



## Voter Turnout Overview

### 2016 Results

League of Women Voters of Texas  
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Data sources available upon request.

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, political organization of volunteers who believe that our representative democracy needs citizens involved in public decisions. Citizens can influence government policies and decisions that affect their lives by participating in politics, particularly voting and contacting their elected officials.

"Let each person do his or her part. If one citizen is unwilling to participate, all of us are going to suffer. For the American dream, though it is shared by all of us, is realized in each one of us."



[LWVTexas.org](http://LWVTexas.org)

Barbara C. Jordan

## Percent Turnout Among the Voting Eligible Population<sup>a</sup> 2016 Presidential Election

<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>TEXAS</b>
<b><i>Percent Voter Turnout, 2016</i></b>	
60%	52%
<b><i>Short-Term Trend in Voter Turnout, 2012-2016</i></b>	
Increased 1.6% in 4 years, 58.6%–60.2%	Increased 2.0% in 4 years, 49.6%–51.6%
<b><i>Long-Term Trend in Voter Turnout, 1996-2016</i></b>	
Voting Age Population <sup>b</sup>	
Increased 6.5% in 20 years, 49.0%–55.5% <sup>c</sup>	Increased 2.4% in 20 years, 41.0%–43.4%
<b><i>Short-Term Trend in Voter Registration, 2012-2016</i></b>	
Increased 18% in 4 years, 69%–87%	Increased 2% in 4 years, 85%–87%
<b><i>Gap Between Those Who Registered &amp; Those Who Voted</i></b>	
Large: 27%	Larger: 35%

<sup>a</sup> Voting eligible population (VEP) = voting age citizens not serving punishment for a felony.

<sup>b</sup> Voting age population (VAP) was used because 1996 VEP data is not available for Texas.

<sup>c</sup> Among the voting eligible population, the turnout increased 8.5% over 20 years (51.7% vs. 60.2%).

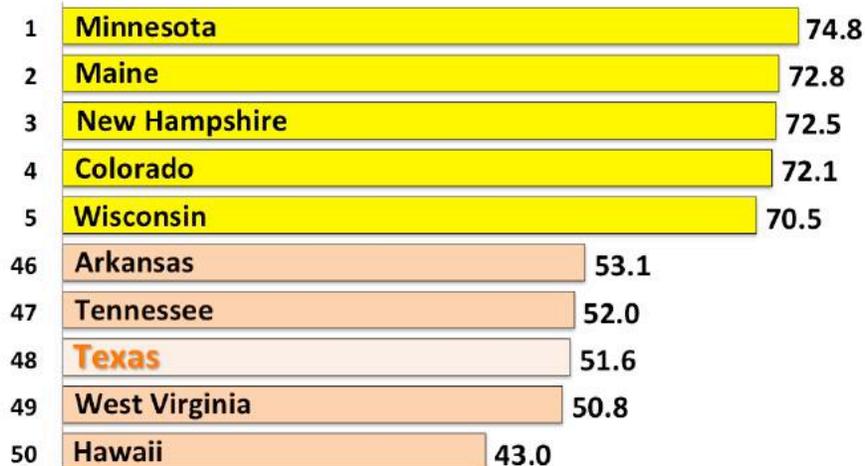
- The good news is that as the electorate continues to grow, so does the proportion of those who register to vote and turn out to vote.
- But there is more work to be done to mobilize voters:
  - The gap between those who register and those who vote is large.
  - And 4 out of 10 people who could have voted, didn't.

### **Note**

The best measure of voter turnout is the proportion of the voting eligible population that voted. Eligible voters are mentally competent, voting age citizens not serving punishment for a felony. Because there is no available nationwide or state by state measure of population mental competency, the voting age population is adjusted only for noncitizens and ineligible felons.

