

# The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)

## Population Characteristics

### Current Population Survey

Thom File

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This report provides analysis of the increasingly diverse American electorate, specifically for presidential elections since 1996, with particular focus given to the patterns of voter turnout by race and Hispanic origin. Overall voting rates have fluctuated in recent presidential races, from a low of 58.4 percent of the citizen population in 1996 to a high of about 64.0 percent in both 2004 and 2008 (Table 1).<sup>1</sup> In 2012, the overall voting rate was 61.8 percent. By examining these overall changes by race and Hispanic origin, this report provides a better understanding of the social and

<sup>1</sup> The estimates for 2004 and 2008 are not statistically different.

demographic factors that have influenced recent American elections.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were the single race White and not Hispanic, people who reported the single race Black, and people who reported the single race Asian. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data.

Because Hispanics may be any race, data in this report for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population and the Asian population.

The data in this report come from the November 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, which surveys the civilian noninstitutionalized population in the United States. The estimates presented in this report may differ from those based on administrative data or exit polls. For more information, see the sections on Source and Accuracy of the Data and Measuring Voting and Registration in the Current Population Survey.

Table 1.  
**Reported Rates of Voting: 1996 to 2012**

(Numbers in thousands)

Presidential election year	Total	Citizens				
		Total	Voted			90 percent confidence interval
			Number	Percent		
2012.....	235,248	215,081	132,948	61.8	61.5	62.1
2008.....	225,499	206,072	131,144	63.6	63.3	63.9
2004.....	215,694	197,005	125,736	63.8	63.5	64.1
2000.....	202,609	186,366	110,826	59.5	59.2	59.8
1996.....	193,651	179,935	105,017	58.4	58.1	58.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years.

## OVERALL VOTER TURNOUT (1996–2012)

Since 1996, the number of citizens eligible to vote has increased in every presidential election, as has the number of citizens who have reported voting. Table 2 displays these relative increases by race and Hispanic origin over the five most recent election cycles.<sup>3</sup> Overall, 133 million people reported voting in 2012, a turnout increase of about 2 million people since the election of 2008. Between 1996 and 2008, turnout increases varied but were always larger than in 2012, reaching a high of about 15 million additional voters in 2004.<sup>4</sup>

In comparison to the election of 2008, about 1.7 million additional Black voters reported going to the polls in 2012, as did about 1.4 million additional Hispanics and about 550,000 additional Asians.<sup>5</sup> The number of non-Hispanic White voters decreased by about 2 million between 2008 and 2012. Since 1996, this is the only example of a race group showing a decrease in net voting from one presidential election to the next, and it indicates that the 2012 voting population expansion came primarily from minority voters.<sup>6, 7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Because of changes in the Current Population Survey race categories beginning in 2003, data in this report from 2004–2012 are not directly comparable with data from earlier years.

<sup>4</sup> Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander populations are not shown in this report because of their small sample size in the November 2012 Current Population Survey.

<sup>5</sup> The 2012 increases for Black voters and Hispanic voters were not statistically different.

<sup>6</sup> Race is a self-reported concept in the CPS. In this report, we take race as it is reported at the time of survey, even though respondents can change the way they identify or report their race over time.

<sup>7</sup> In this report, the term minority means any group other than non-Hispanic White.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Voting and registration rates are historically higher in years with presidential elections than in congressional election years. For this report, we compare 2012 election data only with data from other recent presidential election years. While the Census Bureau has collected voting and registration data since 1964, the CPS has gathered consistent citizenship data in presidential elections only since 1996. Because this analysis focuses solely on the voting eligible citizen population, the discussion that follows will be limited to 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012.

Table 2.

**Voter Turnout, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1996 to 2012**  
(Numbers in thousands)

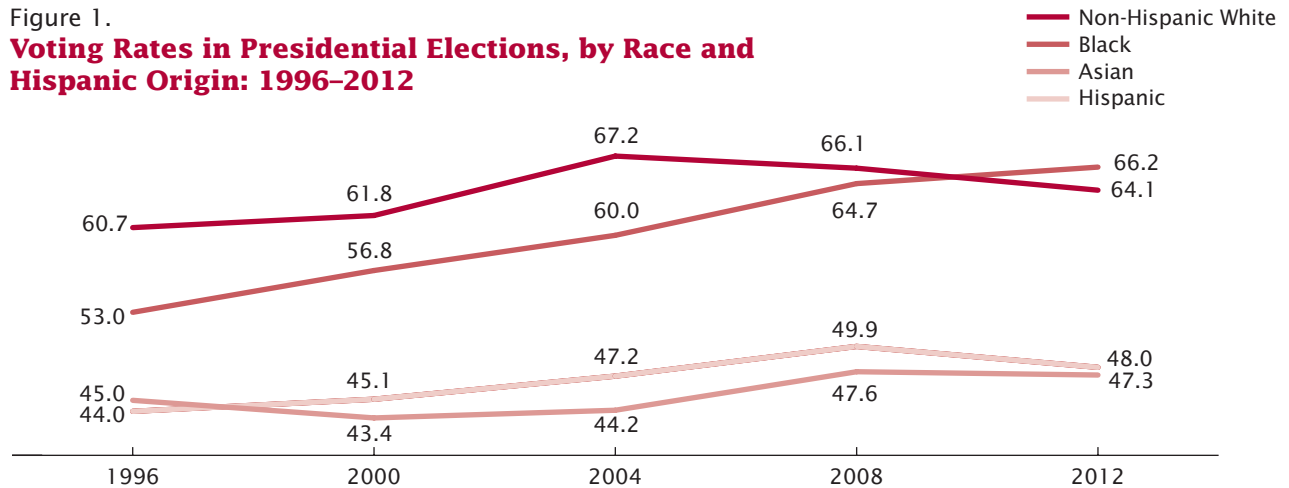
Year and race and Hispanic origin	Total votes cast	Net change from previous presidential election
<b>2012</b>		
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>132,948</b>	<b>1,804</b>
White, non-Hispanics .....	98,041	-2,001
Blacks .....	17,813	1,680
Asians .....	3,904	547
Hispanics .....	11,188	1,443
<b>2008</b>		
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>131,144</b>	<b>5,408</b>
White, non-Hispanics .....	100,042	475
Blacks .....	16,133	2,117
Asians .....	3,357	589
Hispanics .....	9,745	2,158
<b>2004</b>		
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>125,736</b>	<b>14,910</b>
White, non-Hispanics .....	99,567	10,098
Blacks .....	14,016	1,099
Asians .....	2,768	723
Hispanics .....	7,587	1,653
<b>2000</b>		
<b>Total</b> .....	<b>110,826</b>	<b>5,809</b>
White, non-Hispanics .....	89,469	2,865
Blacks .....	12,917	1,531
Asians .....	2,045	304
Hispanics .....	5,934	1,006

Notes: Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were the single race White and not Hispanic, people who reported the single race Black, and people who reported the single race Asian. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data.

