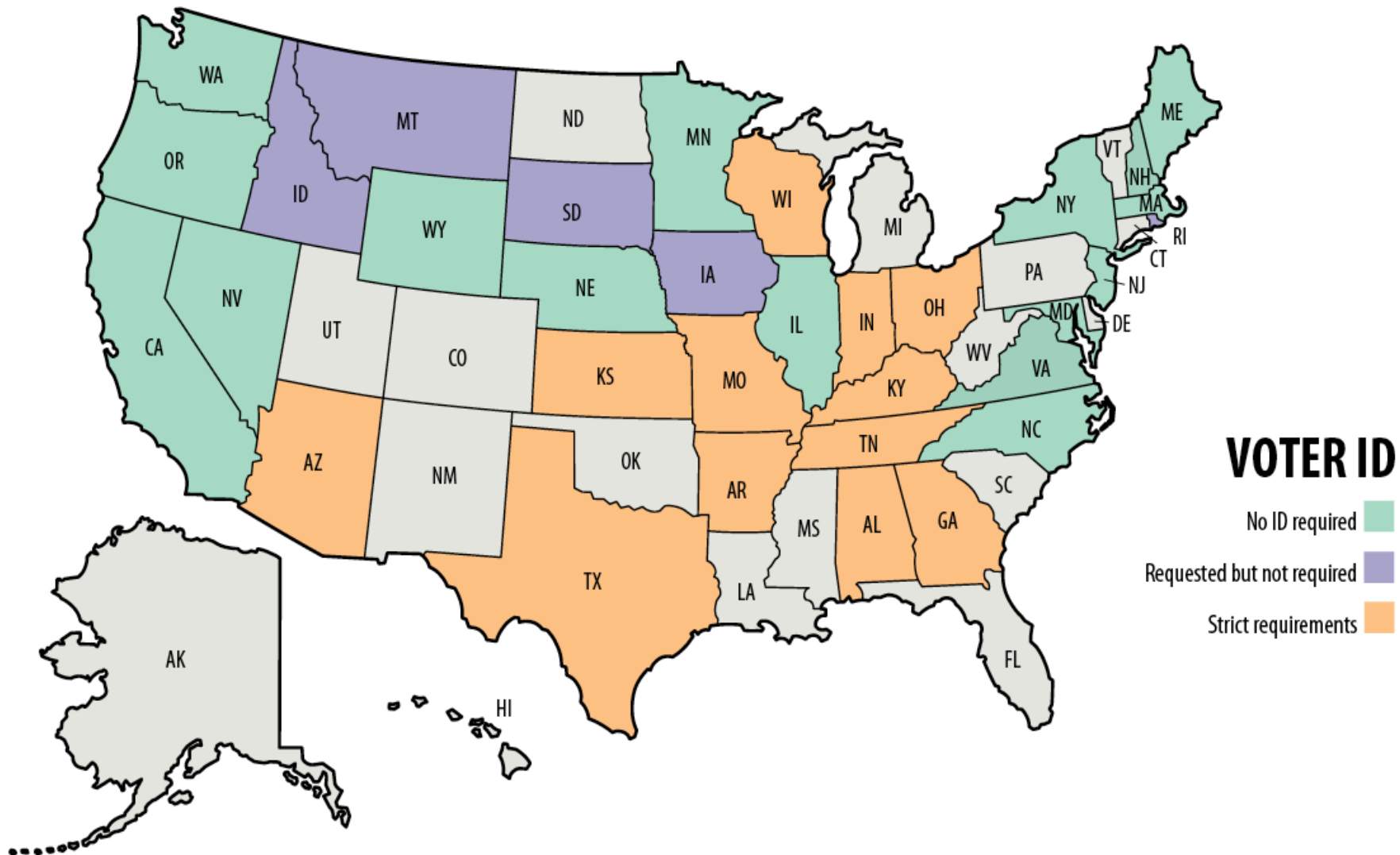
2020 Election: Latest Voter Registration Deadline



- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| ① October 4 | ④ October 7 | ⑦ October 12 | ⑩ October 19 |
| ② October 5 | ⑤ October 9 | ⑧ October 13 | ⑪ October 24 |
| ③ October 6 | ⑥ October 10 | ⑨ October 16 | ⑫ October 31 |
| ⑬ November 3 (Election Day) | | | |

Voter ID Laws

- **Less than one in every 15 million efforts to vote involve “in-person” voter fraud. (Fraud usually involves absentee ballots and their handing.)**
- **After 2000 – and especially after 2008 and 2010 – almost all U.S. states considered and many passed bills to require voters to show picture IDs at the polls – often restricted to drivers’ licenses, passports, gun permits, and military identifications, but usually not student IDs.**
- **Public opinion is divided, because majorities have heard false claims – and many middle class people think IDs are no big deal.**
- **But millions of poor, black, Latino, very elderly, and young voters do not have the requisite IDs. People may have to pay fees and go to offices in inconvenient locations with limited hours.**
- **Research shows a substantial impact on election outcomes.**

