

The Effectiveness of U.S. Voter Law Reforms in Increasing Youth Turnout

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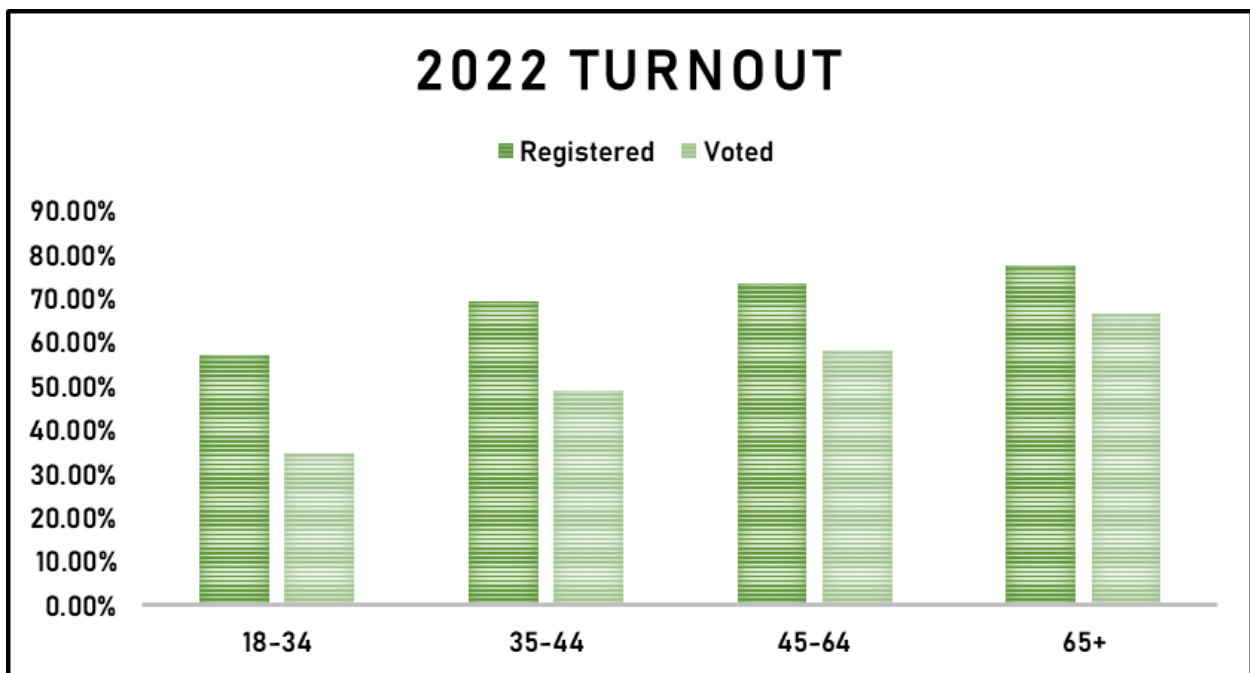
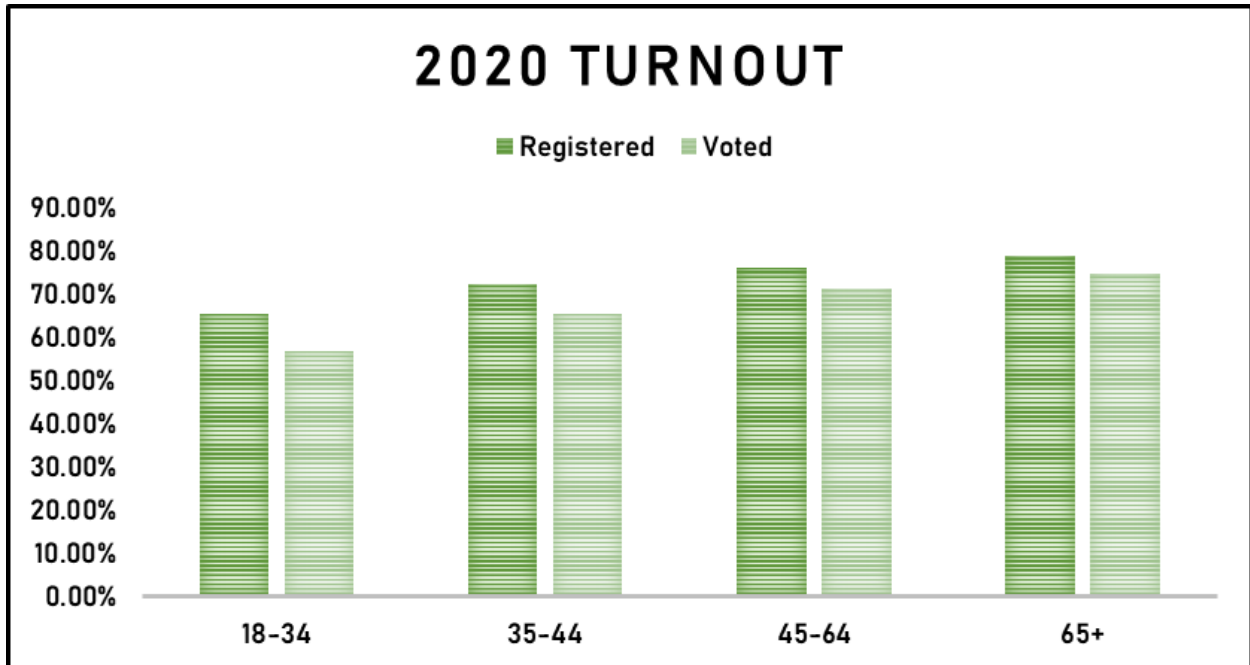
Abstract

Following the 2016 Presidential election, youth voter turnout has consistently increased and reached record levels, but still remains the lowest among overall turnout. Monumental reforms in election laws regarding voter registration and voter access to the ballot box may be a catalyst for this significant incline, among other factors such as partisanship or increased access to information. Looking at the two most recent elections, and their relationship to voter turnout, have expressed positive, high youth turnout rates in states that adopted easier access to voter registration or more options to vote, and negatively contrary to states adopting more restrictive voter reforms. In a country that decides elections on the numbers, every vote counts, and looking into reforms that boost voter turnout is key to empowering the democratic process, and this starts with alleviating the low rates seen within the youth vote.

