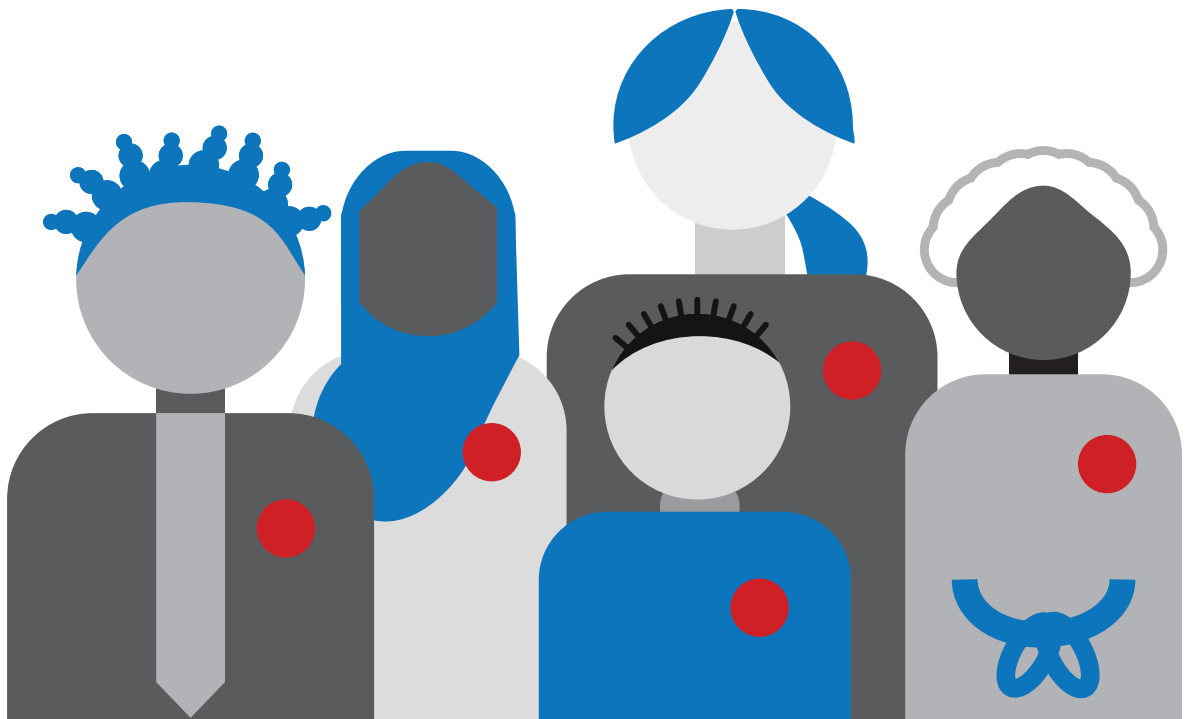


# Reflecting Democracy

*Reclaiming Equity in the Political Process*



Massachusetts  
Voter Table



Mass  
VOTE

# About Us

## Massachusetts Voter Table

The Massachusetts Voter Table advances civic access, engagement, and representation to increase resources and power for people of color and working-class people toward achieving a multiracial democracy. MVT convenes a statewide coalition of community organizations to integrate voter engagement with grassroots organizing in service of a shared agenda for economic and racial justice. We provide coaching, training, and guidance on data-driven field strategies to over 25 base-building organizations in communities of color in Boston and in Gateway Cities in Massachusetts.



## MassVOTE

MassVOTE is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that seeks to increase voter participation in Massachusetts and advocates for electoral justice for the sake of building a government truly representative of the people. In 1999, a small group of community leaders came together to close the voter turnout gap between white, suburban areas and urban communities of color. MassVOTE works on a nonpartisan basis to increase voter registration, education, and participation in historically underrepresented communities in Massachusetts to promote social, economic, environmental, and racial justice. MassVOTE trains nonprofit staff and volunteers - people with legitimacy, credibility, and relationships in the community - to tie voting people's everyday concerns. When people go to community nonprofits for healthcare, affordable housing, and childcare, MassVOTE helps them become engaged voters whose voices will be heard.

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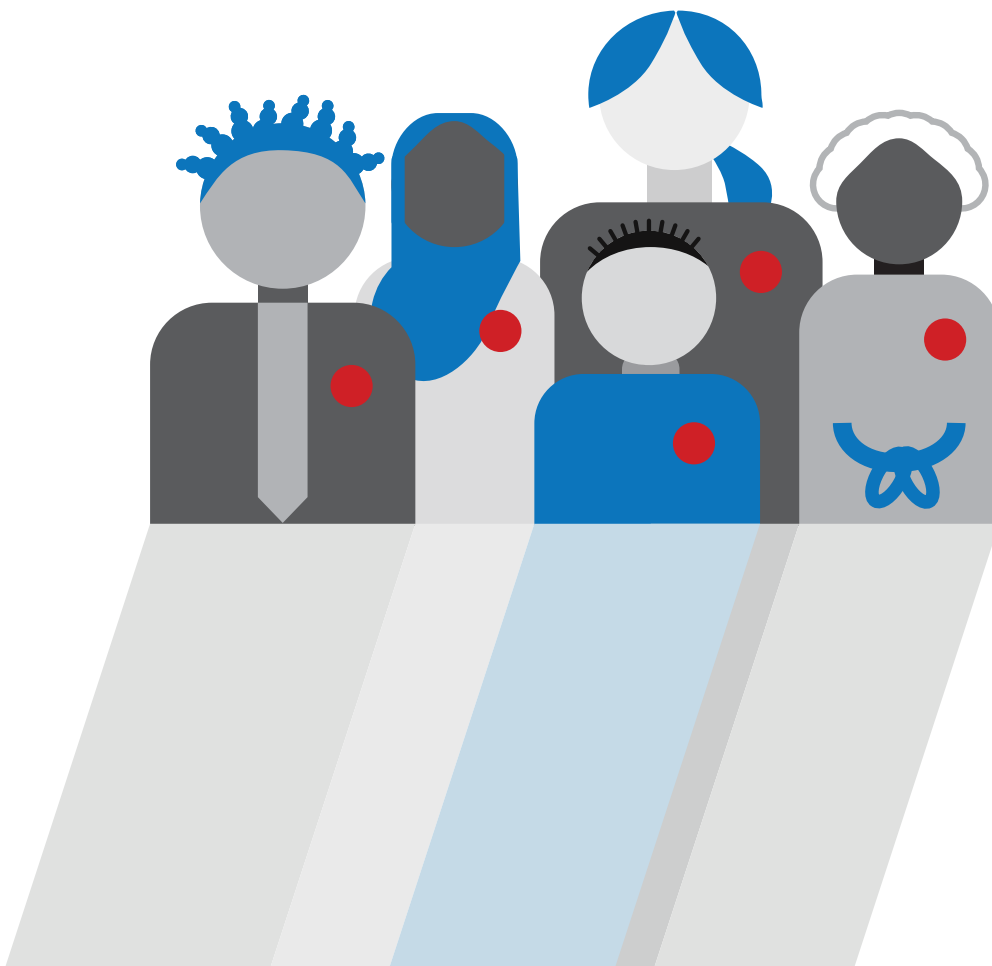
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# Reflecting Democracy

