

## University of Virginia Center for Politics



### Voter Participation: Who's Voting?

**Purpose:** Voting in state, local, and federal elections is an integral component of citizenship and yet only sixty-four percent of American citizens participated in the elections of 2004. Students will examine census information from the 2004 election in order to compare the demographic differences between voting populations. Using this information, students will evaluate strategies for increasing voter turnout in future elections.

#### Objectives:

1. Students will understand the role of voting in a democracy in order to describe the importance of voting to the nation's future.
2. Students will examine current census data regarding the 2004 election in order to determine Americans who are under-represented in the election process.
3. Students will identify reasons why many Americans do not vote in order to evaluate strategies for increasing voter turnout.

#### Keywords:

*census*                      *demographics*                      *native citizen*  
*naturalized citizen*                      *socio-economic status*

#### Materials:

1. Census 2004: *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004* (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>)
2. Student handout: *2004 Elections: Census Data Analysis*
3. Teacher key: *2004 Elections: Census Data Analysis*
4. Teacher resource: *Conclusions from the 2004 Elections*
5. Student handout: *Time Out Ticket*
6. Student handout: *Proposals for Increasing Voter Turnout*
7. Student handout: *Public Service Announcement Checklist*
8. Access to the internet:
  - <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>
  - Resources on alternatives to the current election system

#### Procedure:

6. Warm-up: Instruct students to brainstorm the word *democracy*. After they have generated a list of words ask them to go back and highlight the one or two words that are most important to the survival of a democracy. Most students should identify voting as a key component of a democracy.
  - Is voting important to our democracy?



- Why is voting so important to American democracy?
  - If you asked one hundred Americans the same questions, how many do you think would agree that voting is important?
  - What percentage of eligible Americans do you think voted in the 2004 elections? (Answer: 64%)
  - Does this surprise you? If yes, why? If not, why?
  - Should more people be voting? What might it mean if less than three-fourths of registered voters participated in the 2004 elections?
2. Have students analyze 2004 census data in order to determine who voted in the 2004 presidential election. Have students visit:  
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>
- In what region of the country do you find the highest rates of voter participation? Lowest?
  - What factors affect the likelihood that a person will vote? Answers should include: Race/ethnicity, education, amount of time a person has lived in one location, whether or not a person is a native or naturalized citizen, **socio-economic status** (the economic, social and physical environments in which individuals live and work).
  - Describe a typical voter/non-voter in the United States:
    - Gender
    - Location
    - Education
    - Income
    - Age
    - Occupation
  - What do the *demographics* imply about representative government in the United States?  
**Demographics**- statistics or information regarding life in a society or community  
**Native Citizen**- a citizen born in the United States  
**Naturalized Citizen**- a citizen born outside of the United States
3. Using the handout *Conclusions from the 2004 Elections* break students into small groups and give each group a conclusion from the list. Have them discuss the statement and hypothesize as to whether or not the statement is true. Each group should prepare to summarize their group's findings with the class and answer questions from other students.
4. Distribute the handout *Time Out Ticket* and have the students reflect on the effects of low voter turnout on the democratic process.
- Many Americans complain that their representatives in Congress and the president have little in common with them. Based on the **demographic** information in the lesson, why might this be true?
    - What groups tend to be under-represented in the electoral process?
    - How is the legislative process affected by the lack of voter participation?



5. Revisit the chart entitled *Reasons Given for Not Voting: 2004*. In small groups have the students discuss the reasons that they feel are most valid and propose strategies for improving voter turnout. Ask them to record their group's ideas on chart paper and share them with the class.
6. Working in the same small groups, have the students research the various strategies proposed for increasing voter turnout. Students should record their research on the chart *Proposals for Increasing Voter Turnout*. Engage in a jigsaw activity by having one student from each group meet to debate the various suggestions. Students should complete page 2 of the handout in order to evaluate the options presented in the lesson. The following sites have information on the strategies. If you have no access to the internet, articles have been included to support this activity.