Background

In 2020 and 2022, some of the highest rates of turnout were ever recorded among all age groups. The overall turnout rate for all eligible U.S. adults in 2020 was about 66.8%, while in 2022 the number decreased to a rate of 52.2%.¹ Graphs of the turnout rates of different age groups defined by the U.S. census are provided below.

¹ U.S. Census. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022." *U.S. Census Bureau*, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>.

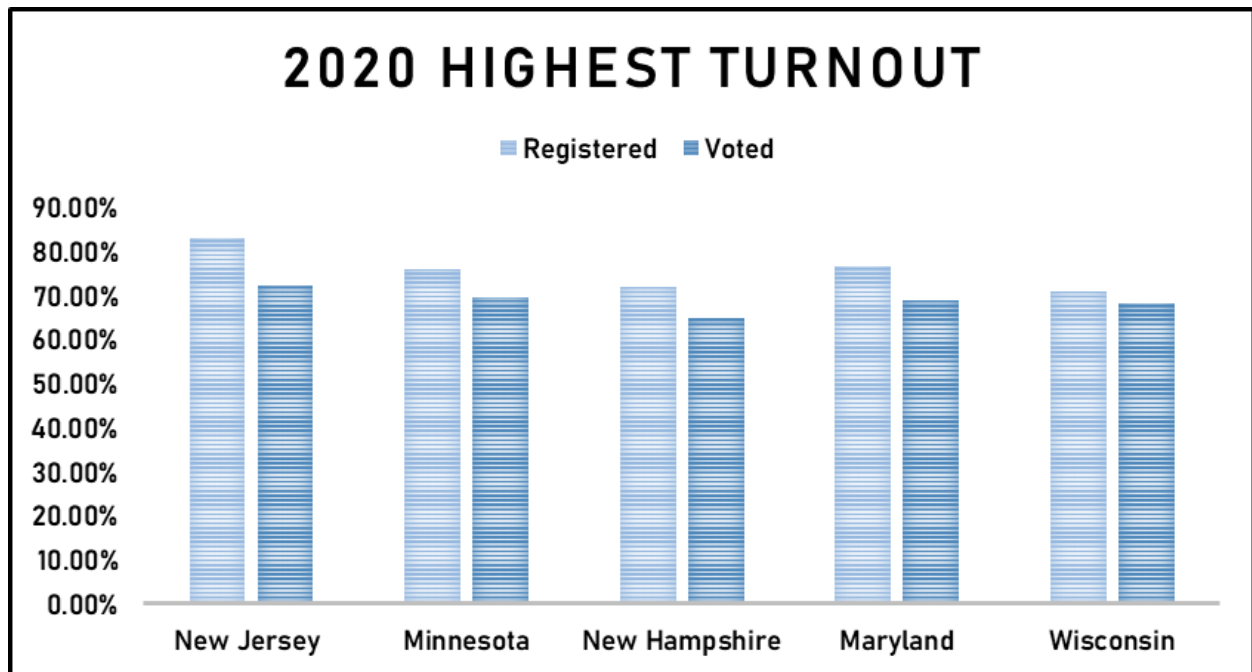


The election cycle 2022 compared to 2020 had similar rates of registration among all age groups, but saw a significant decline in those that actually turned out to vote. Midterm elections do tend to have lower turnout rates as they do not have a top-of-the-ticket Presidential election occurring, which could potentially explain this significant drop in turnout.

Also in 2020 and 2022, voter turnout was among the highest rates for youth voters (18-34) ever, coming in at 56.7% and 34.7% respectively, but was still disproportionately lower compared to