**Data sources begin on page 9.**

## Highest & Lowest Voter Turnout (% VEP\*) States, November 2016

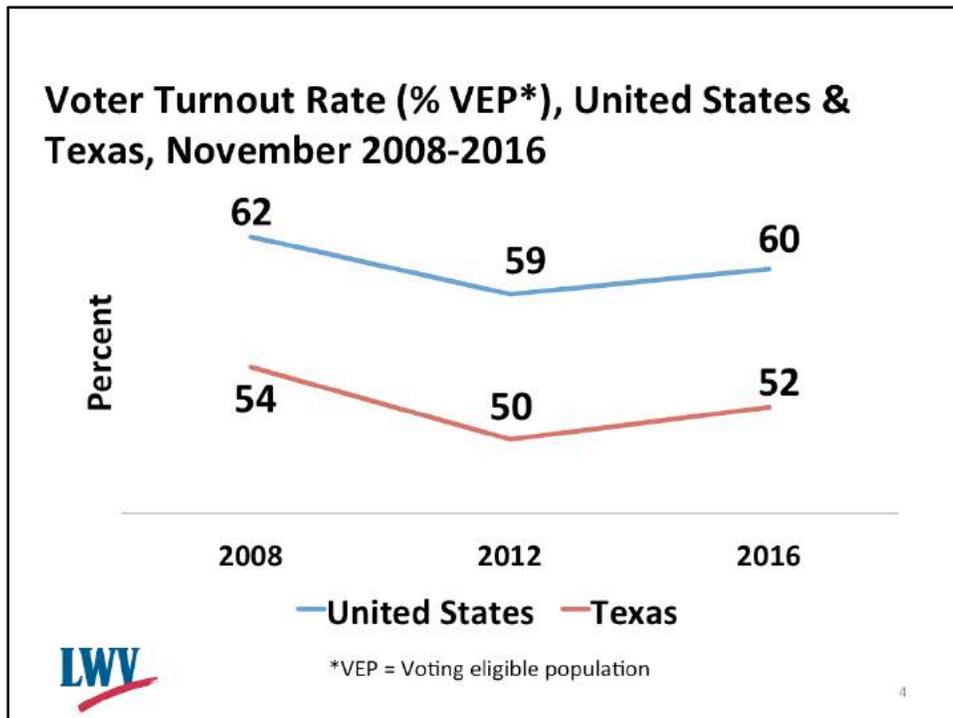


\*VEP = Voting eligible population

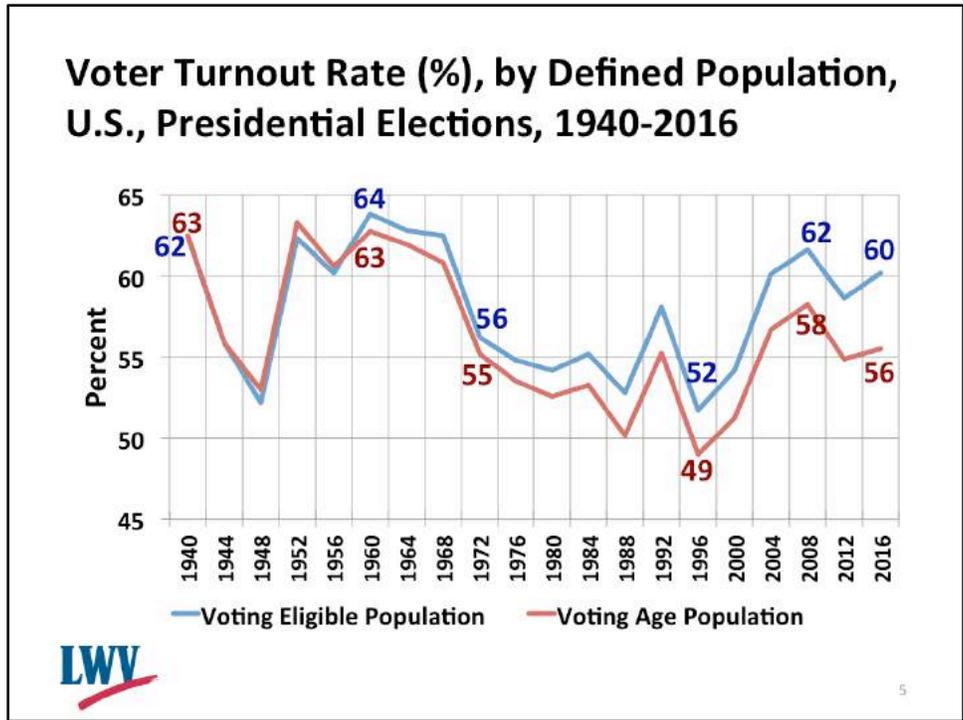
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Voter turnout varies considerably among states. Since each state administers its own elections, public policies differ related to voting access, competitive races, and voter engagement. These factors affect voter turnout.

