

OCTOBER 2026

Texas Civic Vitality Report

Electoral Participation and Relative Representation in U.S. and Texas

The University of Texas at Austin
Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life
Moody College of Communication

Overview

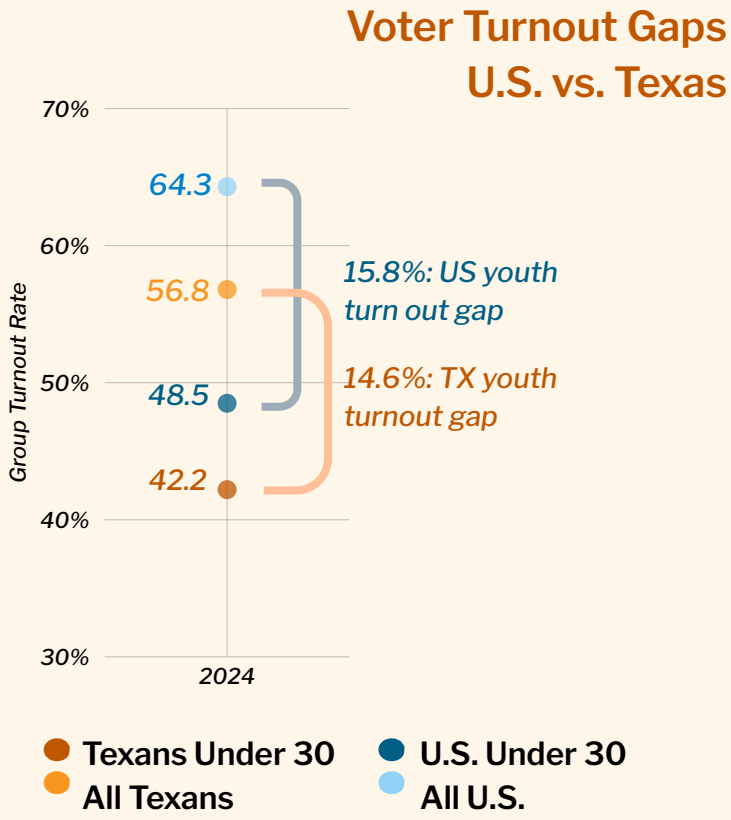
This report examines historic voter turnout trends in Texas, with a special focus on young voters in the 2024 general presidential election. We find that voter turnout in Texas continues to trail the national average. 64.3% of eligible voters nationally participated in the 2024 presidential election, compared to 56.8% of eligible voters in Texas.

Among eligible voters below the age of 30, national turnout was 48.5%, compared to 42.2% in Texas. However, while young voters continue to underperform older voters, our research shows that this generation's young voters do turn out at higher rates than Millennials or Gen X did at the same age.

We also investigate youth participation using our Voter Representation Index (VRI), which compares a group's share of eligible voters to its share of actual voters. In 2024, the share of Texas voters under the age of 30 was 25.3% lower than its share of eligible voters. In this respect, Texas youth were on par with young voters nationally.

As a supplement to this report, we have updated our online dashboard which tracks longitudinal voter turnout rates and VRI data for all 50 states. That dashboard is available on the Annette Strauss Institute website. The data for this report are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement.

2024 Findings At-a-Glance



56.8% of Texans voted in the 2024 general presidential election.

But just 42.2% of Texans under 30 cast a ballot.

In 2024, Texans under the age of 30 improved their turnout rate by 2.7 percentage points relative to 2020.