Reclaiming Equity in the Political Process

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# Executive Summary

We must reckon with the impact of inequality on our political system in Massachusetts. High levels of racial and economic inequality have stood in the way of a democracy that reflects the needs of people of color, immigrants, low-income people, and youth in the commonwealth. Underrepresentation and lack of resources have caused many people to stop participating in the political system. In the past few years, heightened

**How can we close the civic engagement gap to create a democracy that reflects the needs of marginalized people?**

fear and distrust of the government institutions have driven down civic engagement. Low civic participation leads elected officials to continue to ignore the needs of marginalized people when forming public policy. This vicious cycle of erasure leading to low participation is fueled by inequality and threatens the foundations of our democracy.

The primary question that we seek to answer is: how can we close the civic engagement gap to create a democracy that reflects the needs of marginalized people? Our question is not new, but we seek to lay out a strategy and approach that meet the demands of the current political moment and leads to long-term transformation of our unequal political system into a democracy that reflects the needs of marginalized people and addresses root causes of inequities.

The goals of this report are to analyze the participation of voters of color from 2010-2018, examine local and national models of success in building power, and propose an integrated voter engagement strategy to advance equity in our democracy. After taking an honest look at our progress and challenges and assessing existing models, we lay out the proposed strategy for grassroots organizing integrated with civic engagement in 2020.

Through our analysis of voter data, we find that voters of color left 46.1% of their political power on the table in the 2018 election. In 2020 we must turnout 170,739 voters of color and register 216,736 voters of color to reach parity with white voters on participation and registration rates. Further, we analyzed these trends by county and found lower racial gaps in voter participation in Nantucket and Suffolk Counties than in counties across the state. Policy reforms that expand civic access and turnout can play a major role in reaching parity. Achieving parity is an important goal, but achieving racial equity in our democracy will require more than mobilizations to close quantitative gaps.

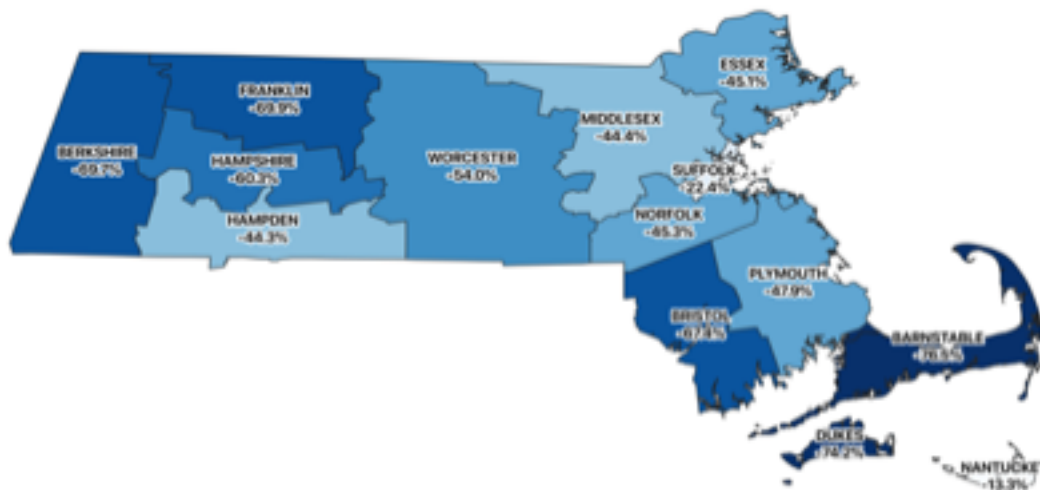


Figure 1: Percentage difference between the share of ballots cast (vote share) and the share of all eligible voters (CVAP). The statewide percentage difference is 46.1%

2020 will be a historic year for civic participation in communities of color in Massachusetts. This year, we have the opportunity and imperative to mobilize 275,284 low-propensity voters of color and low-income in Gateway Cities and 163,883 in Boston to take action in the decennial census and the three elections. Our ability to transform these short-term mobilizations into long-term equity depends on the depth of our local networks in communities of color. This is why we propose a new infrastructure for integrated voter engagement in Massachusetts that resources community organizations to take advantage of short-term mobilizations as opportunities to develop leaders and build and connect regional coalitions. The strength of this integrated voter engagement infrastructure is necessary for achieving racial equity in the next decade.

In addition to building the infrastructure, we will lay the ground work for a reflective democracy in the next decade by taking on the key issues confronting our communities: climate change and displacement, racial gaps in education, and redistricting and political power. By weaving our local networks together and finding the intersections between these issues, we seek to build the narrative and the infrastructure for our people and our communities to claim our power in 2020 and thrive in the next decade. Together, we will win a more equitable democracy when we re-generate our civic commons, one voter, resident, block, and community at a time.

## Introduction

Racial and economic inequality is the biggest barrier to achieving a democracy that reflects the needs of communities of color, immigrants, low-income people, and immigrants in Massachusetts. To overcome these barriers, we must reckon with the impact of daily inequality on the foundations of our democracy. Forty-three families are evicted from their homes every day while the median home price soars above \$400,000. Overall educational attainment in Massachusetts shines while Black and Latinx students fall behind in Gateway City school districts. Immigrant children with severe illnesses face deportation from beds of top-ranked hospitals. Low-income bus riders are stalled in traffic while tax breaks for multinational corporations have drained state coffers for public transportation.

This inequality is the root of low civic participation. When people feel that their communities are underrepresented and under-resourced, they stop participating. This leads elected officials to continue to ignore the needs of marginalized people when forming public policy. People struggling to get by slide into the cynical rationalization that their participation does not matter.

Short-term investments in communities of color for electoral politics and nonpartisan voter mobilization sometimes lead to temporary increases in participation but rarely create permanent gains in political power for communities of color, low-income people, and immigrants. The seed of long-term equity and the roots of our power lie in developing ordinary people into leaders who are ready to take on issues facing their neighbors and communities.

To claim our power in this critical year of civic engagement, we must weave together the power-building networks and organizations rooted in communities of color. The capacity that we build in 2020 will come from the leaders who we develop and test through the decennial Census and three consequential elections in 2020. Together, we will build the infrastructure for a more equitable civil society and lay the foundation for a democracy that addresses the root causes of the problems that our communities face everyday.