Compulsory Voting-

<http://www.geography.about.com/library/weekly/aa060100a.htm>  
[www.mind-trek.com/writ-dtf/votehoax/p-mcguin.htm](http://www.mind-trek.com/writ-dtf/votehoax/p-mcguin.htm)

Voting by Mail-

[www.fairvote.org/turnout/mail.htm](http://www.fairvote.org/turnout/mail.htm)  
[http://www.sos.state.or.us/executive/votebymail/pdf\\_files/CarterBaker.pdf](http://www.sos.state.or.us/executive/votebymail/pdf_files/CarterBaker.pdf)  
[http://www.idea.int/vt/postal\\_voting\\_internet\\_voting.cfm](http://www.idea.int/vt/postal_voting_internet_voting.cfm)

Voting by Internet-

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/30/AR2006103001062.html>  
[http://www.sos.ca.gov/executive/ivote/final\\_report.htm#final-2](http://www.sos.ca.gov/executive/ivote/final_report.htm#final-2)  
<http://igs.berkeley.edu/library/htElectronicVoting2004.html>

7. To assess student achievement have the students work in pairs to create a public service announcement (PSA) that would encourage voter participation in 2008. Use the PSA Checklist to guide development and evaluation of the PSA. Students could use PowerPoint to create their PSAs or if technology is limited they could create the storyboards (see included template.)

### **Extension Activities:**

1. Start an advocacy project for one of the proposals to increase voter turnout. Have the students use the *Speakout!* Section of the YLI website to contact legislators and invite them to speak to students on the issues. Contact groups that work with under-represented voters to see how you can promote voting in your area.
2. Create and perform skits that illustrate what happens to a democracy when its citizens don't vote. Contact elementary/middle schools in your area to see if the students could perform the skits. Skits could also be taped and sent to area schools.

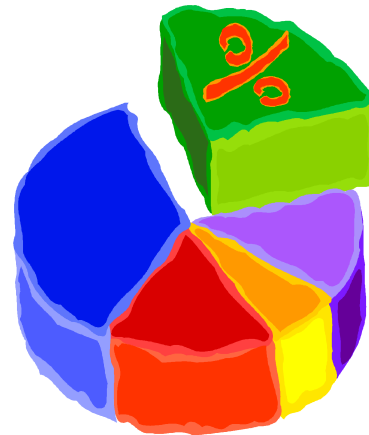


3. Have each student poll ten adults who are eligible to vote (citizen, over the age of 18, not a felon). Students should ask the adults if they participated in the 2004 elections. They should also record the reasons why the person did or did not vote. Compare the class results to the chart from the census report, *Reasons Given for Not Voting: 2004*.

## 2004 Elections: Census Data Analysis

**Directions:** Using the information provided in the Census Data report answer the following questions. Remember to examine the charts and graphs carefully before responding.

1. *Figure 1 on Page 3. Voters among the Total, Citizen and Registered Voting Age Populations: 2004*
  - a) What percentage of the total U.S. population voted in 2004?
  - b) What percentage of citizens voted in 2004?
  - c) What percentage of registered citizens voted in 2004?
  - d) How would you compare the number of citizens and the number of registered citizens?
  - e) What does this chart tell us about the electoral process in 2004?



2. *Figure 3 on Page 6. Type of Voting Rate by Race and Ethnicity: 2004*
  - a) What racial groups had the highest percentage of voting-age, non-citizens?
  - b) If many people in a region are not citizens, what will the effect be on representation in Congress?



3. *Table B on Pages 5-6. Rates of Voting and Registration by Selected Characteristics*
  - a) Who has a higher rate of voting participation, men or women?
  - b) Which racial or ethnic groups have the highest rates of voter participation?
  - c) Which age group has the highest levels of voter participation?
  - d) Describe the relationship between educational attainment and voter participation?
  - e) Who tends to vote more, households with lower incomes or those with higher incomes?
  - f) Why might employed citizens vote in higher numbers than unemployed citizens?
  - g) In what regions of the United States do you find the highest voter turnout?
  - h) In what regions do you find the lowest voter turnout?

4. *Figure 5 on Page 9. Voting by State: 2004*
  - a) According to the data in the graph, what state had the highest voting-age citizen population to vote?
  - b) What state has the lowest percentage of voting-age citizen population who voted?
  - c) What percentage of voters in your state participated in the 2004 election?



5. *Figure 6 on Page 11. Method of Registration to Vote: 2004*

- a) Looking at the graph, which method appears to be most successful in registering students to vote?
- b) Why do you think that is true?

6. *Table C on Page 10. Characteristics of Voters and Nonvoters: 2004.* Using data from the chart, describe a typical **voter** in the 2004 elections [highest percentage of voters].

