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REPRESENTATIONAL BIAS IN THE 2014 ELECTORATE: KEY FINDINGS

by LASHONDA BRENSON, Ph.D.



This document highlights key findings from *Representational Bias in the 2014 Electorate*.

This comprehensive new report from Project Vote examines how the American electorate has become more or less representative of the adult citizen population, by comparing the electorates for every federal election—presidential and midterm—since 2004. Using the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey, *Representational Bias in the 2014 Electorate* illustrates how electoral participation varies for different segments of the adult citizen population, and identifies where there is still work to be done to achieve a fully representative democracy.

Overall Poor Turnout in the 2014 Election

While midterm elections generally have lower turnout rates when compared to presidential elections, the 2014 midterm election marked a historic low:

- 38 U.S. states had turnout rates less than 50 percent in 2014, and the highest turnout rate was only 61 percent.
- Voting rates declined by 3 to 7 percentage points for all racial and ethnic groups in 2014, compared to the previous midterm in 2010.
- While non-whites are overrepresented in groups with low electoral participation (i.e. low-income households, and those with higher residential mobility rates), black Americans still register and vote in proportion to their general population. The same is not true for other racial and ethnic groups for a variety of reasons.

When the Presidency’s Not at Stake, the Electorate Looks A Lot Different

- The historically low political participation among younger citizens, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income households, and those with less than a high-school education are more acute during midterm elections.
- For instance, in the 2012 presidential election, turnout was the highest among blacks over the age of 65 (75 percent), which was second to whites 65 and over (72 percent). However, in the 2014 mid-term election, turnout was highest among white men 65 and over (64 percent), followed by white women in the same age group (60 percent) and senior blacks (57 percent).
- When comparing turnout rates of members of the same racial or ethnic group and age, we observe significant differences (as much as 39 percent) in turnout 2012 and 2014. These differences say more about the differences between presidential and midterm elections, and less about the difference in turnout within a particular group.

Continuing Disparities in the American Electorate

Continuing traditional patterns, inequality in representation remained the norm in the composition of the American electorate in 2014:

- White Americans were overrepresented in the 2014 election. Whites made up 69.9 percent of the adult citizen population in 2014, but 76.3 percent of the voting population.
- Turnout for black Americans (11.7 percent) was relatively consistent with their numbers in the general population (12.1 percent) in 2014.
- However, America's growing Latino population remains underrepresented: Latinos made up 11.4 percent of the adult citizen population in 2014, but only 7.3 percent of the 2014 electorate.
- Young citizens were also severely underrepresented in the electorate: Americans under 30 made up 21.1 percent of the adult citizen population in 2014, but only 10 percent of the voting population.
- Registration and voting rates are disproportionately higher among higher-income people. Of adult citizens earning less than \$25,000, only 30 percent reported voting in the 2014 election, compared to 51 percent of those earning over \$100,000 dollars.
- Education is also positively associated with voting and registration. Over 56 percent of Americans with a bachelor's degree or higher reported voting in 2014, compared to only 22 percent of adult citizens without a high-school diploma.
- Americans with disabilities were registered at the same rates as those without disabilities in 2014, but turnout was 2 percentage points lower for those with disabilities.
- Women are typically more likely to participate in elections than men, and being married increases the likelihood that an individual will register and vote.
- Residential stability matters for registration and turnout rates. There was a 27 percent difference in registration rates between people who lived in a residence for one year or less (54 percent) and those residing in a set location for five years or more (81 percent).

States Ranked by 2014 Registration and Voting Rates

- Maine, Mississippi, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Missouri were among the states with the highest rates of voter registration in 2014. Hawaii, Wyoming, Utah, California, and Nevada had the lowest rates of registration.
- Maine, Colorado, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Iowa had the highest voter turnout rates in 2014. West Virginia, Oklahoma, New York, Texas, and Indiana had the lowest turnout rates.
- Some perennial battleground states, like Florida and Pennsylvania, rank below the national average in voter registration rates in 2014.

Methods of Registering to Vote in 2014

Race and ethnicity intersect with voter registration in important ways. In 2014, DMVs registered similar proportions of non-white and white voters. However, other locations registered non-white citizens at higher rates than white registrants:

- Non-white citizens were more than three times more likely to register through public assistance agencies (2.99 percent) than white citizens (0.8 percent).
- Non-whites (7.74 percent) were almost twice as likely to register through voter registration drives than whites (4.07 percent).
- Non-whites were also more likely to register by mail, online, and through registration efforts at schools, hospitals, and campuses.
- These disparities speak to the need for enforcement of the public assistance agency requirements of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), and for states to enact laws and policies that facilitate community-based voter registration drives.

