

B | Metropolitan Policy Program at BROOKINGS

For Immediate Release

February 16, 2017

Contact

Allison Courtin

acourtin@brookings.edu

RELEASE: New Brookings, CAP, and Bipartisan Policy Center Report Looks at Representation Gaps in American Politics

Washington, DC — Today, the Brookings Institution; the Center for American Progress; and the Bipartisan Policy Center released a new report from the [States of Change: Demographics and Democracy project](#), looking at issues with representation gaps along age, education, gender, and race lines in American politics, and predicting what those gaps might look like going into the future using the best available demographic projections and voter turnout data.

The significant demographic changes that the United States has undergone in the past four decades — due to immigration patterns altering the country's racial composition, medical advances aging our population by prolonging lives, and economic forces driving the population to educate itself at unprecedented levels — will shape this century's social and political landscape and test many of society's institutions. The authors of this report believe that representation gaps — the difference between the percentage of voters who belong to a given group and the percentage of the whole population that belong to that same group — will be one of the most important such tests.

The analysis finds that while white overrepresentation and minority underrepresentation has been a defining feature of American politics for decades, our country may currently be at peak levels of both overrepresentation and underrepresentation. Simulations by the authors indicate that the most successful route for minimizing future representation gaps lies in equalizing registration and turnout rates across races.

"The ultimate goal of this report now that we've laid out what representation gaps currently look like and what they may look like in the future is to facilitate a conversation about the representational challenges the U.S. is likely to face in the coming decades, and what solutions might work best to confront them," said [Ruy Teixeira](#), Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress and co-author of the report.

The report's main findings include:

White overrepresentation is likely to decline in the future, as underrepresentation of Latinos and Asians declines significantly due to projected increases in citizenship among these groups, a trend that will be especially noticeable in states that currently have the highest white representation gaps, such as Arizona, California, and Texas.

"It's important to remember that racial changes have not and will not be evenly distributed, because places and age groups are shifting at different rates. Furthermore, our nation's diversification can be described as bottom-up, with younger cohorts changing at a faster rate than older age groups," said [Rob Griffin](#), Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for American Progress and co-author of the report.

While representation gaps will likely decline in future decades, they will by no means be eliminated, with significant white overrepresentation and Latino and Asian/other underrepresentation likely remaining primarily because of participation gaps reflecting the relatively low registration and turnout rates of those latter groups.

“Going forward, racial minorities will comprise ever larger shares of the nation’s eligible voters. But their clout on Election Day will be dependent on closing their now substantial gaps with whites in voter registration and turnout,” said [William H. Frey](#), Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and co-author of the report.

Click here to read the full report.

[Click here](#) to watch the livestream of today’s event.

For more information or to speak to an expert on this topic, please contact Allison Courtin at acourtin@brookings.edu or 202.238.3556.

[The Bipartisan Policy Center](#) is a nonprofit organization that combines the best ideas from both parties to promote health, security, and opportunity for all Americans. BPC drives principled and politically viable policy solutions through the power of rigorous analysis, painstaking negotiation, and aggressive advocacy.

The [Center for American Progress](#) is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

###

[The Brookings Institution](#) is a nonprofit organization devoted to independent research and policy solutions. Its mission is to conduct high-quality, independent research and, based on that research, to provide innovative, practical recommendations for policymakers and the public.