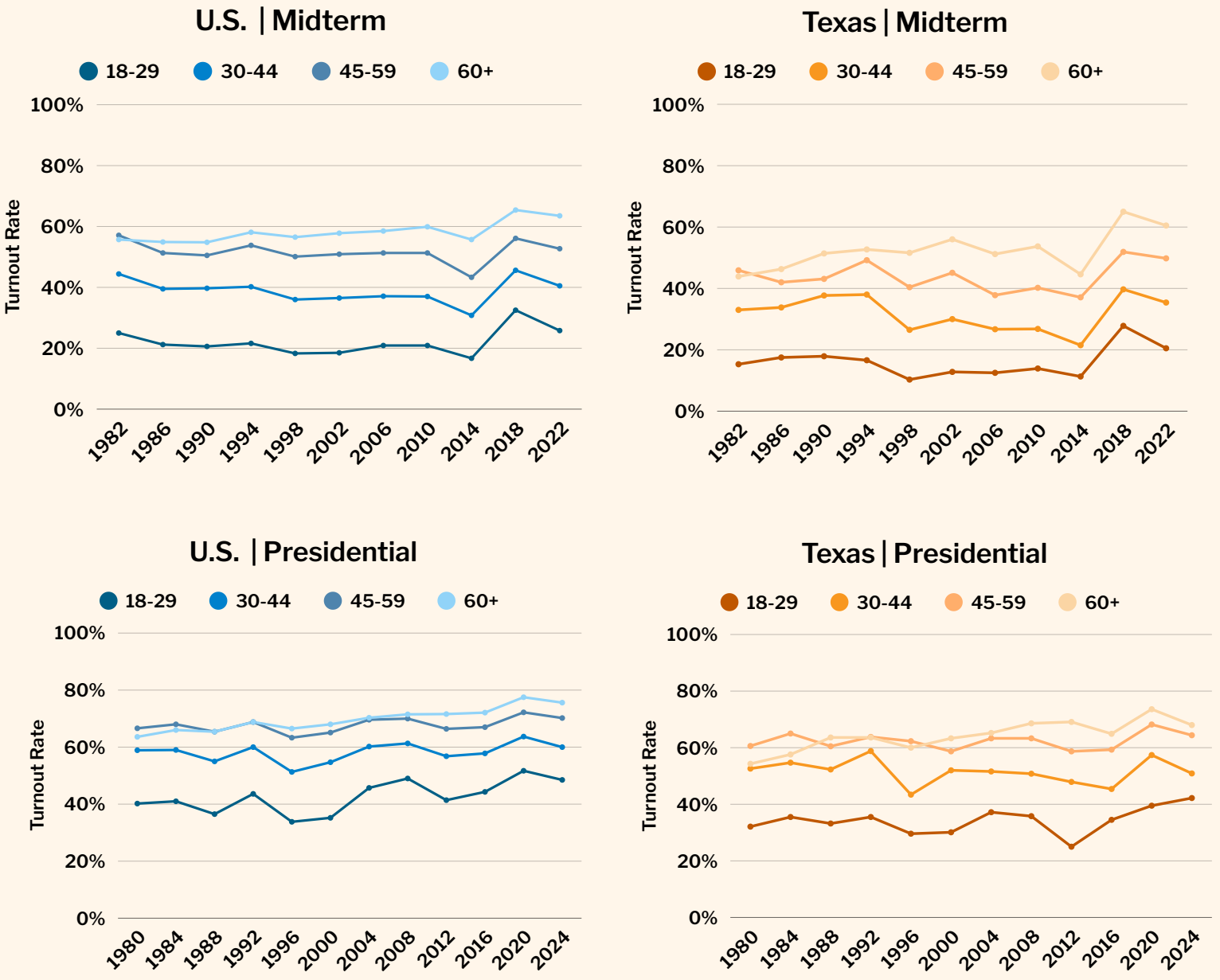


Figure 1: Electoral Participation by Age Group 1980-2024, U.S. vs. Texas

Generation Z is voting at higher rates in their first eligible elections compared to youth from previous generations.