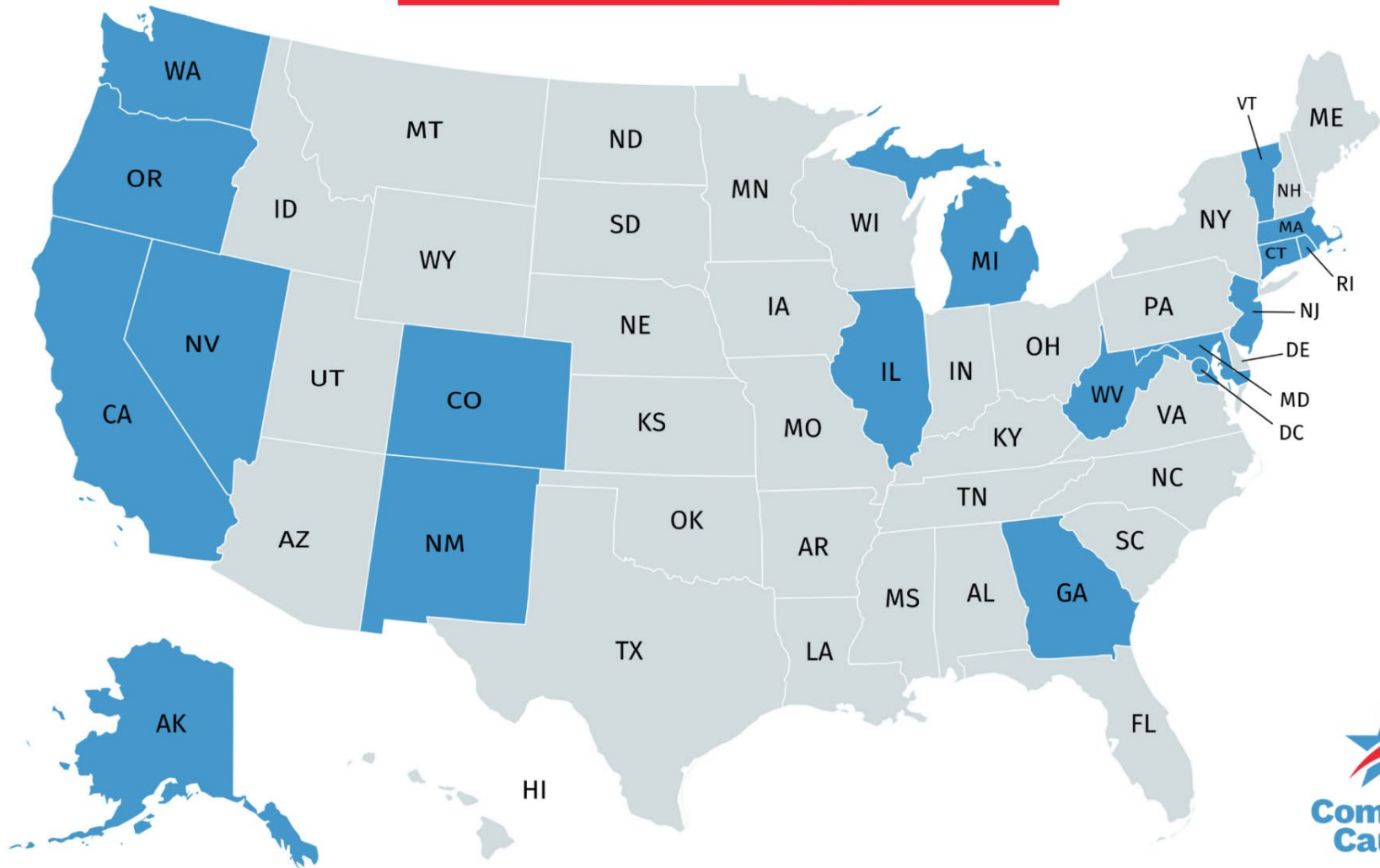


Source: Sierra Club, April 2020.

Reforms have varied implications

- “**CONVENIENCE VOTING**” reforms make it easier for *already-registered voters* to cast ballots – but do not always equalize participation because (as political scientist Elizabeth Rigby shows) **the already-registered tend to be more privileged**.
- **ELECTION DAY VOTER REGISTRATION** does more to enlarge and equalize voter participation.
- Richard Freeman in “What Me, Vote?” points to Puerto Rico, where **ELECTION DAY HOLIDAYS** (especially on Tuesday) boost and equalize turnout.
- Voters can be **AUTOMATICALLY REGISTERED** unless they opt out, easing the process and making updating and accuracy checks easier for officials.

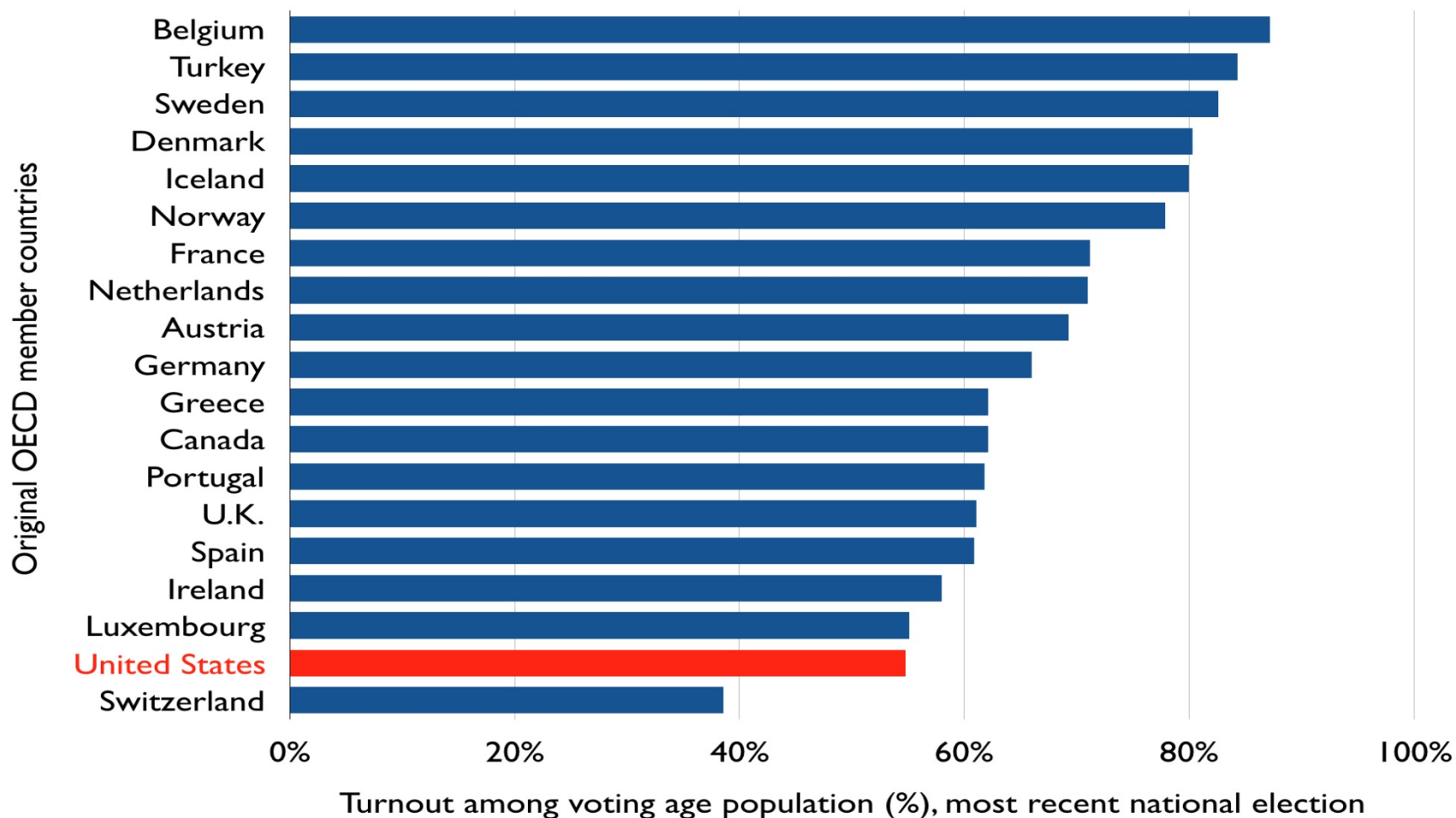
States That Have Passed or Adopted Automatic Voter Registration