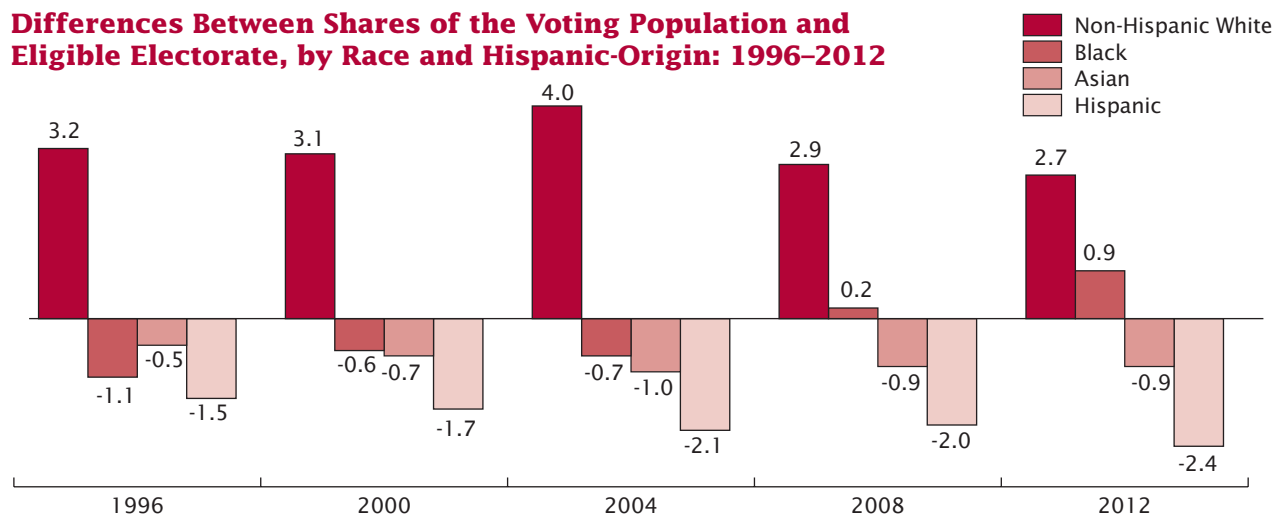
Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander populations are not shown in this report because of their small sample size in the November 2012 Current Population Survey.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years.

Figure 1.  
**Voting Rates in Presidential Elections, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1996–2012**



**Differences Between Shares of the Voting Population and Eligible Electorate, by Race and Hispanic-Origin: 1996–2012**



Note: The top portion of this graphic shows voting rates over time by race groups and Hispanics. The bottom portion shows these subpopulation's shares of the eligible electorate compared to their shares of the actual voting population. For example, in 2012 the non-Hispanic White share of the voting population was 2.7 percentage points higher than the non-Hispanic White share of the eligible electorate. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years.

### TRENDS IN VOTING RATES (1996–2012)

Voting rates by race and Hispanic origin have also varied across recent election cycles (Figure 1). In 2012, Blacks voted at a higher rate (66.2 percent) than non-Hispanic Whites (64.1 percent) for the first time since the Census Bureau started publishing voting rates by the eligible citizenship population

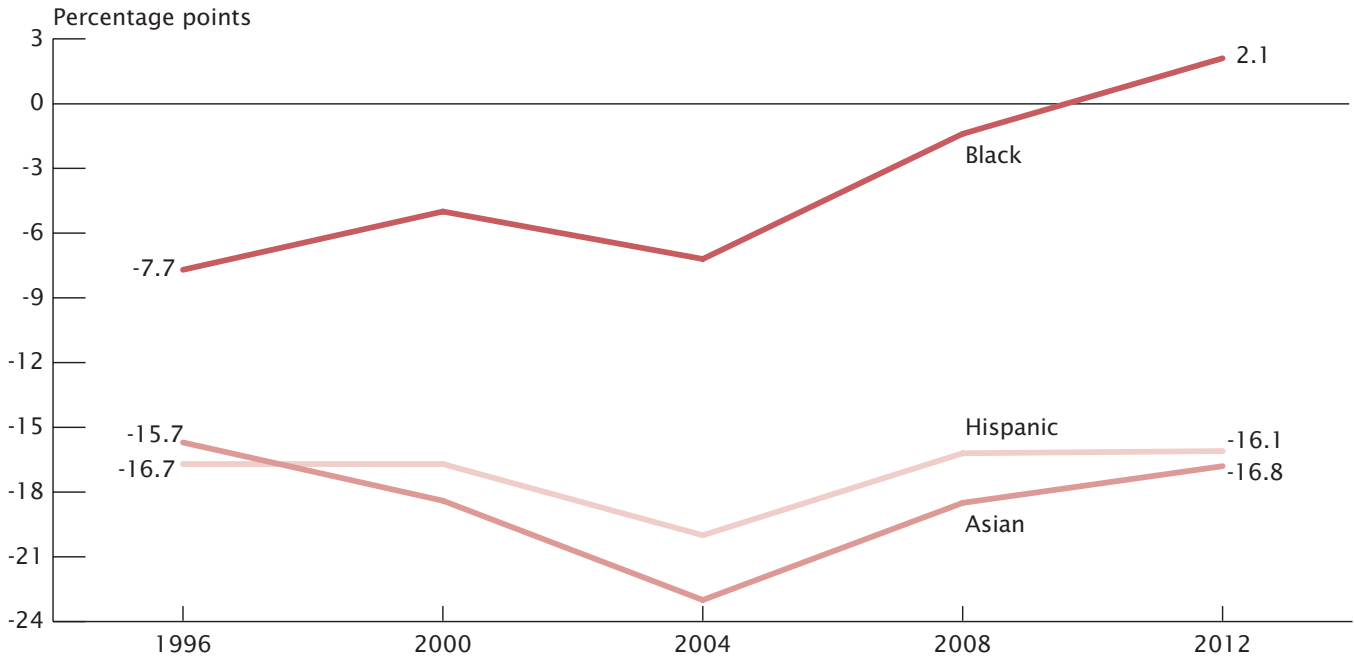
in 1996.<sup>8</sup> Both these groups had voting rates higher than Hispanics and Asians (about 48 percent each) in 2012.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> The estimates for Hispanics and Asians were not statistically different.