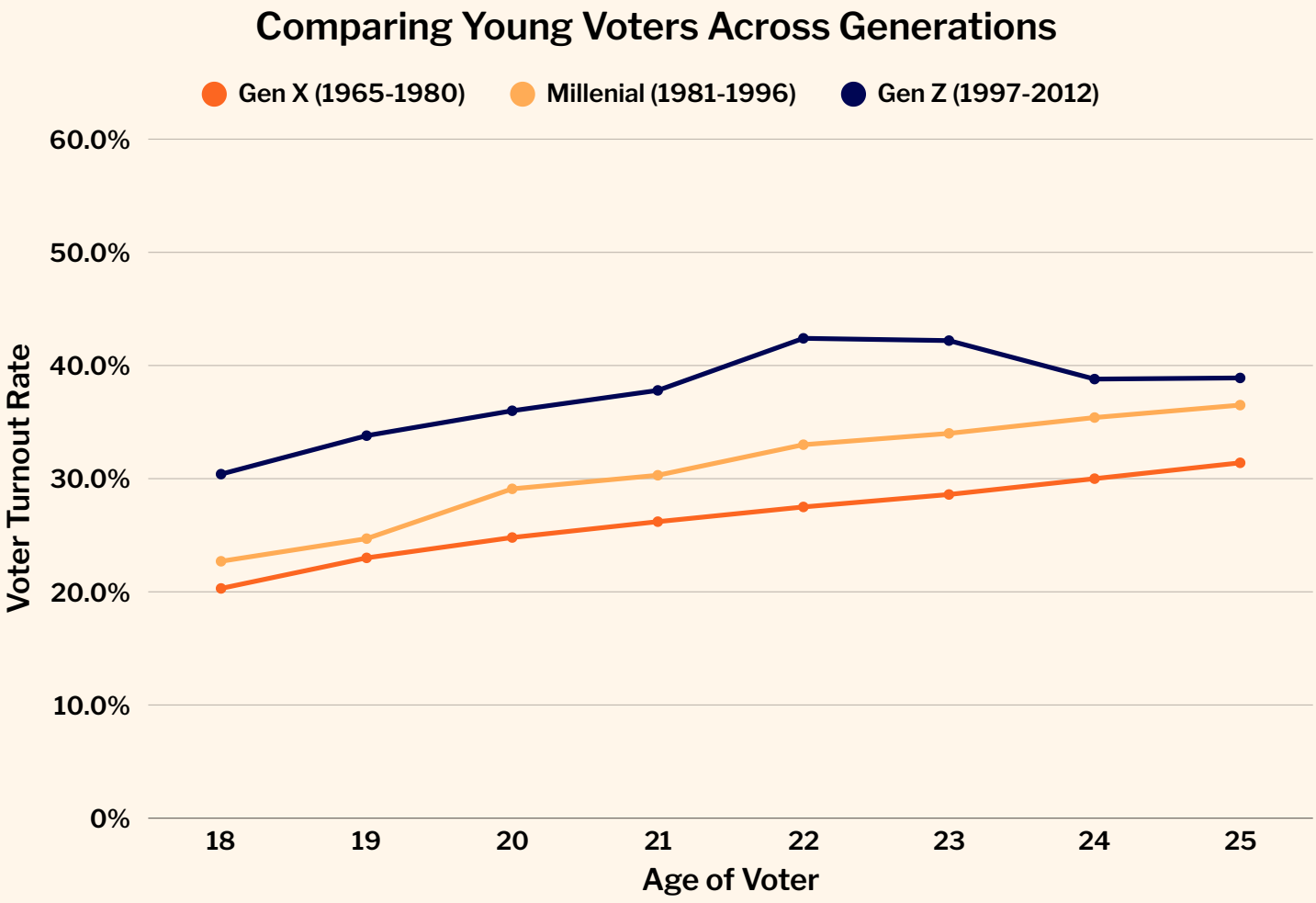


Figure 2: Young Voter Turnout Across Generations, U.S. 1982-2024

How to Read this Figure

For each generation, the voter turnout for each age is calculated as the percent of people in that generation who voted when they were a given age. This is combined across surveys from 1982 to 2024, so both midterm and presidential elections are included when determining what the age-level turnout was for each generation. For example, 20.3% of Gen X voted when they were 18 years old. This finding is calculated across all elections for which any member of Gen X was 18 years old.

Voter Representation Index

To evaluate a group's voting strength, we compare their share of eligible voters to their share of actual voters.