Additional Voters If Parity Had Been Achieved in 2014

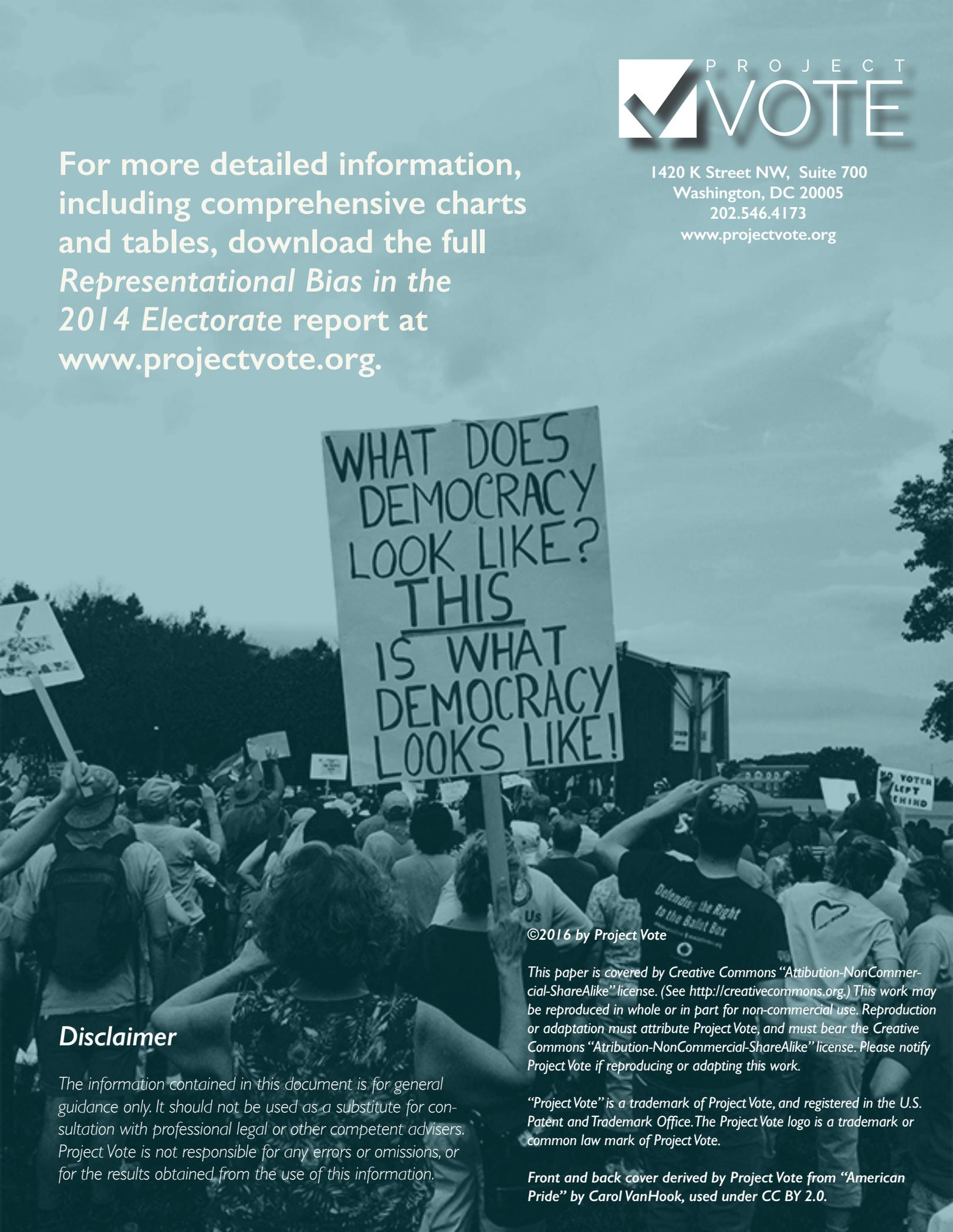
If disparities in participation had been eliminated in 2014, tens of millions more Americans would have voted:

- If the non-white population had voted at the same rate as whites, the electorate would have grown by over 8.3 million voters.
- If individuals under the age of 30 voted at the same rate as persons aged 30 or older, the electorate would expand by nearly 13 million voters.
- If people from low-income households voted at the same rate as those earning more than \$100,000 a year, the electorate would grow by 9.7 million voters.
- If adult citizens with a High School education or less voted at the same rate as those with some college experience or more, there would be an additional 15.5 million voters.
- If unmarried citizens voted at the same rate as married citizens, the electorate would grow by nearly 19 million voters.

In order for public policy to successfully reflect the needs and interests of all Americans, it is necessary to address the limitations to full representation discussed in *Representational Bias in the 2014 Electorate*.

This means it is crucial that we work to increase participation among underrepresented groups, and advance policies that facilitate, not hinder, the ability of all Americans to register and vote. To accomplish this, it is crucial to ensure the enforcement of the NVRA and other federal laws, and to pass and implement policies that make registering and voting simpler.

For more detailed information, including comprehensive charts and tables, download the full *Representational Bias in the 2014 Electorate* report at www.projectvote.org.



WHAT DOES
DEMOCRACY
LOOK LIKE?
THIS
IS WHAT
DEMOCRACY
LOOKS LIKE!

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