## I. Analysis of Vote Share of Communities of Color from 2010-2018

In the 2018 election, voters of color in Massachusetts left 46.1% of their political power unclaimed. Voter participation among people of color in Massachusetts dropped from 63.3% in 2016 to 46.4% in 2018, leading to a precipitous decrease in share of ballots cast by voters of color.<sup>1</sup> Turnout among voters of color (46.4%)

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1 Racial models for voter data come from Catalyst.

increased relative to 2014 (34.9%) and 2010 (42.5%), but the drop off in turnout from 2016 to 2018 led to voters of color claiming only 10.3% ballots cast in 2018 despite making up 19.3% of eligible voters.

## Key Trends from 2010-2018

The four major data points we rely on to track disparities in political participation among people of color include: Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP), voter registration percentage, voter turnout, and vote share. Analyzing these four interrelated data points over time allows us to understand how communities of color are participating in the political process and identify key trends.

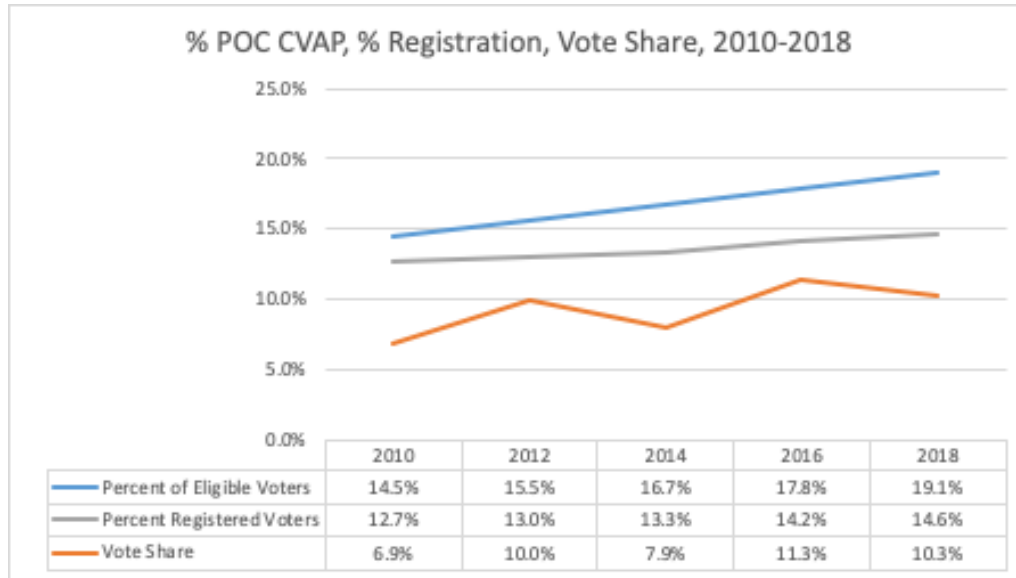


Figure 2: Although the percent of eligible voters and the percent of registered voters who are people of color has consistently increased from 2010 to 2018, vote share of communities of color drops dramatically from presidential elections to midterm elections.

### Citizen Voting Age Population

Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) is data that is collected by the American Community Survey and gives the best estimates of the number of eligible voters of color. Best available data indicates that the total CVAP in Massachusetts in 2018 was 4,964,686, of which 946,146 are people of color. The share of people of color of CVAP has grown quickly in the past decade, from 14.5% in 2010 to 19.1% of all eligible voters in Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup>

### Voter Registration Percentage

Voter registration percentage is the percentage of registered voters who are people of color. In 2018, people of color accounted for 665,537 active registered voters out of a total of 4,410,512 registered voters, or 15.1% of all active registered voters in Massachusetts.<sup>3</sup> An additional 216,736 people of color would need to register to vote to close the gap relative to white voters in Massachusetts.

### Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is the percentage of registered voters who cast a ballot in a particular election. Turnout among all communities of color is lower when compared to the statewide average in Massachusetts. In 2018, 309,740

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2 Citizen Voting Age Population comes from US Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for 2018. U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables B05003B, B05003D, B05003I, B05003H, B05003

3 Data about voter registration and turnout by race comes from racial models from TargetSmart for 2010-2016 and from Catalyst for 2018.

voters of color (46.4% of 665,537 registered people of color) voted in the general election compared to total turnout of 2,717,382 voters (59.9% of 4,410,512 registered voters).<sup>4</sup> White voter turnout dropped only 17% from the 2016 election to the 2018 midterm, but turnout dropped by 22% for black voters, 33% for Latinx voters, and 20% for AAPI voters in Massachusetts from 2016 to 2018.

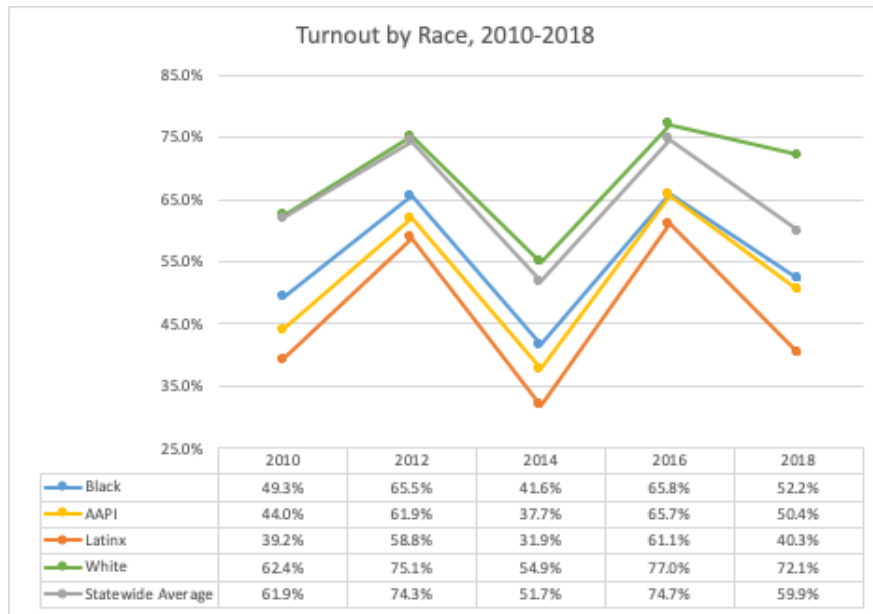


Figure 3: Voter participation rates fell precipitously from 2016 to 2018.

## Vote Share

Vote share refers to the percentage of ballots cast for any given election. In 2018, voters of color made up 10.3% of all ballots cast in the general election, a decline from 11.3% of vote share in the 2016 presidential election but an increase from 7.9% in 2014 and 6.9% in 2010.