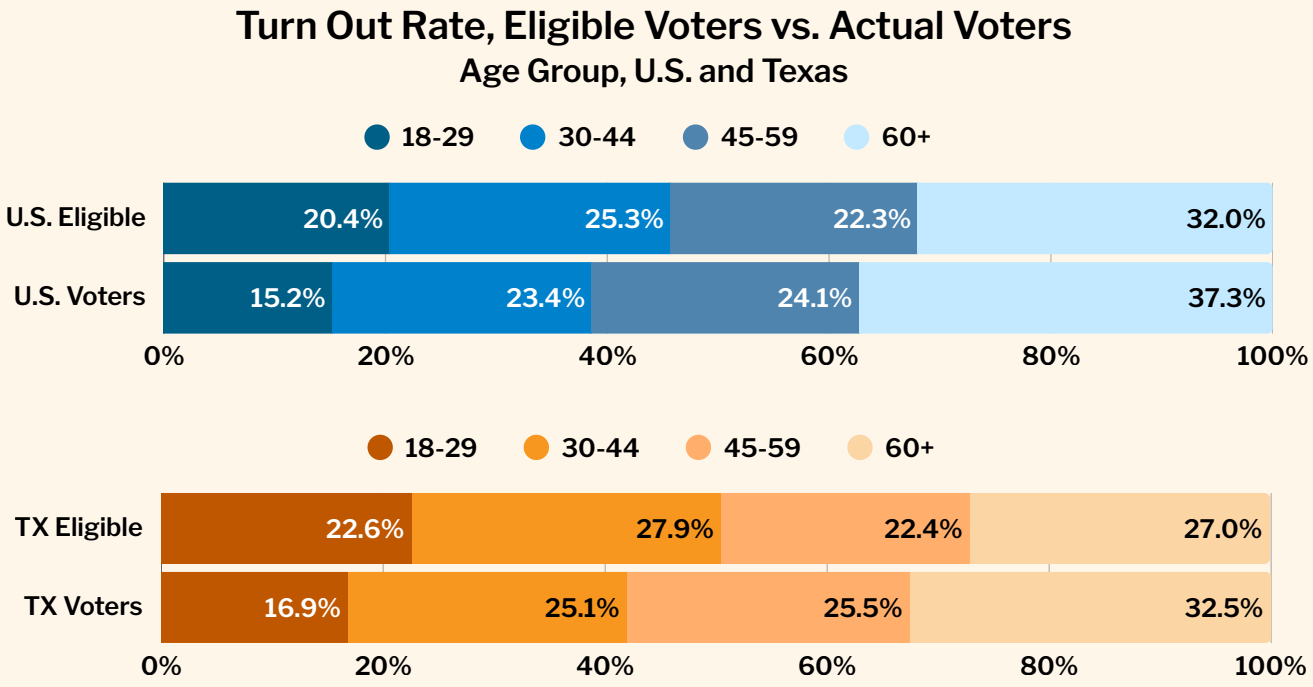


Figure 3: Voter-Eligible Population and Voters by Age, US vs. Texas in 2024

- **Nationally, young people comprised 20.4% of eligible voters in 2024 but only 15.2% of actual voters.**

- **In Texas, young people comprised 22.6% of eligible voters but only 16.9% of actual voters.**

Between 2020 and 2024, the Voter Representation Index for Texan voters under the age of 30 improved by 8.6 percentage points.