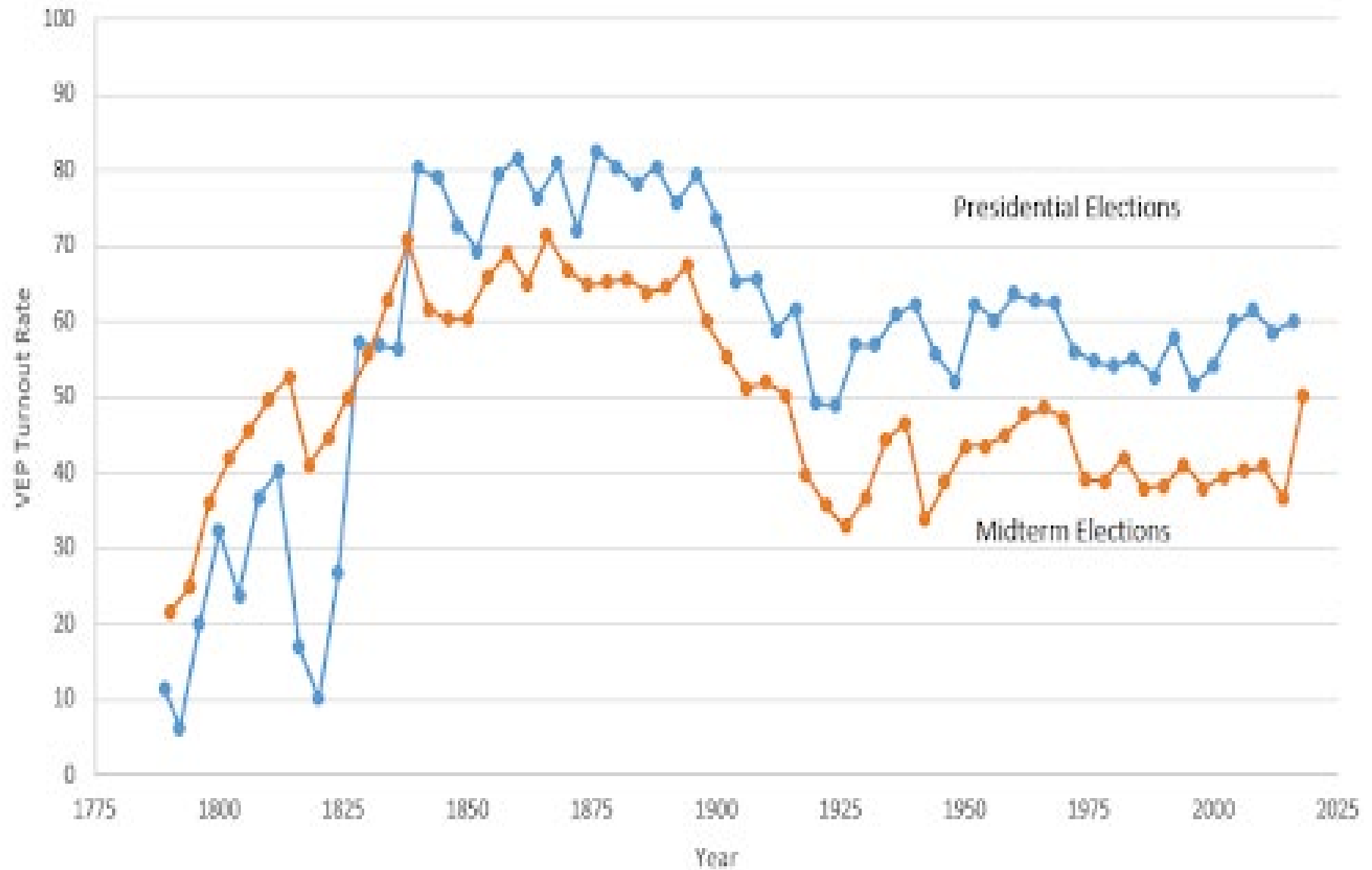
NOT ALL WHO CAN VOTE ACTUALLY DO

- **Among countries worldwide that hold elections, the USA ranks near last in turnout.**
- **Democracies averaged c.73% turnout (in 2003), but the USA hovered around 50% in presidential contests after the 1960s. Presidential turnout rose to c.60% in 2008 and 2012, and declined slightly in 2016.**
- **Turnout is always lower in “off year” or “midterm” U.S. Congressional elections – But grew a lot in 2018.**

Voting rights are not always exercised. By international standards, the United States has had very low turnout even in presidential contests.