Voting rates for Blacks were higher in 2012 than in any recent Presidential election, the result of a steady increase in Black voting rates since 1996. Voting rates also increased among Hispanics and Asians across some of the elections addressed in this analysis, although these gains were not nearly as consistent as for Blacks. Non-Hispanic White voting rates dropped in both

Figure 2.  
**Voting Rate Gap Between non-Hispanic Whites and Other Race and Hispanic-Origin Groups: 1996–2012**



Note: The numbers in this graphic show the differences between voting rates for race groups and Hispanics in comparison to non-Hispanic Whites. For example, in 2012, Black voting rates were 2.1 points higher than non-Hispanic Whites, while Hispanic voting rates were 16.1 points lower than non-Hispanic Whites.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years

2008 and 2012, after reaching a high of 67.2 percent in 2004.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, Black turnout rates increased by about 13 percentage points between 1996 and 2012. Notably, among all race groups and Hispanics, only Blacks showed a significant increase between 2008 and the most recent election in 2012.

Since 1996, Black voting rates have gone from trailing those of non-Hispanic Whites by about 8 percentage points to surpassing them in 2012 (Figure 2). There are differences in voting rates between non-Hispanic Whites and both Hispanics and Asians across elections,

<sup>10</sup> Additional historical voting and registration data, as well as detailed tables addressing each of the topics discussed in this report, are available at <[www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html)>.

**ABOUT THIS REPORT**

The following section of this report discusses two additional populations: the eligible electorate and the voting population.

**The eligible electorate** refers specifically to citizens 18 years of age and older—or the citizen voting age population.

**The voting population** refers to the number of voting age citizens who actually reported casting ballots.

This section also introduces measurements of voting relative to eligibility. It is important to note that these concepts refer only to two voting-related measures for a specific group and do not compare one group with either another group or with national/overall measures.

with the largest disparities occurring in 2004, when non-Hispanic Whites voted at higher rates than

Hispanics by about 20 points and Asians by about 23 points.

Table 3.

### Composition of the Voting Population and Eligible Electorate, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1996 to 2012

Year and race and Hispanic origin	Percentage of eligible electorate <sup>1</sup>	Percentage of voting population <sup>2</sup>
<b>2012</b>		
White, non-Hispanics.....	71.1	73.7
Blacks .....	12.5	13.4
Hispanics.....	10.8	8.4
Asians .....	3.8	2.9
<b>2008</b>		
White, non-Hispanics.....	73.4	76.3
Blacks .....	12.1	12.3
Hispanics.....	9.5	7.4
Asians .....	3.4	2.6
<b>2004</b>		
White, non-Hispanics.....	75.2	79.2
Blacks .....	11.9	11.1
Hispanics.....	8.2	6.0
Asians .....	3.2	2.2
<b>2000</b>		
White, non-Hispanics.....	77.7	80.7
Blacks .....	12.2	11.7
Hispanics.....	7.1	5.4
Asians .....	2.5	1.8
<b>1996</b>		
White, non-Hispanics.....	79.2	82.5
Blacks .....	11.9	10.8
Hispanics.....	6.1	4.7
Asians .....	2.1	1.7

Notes: Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were the single race White and not Hispanic, people who reported the single race Black, and people who reported the single race Asian. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data.

Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander populations are not shown in this report because of their small sample size in the November 2012 Current Population Survey.

<sup>1</sup> The eligible electorate refers specifically to citizens 18 years of age and older, or the citizen voting-age population.

<sup>2</sup> The voting population refers to the number of voting-age citizens who actually reported casting ballots. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years.

### THE ELIGIBLE ELECTORATE AND THE VOTING POPULATION

One useful strategy for assessing electoral behavior is to compare a subpopulation's share of the eligible electorate to their share of the population that actually voted. If a group accounts for 50 percent of the eligible electorate (i.e., citizens 18 years of age and older) and 50 percent of the voting population

(i.e., citizens who actually reported casting ballots), then we can say this group is voting evenly with their eligibility. However, if a subgroup reports voting in either higher or lower percentages than their share of the eligible electorate indicates, we can say that these groups are not voting evenly relative to their eligibility.

Table 3 shows race groups and Hispanics by both their percentage

share of the eligible electorate and their percentage share of the voting population. "Percentage of the eligible electorate" means the portion of the total citizen population who could have voted in a given election, and "Percentage of the voting population" refers to the percentage of all voters who were non-Hispanic White, Black, Asian, or Hispanic.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1996 and 2012, the Black population, the Asian population, and the Hispanic population all saw their shares of the eligible electorate and the voting population increase. Non-Hispanic Whites were the only race group whose shares of the eligible electorate and the voting population did not increase. Between 1996 and 2012, the non-Hispanic White share of the eligible electorate dropped from 79.2 percent to 71.1 percent, and their share of the voting population decreased from 82.5 percent to 73.7 percent.