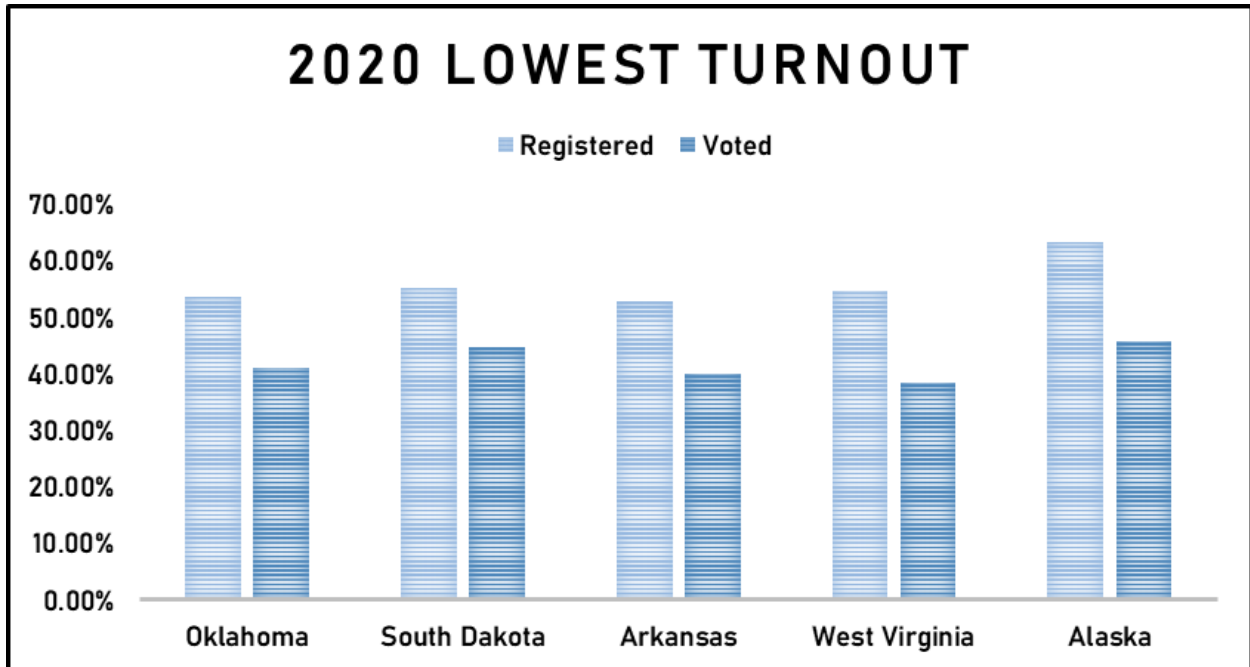
older voters. With the United States being a country of many different states with different laws pertaining to how people can and cannot vote, many states have drastically different ways of going about how to conduct elections. This causes significant imbalances in voter turnout and registration in many states, particularly for youth voters. While the types of elections, quality of candidates on the ballot, and other factors can influence voter turnout, voter laws likely provide a significant indicator of voter turnout. Looking at the highest and lowest states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, and their respective voter laws, can help provide indicators on what laws help boost or mitigate voter turnout. The tables and statistics provided are based on information from data gathered by the U.S. Census in the respective elections of 2020 and 2022.²

In 2020, the top five states with the highest youth voter turnout were the states of New Hampshire, Minnesota, New Jersey, Maryland, and Wisconsin. Of these states, New Jersey had the highest percentage of eligible youth voters registered at 83%, and the highest voter turnout at 72.3%.

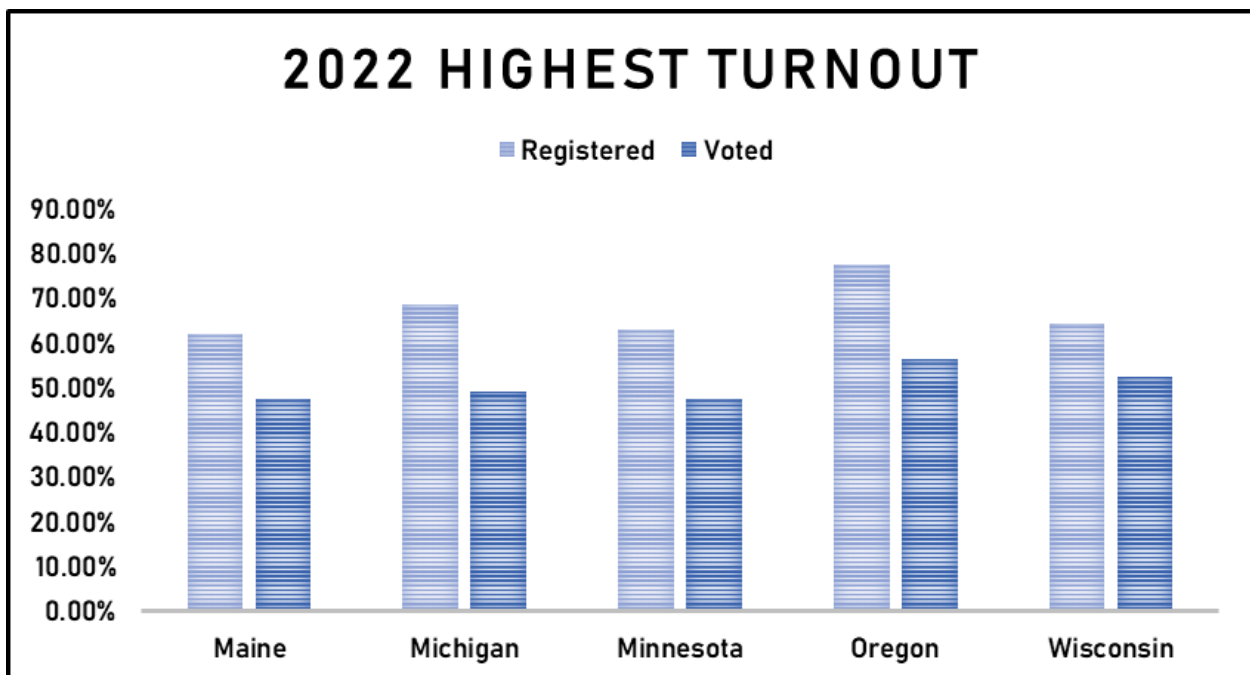


Also in 2020, the bottom five states with the lowest youth voter turnout were the states of Oklahoma, South Dakota, Arkansas, West Virginia, and Alaska. Of these states, Arkansas had the lowest percentage of eligible youth voters registered at 53%, while the state of West Virginia had the lowest voter turnout at 38.3% of eligible youth voters.