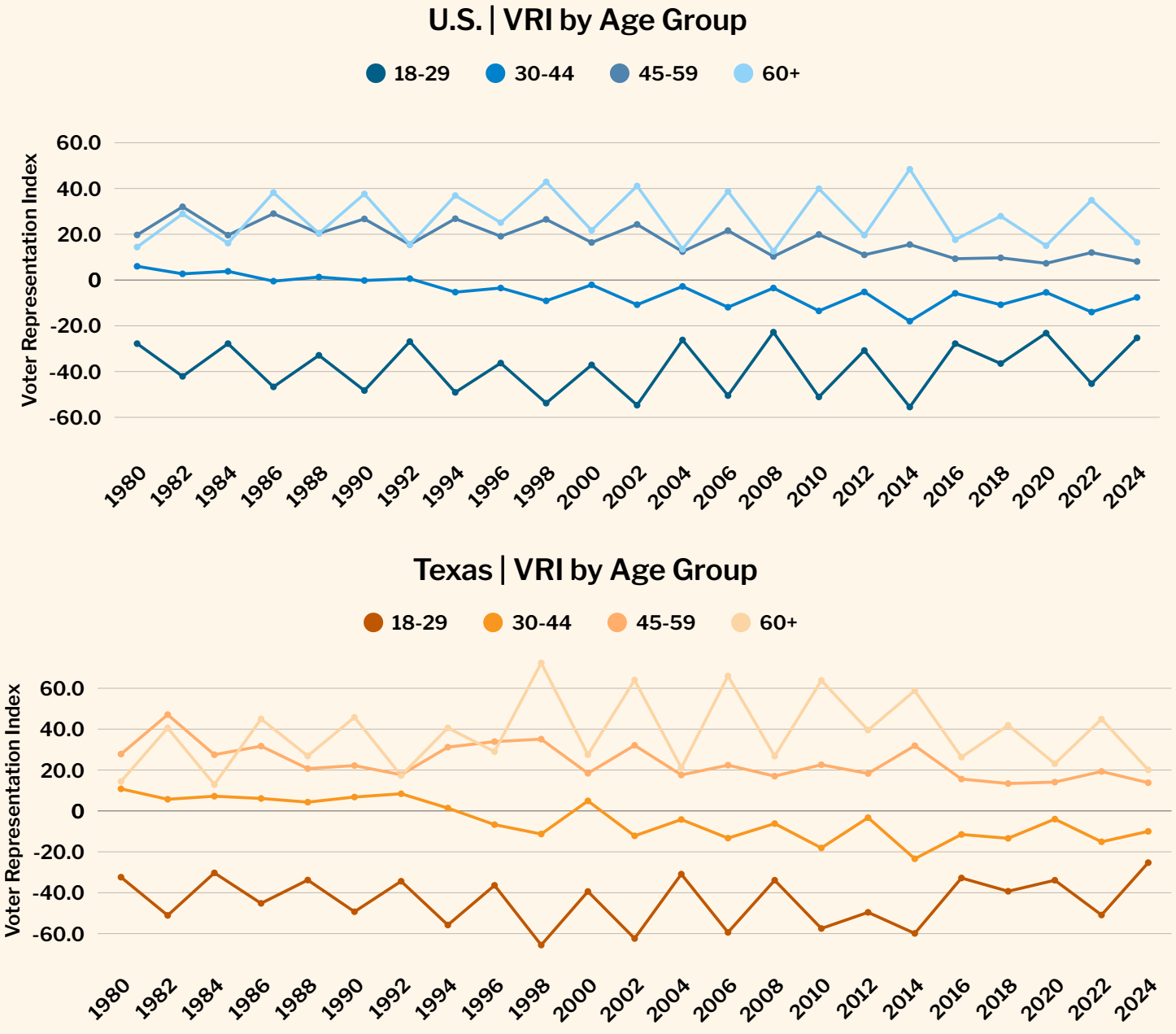


Figure 4: Age Group Electoral Representation, 1982-2024, U.S. vs. Texas

How to Read this Figure

The VRI measures relative representation. The closer a value is to the center line of 0, the more proportional a group's performance is to its overall share of eligible voters. Values below the center line of 0 mean a group is under-performing. A value above the axis means a group is over-performing.