- The five states with the highest voter turnout in the 2016 Presidential Election all had same-day voter registration.
  - All but Minnesota were also battleground states—the 14 states in which the presidential contest was highly competitive.
    - While 35% of eligible voters lived in the 14 battleground states, these states got 95% of presidential campaign visits and 99% of spending on campaign ads.
    - Voter turnout in the 14 battleground states as a whole was 5% higher (65%) than nonbattleground states (60%) and the nation as a whole (60%).
- The five states with the lowest voter turnout have been in the bottom five for the last three Presidential Elections.
  - None were battleground states.
  - All five cut off voter registration or updating voter registration 3-4 weeks before Election Day.
  - All but Hawaii had a lower proportion of adults who have graduated from high school and college than the national



- The percentage of the voting eligible population that voted in the last three presidential elections has varied little each election since 2008.
- Note that the Texas VEP turnout rate is consistently below the national turnout rate—in fact, Texas has ranked either 47th or 48th in the last three presidential elections.
- Many lament that voter participation has declined sharply over time. Following this presidential election, a number of news organizations and pundits published and broadcast such a false narrative.
  - On the Saturday after the election, *CNN Politics* headlined an online article with “Voter turnout at 20-year low in 2016.” The news brief went on to say, “Voter turnout this year dipped to nearly its lowest point in two decades. While election officials are still tabulating ballots...That measure of turnout is the lowest in a presidential election since 1996...But it would take another 18.7 million votes to reach the high point for turnout of 2008....” (Wallace & Yoon, 2016)
- Let’s take a look at historical data for a more realistic perspective on voter turnout over time.

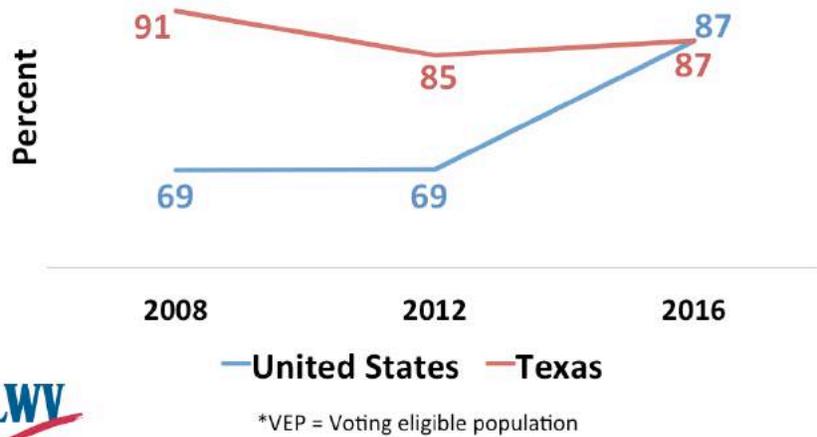


- This graph shows that 2016 voter turnout is higher than it has been since 1972.
  - Voter turnout among the voting eligible population is 8.5% higher than 20 years ago, increasing from 51.7% in 1996 to 60.2% in 2016.
  - This is a much more optimistic scenario than the “20-year low” narrative.