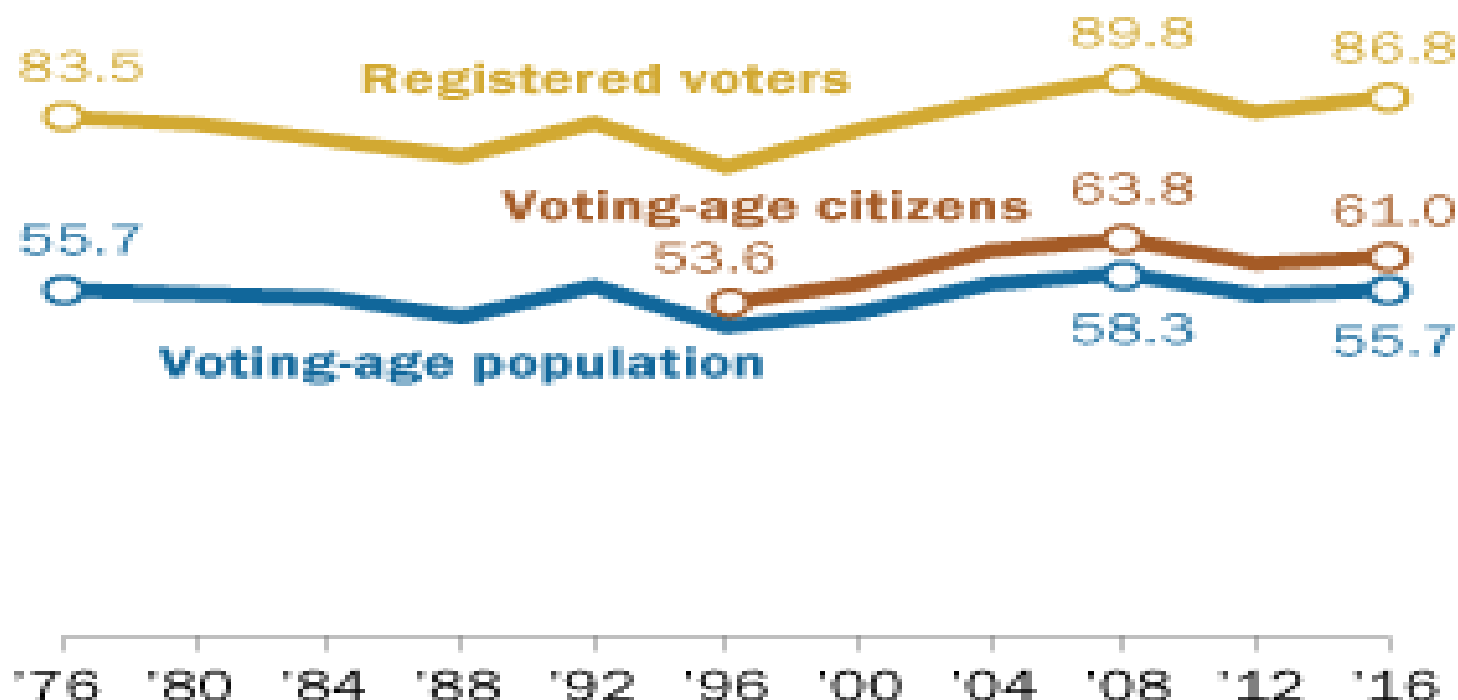


United States VEP Turnout Rates 1789-2018



Turnout in U.S. presidential elections

Votes cast as a share of ...

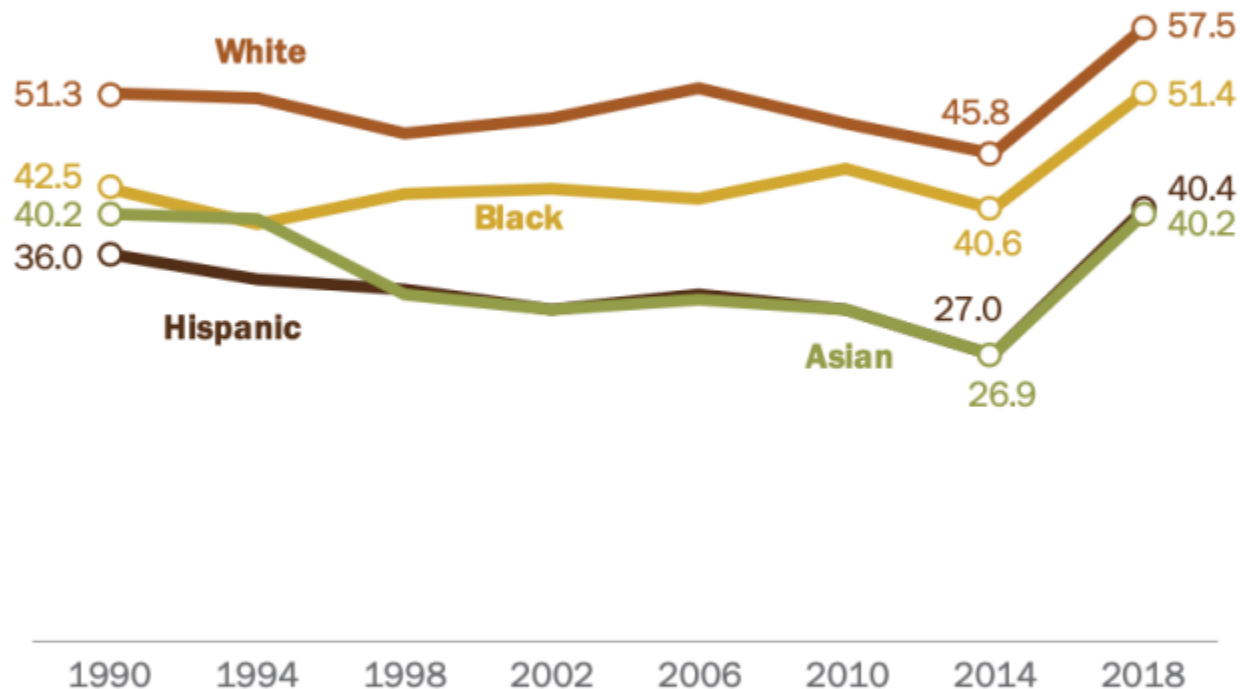


Source: Census Bureau (population estimates), House Clerk's office and Pew Research Center (vote totals).

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Voter turnout rate increased sharply across racial and ethnic groups during 2018 midterm elections

