



District of Columbia

STATE DATA CENTER MONTHLY BRIEF

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These indicators were derived from data produced by the U.S. Census Bureau and may differ from data produced by other entities.

The Voting Rights Act and Voter Participation: 2015

This year will mark the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act – This act was signed into law on August 6, 1965, by President Lyndon Johnson. It outlawed the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many southern states after the Civil War, including literacy tests, poll taxes, and other such requirements that were used to restrict black voting. Blacks also risked harassment, intimidation, economic reprisals, and physical violence when they tried to register or vote. As a result, very few African Americans were registered voters, and they had very little, if any, political power, either locally or nationally.

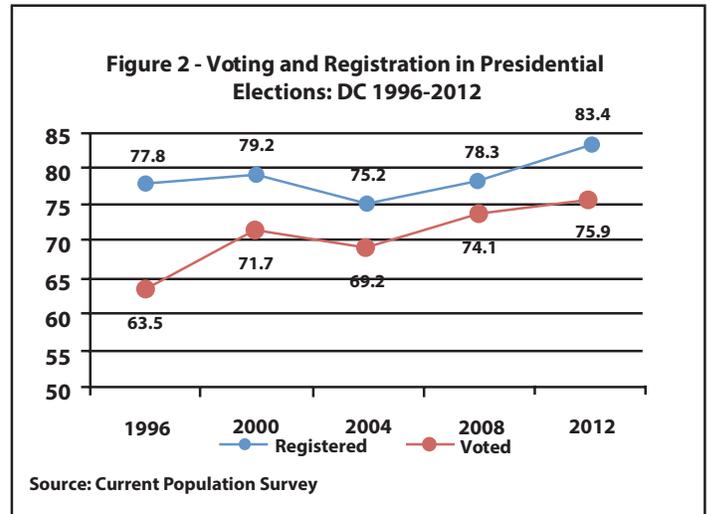
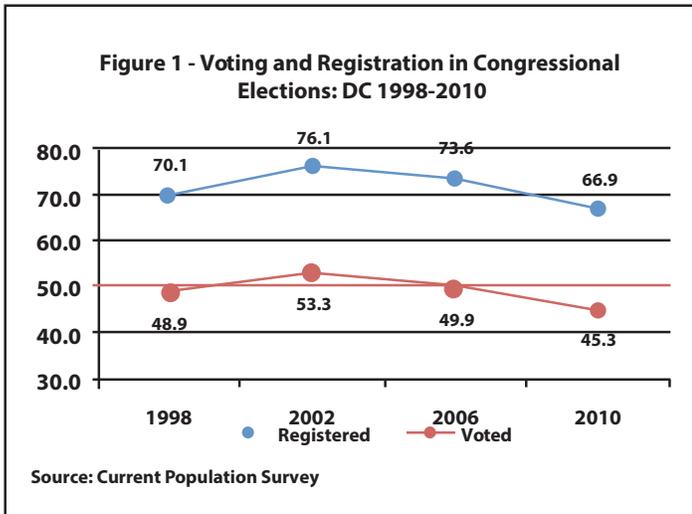
With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made it illegal to treat people differently because of the color of their skin, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. realized that just the mere passing of the law did not make things better for African-Americans. Dr. King believed that the situation would not change until more blacks voted in elections. However, although they had the legal right to vote due to the Fifteenth Amendment, many states had rules that made it difficult for them to register and vote. In 1964, numerous demonstrations were held, and the considerable violence that erupted brought renewed attention to the issue of voting rights. The murder of a voting- rights activist in Mississippi, and the attack by state troopers on peaceful marchers in Selma, AL, gained national attention, and persuaded President Johnson and Congress to initiate meaningful and effective national voting rights legislation which culminated in the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Within months of the passage of the Voting Rights Act, a quarter of a million new black voters had been registered. Within four years, voter registration in the South had more than doubled. In 1965, Mississippi led the nation in both African-American turnout (74 percent), and the number of African-American leaders elected. By 1969, the impact was even more salient: African-American turnout in Tennessee was 92.1 percent; Arkansas, 77.9 percent; and Texas, 73.1 percent (American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) – Remembering Dr. King’s Defense of Voting Rights – 01-16-2012). By 2012, the percentage of black voter turnout has fluctuated from the rates of the 1960s, but the historic events surrounding the Voting Rights Act still resonate with many individuals today.