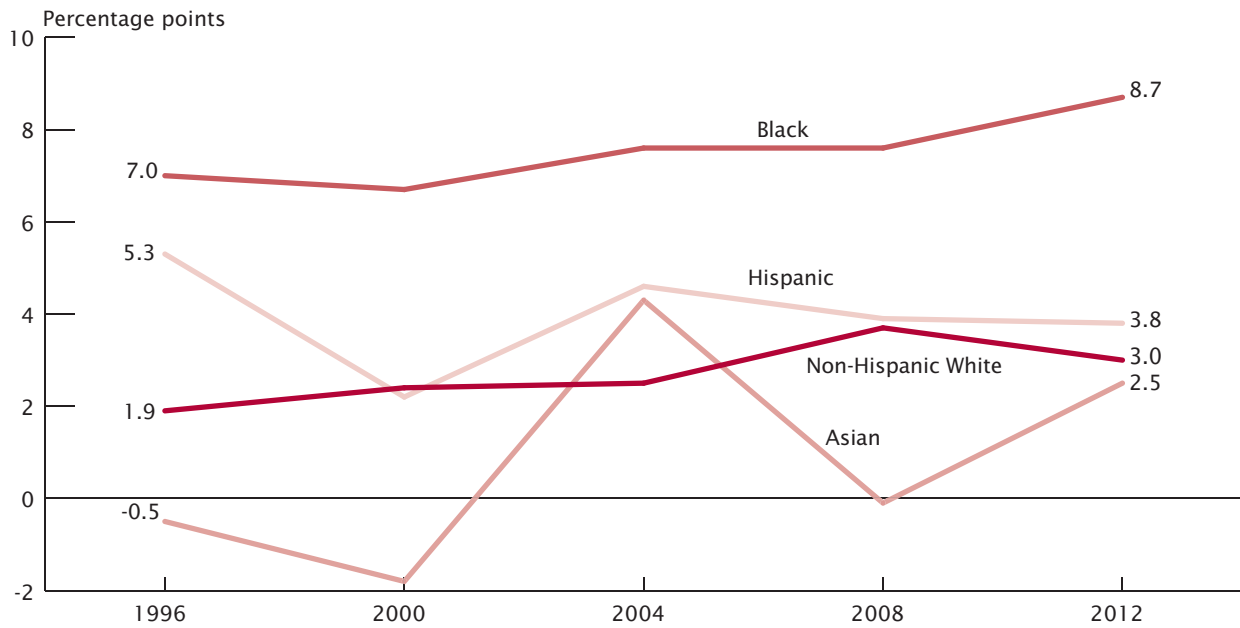
Overall, in the last five presidential elections, the non-Hispanic White share of total votes cast dropped by about 9 percentage points. In comparison, between 1996 and 2012, the Hispanic share of total votes cast increased by about 4 percentage points, while the Black share increased by about 3 percentage points.

During the same period, non-Hispanic White voting rates have been higher than the group's proportion of the eligible electorate in every election, from a high differential of 4.0 percentage points in 2004 to 2.7 percentage points in 2012.<sup>12</sup> Figure 1 shows the percentage of race groups and Hispanics

<sup>11</sup> People in the military, U.S. citizens living abroad, and people in institutionalized housing, such as correctional facilities and nursing homes, were not included in the survey.

<sup>12</sup> The 2012 differential for non-Hispanic Whites was not statistically different from either 2008 or 2000.

Figure 3.  
**Gender Voting Gap Over Time, By Race and Hispanic Origin**  
 (Female voting rates in comparison to male voting rates)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years.

that voted and that were eligible to vote from 1996 to 2012.

Despite having an increased share of the voting population, in every presidential election since 1996, Hispanics have still accounted for a smaller percentage of actual votes cast than their share of the eligible electorate would indicate. Blacks, meanwhile, had voting deficits in 1996, 2000, and 2004. In 2008, however, they voted in numbers not statistically different from their eligibility for the first time, and in 2012, Blacks accounted for a larger percentage of votes cast (13.4 percent) than their share of the eligible electorate (12.5 percent).

### RACE, HISPANIC ORIGIN, AND THE GENDER VOTING GAP

In addition to the differences by race and Hispanic origin discussed above, voting rates have also

historically varied according to gender. In every presidential election since 1996, women have voted at higher rates than men. Most recently in 2012, the spread was about four percentage points. Data by race and Hispanic origin provide a more detailed picture of this gender voting gap (Figure 3).

Since 1996, the gender voting gap has been consistently present for Black voters, with Black women voting at higher rates than Black men by a range of 7 to 8 percentage points through 2008. In 2012, Black women voted at higher rates than Black men by about 9 percentage points, approximately 6 percentage points greater than each of the other race groups.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The Black voting rate differences by gender discussed in this paragraph are not statistically different.

For non-Hispanic Whites, the gap has been smaller than for Blacks but consistently present across elections. For Hispanics, the gender voting gap has been present in every election except for 2000. In no election since 1996 have gender voting rates statistically differed for Asians.

### AGE AND ELECTION CYCLES

Voting rates have also traditionally varied according to age. In every presidential election since 1996, voting rates have tended to increase with age. In 2012, voting rates ranged from a low of 41.2 percent for 18- to 24-year-olds, to a high of 71.9 percent for those 65 years and older.