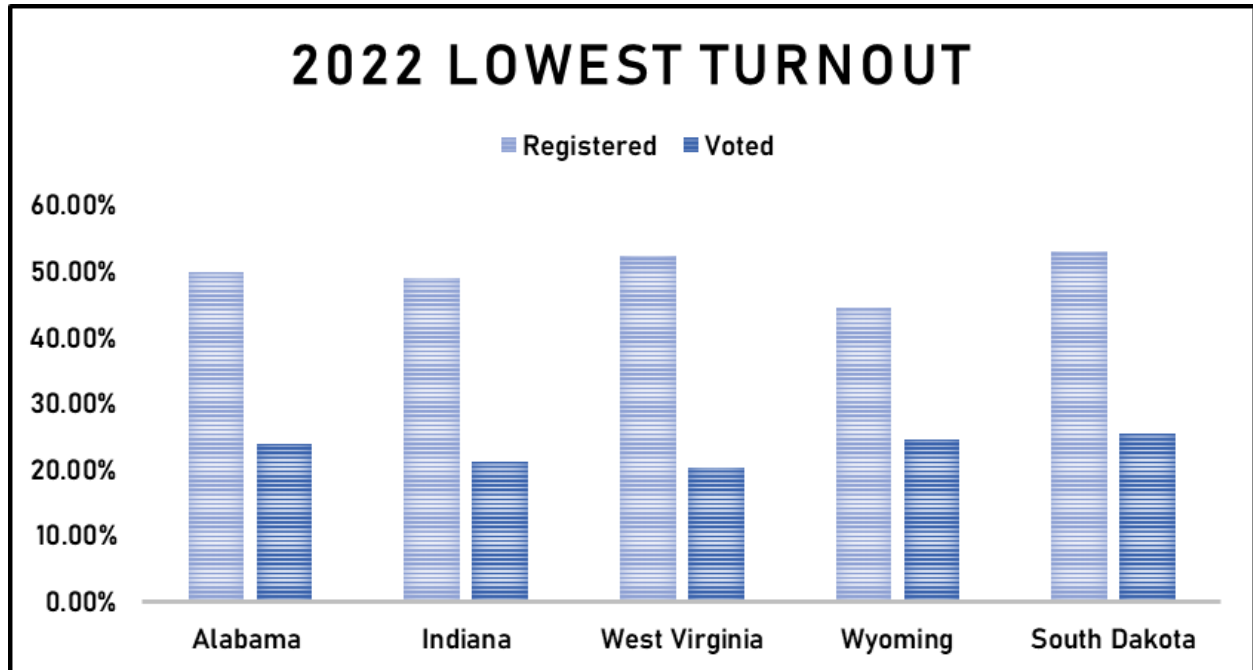
² U.S. Census. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2022." *U.S. Census Bureau*, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-586.html>.



In the next election cycle, the 2022 midterms, the top five states with the highest youth voter turnout were the states of Maine, Minnesota, Michigan, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Of these states, Oregon had the highest percentage of eligible youth voters registered at 77.5%, and the highest voter turnout at 56.3%.



Also in the 2022 midterms, the bottom five states with the lowest youth voter turnout were the states of West Virginia, Wyoming, Alabama, South Dakota, and Indiana. Of these states, Wyoming had the lowest percentage of eligible youth voters registered at 44.5%, while the state of West Virginia had the lowest voter turnout at 20.1%.



Same-Day Voter Registration The first variable looked into regarding youth voter turnout was whether or not the respective state had same-day voter registration. This policy is that during election day (or in the case of North Carolina and Montana, just during early voting) an eligible voter can bring proof of residency and a photo ID to register and vote all in the same trip if verified by the respective election official.³ Proponents for same-day voter registration find it a massive boon to voter turnout, by allowing for more people to access the polling booth especially if they were unable to originally register to vote. Those against same-day voter registration say that this provides chaos during election day, with election workers having to do an extra, time consuming task, which can cause long lines and potentially less voters as a result.⁴ Others point out the confounding variable that voter ID laws also disproportionately impacts Black and Latino voters from being able to access this method of voting, as they have significantly lower rates of

³ Staff. (2023, May). *Same-day voter registration*. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/Same-day_voter_registration

⁴ Waldman, M., Crayton, K., Efrati, M., Singh, J., & Grange, C. (2023, July 18). *The impact of voter suppression on communities of color*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/impact-voter-suppression-communities-color>

having a photo ID like a drivers license compared to White voters, according to research conducted by the Brennan Center.⁵

As of 2023, 20 out of 50 states currently have some sort of same-day voter registration laws.⁶ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, 6 out of the 8 states had same-day voter registration laws, while just one state of the lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 had this policy. This suggests that same-day voter registration positively affects voter turnout, and gives voters more opportunities to be able to cast their ballot. Wyoming, the one state that had same-day voter registration while being in the bottom five states of turnout in 2022, could be seen as an outlier in this regard, as they did not have any competitive races in this election and also allow for localized elections to be conducted by mail, reducing in-person voters.⁷

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Same day voter Registration	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Online Registration While registering in person used to be something you could only do in person at your local election office or by mail, the rise of the internet has many states giving voters the opportunity to register to vote online. This varies state by state, but typically involves giving a social security number or other information in order to become registered on the state’s website.⁸ Proponents of online registration say it is an easy and safe way to register to vote, especially increasing access to those who live far away from their elections office or have lack of access to transportation. Those that are against online registration find that it isn’t safe enough as opposed to in-person registration as people could be registering other people or committing voter fraud by utilizing the information they know about another person, to potentially advance their own political means.⁹ A confounding variable to the success of online registration is that according to Broadband Now, an independent research group, over 42 million Americans do not have access to broadband or reliable internet, particularly rural communities.¹⁰ Not having

⁵ Staff. (2022, February 3). *Summary table 18: States with all-mail elections*. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-18-states-with-all-mail-elections>

⁶ Staff. “Same Day Voter Registration.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 31 January 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-voter-registration>.

⁷ Staff. “All-mail voting.” *Ballotpedia*, July 2023, https://ballotpedia.org/All-mail_voting.