2024 Demographic Characteristics

U.S. vs. Texas, 18-29 Year Olds

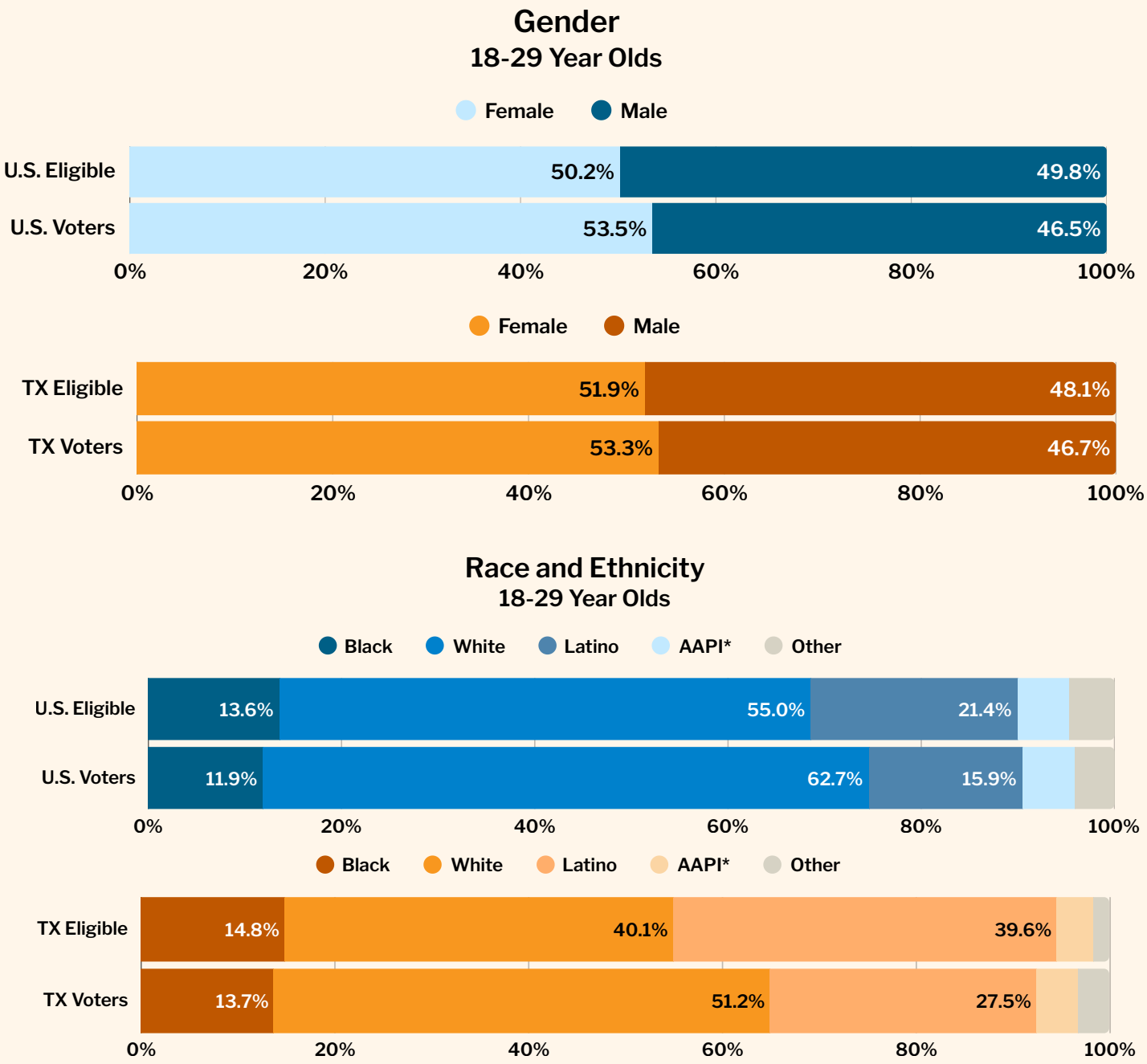


Figure 5a: Demographic Characteristics of Voting-Eligible Youth, U.S. vs. Texas in 2024