- a) Gender:
- b) Region:
- c) Level of Education:
- d) Income level:
- e) Age:
- f) Race:

7. *Table C on Page 10. Characteristics of Voters and Nonvoters: 2004.* Using data from the chart, describe a typical **non-voter** in the 2004 elections [lowest percentage of voters].

- a) Gender:
- b) Region:
- c) Level of Education:
- d) Income level:
- e) Age:
- f) Race:

**Summary Questions**

1. What factors affect the likelihood that a person will vote? Which do you feel are the most decisive?
2. How might the study of **demographics** (statistics or information regarding life in a community) affect political campaigns?
3. Is our representational democracy really representative of the entire nation? Why or why not?

## 2004 Elections: Census Data Analysis

Directions: Using the information provided in the Census Data report answer the following questions. Remember to examine the charts and graphs carefully before responding.

1. *Figure 1 on Page 3. Voters among the Total, Citizen and Registered Voting Age Populations: 2004*
  - a) What percentage of the total U.S. population voted in 2004? **58.3%**
  - b) What percentage of citizens voted in 2004? **63.8%**
  - c) What percentage of registered citizens voted in 2004? **88.5%**
  - d) How would you compare the number of citizens and the number of registered citizens?  
**There are 197 million citizens, but only 142.1 million register to vote.**
  - e) What does this chart tell us about the electoral process in 2004?
    - **The citizenship requirement prevents many people from voting.**
    - **Citizens who are registered to vote, are far more likely to vote than unregistered voters.**
    - **Voter registration is a major barrier to voting.**
2. *Figure 3 on Page 6. Type of Voting Rate by Race and Ethnicity: 2004*
  - a) What racial groups had the highest percentage of voting-age, non-citizens? **Hispanics followed by Asians**
  - b) If many people in a region are not citizens, what will the effect be on representation in Congress? **Non-citizens will most likely not be represented in Congress because they cannot vote**
3. *Table B on Pages 5-6. Rates of Voting and Registration by Selected Characteristics: 2004*
  - a) Who has a higher rate of voting participation, men or women? **women by +3.1%**
  - b) Which racial or ethnic groups have the highest rates of voter participation? **Whites have the highest; then blacks**
  - c) Which age group has the highest levels of voter participation? **65-74 year olds**
  - d) Describe the relationship between educational attainment and voter participation? **The more educated a person is, the more likely he/she will vote**
  - e) Who tends to vote more, households with lower incomes or those with higher incomes? **higher incomes**
  - f) Why might employed citizens vote in higher numbers than unemployed citizens?
    - **Unemployed citizens are less likely to have a permanent place of residence and be registered to vote.**
    - **Unemployed citizens are under great stress looking for work and less likely to make voting a priority.**
  - g) In what regions of the United States do you find the highest voter turnout? **Midwest followed by the Northeast**
  - h) In what regions do you find the lowest voter turnout? **West is lowest followed by the South**



4. *Figure 5 on Page 9. Voting by State: 2004*

- a) According to the data in the graph, what state had the highest voting-age citizen population to vote? **Minnesota**
- b) What state has the lowest percentage of voting-age citizen population who voted? **Hawaii**
- c) What percentage of voters in your state participated in the 2004 election?

5. *Figure 6 on Page 11. Method of Registration to Vote: 2004*

- c) Looking at the graph, which method appears to be most successful in registering students to vote? **at school or on college campuses**
- d) Why do you think that is true?
  - o **Students spend most of their daylight hours at school, and cannot easily get to their government office buildings or DMV during business hours.**
  - o **Students are less likely to have transportation to get to government office buildings or DMV during business hours.**
  - o **Convenience of registering at school.**
  - o **Positive peer pressure as well as teacher/staff influence may motivate students to register to vote.**

6. *Table C on Page 10. Characteristics of Voters and Nonvoters: 2004.* Using data from the chart, describe a typical **voter** in the 2004 elections [highest percentage of voters].

- g) Gender: **female**
- h) Region: **South**
- i) Level of Education: **bachelor's degree or higher**
- j) Income level: **\$50,000-\$99,999**
- k) Age: **55 or older**
- l) Race: **White**

7. *Table C on Page 10. Characteristics of Voters and Nonvoters: 2004.* Using data from the chart, describe a typical **non-voter** in the 2004 elections [lowest percentage of voters].