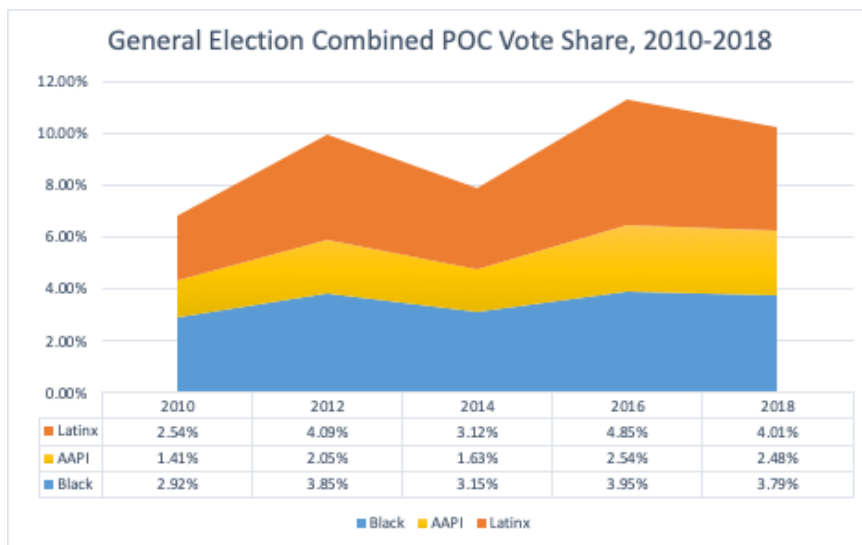


Figure 4: Combined, vote share across communities of color peaked in 2016 and fell in 2018. However, vote share among voters of color in 2018 exceeded vote share in 2010 and 2014.

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4 Voter turnout data from 2010-2016 comes from TargetSmart, and 2018 voter turnout data comes from Catalist.

People of color account for 19.1% of all eligible voters (CVAP) in Massachusetts but only account for 10.3% of ballots cast in the 2018 general election. The larger drops in turnout for voters of color relative to white voters means that vote share for people of color decreased in 2018.

Our core task remains increasing civic engagement to capture a greater vote share in all elections, especially midterm and municipal elections and primary elections, and amplify the voices of voters of color. To close the vote share gap, we must turn 170,739 eligible voters of color who did not cast a ballot in 2018 into voters in the 2020 election.

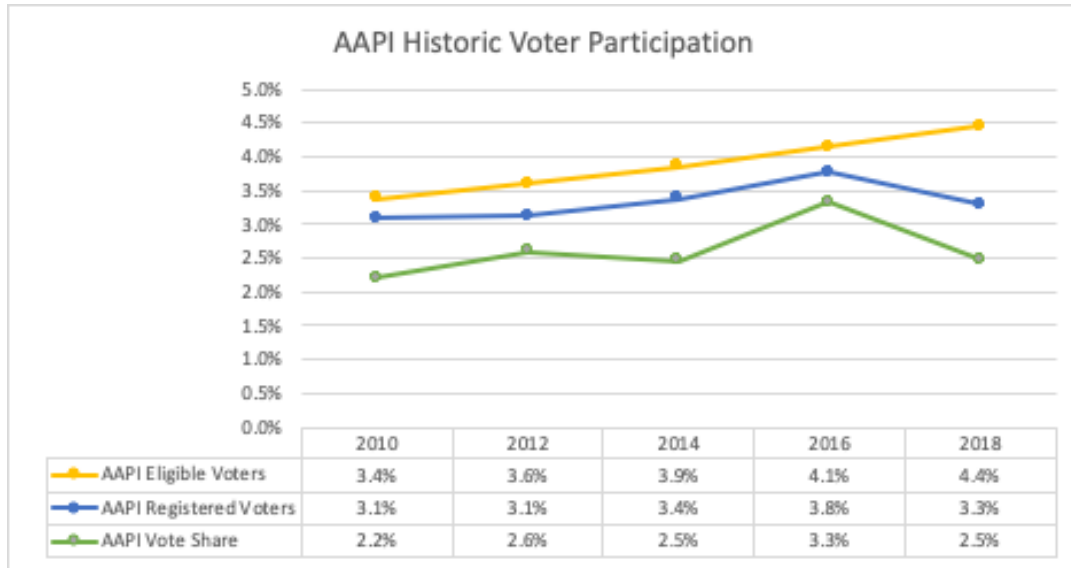


Figure 5: The voter participation trends among Asian American Pacific Islander are encouraging in presidential elections, and midterm turnout remains a major challenge.

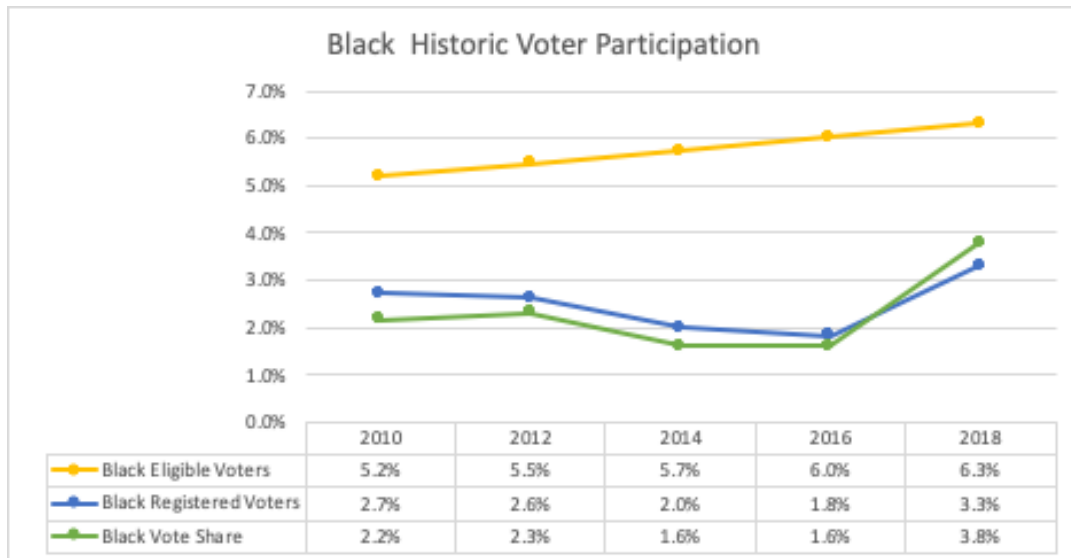


Figure 6: Black voter turnout and vote share for African-Americans decreased from 2010-2016 and finally rebounded in 2018.