*AAPI = Asian American, Pacific Islander

2024 Demographic Characteristics

U.S. vs. Texas, 18-29 Year Olds

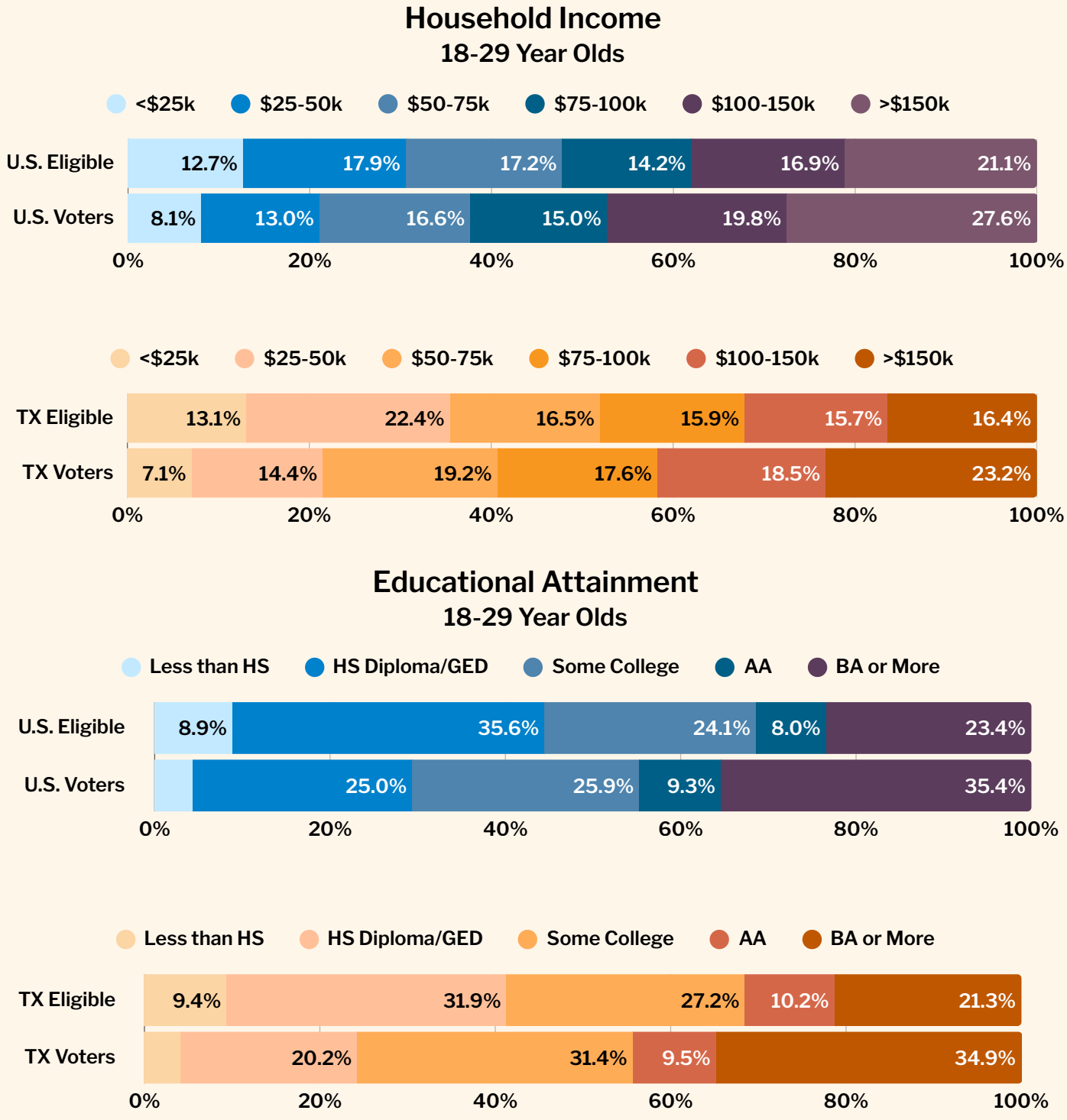


Figure 5b: Demographic Characteristics of Voting-Eligible Youth, U.S. vs. Texas in 2024

Methodology

The data for this report are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, accessed through IPUMS.[1] These large-scale national surveys are conducted every two years. The most recent CPS in 2024 collected 99,063 responses nationally, and 5,871 in Texas.

These surveys are nationally representative and employ probability sampling methods. However, state voter files provide a more accurate accounting of voter turnout than the CPS because survey respondents are known to over-report voting behavior. Thus, survey weights from the CPS responses are adjusted with empirical turnout figures as suggested by Hur & Achen [2] using state-level turnout data from the University of Florida Election Lab.[3,4] When available, the number of votes cast was used, but in certain cases that was not available, so for those states and years the number of votes cast for the highest office on the ballot was used instead.[5]

The individual survey weights are either increased or decreased depending on whether the respondent self-reported voting or not voting. Non-responses and other inapplicable values are dropped. After reweighting, the calculated turnout rates across each state and year has been bench marked to the actual results from the corresponding election. The resulting adjusted weights and binary vote/non-vote responses are used to calculate the turnout and VRI figures used in this report. For any data-related inquiries, please contact eugenia.quintanilla@austin.utexas.edu and bei246@my.utexas.edu.

Endnotes

1. Ruggles, Steven, Sarah Flood, M. Sobek, D. Backman, A. Chen, G. Cooper, S. Richards, R. Rodgers, and M. Schouweiler. (2024). *IPUMS USA: Version 15.0* (Version 15.0)[Dataset]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS.

2. Hur, A., & Achen, C. H. (2013). *Coding voter turnout responses in the Current Population Survey*. Public Opinion Quarterly, 77(4), 985-993.

3. Michael McDonald. 2024. "1980-2022 General Election Turnout Rates (v1.2)." https://election.lab.ufl.edu/dataset/1980-2022-general-election-turnout-rates-v1-2/

4. Michael McDonald. 2024. "Turnout Rates in the 2024 General Election (v0.3)." https://election.lab.ufl.edu/dataset/2024-general-election-turnout-rates-v0-3/

5. Additionally, in precisely one case—Louisiana in 1982—reweighting was not performed because there were no federal (presidential or congressional, the latter on technicality) nor state (Louisiana holds statewide elections in odd years) in 1982 in Louisiana, so there was no data available for that year on turnout.

About the Institute

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life is dedicated to educating, inspiring, and connecting the next generation of civic leaders in Texas. Through hands-on civic education programs, the Institute has empowered tens of thousands of students—from elementary schools to colleges—across the state with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed for meaningful civic engagement and leadership. At The University of Texas at Austin and beyond, the Strauss Institute provides students with transformative opportunities to engage in civic life.

About the Authors



Dr. Eugenia Quintanilla is a Research Associate at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life. She studies how aspects of our psychology—such as group identity, prosociality, and perceptions of stratification—shape political engagement in the United States. Her areas of expertise include survey experiments and measurements, race and ethnic politics, and public opinion. She received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Michigan in American Politics and her BA in Psychology and Political Science from New College of Florida.



Bailey Inglish is a former research intern at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life. He is currently a junior at UT Austin studying Plan II Honors and Statistics & Data Sciences. His areas of interest include voter turnout, demographic representation, and ranked-choice voting. His research projects include studies of electoral representation, democratic norms in rural Alaska, and political hot mic recordings.