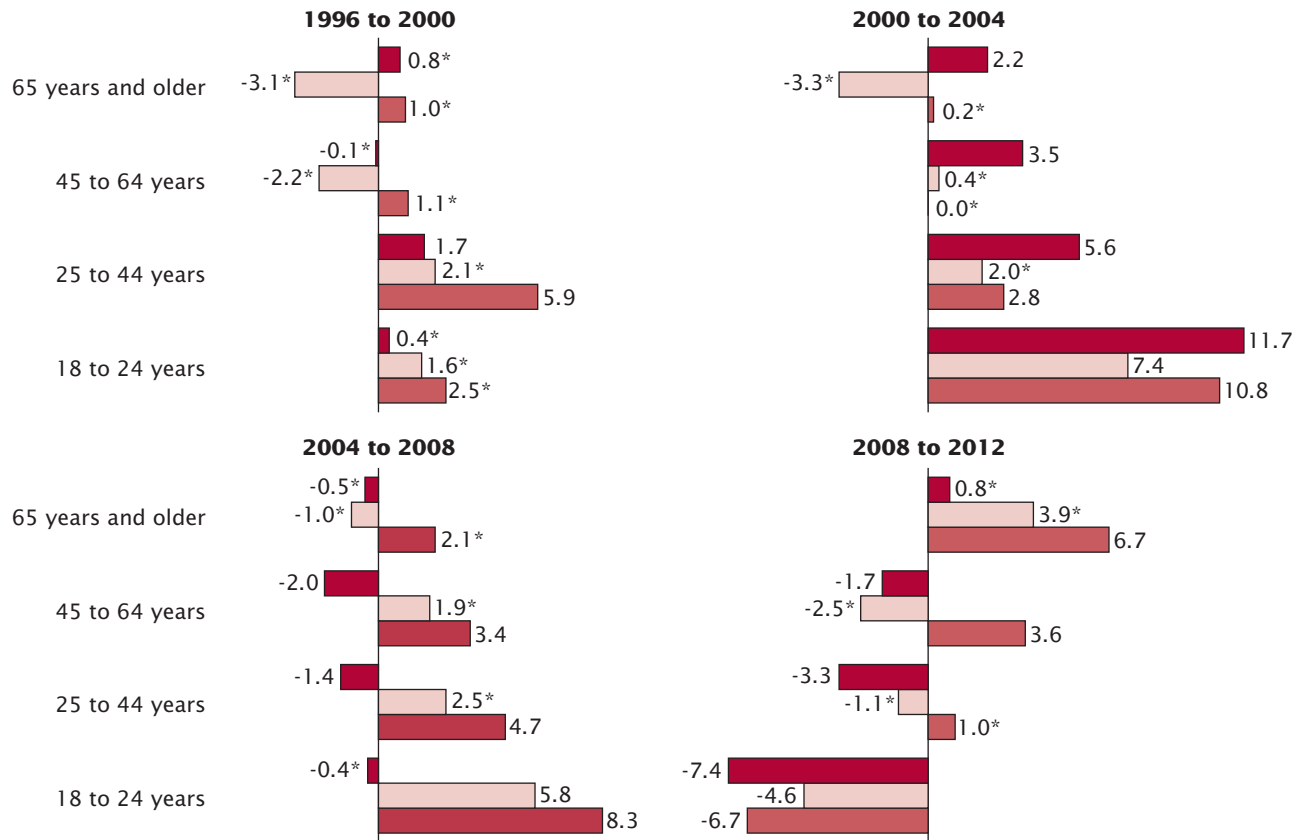
After accounting for race and Hispanic origin, these observed age disparities become more complex. Figure 4 shows how voting turnout has changed from one election to

Figure 4.

**Voting Rate Changes By Age and Race and Hispanic Origin: 1996-2012**

(In percentage points)

■ Non-Hispanic White  
 ■ Hispanic  
 ■ Black



\* Not a statistically significant change.

Note: Between 2000 and 2004 there was no observable statistical difference in voting rates among Blacks between the ages of 45 and 64 (the difference rounds to zero).

This figure presents voting rate changes by election for various race groups and Hispanic origin. For example, voting rates for non-Hispanic Whites between the ages of 25 and 44 increased about 2 points in 2000, increased about an additional 6 points in 2004, decreased about 1 point in 2008, and then decreased about an additional 3 points in 2012.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Select Years.

the next by age for non-Hispanic Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics.<sup>14</sup> For example, voting rates for non-Hispanic Whites between the ages of 25 to 44 increased about 2 points in 2000, increased about an additional 6 points in 2004, decreased about 1 point in 2008, and then decreased about an additional 3 points in 2012.

In 2000, overall voter turnout rates increased in comparison to 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Due to sample size constraints, the following sections do not include analysis of Asian voting rates.

This increased engagement was primarily seen in non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks between the ages of 25 and 44.

In 2004, overall turnout rates increased in comparison to 2000. This increased engagement was seen in every age-based breakdown for non-Hispanic Whites and also for Blacks between the ages of 18 to 24 and 25 to 44. Young Hispanics between 18 to 24 years also showed a statistically significant voting rate increase.

Overall voting rates remained high in 2008, the combined effect of increased minority turnout and decreased non-Hispanic White turnout.<sup>15</sup> Blacks between the ages of 18 to 24, 25 to 44, and 45 to 64 showed voting rate increases in 2008, as did young Hispanics between 18 to 24 years of age. Non-Hispanic Whites, meanwhile, showed statistically significant voting rate decreases for those

<sup>15</sup> Overall voting rates in 2004 and 2008 were not statistically different.

between the ages of 25 to 44 and 45 to 64.

In 2012, overall turnout rates decreased in comparison with both 2004 and 2008, a drop in voting characterized by large decreases in youth voting rates for all race groups and Hispanics. The only subgroups showing voting rate increases in 2012 were Blacks between the ages of 45 to 64 and 65 years of age and over. Non-Hispanic Whites between 18 to 24, 25 to 44, and 45 to 64 showed statistically significant voting rate decreases, as did young Blacks and young Hispanics between 18 to 24 years of age.

### **REGIONAL VOTING PATTERNS BY RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN**

Although the CPS is a state representative survey, the sample sizes for voting statistics at the state level, when combined with estimates of race and Hispanic origin, result in margins of error for voting rates in many states that are so large that the estimates become unreliable.<sup>16</sup> In this section, we discuss voting rates for census divisions, where standard errors are smaller and voting rates are therefore more dependable.

Although Blacks voted at higher rates than non-Hispanic Whites nationally in 2012, this result was not geographically uniform. Figures 5–7 allow comparisons of the voting rates of race groups and Hispanics across nine census geographic divisions.

In the eastern part of the country, Blacks tended to vote at higher rates than non-Hispanic Whites (Figure 5). The New England division was an exception, as voting

<sup>16</sup> State level estimates of voting and registration are available in the 2012 detailed tables, available at <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/)>.

rates for Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites were not statistically different in that part of the country. Voting disparities were high in the East South Central division, where Blacks voted at higher rates than non-Hispanic Whites by 7.6 percentage points.<sup>17</sup> In the middle part of the country voting rates for Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites were generally not statistically different from one another, but in the two most western census divisions, the rates for non-Hispanic Whites were higher than those of Blacks by margins of 12.8 percentage points in the Mountain division and 5.9 percentage points in the Pacific division.<sup>18</sup>

Non-Hispanic Whites, meanwhile, voted at higher rates than Hispanics across most of the country, with the lone exception being in the South Atlantic division, where voting rates were not statistically different from one another (Figure 6).