⁸ Staff. “Online voter registration.” *Ballotpedia*, July 2023, https://ballotpedia.org/Online_voter_registration.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Staff. “Lack of Internet Access Hinders Rural America’s Education and Economic Opportunities - United States House Committee on Oversight and Accountability.” *House Oversight Committee*, 22 October 2021,

reliable access to the internet makes these communities have a difficult time utilizing online services like online voter registration.

As of 2023, 41 out of 50 states currently have some sort of online voter registration laws, with Maine enacting but not implementing this policy as of yet.¹¹ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, 6 out of the 8 states had same-day voter registration laws, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 had 5 of the 8 states with this policy. While you could argue that since there is one more state in the high youth voter turnout category compared to the lower youth voter turnout category, meaning that online voter registration does provide some benefit, it is rather inconclusive on whether or not this provides a substantial boost to voter turnout. However, those that do not have online voter registration tend to have lower registration rates compared to similar states. Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Arkansas had the lowest voter registration rates in 2020 of all states, while of the high turnout states in 2020 and 2022, Maine and New Hampshire were the lowest of the high ranked states, placing 5th overall in youth turnout. While this does not have finite implications, you could allude from this information that online registration does have a small, positive impact on youth voter turnout, particularly in getting voter registration numbers up substantially.

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Online Registration	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓

Automatic Voter Registration In an attempt to eliminate the barrier of registering to vote in general, many states have begun automatic voter registration programs. In every state except Alaska, this is through “motor-voter” or DMV (department of motor-vehicles) automatic voter registration, where whenever you renew your driver’s license or something of that sort at the DMV, you will be registered to vote at the same time unless you choose to opt out.¹² In Alaska, this is not conducted by the DMV, rather by the registration process for the Permanent Fund Dividend.¹³ Those in favor of automatic voter registration claim that this eliminates the barrier of people forgetting to register to vote that otherwise would vote, and generally gives more people the opportunity to vote that otherwise would not. Opponents of automatic voter registration state

<https://oversight.house.gov/release/lack-of-internet-access-hinders-rural-americas-education-and-economic-opportunities/>.

¹¹ Staff. “Online voter registration.” *Ballotpedia*, July 2023, https://ballotpedia.org/Online_voter_registration.

¹² Staff. “Summary Automatic Voter Registration.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 7 February 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration>.

¹³ *Ibid*.

that this policy can be too vigorous and may register non-citizens to vote, in addition to the fact that it may be an unnecessary policy as those who forget to register to vote typically would not have turned out to vote regardless.¹⁴ It also may register people to vote that may not want to be registered, whether for a personal or religious reason, and there is a short window to opt-out by mail.

As of 2023, 20 out of 50 states currently have some sort of automatic voter registration laws, with New York and Delaware enacting but not implementing this policy as of yet.¹⁵ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, 5 out of the 8 states had same-day voter registration laws, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 had just 2 of the 8 states with this policy. Since over double the amount of high youth turnout states have automatic voter registration compared to the lowest youth turnout states, these numbers show that automatic voter registration positively affects youth turnout. Of course, not all of the high-performing youth turnout states have automatic voter registration, but of those that do, they rank towards the top of all states, including that of New Jersey and Oregon which had the highest youth turnout rates in 2020 and 2022 respectively. West Virginia and Alaska may be outliers as they are both states with a high rate of rural voters, which can make actually turning out to vote and getting to a polling place difficult, an issue automatic voter registration does not address.¹⁶

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Automatic Voter Registration	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗

No-Excuse Absentee Voting Absentee voting is when one can not access an in-person polling location on the day of the election, whether through illness, being overseas, or another reason, and are sent a mail-in ballot before the election so that the individual can still vote.¹⁷ No-excuse absentee voting is exactly what it says in the same, you don't need an excuse like being overseas

¹⁴ Kim, Silvia. "Automatic voter registration | MIT Election Lab." *MIT Election Lab*, 16 February 2023, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/automatic-voter-registration>.

¹⁵ Kim, Silvia. "Automatic voter registration | MIT Election Lab." *MIT Election Lab*, 16 February 2023, <https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/automatic-voter-registration>.

¹⁶ Moore, Elena, and Ximena Bustillo. "Rural Gen Zers in 2024? Here's what some think so far." *NPR*, 14 July 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/14/1185826401/rural-voters-lean-red-young-voters-lean-blue-so-whats-a-yo-ung-rural-voter-to-do..>

¹⁷ Staff. "Absentee voting or voting by mail." *USA.gov*, July 2023, <https://www.usa.gov/absentee-voting>.

in order to request an absentee ballot.¹⁸ Popularized particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the scare of infection in in-person voting booths, many states have adopted permanent measures due to the success. Advocates claim it helps increase access to those unable to get to the polling location on election day due to a reason not previously eligible for an absentee ballot, like lack of transportation, work commitments, and more. Those against no-excuse absentee voting claim that it could lead to heightened voter fraud, like seen in the NC-9th Congressional race in 2018, with ballots potentially being filled out for people who would've otherwise not voted or voted differently.¹⁹ A confounding variable is that mail could also potentially get lost, and if one's ballot is lost either they could request a new one or might not be able to cast a ballot at all, eliminating the vote of that individual.