% of eligible voters who say they voted, by midterm election year

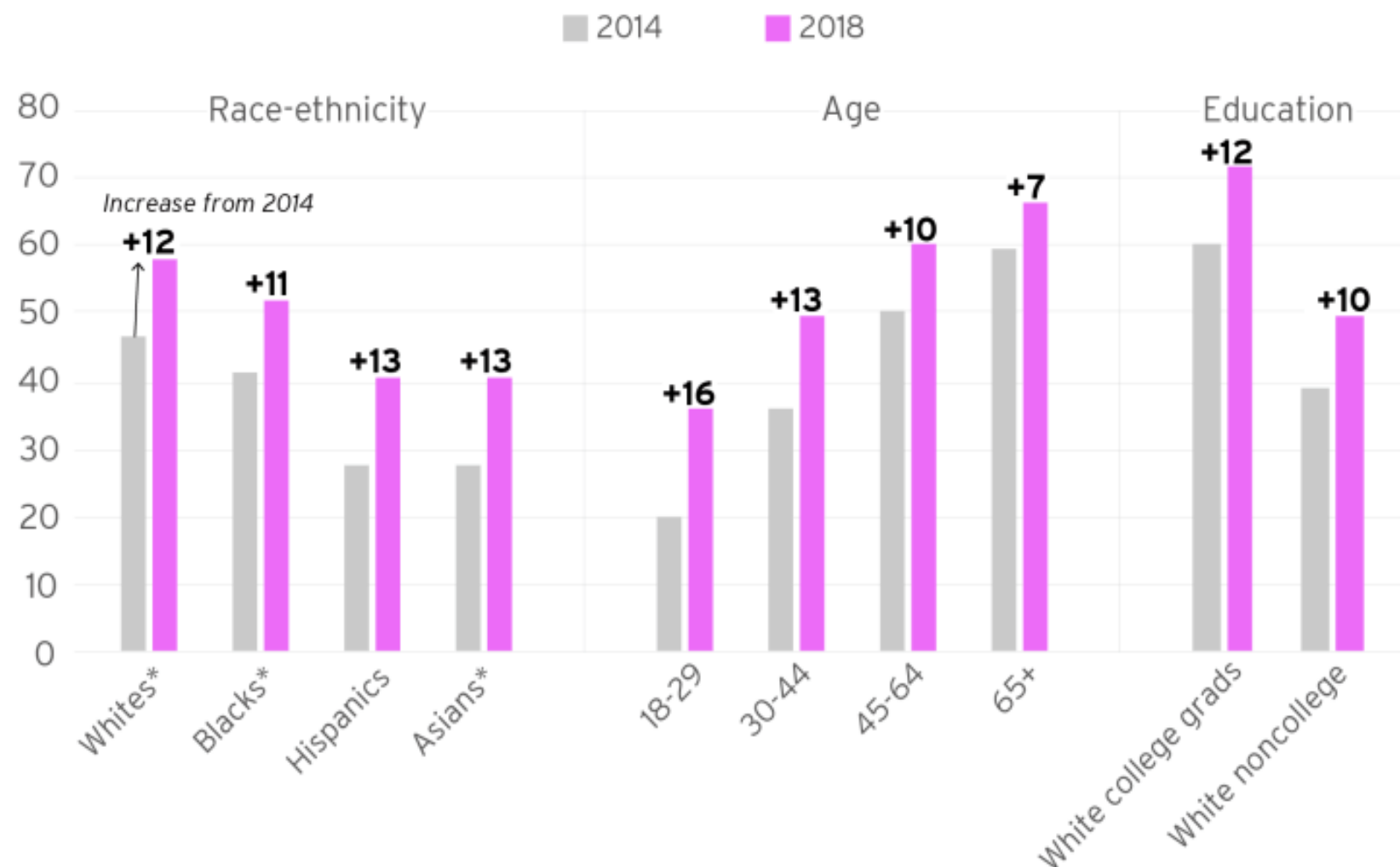


Note: Eligible voters are U.S. citizens ages 18 and older. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1990-2018.

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United States voter turnout rates for attributes, 2014 and 2018

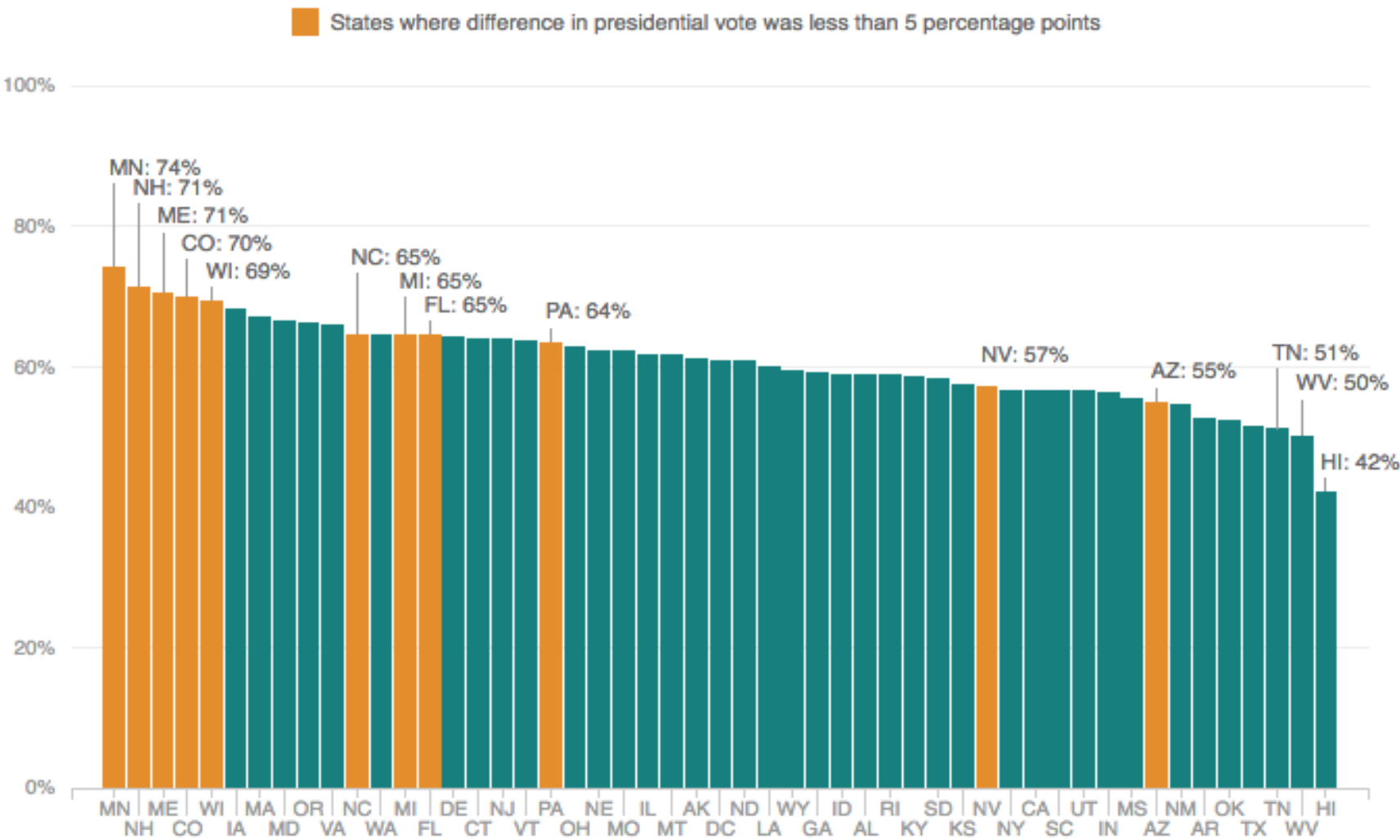


* Non-Hispanic members of racial group

Source: William H Frey analysis of Current Population Survey Micro-files, 2014 and 2018, released April 23, 2019.