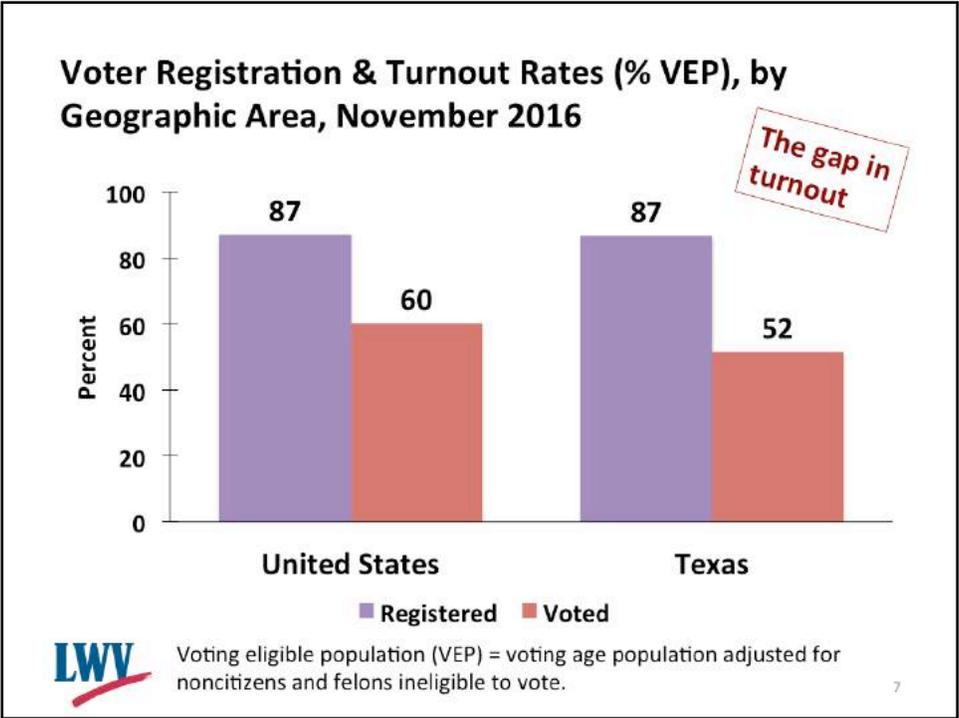
**Background on Voter Turnout Measures**

- Until the 1990s the Census Bureau reported rates of voter registration and turnout using the voting age population as the denominator—anyone living stateside old enough to vote. This is the red line on the graph.
  - However, the voting age population estimate includes noncitizens and ineligible felons who cannot vote.
  - Although the Census Bureau measure of the *citizen voting age population* excludes noncitizens, a more recently developed *voting eligible population* turnout rate adjusts for felons ineligible to vote as well as noncitizens.
  - Thus the VEP turnout rate is most accurate. But needed data to calculate it is not available at the local level.

## Voter Registration Rate (% VEP\*), United States and Texas, November 2008-2016



- A large majority of those eligible to vote are registered to vote.
- In 2016, there was a soar in the national voter registration rate, partly due to newly enacted automatic voter registration.
  - Automatic voter registration was implemented in five states since 2015 and in effect for the first time in a presidential election in those states: California, Connecticut, Oregon, Vermont, and West Virginia.
    - As of February 2017, the list of states with automatic voter registration also included Alaska, Colorado, and District of Columbia.
    - SB1933 passed the Illinois Legislature on May 31, 2017, and was expected to be signed by the governor.



- While a large majority of those eligible to vote were registered in 2016, only a small majority actually voted.

## LWV-Texas GOTV Resources

- Voter education materials
  - [www.lwvtexas.org/GOTVLeague.html](http://www.lwvtexas.org/GOTVLeague.html)
    - Presentations
    - Bookmarks, brochures, graphics
    - Social media content
- How to educate and mobilize voters
  - [www.lwvtexas.org/Best\\_Practices\\_GOTV.html](http://www.lwvtexas.org/Best_Practices_GOTV.html)
    - Best practices
    - Tactics that work
    - What to say
    - Engaging target populations



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The League is your premier resource for nonpartisan voter education.