As of 2023, 35 out of 50 states currently have some sort of no-excuse absentee voter laws.²⁰ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, 7 out of the 8 states had no excuse absentee voting laws, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 also had 6 the 8 states with this policy. The state of Oregon technically does not offer no-excuse absentee voting, the entire state is vote-by-mail so regardless of circumstance all individuals have to vote by mail, or absentee, which is why it is marked as such in the table.²¹ While you could argue that voting through no-excuse absentee increases overall turnout due to one more state from the high youth voter turnout states than the lower youth turnout states, this one state difference really isn't that statistically significant, but you could allude that it might help turnout. In 2020 almost all states offered no-excuse absentee voting, so the impact of new no-excuse absentee voting on voter turnout is still to be determined post-Covid-19.

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
No Excuse Absentee Voting	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓

Drop Boxes With many voters voting absentee or by mail in states across the country, many, instead of submitting their ballot by mail, choose to utilize drop boxes instead (if available),

¹⁸ Staff. "Summary Table 1: States with No-Excuse Absentee Voting." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, NCSL, 12 July 2022,

<https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-1-states-with-no-excuse-absentee-voting>.

¹⁹ Reynolds, Molly E. "Understanding the election scandal in North Carolina's 9th district | Brookings." *Brookings Institution*, 7 December 2018,

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/understanding-the-election-scandal-in-north-carolinas-9th-district/>.

²⁰ Movement Advancement Project. "Availability of No-Excuse Absentee Voting."

https://www.mapresearch.org/democracy-maps/absentee_requirements. Accessed 08/05/2023.

²¹ Oregon Secretary of State. "State of Oregon: Elections - Voting in Oregon." *Oregon Secretary of State*, <https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Pages/voteinor.aspx>.

which are in secure locations for them to place their ballots to be counted. Ballots sent by mail have the chance of potentially getting lost or stolen, so many choose this option as it may be more reliable and convenient.²² Those in favor of drop boxes claim that it helps maintain the integrity of people’s ballots by being in a secure location and improve public morale about elections, as described by research from Professor Laura Albert of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.²³ Opponents to drop boxes claim the contrary, that this is not a secure method of voting and that it promotes ballot harvesting and unverified voter fraud.²⁴ It also can cost tens of thousands of dollars to monitor a ballot box and have a poll worker regularly grabbing and counting ballots from the drop box, which can overextend limited resources. It is also important to note that 11 states, including that of Texas and Wisconsin, have banned ballot drop boxes, which is a significant barrier to implementing any future changes.

As of 2023, 34 out of 50 states currently have some sort of ballot drop box laws, while 11 states have banned the use of ballot drop boxes. Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, 6 out of the 8 states had ballot drop box laws, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 had just one state with drop boxes. This is a major imbalance between the low and high youth turnout states, and alludes that ballot drop boxes have a strong correlation with high voter turnout. It is also note that the one low-turnout state that has ballot drop boxes, Alaska, is a primarily remote and rural state, where polling locations are scarce and ballot-drop boxes are needed to simply vote for many individuals, explaining their outlier status. In order for ballot drop boxes to be effective, you need to have a strong presence of absentee or mail-in voting to be present, which could be a further confounding variable in the boost drop boxes provide for youth voter turnout.

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Drop Boxes	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓

Voter ID With many publicized instances of voter fraud occurring in NC-9th district 2018 election as previously mentioned, to voter rolls not being updated and having deceased

²² Staff. “Democracy Maps | Ballot Drop Box Policies & Availability.” *Movement Advancement Project* |, MAP, 2023, https://www.lgbtmap.org/democracy-maps/drop_box_policies.

²³ Albert, Laura A. “States regulating ballot drop boxes should check the science first.” *The Hill*, 23 July 2022, <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/3568986-states-regulating-ballot-drop-boxes-should-check-the-science-first/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

individuals vote as a consequence (through voter fraud by another person), many people have called for more measures in place to verify a voter’s identity. In many states across the country, voter ID laws, where voters have to present a valid ID, typically with a photo, in order to prove their identity to be able to vote.²⁵ Proponents of voter ID laws claim that this will crack down on voter fraud and will prevent elections from being swayed by fake or even dead “voters”.²⁶ Those opposed to the voter ID laws claim that they disproportionately impact Black and Latino voters who have a significantly lower rate of having a valid photo ID, meaning these laws suppress voters of color and empower a white voter’s vote even more.²⁷ Regardless, placing this restriction will still limit the amount of voters able to vote on election day, as some may forget their ID or simply not have one.

As of 2023, 34 out of 50 states currently have some sort of voter ID laws, while the state of Nebraska has enacted but not implemented required voter ID.²⁸ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, just 2 out of the 8 states had required voter ID laws, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 had all 8 states require a voter ID to vote. This 2-8 imbalance is massive, and showcases exactly how potentially detrimental voter ID laws can be on youth voter turnout, as all of the lowest youth voter turnout states require a voter ID, while almost all high youth voter turnout states do not require any ID to vote. A 2022 NBC News Washington article details the impact that voter ID laws have on suppressing youth voter turnout, as many 18 year olds do not have a driver's license or government issued ID, with the ACLU estimating 10 million youth voters being ineligible to vote by these standards.²⁹ This stark statistic shows how voter ID really is a barrier in keeping young (particularly young voters of color) from being able to vote, and can help explain the abysmal youth turnout rates in states with voter ID laws.

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Voter ID	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓

Vote By Mail Popularized by the Covid-19 pandemic, voting by mail has been around for decades, with states like Oregon conducting their elections completely by mail. Similar to

²⁵ Staff. “Report Voter ID Laws.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, NCSL, March 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Waldman, M., Crayton, K., Efrati, M., Singh, J., & Grange, C. (2023, July 18). *The impact of voter suppression on communities of color*. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/impact-voter-suppression-communities-color>

²⁸ Staff. “Report Voter ID Laws.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 9 03 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id>.