Election Turnout Varies Significantly State To State

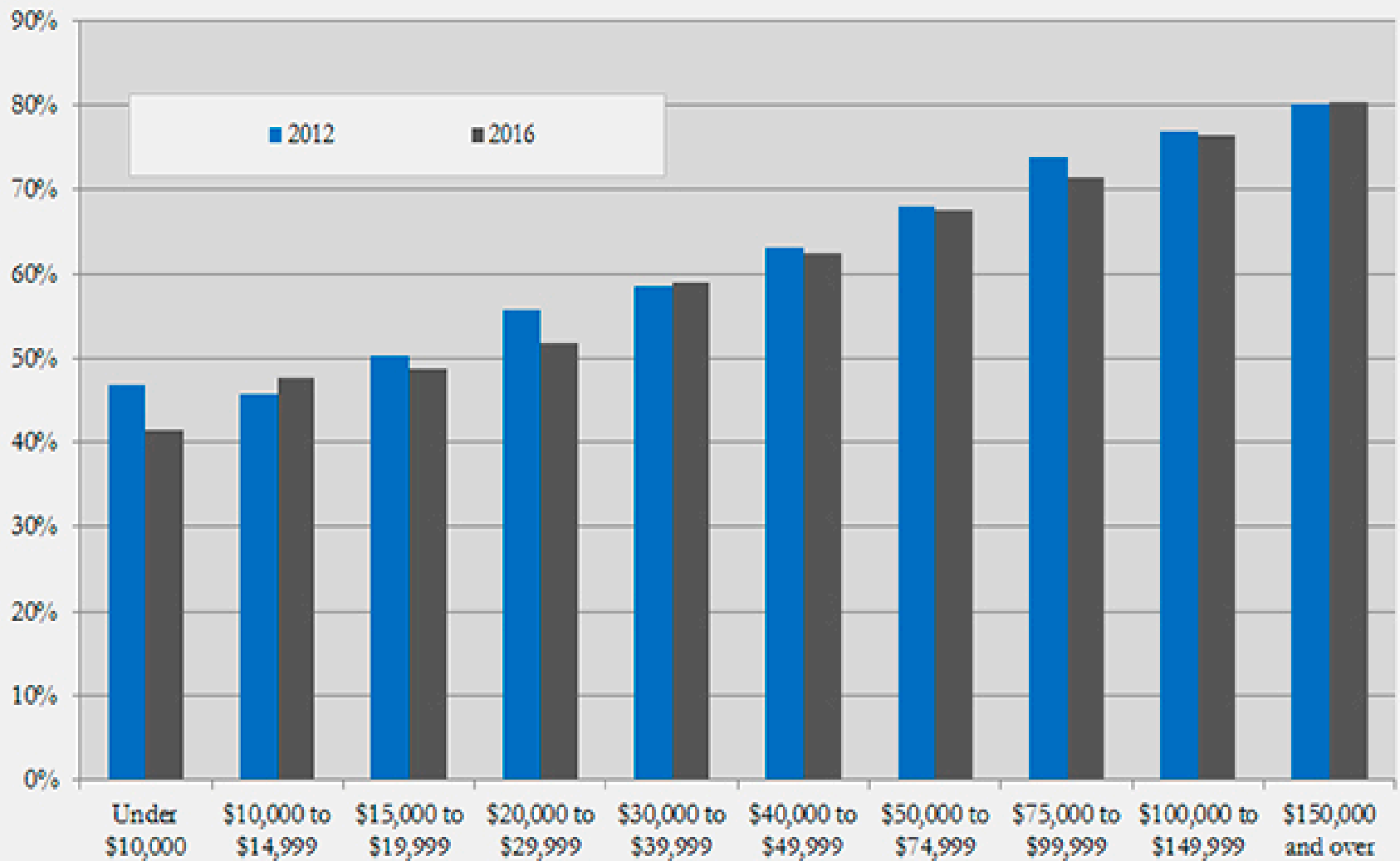
In the highly competitive 2016 presidential election, voter turnout ranged from 42 percent to 74 percent depending on the state, averaging 59 percent nationwide. Battleground states experienced higher turnout, on average.



Notes

Turnout rates calculated include all residents of a state who are of voting age, minus individuals who are noncitizens, in prison, on probation, on parole or ineligible because of felony convictions