- Prepared educational materials are ready for you to download and use free of charge.
- And for those of you who want to learn about the most effective ways to increase voter turnout—what works and what to say—we have training materials online for you to learn from.

### ***Getting people out to vote is not ...***

- Merely a matter of reminding them that Election Day is near.
- Or just a matter of putting election-related information in front of them.
- Or telling people why they should vote.

### ***To get voters to turn out ...***

- Make them feel wanted at the polls.
- Personal invitations convey the most warmth and work best.
- Next best are phone calls in which the caller converses with the respondent, as opposed to reading a canned script.

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### Data Sources

Nonprofit VOTE & U.S. Elections Project. (2017, March). *America goes to the polls 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/america-goes-to-the-polls-2016/> (VEP turnout 2016 Texas and U.S.)

Peters, G. (n.d.). Voter turnout in presidential elections: 1828-2012. *The American presidency project*. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php> (VAP turnout voter rate 1996 U.S.)

Texas Secretary of State. (n.d.) *Turnout and voter registration figures (1970-present)*. Retrieved December 20, 2016, from <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/70-92.shtml> (VAP turnout 1996 & 2016 Texas)

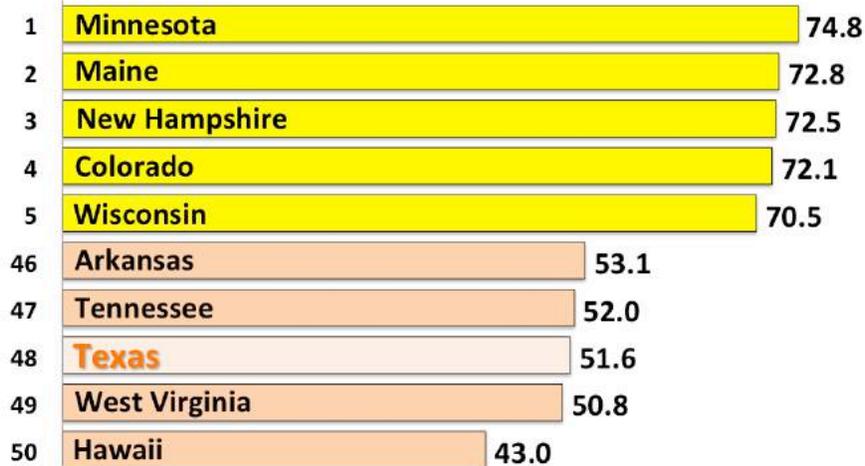
U.S. Census Bureau. (2013, May). Table 1. Reported voting and registration, by sex and single years of age: November 2012. *Voting and registration in the election of November 2012*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2012/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-568.html> (% registered voters 2012 U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2014, September 3). *2012 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved November 10, 2016, from <http://www.electproject.org/2012g> (# VEP, # ballots cast 2012 U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2016). U.S. Elections Project. (2016, November 10). *2016 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved December 20, 2016, from <http://www.electproject.org/2016g> (# VEP, VAP turnout rate 2016 U.S.)

Whitaker, B. & Brill, C. (2016, October 25). SmartShot: National voter registration has hit 200,728,959! *TargetSmart*. Retrieved from <http://targetsmart.com/news-item/smartshot-hits-200728959/> (# registered voters 2016 U.S.)