Blacks also tended to vote at higher rates than Hispanics, with the exception of the Mountain and New England divisions, where voting rates were not statistically different from one another (Figure 7). Across the rest of the country, Black voting rates were consistently higher, particularly in the West South Central Division, where Blacks voted at higher rates than Hispanics by more than 20 percentage points.<sup>19</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Voting rates have historically varied by an array of demographic factors,

<sup>17</sup> The margin of 7.6 percentage points for East South Central is not significantly different from the margins for East North Central, Middle Atlantic, South Atlantic, and West South Central.

<sup>18</sup> The differences for the Mountain and Pacific divisions are not statistically different.

<sup>19</sup> The West South Central Division margin is not significantly different from the margins of the West North Central, East North Central, and East South Central divisions.

including race and Hispanic origin. In 2012, Blacks voted at a higher rate than non-Hispanic Whites for the first time since the Census Bureau started reported voting rates for the eligible citizen population in 1996. In 2012, Blacks also voted at a higher percentage than their percentage of the eligible electorate.

A gender voting gap also existed among non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, and Black voters in 2012, although this divide was most pronounced among Black men and women. Voting rates by age categories also varied according to race and Hispanic origin and according to the specific election.

Finally, in 2012, certain voting differences by geographic location were observed for race groups and Hispanics. Compared with non-Hispanic Whites, Blacks tended to vote at higher rates in the eastern part of the United States and at lower rates in the West. With the exception of the Mountain Division and New England, Blacks voted at higher rates than Hispanics, while non-Hispanic Whites voted at higher rates than Hispanics in every division of the country except the South Atlantic.

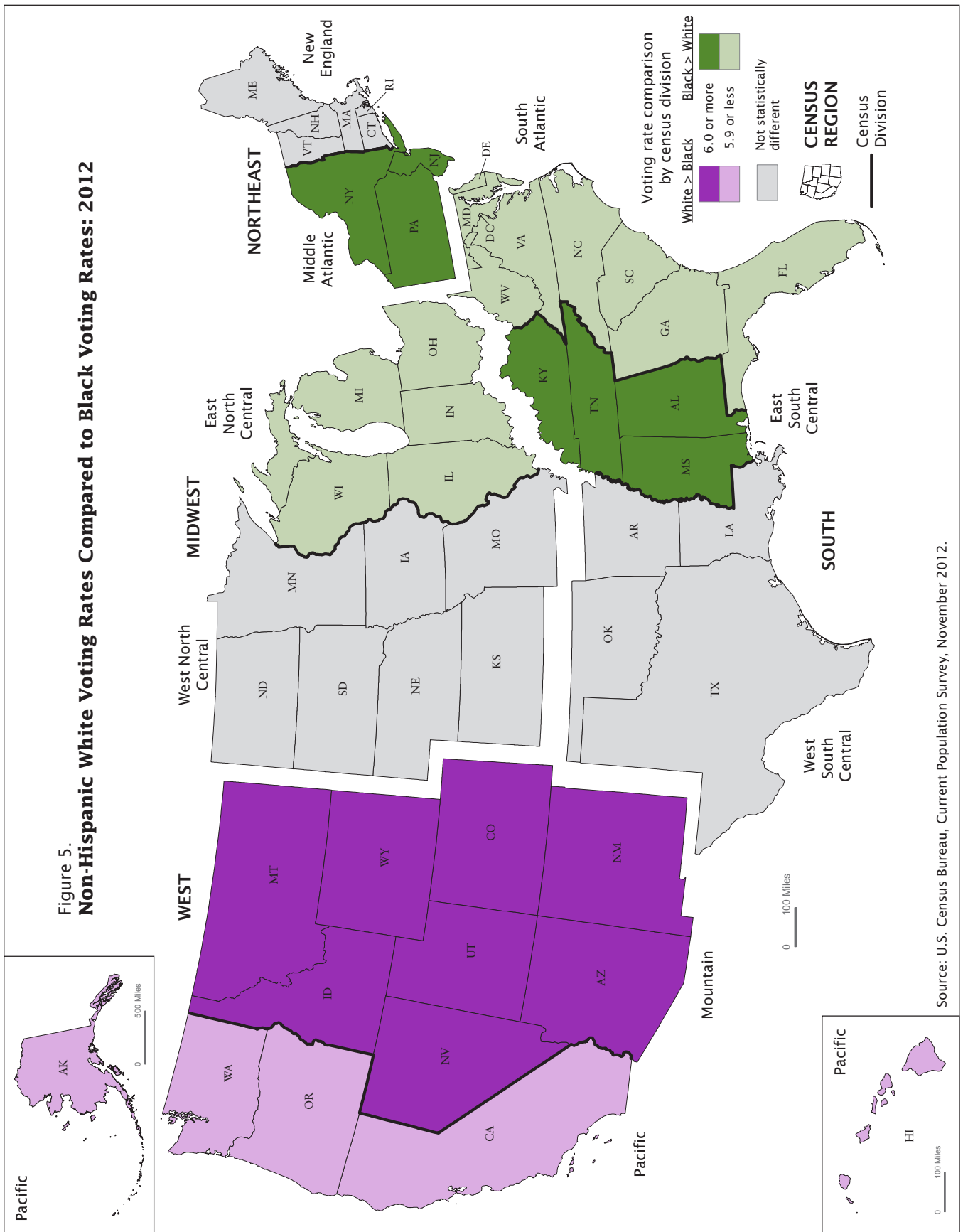
### **SOURCE AND ACCURACY OF THE DATA**

The population represented (the population universe) in the Voting and Registration Supplement to the November 2012 CPS is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. The excluded institutionalized population is composed primarily of individuals in correctional institutions and nursing homes.