²⁹ Pransky, Noah. “How Voter ID Laws Curtail Gen Z Turnout.” *NBC4 Washington*, 3 November 2022, <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/politics/how-voter-id-laws-curtail-gen-z-turnout/3198350/>.

no-excuse absentee voting, vote by mail systems typically have ballots sent to every eligible, registered voter, unless they otherwise opt out. Some states still do offer in-person opportunities whether through early or election day voting, but some states fully conduct their elections by mail without in-person opportunities.³⁰ Proponents of vote by mail claim that it eliminates the barrier that travel and time commitments have on many voters, either being unable to access a polling location due to being occupied by a job or otherwise.³¹ It also significantly reduces the need and cost of poll workers, as you do not need as many workers to work the polling station throughout the day.³² Opponents of vote by mail systems point to the threat of voter fraud and ballot harvesting (as seen again in NC-9th 2018 Congressional election) as ballots and signatures can be forged, in addition to at-home environments potentially influencing the votes one has.³³

As of 2023, 8 out of 50 states currently have some sort of all-mail voting laws.³⁴ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, just 1 out of the 8 states followed a state-wide vote by mail system, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 had zero states with this system. While this can seem like it means quite little in terms of the states at the top and bottom of youth turnout since just Oregon is the only state of this group that follows this system, Oregon has been a model for voting systems followed by many other states. Oregon consistently has one of the highest voter turnout rates generally in the entire United States, and adopted the vote by mail system back in 1998.³⁵ Since then, many other states, like Vermont, Nevada, and many more have adopted Oregon-like voting systems due to its success, and may explain why in 2022, Oregon had the highest voter turnout of all states, suggesting that this system can prove to be quite effective.

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Vote By Mail	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Early/In-Person Absentee Voting While many people request their absentee ballots due to currently being outside of the country, many still want to experience voting in person if they

³⁰ Staff. (2022, February 3). *Summary table 18: States with all-mail elections*. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-18-states-with-all-mail-elections>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Staff. (2022, February 3). *Summary table 18: States with all-mail elections*. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-18-states-with-all-mail-elections>

³³ Brooks, Anthony. "Mass. high court hears GOP case challenging mail-in voting." *WBUR*, 6 July 2022, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/07/06/massachusetts-supreme-judicial-court-mail-in-voting>.

³⁴ Staff. "All-mail voting." *Ballotpedia*, 2023, https://ballotpedia.org/All-mail_voting.

³⁵ Staff. "Voting in Oregon - Vote By Mail | Multnomah County." *Multnomah County* |, 2023, <https://www.multco.us/elections/voting-oregon-vote-mail>.

have the opportunity.³⁶ Proponents of early/in person absentee voting say that it essentially extends election day voting over a long period of time, giving people who otherwise could not turnout on election day the opportunity to vote, and reduce wait times at potential polling locations.³⁷ Those opposed to early/in-person absentee voting may claim that it is costly to pay the election workers for such an extended period of time, and can cost campaigns even more money.³⁸

As of 2023, 47 out of 50 states currently have some sort of early/in-person absentee voting laws.³⁹ Of the top 5 states for voter turnout in 2020 and 2022, 7 out of the 8 states offered early/in-person absentee voting, while the bottom five lowest voter turnout states in 2020 and 2022 also had 7 out of 8 states with this policy. New Hampshire and Alabama are actually the only two states in the entire United States to not offer any sort of early or early in-person absentee voting other than the state of Mississippi. Since early/in-person absentee voting is essentially the norm in almost all states, it is inconclusive on whether or not this practice boosts or deters youth voter turnout. New Hampshire and Alabama are also from opposing groups, being one of the top states in youth voter turnout, while the other is one of the bottom states in youth voter turnout, further amplifying the idea that early/in-person absentee voting may not provide a massive change in turnout. However, considering most states adopted this style of voting following the Covid-19 pandemic, it must’ve had some sort of positive benefits to be established into law in almost all states across the country, regardless of partisan affiliation or how urban/rural the state is.

	OK	SD	AR	WV	AK	AL	WY	IN	MD	NJ	OR	MN	NH	WI	ME	MI
Early/In Person Absentee Voting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓

Future Election Law Changes Even though 2023 is not a bustling election year for most states on the federal or state-wide level, many legislatures have begun to implement laws to both expand and limit access to ballot box. According to reporting by the Brennan Center, 11 states in

³⁶ Staff. “Brief Early In-Person Voting.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 13 June 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>.

³⁷ Staff. “Arguments for and against early voting.” *Ballotpedia*, https://ballotpedia.org/Arguments_for_and_against_early_voting.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Staff. “Brief Early In-Person Voting.” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 13 June 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/early-in-person-voting>.

2023 so far have enacted electoral reform bills making it more difficult to vote, in addition to 13 states enacting expansive electoral reform bills making it easier for voters to vote.⁴⁰

In regards to the restrictions implemented by these 11 states, 7 bills limit access to mail in voting (whether shortening the window to submit a request, eliminating no-excuse, etc), 6 bills have enacted voter ID requirements in order to register to vote or to simply just vote.⁴¹ In states like South Dakota, they have followed suit like many other conservative-leaning states in banning ballot drop-boxes, and established a criminal penalty if any election official allows such a practice.⁴² On the contrary, the state of Minnesota has implemented bills such as pre-registration for 16 year olds, criminalizing voter intimidation, and establishing automatic voter registration.⁴³ These reforms are even after Minnesota enjoys one of the highest voter turnout rates not just for youth voters, but overall in the entire United States.