- g) Gender: **male**
- h) Region: **Northeast**
- i) Level of Education: **Less than high school graduate**
- j) Income level: **less than \$20,000**
- k) Age: **18-24 year olds**
- l) Race: **Asians**



## **Summary Questions**

1. What factors affect the likelihood that a person will vote? Which do you feel are the most decisive?

- **Your age**
- **Your race**
- **Your gender**
- **Where you live**
- **What gender you are**
- **Where you live**
- **How much money you make**
- **How much education you've received**

2. How might the study of **demographics** (statistics or information regarding life in a community) affect political campaigns?

**Possible responses:**

- **Candidates, particularly Democrats, will organize voter registration drives to sign up new voters.**
- **Political campaigns will gear their advertising, particularly TV spots, to attract certain demographic groups.**
- **Campaign strategies will include rallies, money spent toward certain regions and demographic groups.**
- **Candidates may adapt their party platforms to attract demographic groups.**

3. Is our representational democracy really representative of the entire nation? Why or why not?

**Possible arguments supporting representative democracy:**

- **All demographic groups, if they are citizens, have the same opportunity to vote.**
- **Not voting is a free choice.**

**Possible arguments against representative democracy:**

- **Significant numbers of demographic groups do not participate, or who feel disassociated from their government.**
- **A significant problem is that many the demographic make up of most candidates does not represent many in the population i.e. though there is more diversity now than in decades past, most candidates are still white, male, and upper to upper middle class.**

## Conclusions from the 2004 Elections

**Who Votes:** According to the U.S. Census Report, the following statements describe the citizens who make it to the polls.

|                                                                           |                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Non-Hispanic whites constitute most of the voting-age citizen population. | Native citizens are more likely to register and vote than naturalized citizens. |
| Women are more likely to vote.                                            | The peak age group for voting was between 65-74 years of age.                   |
| Married people are more likely to vote.                                   | People with more education, higher incomes and jobs are more likely to vote.    |
| Homeowners and longtime residents are more likely to vote.                | People in the Midwest are most likely to register and vote.                     |
| Most people vote in person instead of using absentee ballots.             | Voting rates are higher in states with same-day registration.                   |

# Time Out Ticket



Many Americans complain that their representatives in Congress have little in common with them. Based on the demographic information in the lesson, why might this be true?

- What groups tend to be under-represented in the electoral process?
- How is the legislative process affected by the lack of voter participation?

# Time Out Ticket



Many Americans complain that their representatives in Congress have little in common with them. Based on the demographic information in the lesson, why might this be true?

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## THE TOP TEN REASONS PEOPLE DON'T VOTE

- |                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Did not register               | 42% |
| 2. Do not like the candidates     | 17% |
| 3. No particular reason           | 10% |
| 4. Are sick or disabled           | 8%  |
| 5. Are not U.S. citizens          | 5%  |
| 6. Are not interested in politics | 5%  |
| 7. Are new residents in the area  | 4%  |
| 8. Are away from home             | 3%  |
| 9. Cannot leave job               | 3%  |
| 10. Cannot get to the polls       | 1%  |



## Proposals for Increasing Voter Turnout

Solution for increasing voter turnout:

Information that supports this solution:

Information that opposes this solution:

Do you think this strategy would be successful in increasing voter turnout? Why or why not?

**Part 2: Jigsaw** - Working with your group, use the decision-making grid to evaluate the proposals for increasing voter turnout. Be prepared to present your group's decision.

## Decision-Making Model

| Problems | Goal (s) |
|----------|----------|
|          |          |

| Alternatives | Pros (+) | Cons (-) |
|--------------|----------|----------|
|              |          |          |
|              |          |          |
|              |          |          |
|              |          |          |

| Decision (s) | Reasons (s) |
|--------------|-------------|
|              |             |

# Public Service Announcement Checklist



Directions: In your group, prepare a 30 second PSA that will encourage citizens to vote in the 2008 election

| Criteria                                                    | Possible Points | Points Earned |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Explains the importance of voting                           | 10              |               |
| Describes voter participation in the 2006 election          | 15              |               |
| Identifies reasons why citizens don't vote                  | 10              |               |
| Explains the effects of low voter turnout for our democracy | 10              |               |
| Supports a strategy for increasing voter turnout            | 10              |               |
| Incorporates a slogan that encourages citizens to vote      | 10              |               |
| PSA is engaging and interesting                             | 10              |               |
|                                                             |                 |               |
| <b>Total</b>                                                | 75              |               |