## Highest & Lowest Voter Turnout (% VEP), by State, November 2016



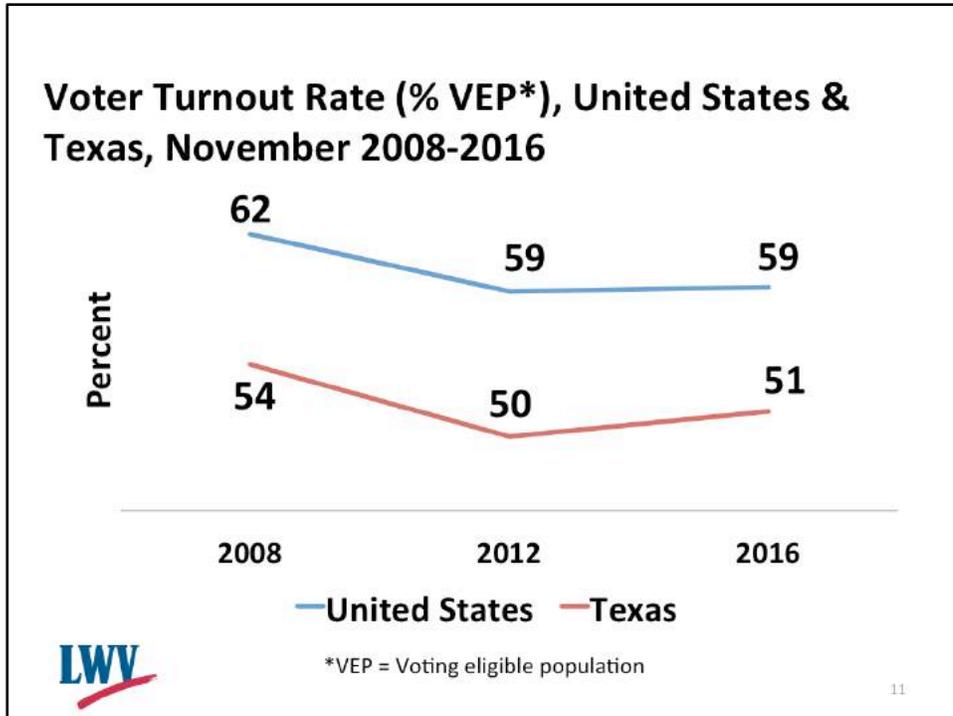
\*VEP = Voting eligible population

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### Data Source

Nonprofit VOTE & U.S. Elections Project. (2017, March). *America goes to the polls 2016* (pp. 3, 7 & 10). Retrieved from <http://www.nonprofitvote.org/america-goes-to-the-polls-2016/>

U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.) *QuickFacts*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/00>



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Texas Secretary of State. (n.d.). *1992-Current election history*. Retrieved from <http://elections.sos.state.tx.us/index.htm>  
 (# ballots counted 2008 and 2012 Texas)

Texas Secretary of State. (2016, November 10). *2016 General election, election night returns: Statewide race summary*. Retrieved from [https://enrpages.sos.state.tx.us/public/nov08\\_319.htm](https://enrpages.sos.state.tx.us/public/nov08_319.htm)  
 (# ballots counted 2016 Texas)

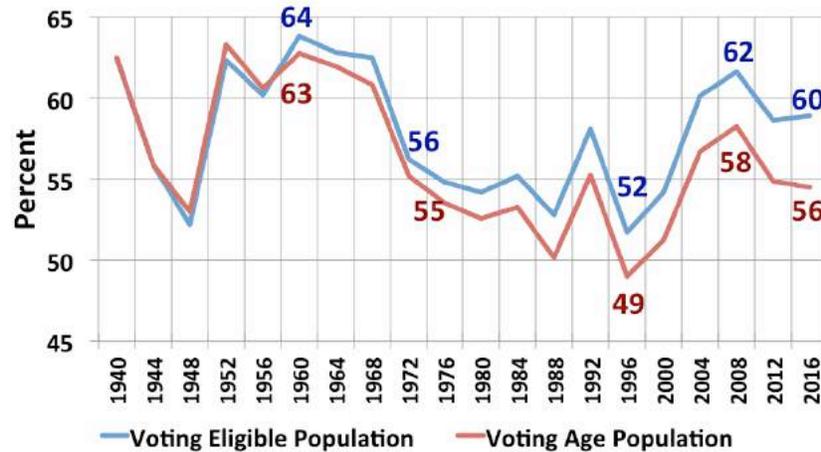
U.S. Elections Project. (2012, March 31). *2008 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2008g>  
 (# voting eligible population 2008 Texas and U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2014, September 3). *2012 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2012g>  
 (# voting eligible population 2012 Texas and U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2016, November 10). *2016 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2016g>  
 (VEP turnout 2016 TX & U.S.)