Turnout Rate, By Family Income, 2012 and 2016

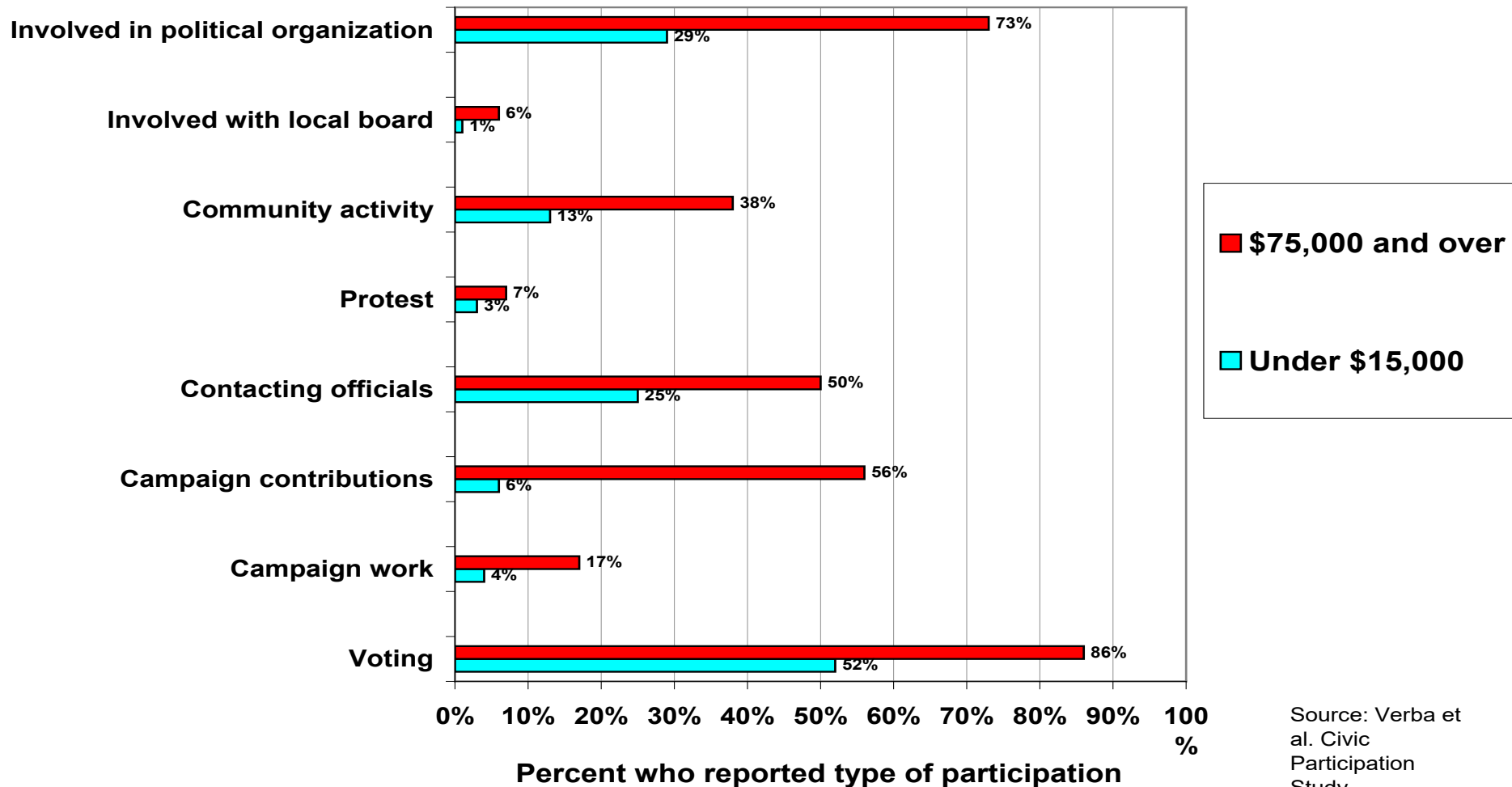


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

@SeanMcElwee

Although U.S. voting rates are low, voting is the most common and least class-skewed form of political participation – as a classic study showed.

Forms of Political Participation by High and Low-income Americans



WHY PEOPLE MAY NOT PARTICIPATE

- **CANNOT PARTICIPATE:**
 - legal or de facto barriers;
 - lack resources of money, time, or skill
- **DON'T WANT TO:** not interested;
believe they cannot make a difference
- **NOBODY ASKS:** isolated from social networks of recruitment; leaders are not contacting and mobilizing them

Table 7-1 Decomposition of the Decline in Voter Turnout in Presidential Election Years Between the 1960s and 1980s

The Change	Effect on Percentage Change in Turnout Between 1960s and 1980s	Percentage of Decline in Turnout Explained
An easing of voter registration laws	+ 1.8	
Increased formal education	+ 2.8	
A younger electorate	- 2.7	17
Weakened social involvement	- 1.4	9
Declining feelings of efficacy	- 1.4	9
Weakened attachment to and evaluations of the political parties and their candidates	- 1.7	11
A decline in mobilization	- 8.7	54
		<u>100</u>
Net change in voter turnout:	-11.3	

Source: Appendix D.

Source: Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America.

Differences in mobilization help explain contrasts over time and across similar countries

- **19th century U.S. parties were rooted in locally based networks with patronage-oriented elites who cooperated with unions, ethnic associations and fire companies to turn out eligible male voters at 75% rates and higher.**
- **European democracies have had strong labor parties or Catholic parties with community roots – parties able to contact and turn out voters who are less-educated, lower-income, and less interested.**
- **Many of today's forms of participation and mobilization favor the rich and well-educated, who are knowledgeable and interested.**
- **Modern media can reinforce biases – especially cable TV and the Internet.**

An interesting exception:

Voting and political participation by the U.S. elderly in recent decades.

ELDERLY VOTING HAS INCREASED OVER TIME

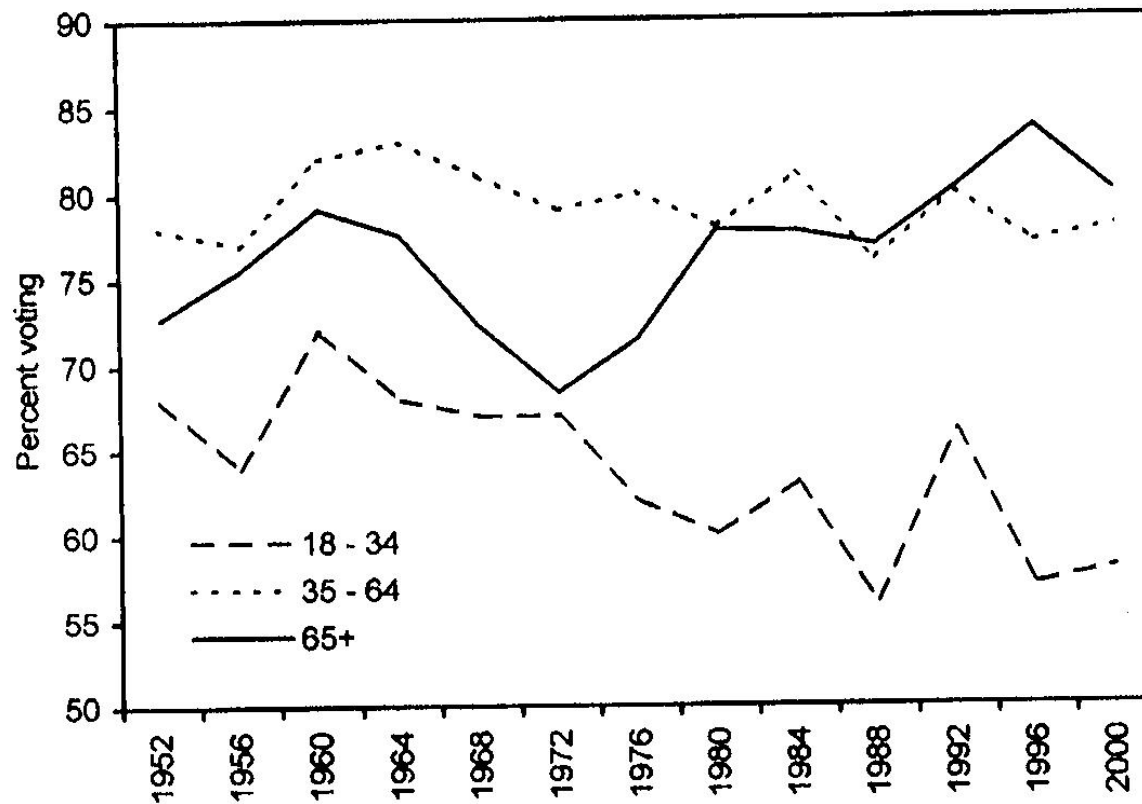


Figure 2.5 Turnout in presidential elections by age, 1952–2000. (National Election Studies.)

Source: Andrea Louise Campbell, HOW POLICIES MAKE CITIZENS, p. 29.

