

Kenyon, S. and McMonagle, R. 2024. Workshop: Civic Education and Active Learning: Applying the CDIO and Debate Models. Proceedings of the 20th American Political Science Association Annual Meeting and Exhibition. Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA. 5-8 September, 2024.

The scenario

Voter turnout in elections has been declining in democracies across the globe¹ (Kostelka and Blais, 2021). The State Governor of Oklahoma has pledged to increase voter turnout in the 2028 US Presidential election, to foster democracy in this non-swing state. His target is to increase turnout from 55% in 2020 to 66%, to match the 2020 US national average².

He is putting a Task Force together to consider the options. He strongly believes that making voting compulsory is the best way to achieve his target.

You are part of the task force, meeting the Governor in 1 hour. Your task is to tell him if he should pursue compulsory voting (CV), or if there are alternatives that he and the Task Force should consider.

The governor will ask you if you agree or disagree with his position that CV is the best way to achieve his target, on a scale of 1 to 7. Prepare to justify your position, in response to positions taken by others, suggesting alternatives, where appropriate.

Remember: how you *conceive* a problem determines how you *design* the solution. Use the notes below to help you to conceive the problem, adding to this with your own research online.

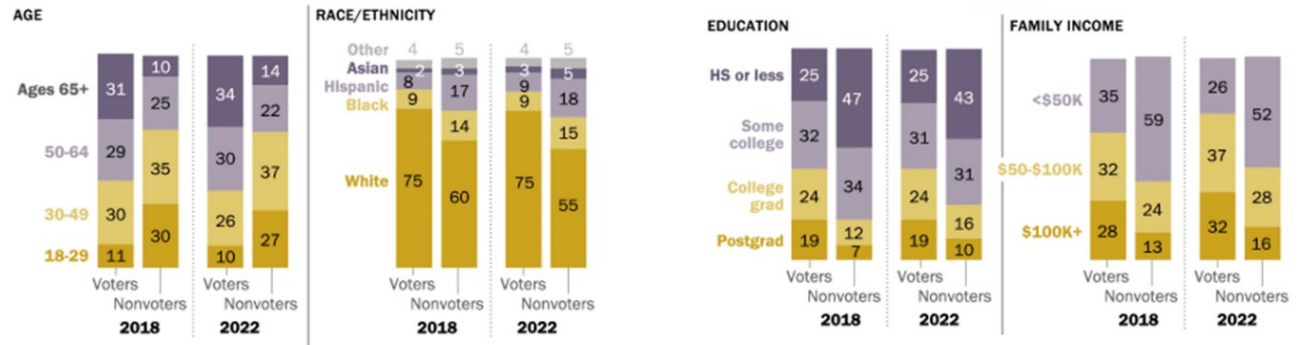
Tip: there are many reasons why people don't vote, as you will see. Be selective in your focus. Which variables will be most impactful in persuading the Governor and the Task Force?

¹ Kostelka, F. and Blais, A. 2021. The Generational and Institutional Sources of the Global Decline in Voter Turnout'. *World Politics*. 73: 4. 629–667. DOI:10.1017/S0043887121000149.

² Statista. Nd. Voter turnout rate in the presidential election in the United States as of December 7, 2020, by state. Available online, via: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1184621/presidential-election-voter-turnout-rate-state/>, viewed 13/08/2024.

Voter turnout: who votes?

66% of the electorate voted in the 2020 Presidential election – the highest rate for any national election since 1900³. However, propensity to vote is not evenly distributed. There are stark differences between those who vote and those who do not, as these figures highlight⁴.



Why do people vote – and why don’t they vote?

There are many reasons why people vote – and why they don’t.

Your Governor believes that people don’t vote because they don’t have to vote. This is why they believe that compulsory voting – telling people that they must vote, or face a penalty – will achieve their aim of 75% turnout in 2028. There is evidence that this will work⁵: in Australia, for example, voting is compulsory and turnout in 2022 was 90%⁶, above your Governor’s target.

But there are still people who don’t vote and voting is still influenced by demographics. Some people also say that it is undemocratic to force people to vote.

This suggests that there are lots of other reasons why people might not vote, which might not be tackled by compulsory voting.

Scholars have suggested some of the following reasons⁷.

³ Hartig, H., Daniller, A., Keeter, S. and van Green, T. 2023. Republican gains in 2022 midterms driven mostly by turnout advantage. Available online, via: https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/07/PP_2023.07.12_validated-voters_REPORT.pdf, viewed 08/08/2024.