DC Voter Participation Highlights (1996-2012)

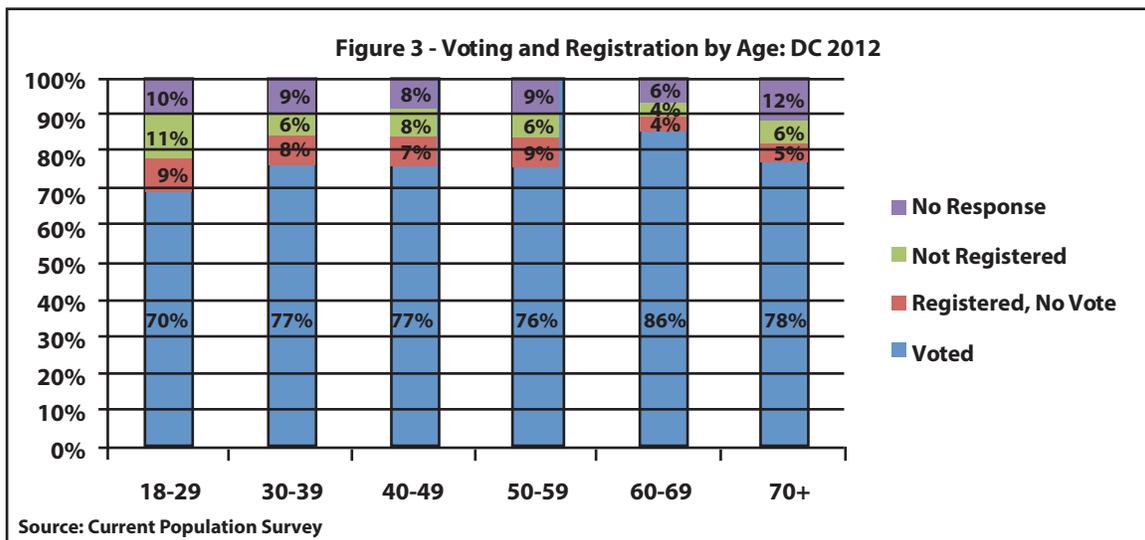
The data used to derive the graphs presented below were obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement. Current Population Survey collects data on voting and voter registration in November of even-numbered years, and has done so since 1964. It provides information about voting and registration by many characteristics, including age, sex, race, and education. Because the data are from a survey, they are subject to sampling error. This report highlights elections held between 1996 and 2012 for the District of Columbia and focuses on the voting aged citizen population 18 years and over.

Voting rates are historically higher in years with presidential elections than in congressional election years. For example, the national voting rate in 2012 – a Presidential election - was 61.8 percent while the national voting rate in 2010 - a Congressional election - was 45.5 percent. The corresponding numbers for the District of Columbia were 75.9 percent voting rate for 2012 and 45.3 percent voting rate for 2010 (Figures 1 & 2). For 2012, the voting rate in the District of Columbia (75.9 percent) was higher than the national voting rate of 61.8 percent.