Mark Strama is Director of the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, and a Professor in the Moody College of Communication. Previously Mark spent 10 years in an executive role at Google, and prior to that served five terms in the Texas House of Representatives. In the 90's he founded the first company to put a voter registration form on the internet, and worked at Rock the Vote, a non-partisan organization working to engage young people in the political process. Previous to those experiences he worked for Texas Governor Ann Richards and State Senator Rodney Ellis. Mark graduated from Brown University with degrees in Philosophy and Political Science.

Acknowledgements

This report was created with input and revisions from several members of the Annette Strauss Institute staff. Replication materials were prepared and reviewed by research intern Rachel Chavez We are also grateful to Dr. Sharon Jarvis, Dr. Rod Hart, and Dr. Daron Shaw for feedback on iterations of this report.

Understanding the Voter Representation Index (VRI)

The **Voting Representation Index (VRI)** provides an alternative way to understand influence of population groups in elections. VRI measures *relative representation*—it compares how a group's share of the pool of voters measures up to its share of the broader voting-eligible population (VEP).

To demonstrate the utility of the VRI, we will model a hypothetical election with **the United Shapes.**

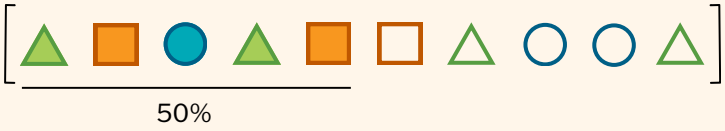
Below are all the possible voters of the United Shapes: orange squares, green triangles, and purple circles. The United Shapes recently held an election to pick their new president.



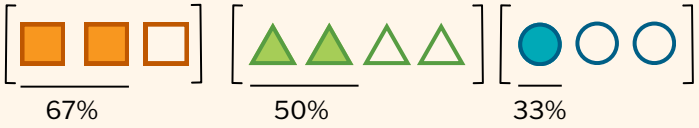
However, when election day came, only some shapes showed up to vote—they are now filled in below.



By counting all the shapes who voted, we now have the total voter turnout: 50%



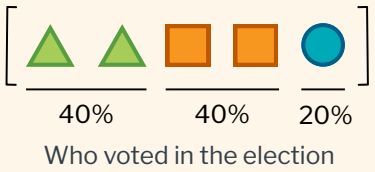
We can also calculate the turnout of each type of shape who voted.



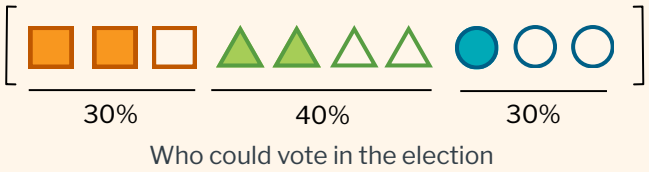
The squares had the highest voter turnout at 67%, The triangles were the next best at 50%, and the circles came in last at 33%.

This may lead us to conclude that the squares must have had the most say in choosing who got elected this year.

However, when you look at who actually voted in the election, there are just as many squares as there are triangles: in fact, each group is the same share of voters.



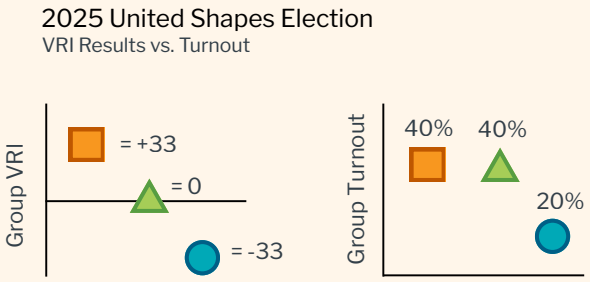
Voter turnout alone fails to inform us of how each group impacts elections *relative* to other groups. Squares and triangles make up different shares of the population.



To better understand this relative influence, we use the **Voting Representation Index**. Below is how we calculated VRI for the squares.

$$\text{VRI} = \frac{\%\ \text{Voters (40\%)} - \%\ \text{Who could vote (30\%)}}{\%\ \text{Who could vote (30\%)}}$$

Here are the results for each shape. Positive values means a group is over-represented, negative values mean a group is under-represented.



VRI is also highly effective for mapping representational changes over time. In real life, VRI can be grouped by age, race, education, and more. A more technical discussion on VRI can be found in the appendix.



For More Information

Visit our website to learn more about our current and past research, state-wide and local civic engagement initiatives, and future events: annettestrauss.org.

For any inquiries related to the data and analyses presented in this brief, email the authors at eugenia.quintanilla@austin.utexas.edu and bei246@my.utexas.edu.

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