⁴ Hartig, H., Daniller, A., Keeter, S. and van Green, T. 2023. Voter turnout, 2018-2022. Available online, via: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/07/12/voter-turnout-2018-2022/>, viewed 09/08/2024.

⁵ Kostelka, F., Singh, SP. and Blais, A., (2024). Is compulsory voting a solution to low and declining turnout? Cross-national evidence since 1945. *Political Science Research and Methods*. 12 (1), 76-93.

⁶ Australian Electoral Commission. Nd. Voter turnout – previous events. Available online, via: https://www.aec.gov.au/elections/federal_elections/voter-turnout.htm, viewed 09/08/2024.

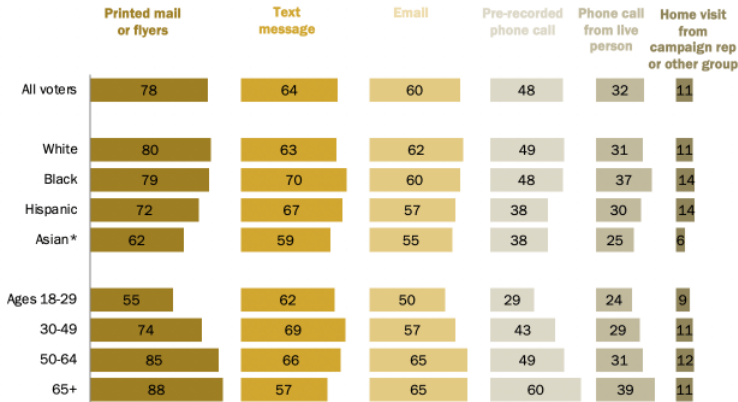
⁷ Uberoi, E. and Johnston, N. 2022. Political disengagement in the UK: who is disengaged? Available online, via: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7501/>, viewed 09/08/2024.

<p><u>People lack of knowledge about:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to register; • How to vote; • Party policies. <p><u>People aren't on the electoral register, because they:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recently moved house; • Are a student; • Didn't know they had to register; • Don't know how to register; • Are alienated from the political process. <p><u>Voting isn't accessible to them, because they:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a disability; • Don't have transport; • Don't have voter ID; • Don't know where to vote; • Have caring responsibilities or have to work; • They are frightened of harassment; • There is a language barrier. 	<p><u>They don't believe it will make a difference, because:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The voting system is not proportional; • They don't trust politicians; • Parties don't canvass in their area; • They prefer to participate in other, more fruitful, ways. <p><u>They aren't in the habit of voting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They haven't been socialised into voting; • No one in their community votes, so it isn't part of their culture. <p><u>They don't perceive a need for change.</u></p> <p><u>There are too many elections:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have voter fatigue.
--	--

Here are some statistics, which highlight some factors that influence why people do and don't vote^{8,9}.

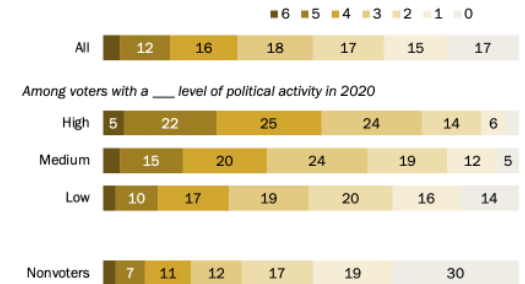
Young voters less likely than older voters to say they were contacted by political campaigns via printed mail, email or phone calls

% who say were contacted in the following ways by a candidate's campaign or a group supporting a candidate in the month before the election



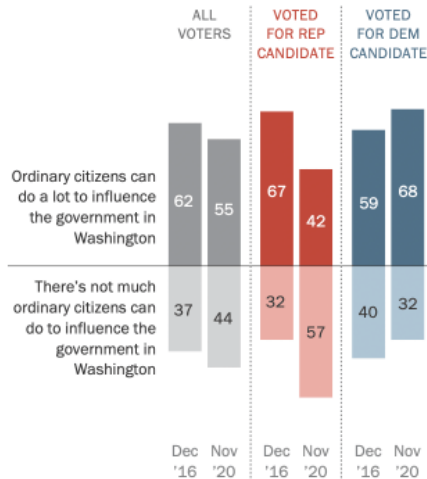
Half of nonvoters say they received little or no campaign outreach in the month before the election

% who received ___ types of contacts from a candidate's campaign or other group supporting a candidate