The November CPS supplement, which asks questions on voting and registration participation, provides the basis for estimates in

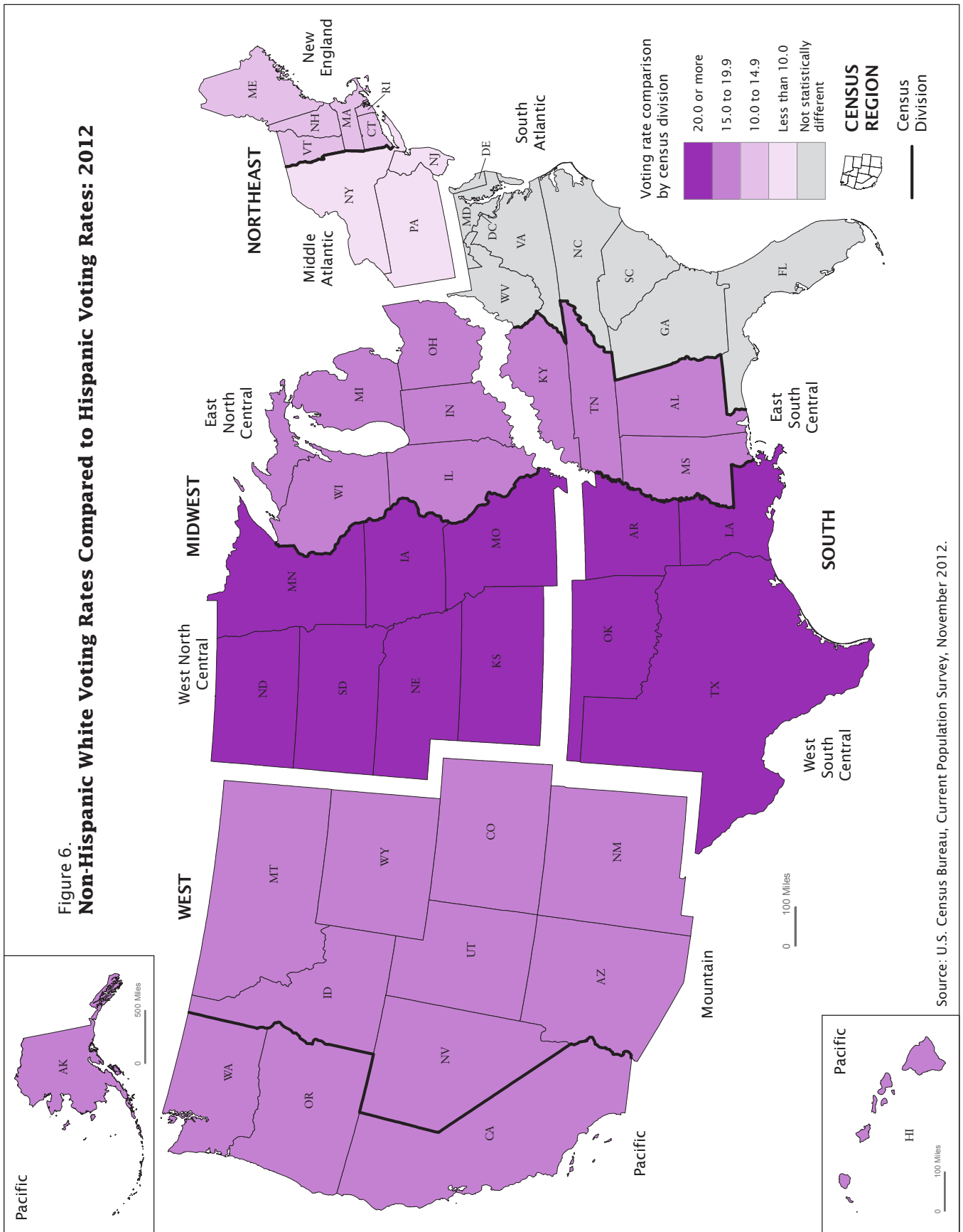


**Figure 5.  
Non-Hispanic White Voting Rates Compared to Black Voting Rates: 2012**



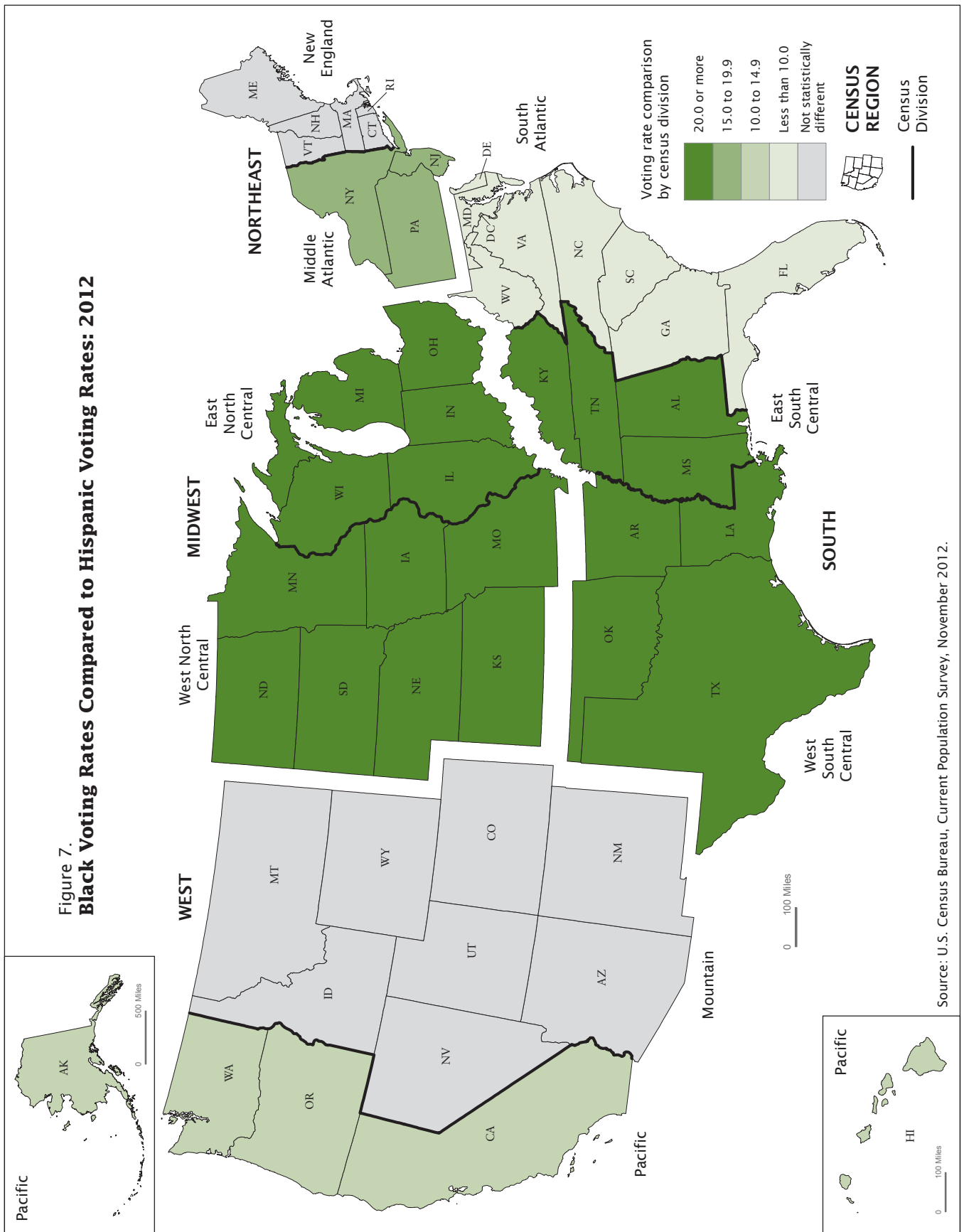
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2012.