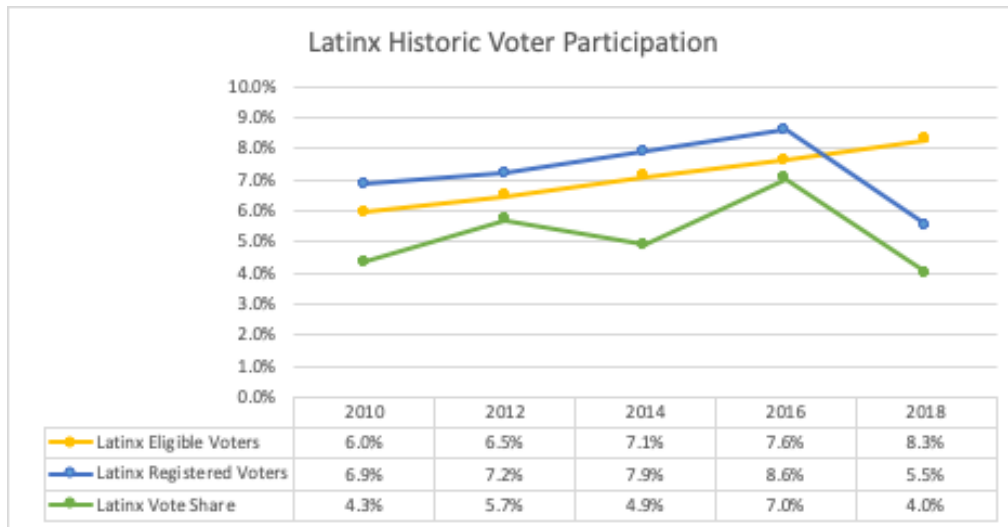


Figure 7: Turnout among Latinx voters surged in 2016, but fell dramatically in the 2018 midterm elections.<sup>5</sup>

## Reaching Parity: Closing the Civic Participation Gap

### Voter Registration

The total Massachusetts registration rate is 88.9% and the registration rate among people of color is 70.2%. This means an additional 216,736 people of color who are eligible to vote need to register to reach parity relative to white voters.

### Voter Turnout

People of color account for 19.1% of all eligible voters but only 10.3% of all ballots cast in 2018 (308,533 out of 3,002,987 total ballots cast in 2018). To reach parity, we must mobilize an additional 170,739 people of color who are eligible to vote but did not vote in 2018 to cast their ballot in 2020.

### Regional Gaps in Civic Participation

These gaps in voter registration and voter turnout vary by region. Across the state, the percentage difference between the share of ballots cast (vote share) and the share of all eligible voters (CVAP) is 46.1%.<sup>6</sup> If all eligible voters of color cast ballots, meaning that every eligible voter of color registered and cast a ballot, the difference would be zero. This means that voters of color left about half of their political power in the 2018 election on the table. This percentage difference varies widely by region in Massachusetts. Voters of color in Nantucket County left 13.4% of their power on the table and 22.4% in Suffolk County. In Barnstable, Berkshire, Bristol, Dukes, Franklin, Hampshire, and Worcester Counties, voters of color left the majority of their power in the 2018 election unclaimed.

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<sup>5</sup> MVT switched data vendors from TargetSmart to Catalist, so the racial modeling changed slightly in 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Percent difference = (% POC CVAP – POC Vote Share) / (% POC CVAP)

**Table 1: Percentage differences between vote share and CVAP by county.**

County	%POC CVAP	POC Vote Share	POC Turnout	POC % of Reg	Percentage Difference
Barnstable	4.5%	1.1%	40.2%	1.8%	76.6%
Berkshire	6.6%	2.0%	38.7%	3.3%	69.7%
Bristol	10.4%	3.4%	32.6%	5.9%	67.5%
Dukes	7.2%	1.8%	48.5%	2.7%	74.3%
Essex	19.7%	10.8%	41.9%	16.3%	45.2%
Franklin	4.5%	1.4%	40.4%	2.2%	70.0%
Hampden	30.4%	16.9%	33.2%	27.6%	44.4%
Hampshire	10.5%	4.2%	49.7%	5.9%	60.4%
Middlesex	18.1%	10.0%	50.9%	13.7%	44.5%
Nantucket	9.9%	8.6%	47.5%	11.9%	13.4%
Norfolk	17.5%	9.6%	50.6%	13.0%	45.3%
Plymouth	11.2%	5.8%	44.7%	8.5%	47.9%
Suffolk	43.8%	34.0%	48.5%	41.6%	22.4%
Worcester	15.8%	7.3%	39.4%	11.5%	54.0%
Statewide	19.1%	10.3%	46.4%	15.1%	46.1%

## II. Models of Success

Turning nonvoters in communities of color into regular voters is core to our mission and strategy for winning long-term equity and addressing root problems. Our strength comes from the trust that our partner organizations have built in the communities and neighborhoods with the lowest voter participation rates in Massachusetts. When local leaders take action, we see impressive results: in 2018, turnout for registered voters contacted by a community-based organization was 69 percent, nine percentage points higher than the statewide average of 60 percent. Unlike political campaigns, MVT and MassVOTE partner organizations do not pack up and leave after Election Day. We integrate voter mobilization with year-round grassroots organizing by organizing membership meetings, identifying issues, and holding accountability sessions with elected officials.

In this section, we will analyze three campaigns that have led to a more reflective democracy. These models guide our approach to establishing the infrastructure for integrated voter engagement.



### Drawing Democracy in 2011: Sowing the Seeds of Victory for Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley and a Diverse City Council in Boston

A transparent redistricting process that prioritized racial equity in 2011 formed the foundation for these historic victories for communities of color in Greater Boston. Funders, community organizations, legal experts, and researchers united after the 2010 Census to create opportunity districts for candidates of color to successfully run for office. This nonpartisan effort laid

the groundwork for greater representation of people of color, especially in Greater Boston. These opportunity districts include the 7th Congressional District, which is now represented by Congresswoman Pressley, the first black woman elected to Congress from Massachusetts, and Boston City Council District 5, which is now held by Councilor Ricardo Arroyo, the first person of color to represent the majority-minority district.

## **Building the Power of Asian Americans Pacific Islanders**

The Wallace H. Coulter Foundation has partnered with local community-based organizations to anchor statewide coalitions to increase civic engagement in AAPI communities since 2010. Meanwhile, the Coulter Foundation has funded State Voices tables, included MVT, to provide technical assistance to organizations in these coalitions and eventually recruit AAPI-serving community-based organizations to the state tables. The Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) has anchored the Asian Pacific Islanders' Civic Action Network (APIs CAN) since 2015 and has regranted over \$650,000 to 29 primarily AAPI serving organizations since 2015. This has led to higher voter participation rates, consistently increasing vote share, and unified diverse communities on a shared agenda for language access and data equity. Locally, this added capacity for civic engagement has led to a greater representation of the needs of AAPI communities, especially in Lowell, Malden, and Quincy, three Gateway Cities with a large density of AAPIs. Since 2018, two of the four new MVT partners have come from APIs CAN.

## **Multi-Sector Collaboration for a Complete Count in the 2020 Census**

The Massachusetts Census Equity Fund (MCEF) has raised over \$1.3 million to prepare community-based organizations for the 2020 Census, prioritizing historically undercounted constituencies in hard-to-count census tracts. In fall 2018, MCEF invited the Massachusetts Nonprofit Network (MNN) and MVT to join its Steering Committee, spurring greater collaboration between community-based organizations and funders. Along with the MIRA Coalition and APIs CAN, MVT and MNN created MassCounts, the coalition of community organizations to prepare for the 2020 Census. MVT and MNN's advising role to MCEF has provided new insights into the challenges of nonprofits in preparation for the 2020 Census. This model has increased the effectiveness of both the funder collaborative and the nonprofit coalition.