Of the many bills being passed across the nation, Michelle Canter Cohen, the policy director of the Fair Elections Center, a non-partisan organization advancing voter opportunities, has stated that, “There haven’t been a lot of moderate changes. It’s very polarized, either one kind or another”. This inference likely means that the wide expanse of voter turnout rates across the nation, exemplified by the lowest and highest turnout states seen in the research above, will likely widen this turnout gap even more. In addition, Canter Cohen also states that the legislation restricting voter access to registration and the ability to vote almost always disproportionately impacts people of color, as these bills typically target this group's primary methods of voting.⁴⁴

While the 2024 election has not occurred yet, many changes are likely still to come as legislation passes through state legislatures over the course of the next year. Time will only tell to see if the trends exemplified by the data provided for turnout rates with particular voter policies will continue.

Limitations

While the data and inferences drawn from it provided can be vital information in understanding and potentially predicting future youth voter turnout, it is not finite. A multitude of factors goes into voter turnout—not just the laws that are implemented regarding voter access. Reporting by the Farmer’s Almanac has shown that historically voter turnout can decrease due to weather

⁴⁰ Waldman, Michael. “Voting Laws Roundup: June 2023.” *Brennan Center for Justice*, 14 June 2023, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-june-2023>.

⁴¹ *Ibid*.

⁴² Brown, Matthew. “Ahead of 2024 election, several states overhauled voting laws.” *Washington Post*, 15 May 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/05/15/2024-state-voting-laws/>.

⁴³ *Ibid*.

⁴⁴ Brown, Matthew. “Ahead of 2024 election, several states overhauled voting laws.” *Washington Post*, 15 May 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/05/15/2024-state-voting-laws/>.

during election day, as severe weather conditions like a hurricane can entice voters to stay home to avoid unsafe conditions.⁴⁵

Furthermore, voter enthusiasm can also be a major determinant of voter turnout. Simply put, if voters are not fully behind a political party or the candidates put forward, they are less inclined to vote for someone that they do not fully believe in. In 2022, right before the midterm elections, Politico reported an 11 point enthusiasm gap between Democrats and Republicans, with Republicans in the lead.⁴⁶ Subsequently, the Republicans won back the U.S. House of Representatives by gaining 20 seats and the popular vote by 5 percentage points.⁴⁷

There may also be confounding factors that even voter reform can not fix. Even if a voter were to have automatic voter registration, or if a voter ID requirement is removed in a particular state, there is an argument that this voter would not simply turnout regardless. In the book *Running from Office: Why Young Americans are Turned off to Politics* by Jennifer Lawless, chapter three goes into the internal disdain for politics young individuals gain from dinner-table discussions around politics.⁴⁸ These discussions can be heated and can occasionally turn families apart, souring politics for this voter and potentially turning them off from voting for a potentially long period of time.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Within the research compiled on voter laws in relation to youth voter turnout, the less restrictive the laws are, the higher rate of youth voter turnout there is. This is exactly why a state like Oregon, a leading state in the all vote-by-mail voting system, has such high youth voter turnout, while a state like Alabama, requiring voter ID, not allowing ballot drop-boxes, among other laws has such low youth voter turnout.

It also is important to note that the states with restrictive voter laws tend to have a significant minority population within these states, potentially to dilute the power that minority voters have. The Brennan Center for Justice has found that restrictive voting measures, such as poll-consolidation in major cities like seen in the Milwaukee Democratic Presidential primary in

⁴⁵ Smerbeck, Bob, et al. "Election Day 2022 Forecast: Does Bad Weather Affect Voter Turnout?" *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, Almanac, 28 November 2022, <https://www.almanac.com/election-day-forecast>.

⁴⁶ Siders, David, and Zach Montellaro. "We've got to stop fooling ourselves!: Enthusiasm gap keeps getting worse for Dems." *Politico*, 31 March 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/31/enthusiasm-gap-dems-00021774>.

⁴⁷ Seitz, Alex. "Republicans win control of the House." *NBC News*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2022-election/republicans-win-control-house-nbc-news-projects-overtaking-democrats-s-rcna57223>.

⁴⁸ Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. *Running from Office: Why Young Americans are Turned Off to Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2020, tend to disproportionately deplete minority voter turnout, particularly that of younger voters.⁵⁰ As many of a fifth of minority voters lack a valid photo ID, for example, so this restriction would essentially target these voters in order to give minority voters less of a voice in the electoral process, and empower white voters.⁵¹ According to the Brookings Institution, recent U.S. Census data shows that American youth are increasingly getting more diverse, with the overall population of white Americans decreasing for the first time ever in the 2020 Census.⁵² Simply put, as our nation is increasingly getting more and more diverse, particularly within the up and coming cohort of today's youth, states that feel their political power being threatened by this are going to try and hold on by whatever means possible, including voter suppression through restrictive voter laws.

All in all, a lot of factors go into the decision that one has in deciding whether or not to cast a vote, in ways that simple data about voter registration and turnout can not provide. But this data still provides a meaningful insight into overall rates of voting statistics, and with being compared to the respective state's voting laws can be useful in determining what does or does not help bring young people to the polls, regardless of whatever barriers there may be.

⁵⁰ Waldman, M., Crayton, K., Efrati, M., Singh, J., & Grange, C. (2023, July 18). *The impact of voter suppression on communities of color*. Brennan Center for Justice.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/impact-voter-suppression-communities-color>

⁵¹ Horine, Brady. "What's So Bad About Voter ID Laws?" *League of Women Voters*, 23 May 2023, <https://www.lwv.org/blog/whats-so-bad-about-voter-id-laws>. Accessed 12 September 2023.

⁵² Frey, William H. "The nation is diversifying even faster than predicted, according to new census data | Brookings." *Brookings Institution*, 1 July 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/new-census-data-shows-the-nation-is-diversifying-even-faster-than-predicted/>. Accessed 12 September 2023.