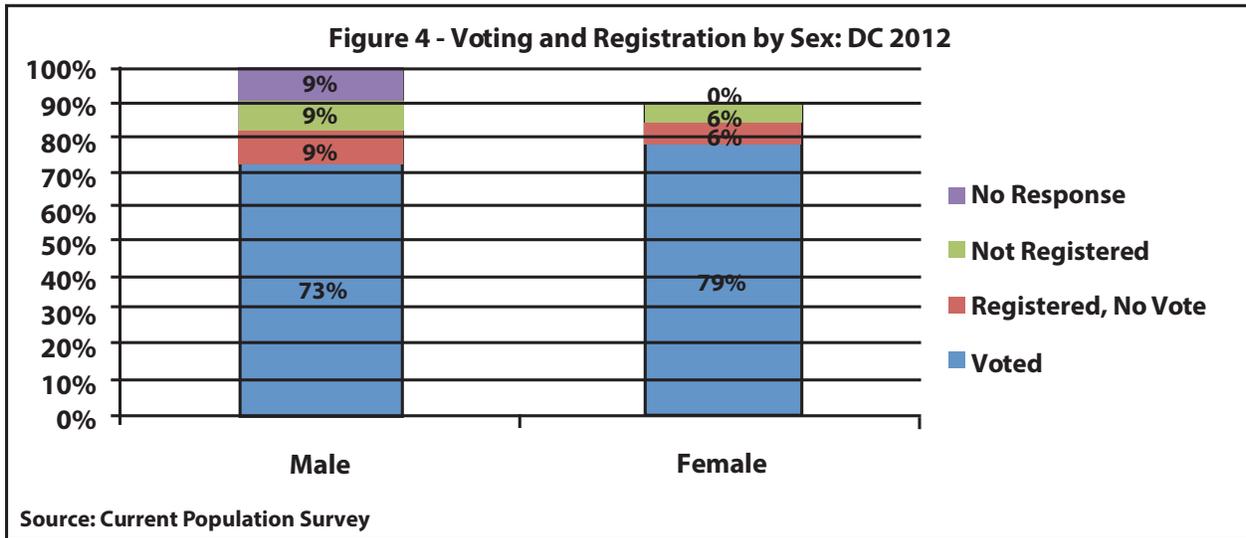
Voting by Age

Voting and registration rates tend to increase with age. In the U.S. in 2012, only 41.2 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds voted, compared with 72.0 percent of those 65 and older. In the District of Columbia in 2012, 61.4 percent of 18-to 24-year olds voted, a voting rate statistically higher than the national average.