## **Winning Structural Reforms and Workers' Rights at the Ballot Box in Missouri**

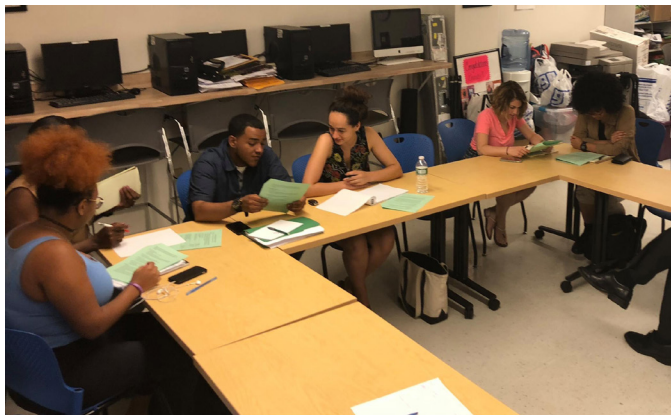
The Missouri state legislature seldom passes progressive reforms that advance civic access and economic justice. As a result, the State Voices table (Missouri Organizing and Voter Engagement Collaborative), labor partners including the Service Employees International Union and the Missouri National Education Association, and Missouri Jobs with Justice have formed Raise Up Missouri to win structural democracy reforms and workers' rights ballot initiatives. Every two years, Raise Up Missouri collects signatures to place one democracy reform and one workers' rights issue on the general election ballot. In the ballot initiative campaigns, Raise Up Missouri integrates voter engagement with leadership development in community organizations and labor unions. Raise Up Missouri has raised the minimum wage, passed constitutional amendments to strengthen ethics and campaign finance laws, and defeated right to work. This pairing of long-term democracy reforms and highly popular economic justice issues has allowed progressive organizations in Missouri to break through the barriers of a resistant legislature.

### III. Opportunities in 2020 for Reclaiming Equity in Our Political Process through Integrated Voter Engagement

With the decennial census and three major elections in 2020, we have the opportunity to translate these short-term mobilizations into long-term power by developing leaders and building infrastructure for grassroots organizing. We have identified four important strategies in 2020 for integrating voter mobilization and year-round organizing to close the civic participation gap and reclaim equity in the political process.

#### Increasing Turnout of Voters of Color in Primary Elections

Through non-partisan voter engagement, MVT and MassVOTE build the power of communities of color to hold elected officials accountable until their priorities address root causes of problems facing people of color, low-income people, and immigrants. Non-partisan voter engagement builds the capacity of local community-based organizations by increasing the scale of their outreach, solidifying their reputation as a trusted source of information about local issues, and creating a relationship necessary for accountability with public officials.



As we saw in our analysis of voting patterns from 2010-2018, turnout drops dramatically among people of color from general elections to primary elections. Even with two contested Congressional elections, the gubernatorial primary, an open race for Suffolk County District Attorney, and a heated race for Secretary of the Commonwealth, voter turnout was 21.85% for the primary election on September 4, 2018.<sup>7</sup> Turnout in the 2018 primary election was nearly three times lower than in the general election just two months later, but the outcomes of the primary election determined the elected official in all races other than governor.<sup>8</sup> Without investment in year-round

civic engagement that increases mobilizations for primary elections, frequent voters, who are more likely to be white, older, and wealthier and to own their home, have a disproportionate voice in selecting the candidates in the general election and thereby the elected officials in a heavily Democratic state.

The primary election for Suffolk County district attorney in the September 2018 shows how we can more effectively work together on primary elections. Faith-based organizations, especially the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization and Massachusetts Communities Action Network's Prophetic Resistance project, the summer youth civic engagement programs of the Chelsea Collaborative and I Have a Future, and the resident leadership development program of Madison Park Development Corporation used multilingual materials from the What a Difference a DA Makes campaign run by the American Civil Liberty Union of Massachusetts to educate voters about the impact of the district attorney primary election on their communities. With representative candidates in Suffolk County district attorney race and the 7th Congressional District race between Ayanna Pressley and Mike Capuano, turnout in Suffolk County the September 2018 primary was 26.6%, exceeding the statewide turnout of 21.85% among all voters. Turnout of voters of color in Suffolk County in September 2018 was 21.8%, which greatly exceeded the 14.7% rate that voters of color turned out across Massachusetts for the same election.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Data from the Secretary of the Commonwealth: <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/elevoterturnoutstats/voterturnoutstats.htm>

8 Racially modeled data from Catalyst.

9 Data from Catalyst, accessed in March 2020.

Increasing civic engagement in low turnout communities of color in municipal and midterm elections, especially in primary elections, can have an outsized impact in capturing greater vote share among people of color since the electorate is typically very small. This can have a dramatic effect on strengthening representation of the needs of communities of color in city halls and the statehouse, where elected officials make consequential decisions on housing, education, transportation, and working conditions.

## Building Local and Regional Coalitions in Gateway Cities

Massachusetts has over 1 million voters with incomes under \$30,000, and nearly two-thirds of these low-income voters are people of color. We will build regional and local organizing hubs to increase turnout of low-income voters in communities of color across the state. These municipal organizing hubs, especially in Gateway Cities, are essential to reaching a larger number of voters of color. Every year, MVT creates a target universe for partner organizations to reach voters of color, low-income voters, and young people. MVT and MassVOTE works with trusted leaders in these communities to contact voters of color and low-income voters about upcoming elections or opportunities for civic engagement. 163,883 low-income voters of color live in Boston, while 275,284 low-income voters of color live in sixteen cities that have a large electorate of people of color and/or low-income people.

For many years, year-round civic engagement efforts have been concentrated in Boston and Chelsea, leading to higher voter participation in Suffolk County. As we stated in our analysis of statewide voting trends, people of color made up 19.1% of eligible voters, 15.1% of registered voters, and 10.3% of ballots cast in 2018 in Massachusetts, leaving a 46.1% difference between CVAP and vote share across the state. However, because of strong organizing infrastructure in Suffolk County, people of color made up 43.8% of eligible voters, 41.6% of registered voters, and 34.0% of ballots cast in 2018. While the 22.4% difference between CVAP and vote share shows that continued integrated voter engagement in Suffolk County is necessary, it also shows that greater investment, paired with more exciting candidates in recent years, can diminish disparities in civic participation.