LESS INEQUALITY IN TURNOUT AMONG ELDERLY

TABLE 3.3
Participation by Resource Level

	18–34	35–49	50–64	65+	Difference of Means Test 35–49 vs. 65+
<i>Giving money by family income by age</i>					
Under \$15,000	5%	5%	4%	10%	
\$15,000–\$34,999	16	19	16	29	*
\$35,000–\$49,999	20	32	26	34	
\$50,000 and over	22	47	54	67	#
<i>Turnout by education by age</i>					
< HS	7%	28%	64%	63%	***
HS grad.	49	70	76	87	***
Some college	60	77	90	95	**
College grad.	77	85	95	100	*
Post grad.	76	93	96	100	

$p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Source: Citizen Participation Study.

Why has U.S. elder participation increased and equalized?

Andrea Campbell in *How Policies Make Citizens* points to “policy feedbacks” from the expansion of Social Security and Medicare benefits after the mid-1960s:

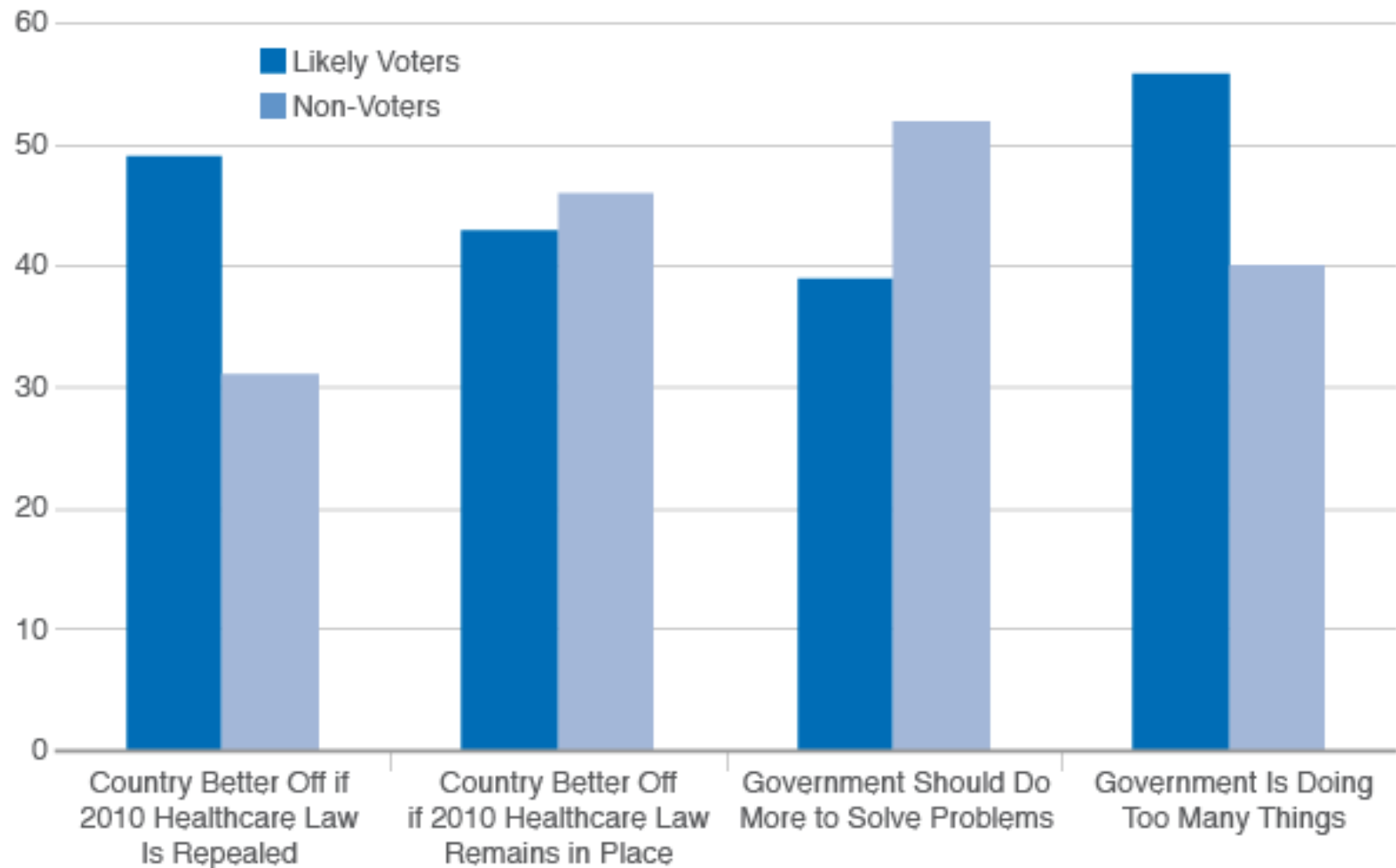
- **Less privileged seniors especially **gained resources** of time, health, income.**
- **Universal policy created “**linked fate**” for all elders.**
- **AARP and other elder organizations grew.**
- **Elderly became **more interested** in government actions.**
- **Stakes rose for voting and contacting officials.**
- **As elder participation increased, **parties have competed to attract their votes and reached out to mobilize them** - -- including now, in 2020.**

Changes in parties and elite strategies dampened post-1970s participation by many of the non-elderly

- **From the 1970s, U.S. political parties shifted from direct voter mobilization toward raising funds for impersonal messages.**
- **Candidates ran individualized campaigns with pollsters, media consultants, and networks of fund-raisers.**
- **Advocacy groups influenced politics by raising money or arousing highly motivated activists.**
- **“Political action committees” and issue-oriented interest groups proliferated – and most contact privileged and educated citizens constantly, while ignoring the less privileged or less attentive.**

So what?

Figure 4. Nonvoters are more liberal than voters (percent who agree)



In sum

- To understand individual political participation, we need to understand differences in **individual resources and motivations** -- and also see which organizations and elites are committed to **asking people to get involved and aggregating efforts**.
- Government policies can stimulate participation – or discourage it.
- Political parties and candidates can spur participation, but so can social movements and elite or mass associations through which people and groups can be directly or indirectly contacted and engaged.

Some nationwide associations and movements still mobilize many citizens into politics

- **Christian right groups, based in evangelical church networks: Christian Coalition, National Right to Life Committee, and others**
- **AARP, with tens of millions elders who receive mailings, and often congregate in local settings and talk politics**
- **National Rifle Association: huge budget and network of clubs**
- **Labor unions – especially teachers' unions (teachers are everywhere! But unions are under attack and declining.**
- **Tea Party grass roots conservatives in 2010 and beyond.**
- **Anti-Trump grassroots resistance groups from 2016, including March of Our Lives and Black Lives Matter**