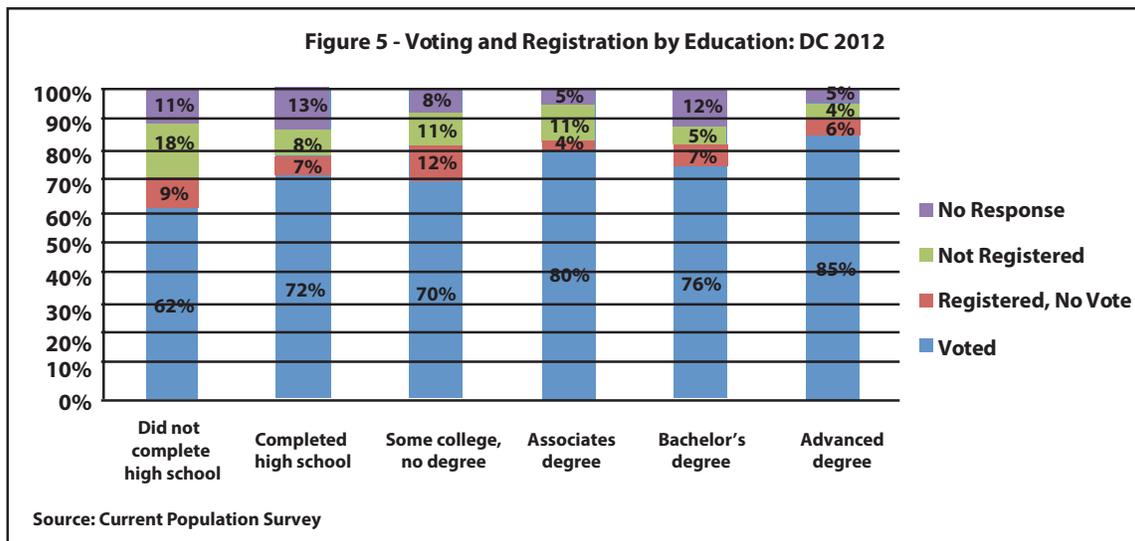
Voting by Gender

In many elections, women vote at higher rates than men. In 2012 this was the case in the United States where the voting rate was 63.7 percent for women, compared to 59.7 for men. For the 2012 election in the District of Columbia 73 percent of males voted compared to 79 percent of females (Figure 4).



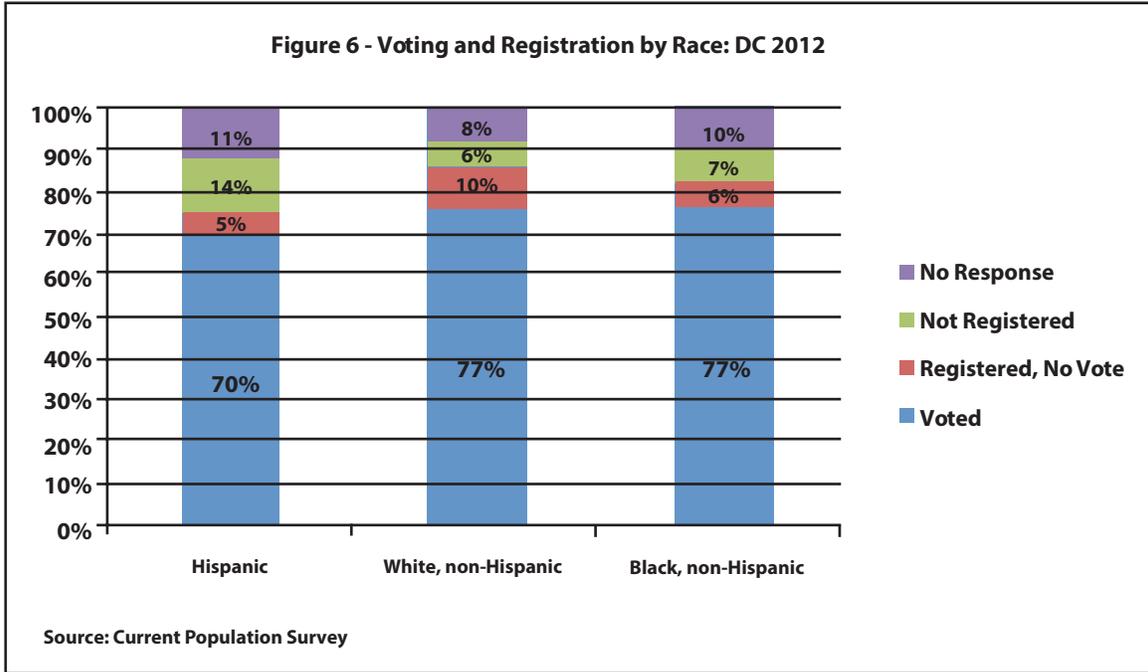
Voting by Education

Voting and registration rates tend to increase with education. In 2012 in the United States, the voting rate for citizens with at least a bachelor's degree was 77.1 percent compared to 38.0 percent for those who had not received a high school diploma. For the District of Columbia, the gap is smaller, the voting rate for those who did not complete high school was 62 percent and increased to 85 percent for those with advanced degree (Figure 5).



Voting by Race and Ethnicity

Voting rates also typically vary by race and Hispanic origin. In 2012 in the United States, the voting rate for White, non-Hispanic was 64.1 percent. It was 66.2 percent for Blacks and 48.0 percent for Hispanics. For the District of Columbia, White, non-Hispanic and Black non-Hispanics had the same voting rate in 2012 at 77 percent. Hispanics were lower at 70 percent.



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