USC Survey Finds Turnout Likely Lower for Voters of Color this November Compared with White Turnout

Study highlights:
• Overall voter turnout may be lower than 4 years ago
• More than 30% of voters surveyed have concerns with the voting process, citing possible incorrect ballot counting or tampering, according to Center for Inclusive Democracy report

Los Angeles, May 21, 2024 – A new USC survey finds that eligible turnout will likely be much lower for voters of color this November, compared to turnout of white voters. Conducted by the Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) at the USC Price School of Public Policy, the study also found that voter turnout may be lower than it was in the previous presidential election in November 2020.

Nearly three quarters (74.8%) of white non-Latino eligible voters said they were “extremely likely” to vote – the highest proportion of any racial or ethnic group examined by the survey. That’s 13.7 percentage points higher than Asian American, Asian Islander, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AAPI), the group with the second-highest proportion choosing this option. Black and Latino eligible voters said they were “extremely likely” at lower rates – 55.2% and 52.4%, respectively.

“These survey findings tell us that, again, voters of color will be underrepresented at the ballot box in an important presidential election. Historical and current barriers to voting for communities of color continue to have impact at the ballot box,” said Mindy Romero, director of the CID and the study’s lead author.

Almost two-thirds (65.2%) of eligible California voters are “extremely likely” to cast ballots in the November election. If such a turnout takes place it would be lower than the 70.8% turnout four years earlier.
But intention and practice may not coincide.

“It is common in public opinion surveys for respondents to be somewhat unreliable about their plans for voting, and that actual voter behavior can vary come Election Day,” Romero said.

In addition, 68% of eligible voters surveyed said that they do not have any concerns when voting in the 2024 general election. Of the roughly one-third who do have concerns:

- 33.5% said they were concerned that vote-by-mail ballots would not be counted accurately;
- 28.7% feared there would be long lines at the polls;
- 27.6% suspected that their vote-by-mail ballot would be tampered with and their vote changed;
- Almost 40% of white, non-Latino eligible voters cited a lack of confidence in their ballot being counted correctly. This group had the highest level of concern about this issue.

The survey found that more than one in four eligible California voters (26.4%) report disinterest as the biggest reason for not voting in the November 2022 election. Another 15.2% cited not liking the candidates, 13.1% cited being too busy, and 10.9% said they didn’t have enough information about their choices. Black and AAPI eligible voters surveyed reported even higher levels of disinterest, both at about 30%.

“Holding an election is one thing – getting voters to the polls and building trust in our election process is another,” said Romero. “What this tells us is that we still have a lot of work to do before the November 2024 election to engage, reassure and motivate voters.”

The full report, titled “Voter Messaging in California: Challenges and Opportunities in an Inequitable Election Landscape,” can be found at https://cid.usc.edu/turnout-briefs

The report also looked at where voters get their information about elections:

- 31.9% cited the county voter information guide;
- 28.4% cited the county website;
- 27.6% cited the voter’s vote-by-mail packets;
- 20% cited family and friends and 14% cited social media, with both of these categories higher for Latinos and youth (18-24 years).

Only 28% of eligible voters knew that a vote-by-mail ballot can be counted if it arrives after Election Day with a postmark indicating it was sent on Election Day. Black and Latino eligible voters were less likely than white, non-Latino and AAPI eligible voters to know when a vote-by-mail ballot needs to be received in order to be counted. Only 16.9% of eligible voters ages 18 to 24 knew this information.

CID’s research also reviewed messaging that could have a more positive effect on the likelihood of respondents voting in November. The survey found messaging that mentioned the various voting options available – combined with community empowerment language – was the most effective. Community empowerment language includes state civil rights organizations urging people to make their voices heard by voting in their communities.
For this study, CID surveyed 11,827 eligible voters (adult citizens) in the state of California. The survey was fielded between January 10 and February 7, 2024, and conducted in both English and Spanish. This research was supported through funding from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

CID recently published a report that found that a significant number of California voters are not using or are not aware of BallotTrax, a free tool adopted by all counties during the 2020 election cycle to help individuals track the status of their vote-by-mail ballot. Romero said use of BallotTrax could boost confidence in the voting process by reducing uncertainties voters might have about whether their mail-in ballot was received and processed.

Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID)
The Center for Inclusive Democracy (CID) is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy. CID’s mission is to improve the social and economic quality of life in U.S. communities by producing non-partisan research that informs policy and on-the-ground organizing efforts through education and outreach for a more engaged, transparent and representative democracy. CID conducts pioneering research that explores voting behavior, civic engagement, as well as electoral and economic issues at the intersection of social justice and democracy.

USC Sol Price School of Public Policy
Founded nearly 100 years ago, the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy combines evidence-based research and rigorous education to improve the quality of life in communities worldwide.

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