**Table 2: Counts of voters of color and low-income voters (household income under \$30,000) in selected cities with highest proportion of low-income voters and voters of color.**

City	%POC	Low-Income Voters of Color <sup>10</sup>	Low-Income Voters <sup>11</sup>
Boston	42.8%	163,883	182,252
Brockton	47.7%	24,519	27,406
Cambridge	23.3%	15,016	18,701
Chelsea	59.7%	9,476	11,207
Everett	39.9%	7,210	9,700
Framingham	16.2%	5,996	8,638
Holyoke	48.0%	11,905	14,748
Lawrence	78.4%	29,128	31,016
Lowell	37.5%	20,533	23,777
Lynn	42.7%	20,930	25,299

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10 Modeled data for household incomes less than or equal to \$30,000 per year comes from Catalist.

11 Modeled data from Catalist for voters of color and voters with household income under \$30,000.

City	%POC	Low-Income Voters of Color <sup>10</sup>	Low-Income Voters <sup>11</sup>
Malden	34.3%	10,230	12,249
New Bedford	15.2%	8,494	18,419
Quincy	23.6%	13,142	17,061
Randolph	48.2%	9,628	10,556
Revere	29.3%	7,671	10,653
Springfield	59.7%	53,959	60,989
Worcester	29.1%	27,447	34,618
<b>Total in Selected Cities</b>		<b>439,167</b>	<b>521,289</b>
<b>Total in Massachusetts</b>		<b>664,986</b>	<b>1,019,094</b>

## Training, Tools, and Resources for Grassroots Organizations in Communities of Color

MVT and MassVOTE have partnered to incubate and strengthen civic engagement capacity of grassroots organizations. For nearly a decade, MVT has provided access to the Voter Activation Network for non-partisan nonprofit organizations. Through training and technical assistance, grassroots organizations have accessed the same or better data and tools as political parties and campaigns. However, we know that these tools, such as the Voter Activation Network, were designed for short-term political campaigns, not year-round grassroots organizing. In the next year, we will develop the capacity of grassroots organizations to use new relational voter engagement tools that will more effectively leverage the community networks of our partner organizations. Integrating traditional door-to-door canvassing, phone banking, and texting with new relational voter engagement will allow us to capture the energy from the major mobilizations of 2020 into long-term power.



In addition to providing new tools, MVT and MassVOTE are collaborating with the MIRA Coalition and APIs CAN to better coordinate training for a wide range of community-based organizations. We are collaborating to provide training for nonprofit organizations to get out the count in the 2020 Census, identify gaps in skill sets for member leaders and staff organizers at our partner organizations, and coordinate coverage of technical assistance for voter education and get out the vote efforts. Together, we are identifying prospective funders and national resources for our shared work in 2020 and beyond. Through these collaborative efforts, we seek to create and test models for incubating new civic engagement capacity and connect local organizing efforts for peer learning and sharing effective strategies. This collaboration is the foundation for a democracy that reflects the needs of people of color, low-income people, and immigrants in our commonwealth.

## Reaching Parity in Voter Registration Rates by Winning Election Day Registration

Alongside legal, research, and advocacy partner organizations, MassVOTE and MVT have served in the leadership of the Election Modernization Coalition, which has won important reforms that have expanded civic access, especially for marginalized voters. MassVOTE and MVT have worked with hundreds of organizations over the years to register voters, and in particular, organizations such as the MIRA Coalition and Massachusetts

Public Interest Research Group have succeeded in registering important constituencies, such as new citizens at naturalization ceremonies and students on college campuses, at a large scale. Meanwhile, many community organizations have integrated voter registration into their year-round grassroots organizing, and MassVOTE has coached nonprofits to register voters within service provision. Although these efforts are highly effective in registering voters, they are difficult to scale without a large investment of funds, which rarely happens outside of highly competitive battleground states.

A more effective large-scale strategy to close the voter registration gap is to pass reforms at the state level to increase voter registration. In 2018, the Election Modernization Coalition passed Automatic Voter Registration, which has the potential to register 680,000 voters across Massachusetts. This means that several hundreds of thousands of somewhat unlikely voters will be added to the voter rolls, enabling candidates and issue organizations to contact them and compete for their votes. In the first year of implementation of Automatic Voter Registration in Oregon in 2016, 225,00 voters were automatically registered to vote, and 43% of those voters cast ballots in November 2016. The implementation of pre-registration, another victory of the Election Modernization Coalition, serves an important function by adding 16- and 17-year-old young adults to the voter registration rolls, increasing their likelihood of a lifetime of civic engagement and voter participation.

Seven of the 10 states with the highest voter turnout rates offer Election Day Registration.<sup>12</sup> This is a commonsense voting reform that has improved voter turnout in over twenty states across the country. As the displacement crisis rages, voters renting in increasingly expensive markets need Election Day Registration to fix their registration when they are forced to move. Election Day Registration is a corrective measure that helps safeguard civic access for renters, young people, and other highly mobile and less frequent voters.

## IV. Beyond 2020: Defining Equity in Our Democracy



The data from the 2020 Census will likely show continued growth in populations of people of color and immigrants. However, we cannot assume that demographics will secure our destiny, and solely reaching parity does not address problems facing our communities at the root-cause level. We need to gain long-term power to achieve an equitable democracy that reflects the needs of all residents in Massachusetts. Building on our efforts this year to mobilize for the 2020 Census and the three major elections, we will integrate nonpartisan voter education and mobilization with year-round grassroots organizing in the next decade to stake our claims to equity on issues facing communities of color, immigrants, low-income people, and youth.

Without a plan for organizing that moves beyond mobilization, we will start at square one for the 2022 election, the 2030 Census, and many legislative sessions and will not build long-term power. To transform the short-term mobilizations for the 2020 Census and the elections into long-term power for winning an equitable democracy, we will confront the key issues facing our communities: climate change and displacement, racial gaps in educational outcomes, and redistricting and political power.

12 Nonprofit Vote, America Goes to the Polls. <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/documents/2019/03/america-goes-polls-2018.pdf/>

## Winning a Green New Deal in Massachusetts

Record-breaking heat means that low-income seniors are increasingly trapped in sweltering apartments that do not cool down overnight. Rising tides mean that nor'easters cause unprecedented coastal flooding that leave residents in need of shelter and electrical power. Air pollution in Massachusetts is concentrated in downtown Boston neighborhoods like Chinatown and in Gateway Cities such as Fall River, Lawrence, New Bedford, and Lowell. The same families facing the threat of displacement from rising rents and deportation are also on the front lines of displacement from extreme weather caused by climate change. Although all residents experience extreme weather events, the most vulnerable struggle the most to make a full recovery.

Together, we will ensure that equity is the unifying principle as we campaign for a Green New Deal and transition into a more just economy. Our priority is to bolster the economic and political resiliency of people of color and low-income people in our efforts with coalition partners to win a Green New Deal. Building new green infrastructure, financed by a more equitable tax system, will create greater connectivity for low-income people, and this investment will restructure regional economies, often in areas ravaged by post-industrialization, foreclosure, and depopulation. Pairing this potential for economic growth with protections for existing residents, such as just cause eviction and rent stabilization, is essential to ensuring that everyone can share in new prosperity.