Sharp decline in share of Trump voters who say ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence the government

Among voters, % who say ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence the government in Washington if they are willing to make the effort

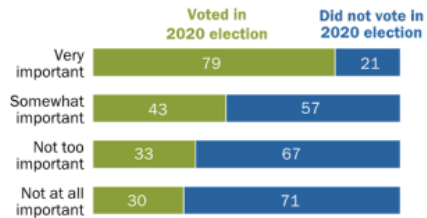


Note: Based on voters.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Majority who say voting is very important to being a good member of society are voters

Validated voter status in 2020 among those who say voting is ___ to be a good member of society



⁸ Daniller, A. and Gilberstadt, H. 2020. Key findings about voter engagement in the 2020 election. Available online, via: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/12/14/key-findings-about-voter-engagement-in-the-2020-election/>, viewed 09/08/2024.

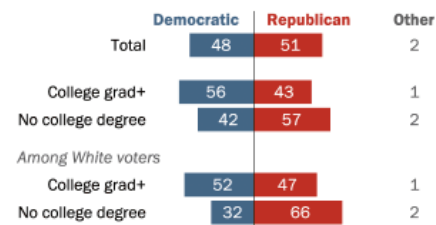
⁹ Silver, L. 2022. Most Americans say it's very important to vote to be a good member of society. Available online, via: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/11/04/most-americans-say-its-very-important-to-vote-to-be-a-good-member-of-society/>, viewed 09/08/2024.

Finally, when thinking about an intervention, it is important to think about unintended consequences, too. Your Governor will!

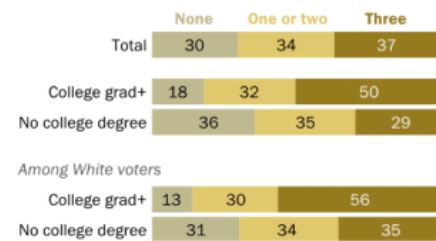
These data show that the tendency to vote varies according to party affiliation. Different demographics vote for different parties; and that the method of voting is correlated with the party that we support¹⁰.

White adults without a college degree strongly prefer GOP candidates, vote at lower rates than those with degrees

% of 2022 validated voters who voted for a(n) ___ U.S. House candidate that year



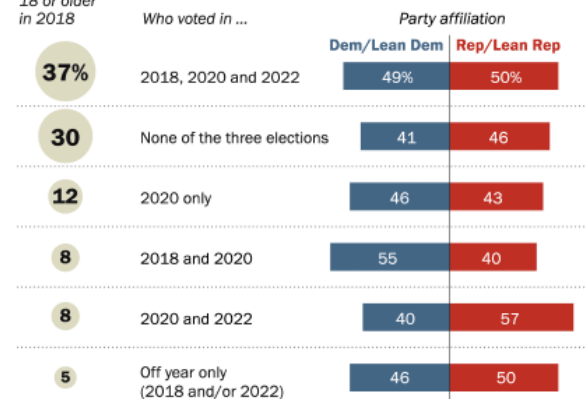
% of U.S. citizens ages 18 and older in 2018 who voted in ___ elections out of 2018, 2020 and 2022



Most Americans are not consistent voters

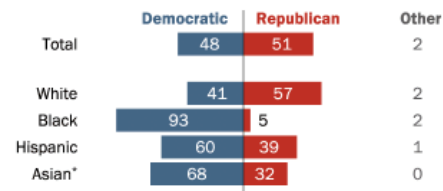
Patterns of turnout across three national elections, 2018-2022

Share of citizens 18 or older in 2018



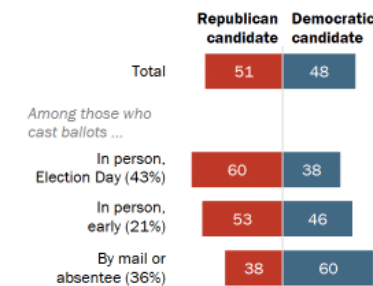
The racial and ethnic divide in 2022 vote choice for U.S. House

% of 2022 validated voters who voted for a(n) ___ U.S. House candidate that year



Large divides in candidate support by vote method

% of validated voters who say they cast a ballot for a ...



¹⁰ Hartig, H., Daniller, A., Keeter, S. and van Green, T. 2023. Voter turnout, 2018-2022. Available online, via: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/07/12/voter-turnout-2018-2022/>, viewed 09/08/2024.