**Figure 6.  
Non-Hispanic White Voting Rates Compared to Hispanic Voting Rates: 2012**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2012.

Figure 7.  
**Black Voting Rates Compared to Hispanic Voting Rates: 2012**



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this report. The first question in the 2012 supplement asked if respondents voted in the election held on Tuesday, November 6, 2012. If respondents did not respond to the question or answered “no” or “do not know,” they were then asked if they were registered to vote in the election.

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling error and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level. Nonsampling error in surveys is attributable to a variety of sources, such as survey design, the respondent’s interpretation of a question, the respondent’s willingness and ability to provide correct and accurate answers, and post survey practices like question coding and response classification. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures in sample selection, the wording of questions, interviewing, coding, data processing, and data analysis.

The CPS weighting procedure uses ratio estimation to adjust sample estimates to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin.

This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage, but biases may still be present when people are missed by the survey who differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. We do not precisely know the effect of this weighting procedure on other variables in the survey. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

Further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, can be found at <[www.census.gov/apspd/techdoc/cps/](http://www.census.gov/apspd/techdoc/cps/)> or by contacting the Demographic Statistical Methods Division via Internet e-mail at <[dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov](mailto:dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov)>.

### **MEASURING VOTING AND REGISTRATION IN THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY**

The Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement is a nationally representative sample survey that collects information on voting shortly after an election in November. The CPS supplement estimates the number of people who registered to vote and who voted based on direct interviews with household respondents. The CPS estimates are an important analytic tool in election studies because they identify the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of people who report that they do, or do not, vote.

Each state’s board of elections tabulates the vote counts, while the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives reports the official results. These tallies show the number of votes counted for specific offices. In a presidential election, the official count of comparison is the national total number of votes cast for the office of the President.

Discrepancies occur in each election between the CPS estimates and the official counts. In previous years, the disparity in the estimates in presidential elections has varied between 3 percent and 12 percent of the total number of votes shown as cast in the official tallies, with

official tallies typically showing lower turnout.<sup>20</sup>

Differences between the official counts and the CPS may be a combination of an understatement of the official numbers and an overstatement in the CPS estimates as described below.

### **UNDERSTATEMENT OF TOTAL VOTES CAST**

Ballots are sometimes invalidated and thrown out during the counting process and therefore do not appear in the official counts. Official vote counts also frequently do not include mismarked, unreadable, and blank ballots. Additionally, when the total number of votes cast for U.S. President represents the official count, voters who do not vote for this office are not included in the reported tally, even though they may report voting during their CPS interview.

### **REPORTS OF VOTING IN THE CPS**

Some of the error in estimating turnout in the CPS is the result of population controls and survey coverage. Respondent misreporting is also a source of error in the CPS estimates. Previous analyses based on reinterviews showed that respondents and proxy respondents are consistent in their reported answers and thus misunderstanding the questions does not fully account for the difference between the official counts and the CPS. However, other studies that matched survey responses with voting records indicate that part of the discrepancy between survey estimates and official counts is the

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<sup>20</sup> The official count of votes cast can be found on the Web page of the Clerk of the House of Representatives at <[http://clerk.house.gov/member\\_info/electionInfo](http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electionInfo)>.

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result of respondent misreporting, particularly vote over reporting for the purpose of appearing to behave in a socially desirable way.

As stated above, the definition of “official count” can provide another source of disparity. The CPS gathers information on whether respondents voted in the November election, not whether they voted for a specific office. The CPS estimates include respondents who voted in only state or local elections, but these individuals would not be included in official vote tallies based on ballots cast for a U.S. presidential candidate.

### **VOTING NOT CAPTURED IN THE CPS**

The CPS covers only the civilian noninstitutionalized population residing in the United States, while the official counts list all votes cast by this universe plus citizens residing in the United States who were in the military or living in institutions and citizens residing outside the United States, both civilian and military, who cast absentee ballots.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Demographic information for Armed Forces members (enumerated in off-base housing or on-base with their families) is included on the CPS data files. No labor force information is collected of Armed Forces members in any month. In March, supplemental data on income are included for Armed Forces members. This is the only month that nondemographic information is included for Armed Forces members.

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Detailed tabulations are available that provide demographic characteristics of the population on voting and registration. The Census Bureau also provides a series of historical tables and graphics, in addition to an interactive “Voting Hot Report.” Electronic versions of these products and this report are available on the Internet at the Census Bureau’s Voting and Registration Web site <[www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting)>.

### **CONTACT**

Contact the U.S. Census Bureau Customer Services Center toll free at 1-800-923-8282 or visit <[ask.census.gov](mailto:ask.census.gov)> for further information.

### **SUGGESTED CITATION**

File, Thom. 2013. “The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections).” Current Population Survey Reports, P20-569. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

### **USER COMMENTS**

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of our data and reports. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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