## Racial Equity in Public Education System

Following the historic passage of the Student Opportunity Act in 2019, community organizations and local tables of the Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance are prepared to ensure that the new \$1.5 billion are spent equitably, especially in Gateway City school districts. This will require community organizations, such as the Chelsea Collaborative, La Comunidad, and Worcester Interfaith, to integrate community and youth organizing with nonpartisan voter mobilization so that school committees reflect the needs of students, parents, and teachers. MVT and MassVOTE will continue to collaborate with youth programs of community organizations to train young leaders of color on voter contact and advocacy. We plan to play a larger role in integrated voter engagement within youth organizing and producing nonpartisan voter education materials for school committee elections. To guarantee the longevity of the new public investment in public schools, we will unite community organizations behind education justice and the Green New Deal to make the tax system more equitable.

## Drawing Democracy

We will lead the statewide efforts for a transparent redistricting process to create maps that maximize political power for people of color, immigrants, and low-income people. As we collaborate with the legislative leadership, we will provide grassroots organizations with access to data and tools to define which districts best reflect their communities and create opportunity for community members to successfully run for office.

In addition to advocating for and participating in a community-driven redistricting process, we will broaden the scope of redistricting to issues that directly confront issues of racial inequity. To set up our next decade in power, we will amend the constitution to end of prison gerrymandering, to ensure that people who are incarcerated are counted and represented in their home districts during the 2030 Census and the following redistricting process. Finally, we will use the strong legal precedent that ended the discriminatory at-large voting system for municipal elections in Lowell to eliminate at-large elections for school committee and city council in Gateway Cities.<sup>13</sup> By ending this discriminatory method of elected school committee members and city councilors, we will unblock the candidate pipeline for higher office to make city halls and the statehouse more reflective of the Massachusetts population.

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13 The consent decree from *Huot vs. Lowell*, brought by Nonprofit Vote, MassVOTE, and Lawyers for Civil Rights, enabled voters to choose a new voting system. Voters selected a hybrid at-large and district-based city council and school committee in November 2018. <http://lawyersforcivilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Huot-v.-Lowell-Consent-Decree.pdf>



## Passing Reforms that Close the Turnout Gap and Expand the Electorate

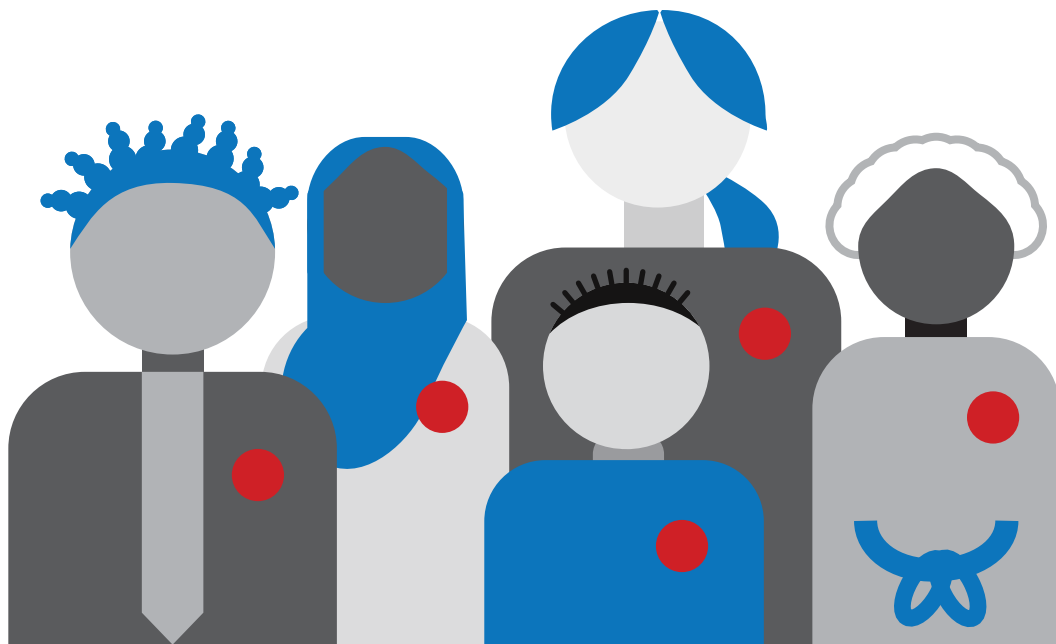
Reforms such as Automatic Voter Registration and Election Day Registration play important roles to close the voter registration gap. Once new voters are added to the rolls, democracy reformers should begin to pivot to policies to impact the turnout gap as well. In particular, vote at home (also known as vote by mail) has the enormous potential to increase voter turnout by making the act of casting a ballot more convenient for working people, people with disabilities, and elderly people. Many MVT partner organizations run “absentee application” drives in low-income senior housing to ensure that their members can cast a ballot. A statewide policy enabling vote at home, or at the very least, enabling municipalities to maintain a list of voters who want to receive an absentee ballot by default, would allow community organizations to spend more time educating voters about issues rather than filling out paperwork.

Policies that expand the electorate will also foster greater civic engagement by making voting truly universal. Restoring the right to vote to people who are currently incarcerated on felony convictions, through a constitutional amendment, will universalize voting for everyone. More immediately, advocacy for state programs and funding for voter registration and absentee voting in jails and prisons will support reintegration into civil society for people incarcerated without felony convictions. Allowing non-citizens to vote in local elections will likely increase responsiveness of municipal government to all residents and spur greater voter participation within mixed documentation households. Enabling municipalities to lower the voting age in local elections to 16 will allow young adults to form lifelong habits of voter participation. Universal civic access eliminates questions about whether an individual is eligible to vote, which dismantles yet another barrier to achieving reflective representation.

## Conclusion

Integrating voter engagement and grassroots organizing, paired with advocacy for policies that expand civic access, is the most effective strategy for closing the racial participation gaps and creating a more reflective democracy. Together, we can build upon effective models in Greater Boston that have decreased the difference between the share of eligible voters and ballots cast of people of color from 46.1% statewide to 22.4% in Suffolk County. We can begin closing this gap by winning civic access reforms and investing in outreach to the 275,284 low-income voters of color and 339,037 low-income voters in Gateway Cities in 2020 through the three major elections and the decennial census.

We seek to break the cycle of low voter participation, erasure of marginalized people from the political system, inequality, and cynicism. We can only break this cycle by transforming short-term mobilizations to reach parity in voter registration and turnout into long-term infrastructure for integrated voter engagement for achieving racial equity. By confronting the most important issues facing communities of color, such as public education and displacement, we can bring equity into the political conversation and give voters of color a reason to participate and stake our collective claim to equity in a political system that reflects the everyday needs of people of color, immigrants, and low-income people. When we achieve these goals, we will make our democracy and our commonwealth stronger.



Massachusetts  
Voter Table 

Mass  
VOTE