

DEMOCRACY IN A MOBILE AMERICA

Scott Novakowski

High rates of geographic mobility in the United States, combined with requirements for re-registration that often accompany an address change, contribute significantly to America's low rates of voter registration and turnout. Tens of millions of Americans move every year.

African Americans, Latinos, low-income people and young people are particularly mobile. It is unsurprising that these same groups are also less likely to be registered and to turn out to vote. Indeed, almost 75 million voting age citizens sat out the 2008 presidential election. Almost 60 million of those citizens were not registered to vote.¹ Straightforward policies like automatic voter registration, voter registration at public agencies, and Same Day Registration can help ensure that the move to a new home, for a new job, or for schooling does not result in a lost opportunity to vote.

The United States is a highly mobile society.

- » Almost 35.2 million U.S. residents, over 1 in 8, moved between 2007 and 2008.²
- » Almost 26.4 million voting-age residents, again over 1 in 8, moved between 2007 and 2008.
- » Twenty-four percent of voting-age citizens resided at their current address for two years or less in 2008.³
- » The vast majority of voting age movers (83%) relocated to a new address within the same state between 2007 and 2008. Almost two-thirds (64%) stayed within the same county.

People of color, low-income people and the young are more likely to move.

- » Race and ethnicity: African Americans and Latinos are the most likely to move. Between 2007 and 2008, 15 percent of both African Americans and Latinos over age 16 reported changing addresses. Mobility rates were lower for whites (10%) and Asians (13%).⁴ Twenty-nine percent of African Americans reported living at their current address for two years or less in 2008, as compared to 22 percent of whites and 18 percent of Asians.⁵
- » Income: Low-income individuals are over twice as likely to move as those with incomes above the poverty line. Between 2007 and 2008, 23 percent of those below the poverty line moved, as compared to only 10 percent of those above the line.⁶
- » Age: Young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 are the most likely to move. Between 2007 and 2008, 24 percent of young adults moved. Mobility rates dramatically decline for older age groups: only 18 percent of those 25-39 years old, 7 percent of those 40-64 years old, and 4 percent of those aged 65 and over moved between 2007 and 2008. While young adults were the most likely to move, they were also among the most likely to remain within the same state and/or county: 84 percent of 18-24 year old movers remained in the same state and 65 percent remained within the same county.

The most mobile are least likely to be registered or to turnout to vote.

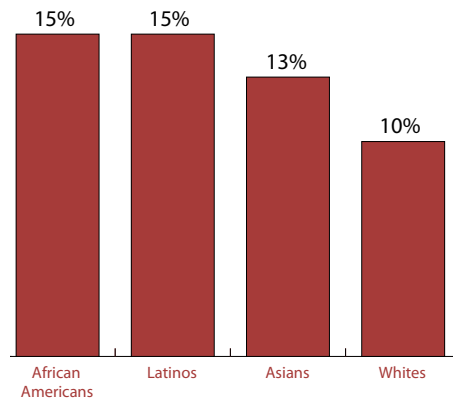
- » Racial and ethnic minorities: Seventy percent of voting-age African American and 59 percent of voting-age Latino citizens were registered to vote in 2008, as compared to 73 percent of whites. Sixty-six percent of white citizens turned out to vote compared to 65 percent of African American and 50 percent of Latino citizens.⁷
- » Young people: Fifty-eight percent of citizens age 18-24 were registered to vote in 2008, as compared to 74 percent of those age 40-64 and 77 percent of those 65 and over. Similarly, 77 percent of citizens age 65 and older and 68 percent of 40-64 year-olds cast ballots, as compared to only 49 percent of young adults age 18-24.
- » Low-income people: Sixty-five percent of citizens in households making under \$25,000 a year were registered to vote in 2008, as compared to 85 percent of those making \$100,000 or more. Only 54 percent of low-income citizens voted, as compared to 79 percent of more affluent citizens.

The home foreclosure crisis may create a new class of unregistered voters.

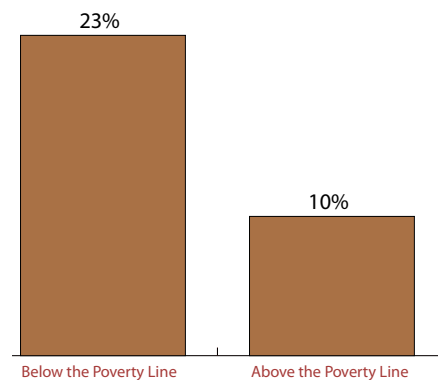
- » The current spike in home foreclosures increases mobility and can swell the ranks of voters who must re-register. By May 2009, almost two million homes had gone into foreclosure.⁸
- » Subprime loans and home foreclosures are heavily concentrated in low-income communities of color. In fact, even when controlling for income, communities of color have significantly higher foreclosure rates than predominantly white communities.⁹
- » The greatest numbers of foreclosures were in California (96,560), Florida (64,588), and Nevada (16,266). The five states with the greatest concentrations of foreclosures were Nevada (1 in 67 homes), Florida (1 in 134), California (1 in 137), Arizona (1 in 164), and Ohio (1 in 410).

MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES, 2007-2008

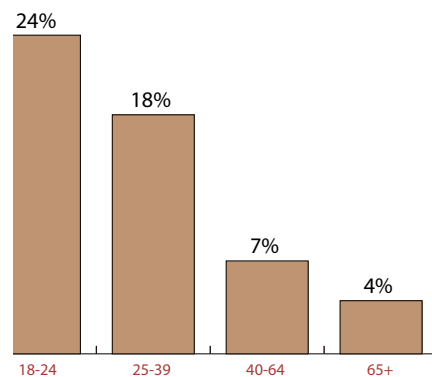
% Moved by Race



% Moved by Income



% Moved by Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Several straightforward policies can help enfranchise voters who move.

- » Automatic registration. Most democracies around the world take responsibility for registering eligible citizens to vote and updating the voter rolls as they move. Election officials in states like Minnesota have proposed to automatically register citizens when they apply for government services, unless they decline, and use postal change-of-address notices to update existing voter registration files. Similar measures to modernize voter registration should be considered by Congress.
- » Public agency-based voter registration. Many states are not providing voter registration services to applicants and recipients of public benefits such as Food Stamps and Medicaid, as required by the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.¹⁰ Proper implementation of the law, which requires voter registration services to be provided with address changes as well as with benefits applications and recertifications, could reach many of the most mobile and least registered of citizens.¹¹
- » Enforcement of federal “fail-safe” voting provisions. The National Voter Registration Act also requires that registered voters who move within their registrar’s jurisdiction, typically a county, be permitted to vote even if they have not notified the registrar of the address change.¹² Since most individuals move within the same county, effective monitoring and enforcement of this provision of the NVRA can help ensure those who move are able to cast a ballot that will count.
- » Same Day Registration (SDR). With SDR, citizens who recently moved into a new election district can register and vote at the time of the election, even if voter registration deadlines have passed.¹³ The nine states that offer Same Day Registration lead the nation in voter registration rates while maintaining the sound and efficient administration of elections.¹⁴

Endnotes

1. All voter registration and turnout data is from the U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008 Voting and Registration Supplement; analysis by Dēmos.
2. Unless otherwise noted, all mobility data is derived from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Detailed tables available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/migrate/cps2008.html>.
3. U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, November 2008 Voting and Registration Supplement; analysis by Dēmos.
4. Individuals identifying as Latino can be of any race.
5. U.S. Census, Current Population Survey, November 2008 Voting and Registration Supplement; analysis by Dēmos.
6. In 2008, the federal Poverty Threshold for a family of four was \$21,910. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh08.html>.
7. The 2008 election saw a historic reduction of the long-standing gap in voter turnout between people of color and white voters. African American turnout increased by 4.9 percentage points over 2004 and white turnout decreased by 1.1 percentage point, greatly reducing the 7 percentage point gap in the 2004 election. Similarly, Latino turnout increased by 2.7 percentage points in 2008 as compared to 2004. See Sam Roberts, "No Racial Gap Seen in '08 Vote Turnout," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2009, A16, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/01/us/politics/01census.html>.
8. RealtyTRAC, <http://www.realtytrac.com/TrendCenter/default.aspx>.
9. Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, *The State of the Nation's Housing 2009*, available at <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/publications/markets/son2009/index.htm>.
10. Douglas R. Hess and Scott Novakowski, *Unequal Access: Neglecting the National Voter Registration Act, 1995-2007* (February 2008), available at <http://www.demos.org/pubs/UnequalAccessReport-web.pdf>.
11. Scott Novakowski, *Toward An Equal Electorate: Five States Gain Under the National Voter Registration Act* (October 2008), available at http://www.demos.org/pubs/nvra_2.pdf.
12. 42 U.S.C. § 1973gg-6(e)(2).
13. In addition, eight states have some system whereby a registered voter who moved within the state can update her address and vote on Election Day. Three of these states require such voters to cast a provisional ballot. See Adam Skaggs and Jonathan Blitzer, *Permanent Voter Registration* (Brennan Center for Justice, 2009), available at http://brennan.3cdn.net/1a1ce9f2a1e87c216a_yjm6iv2uo.pdf.
14. See Dēmos, *Voters Win with Election Day Registration* (updated Winter 2009), available at http://www.demos.org/pubs/voterswin_09.pdf.

Contact

Scott Novakowski
Senior Policy Analyst, Democracy Program
snovakowski@demos.org
212.389.1415

Media Inquiries:
Tim Rusch, Communications Director
trusch@demos.org
212.389.1407

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