Wallace G., & Yoon, R. (2016, November 12). Voter turnout at 20-year low in 2016. *CNN politics*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/11/politics/popular-vote-turnout-2016/>

### Voter Turnout Rate (%), by Defined Population, U.S., Presidential Elections, 1940-2016\*



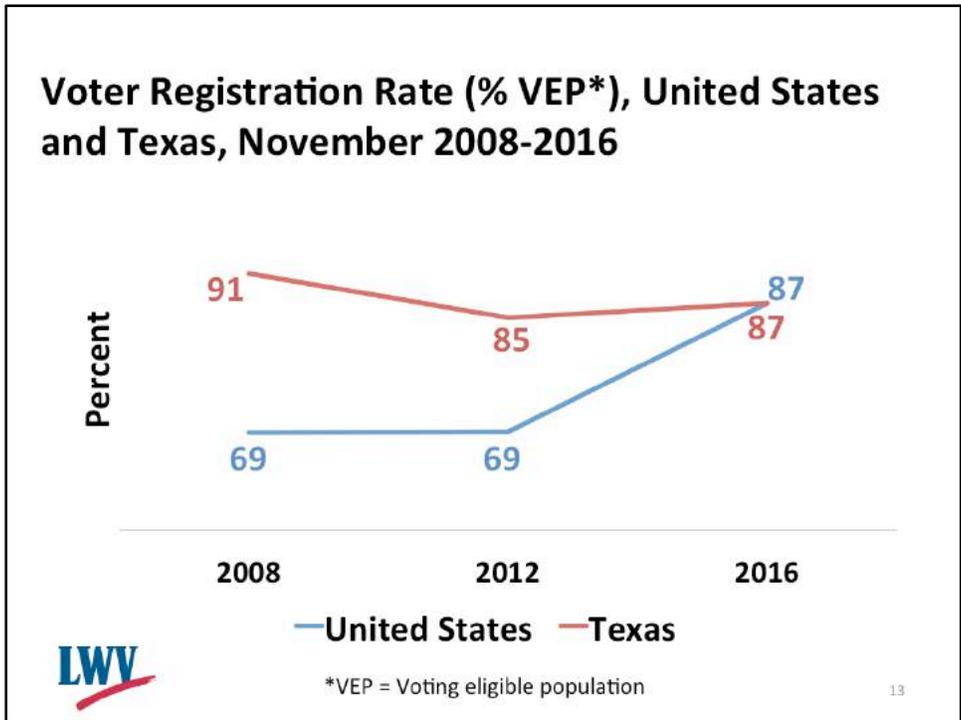
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#### Data Sources

Peters, G. (n.d.). Voter turnout in presidential elections: 1828-2012. *The American presidency project*. Retrieved from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php>  
(VAP turnout voter rates 1940-2012 U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2014, June 11). *National general election VEP turnout rates, 1789-present*. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present>  
(VEP turnout voter rates 1940-2012 U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2016, November 10). *2016 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2016g>  
(VEP and VAP turnout rates 2016 U.S.)



**Data Sources**

Brennan Center for Justice. (2017, June 12). *Automatic voter registration*. Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/automatic-voter-registration> (list of states with automatic voter registration; status of Illinois legislation)

National Conference of State Legislatures. (2017, March 8). *Automatic voter registration*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration.aspx> (list of states with automatic voter registration)

Texas Secretary of State. (n.d.). *Voter registration figures 1991-present*. Retrieved from <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/vrfig.shtml> (# registered voters 2008, 2012, 2016 Texas)

U.S. Census Bureau. (2012, July). Table 4a. Reported voting and registration of the citizen voting-age population, for states: November 2008. *Voting and registration in the election of November 2008*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting/data/tables.html> (# registered voters 2008 U.S.)

