FACT SHEET

Growing Racial Disparities in Voter Turnout, 2008–2022

MARCH 2024

A [Brennan Center study](#) of nearly 1 billion voter file data points finds the following:

- **The nationwide racial turnout gap** — the difference in voting rates between white voters and voters of color — **has grown consistently since 2012**.

- That gap has **grown faster** in the places that, until the Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, had been **covered by Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act**, which provided for federal oversight to ensure that voting changes were not discriminatory (a process called *preclearance*).

A Growing Racial Turnout Gap

- In 2020, the racial turnout gap was more than **12 percentage points**. For Black voters, it was almost **15 percentage points**. Had voters of color voted at the same rate as white voters, **9 million more ballots** would have been cast. In 2022, the racial turnout gap was **18 percentage points**, meaning **14 million more ballots** would have been cast.

- Between 2010 and 2022,

  - ‣ the gap between **white Americans** and **Americans of color** grew by **5 percentage points** to 18 points.

  - ‣ the gap between **white Americans** and **Black Americans** grew by **8 percentage points** to 16 points.

  - ‣ the gap between **white Americans** and **Latino Americans** grew by **4 percentage points** to almost 22 points.

The Effect of *Shelby County v. Holder*

By dismantling the preclearance regime, *Shelby County* has been a significant driver of the growing racial turnout gap. In other words, restrictive voting laws and practices negatively impact nonwhite turnout compared to white turnout.

- In the areas once subject to preclearance, the **racial turnout gap grew** on average **almost twice as fast** as in similar parts of the country that hadn't been subject to federal oversight: by **9 percentage points** in once-covered areas compared to **5 percentage points** in demographically similar parts of the country.

- *Shelby County* **cost hundreds of thousands of votes from voters of color** in formerly covered counties in the 2022 midterm election.