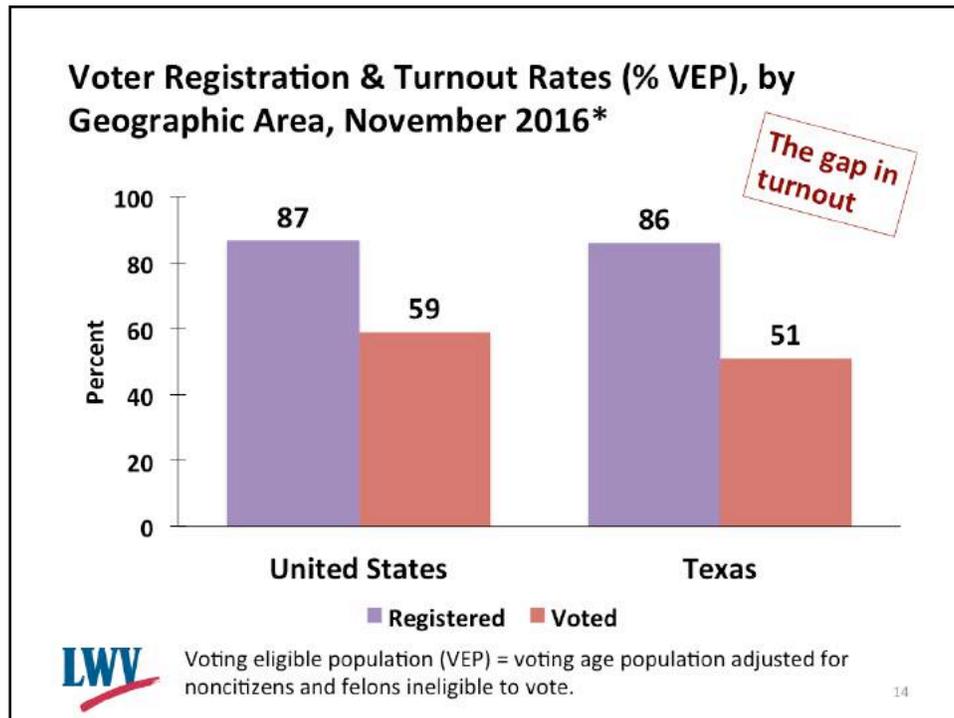
U.S. Census Bureau. (2013, May). Table 1. Reported voting and registration, by sex and single years of age: November 2012. *Voting and registration in the election of November 2012*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting/data/tables.html> (# registered voters 2012 U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2012, March 31). *2008 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2008g> (# voting eligible population 2008 Texas and U.S. )

U.S. Elections Project. (2014, September 3). *2012 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2012g> (# voting eligible population 2012 Texas and U.S.)

U.S. Elections Project. (2016, November 10). *2016 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2016g> (# voting eligible population 2016 Texas & U.S)

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Texas Secretary of State. (2016, November 10). *2016 General election, election night returns: Statewide race summary*. Retrieved from [https://enrpages.sos.state.tx.us/public/nov08\\_319.htm](https://enrpages.sos.state.tx.us/public/nov08_319.htm) (# registered voters and # ballots cast 2016 Texas)

U.S. Elections Project. (2016, November 10). *2016 November general election voter turnout* [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.electproject.org/2016g> (# VEP population and total ballots counted 2016 U.S.)

Whitaker, B. & Brill, C. (2016, October 25). SmartShot: National voter registration has hit 200,728,959! *TargetSmart*. Retrieved from <http://targetsmart.com/news-item/smartshot-hits-200728959/> (# registered voters U.S.)

Whyte, L., & Daniel, A. (2016, November 9). Here's where Texas voters turned out and where they didn't. *The Texas Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.texastribune.org/2016/11/09/heres-where-texas-voters-turned-out-and-where-they/> (# voting age population 2016 Texas) (VEP = voting age population decreased by 15.8%, i.e., 13.5% noncitizens and 2.3% ineligible felons; rates from U.S. Elections Project, 2016)

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### **Reference**

Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015). *Get out the vote: How to increase voter turnout* (3rd ed.; pp. 156-157). Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.