

The State of Black Democracy:

# Bridging the Generational Divide



**YBLOC**

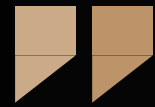
Young Black Lawyers'  
Organizing Coalition



2024

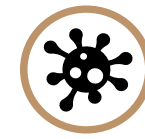


It is very inspiring to see that you guys are so young, yet so interested in making a difference right now. So, this is what we need. We need more young people knowing how important voting is.



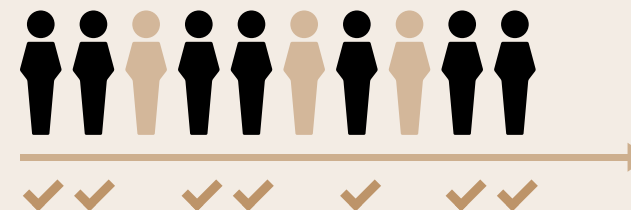
[ Focus Group 1002-1005 ]

## Introduction



Just four years removed from an unprecedented global **pandemic and an insurrection** at the U.S. Capitol, the looming future of American democracy is at stake in the upcoming November election.

Today, Black voters remain a core voting bloc in American politics. Recall that in the 2020 presidential election, **63% of Black eligible voters voted**. In the November election, **14% of eligible voters in the U.S. are Black**, the largest percentage of eligible Black voters in United States history. Today, about **seven in ten Black people in the U.S. are eligible to vote**. A thorough analysis of the contemporary Black voting landscape in the United States before the November election is warranted. Undoubtedly, Black voters will decide this election and the future of American democracy.



This election, the **Young Black Lawyers Organizing Coalition (YBLOC)** led a campaign devoted to understanding the challenges Black voters in the United States face in the voter registration and voting process as well as the perspectives they hold on voting.

After talking to over 100 participants across the United States, we found that although Black voters express positive experiences with the voter registration process, they believe it could be improved in various ways that make it more accessible.

Furthermore, Black voters often referenced a generational divide in their ethos regarding voting in elections, where older Black voters have a more positive perspective on voting than younger Black voters. To address this division, increased representation of young Black people in politics and policy, intergenerational political dialogue, and education about the struggle to secure our right to vote emerged as remedies.



# Research Methodology

Through intensive conversations with Black voters, YBLOC set out to understand the voter registration experience and the perspectives shaping the Black voting landscape today.

The primary goal of the YBLOC campaign was to identify the barriers and perceptions that Black voters encounter and hold when participating in elections. This YBLOC campaign employed a bottom-up approach to voter engagement, prioritizing listening and learning directly from Black communities across the U.S. about their experience with and opinions on the electoral process.

From February through September, YBLOC hosted in-depth focus groups and interviews with

▶ **over 100 participants across four states:**

Michigan, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina.

YBLOC conducted

▶ **nine focus groups and interviewed**

▶ **36 individuals,**

many of them Black leaders with a bird's eye view of voting in their communities. **The vast majority of these participants vote regularly in elections as over 90 percent of participants at the time of the interview were registered to vote.**

Ahead of the election, we felt it important to first ask Black voters about their top policy issues. When asked how important major issues such as affordable housing and voting rights are to them (1 is least important, 5 is most important to you), racial equality and education continue to be the top issues of importance for Black voters in the United States. Respondents stated that racial equality, education, health care, economic inequality, and voting rights were the top five issues of importance.

Issue ✓	Weighted Average Score
Racial Equality	4.85
Education	4.85
Health Care	4.81
Economic Inequality	4.77
Voting Rights	4.76
Affordable Housing	4.70
Jobs and Unemployment	4.69
Criminal Justice Reform	4.65
Police Reform	4.59
Court Reform	4.53

# Core Research Findings

Our overall findings reveal the animating experiences of, and core motivations for, Black voting in our contemporary moment.

We found:



**On experiences,** Black voters indicated generally positive experiences with voter registration but highlighted a need to address gaps in information and access and make voting more user-friendly.



**On motivations,** Black voters noted a growing generational divide on voting, where older Black voters have more positive perspectives on voting than younger Black voters, and suggested the need for more representation of young Black people in politics and policy. Furthermore, Black voters indicate the need for more intergenerational dialogue and education about the struggle for the right to vote as tools to motivate younger voters.

# The Black Voting Experience



Most participants found the voter registration process in their state to be effortless, with a considerable chunk of Black voters registering to vote recently when at the DMV or even further back when signing up for the draft.

Most participants said registering to vote was...

“a very smooth process” (Participant 2.117)

However, voter registration challenges did come up for Black voters. Keeping up with your state’s voter registration process can be difficult. If you have moved multiple times a year, knowing how and when to update your voter registration address can be challenging. This presents a significant barrier to voting.

“I believe we’re having an issue at the registration level. And it’s because there are some people who may have a change of address, 2 to 3 or more times a year, and we’re not keeping up with them. So for them being registered in the way that we’re doing. It is a barrier.” [Participant 634]

A handful of the participants noted how difficult it was to keep track of registration deadlines, especially when requesting a mail-in or absentee ballot. One focus group participant stated it was frustrating that the registration deadline was so far in advance. Black voters also discussed the dilemma of long lines at the polling site and how long it can take to vote on election day.

“There are long lines. I think it should be a more innovative way for people to vote” [Participant 705]

While most participants expressed a positive experience with the voter registration process, our participants questioned why, in 2024, there is not a more innovative way for people to vote. Although most voters found the voter registration process relatively straightforward, participants offered many suggestions for making it even easier. Participants offered a variety of creative ways the voter registration process could be improved.

Some participants suggested that the process should become more electronic, and many Black voters lobbied for an embrace of technology.

“This (voter registration) process is cumbersome. I think it could be more electronic. And then, of course, like, we come into the conversations about well, how do we know, like, what’s the authenticity factor behind that. But we have to give people more ways to be registered, to update their registration, and to stay registered.”

[Participant 634]

Other participants suggested making election day a national holiday to give people the day off work to vote. This would provide working voters the time to vote before the polls close. Others suggested increasing transportation to and from the polls, which would help turn out low-income voters immensely. Lastly, same-day registration in all 50 states was heavily suggested to increase voter turnout among Black voters.

Overall, Black voters in the YBLOC campaign believe in the power of voter education. In addition to educating Black people about the candidates, educating people on the voter registration deadlines and process is just as necessary. Black voters noted that learning the voter registration process in school should be mandatory. It feels as though today, you must go out of your way to educate yourself on the process and the candidates running for office in the United States.

# Black Motivations on Voting in the United States



An integral component of Black voter turnout today is the level of remembrance of the past struggle to secure the right to vote. Many Black voters recount a direct family connection to the Civil Rights Movement. Black voters noted a growing generational divide regarding voting.

“My grandmother and my grandfather walked with Martin Luther King Jr.” [Participant 201]

While previous generations of Black voters remember what it was like not to have the right to vote, younger generations of Black voters get further removed from the Civil Rights Movement each day. When explaining the perceived decrease in young Black voter turnout, Black voters blamed it on the lack of recognition of just how recent the Civil Rights Movement was, noting that we are not that far removed from Black Americans being murdered for attempting to vote in an election.

“The fact that I can, when I really think about it, register and then walk in a polling place and cast a ballot without being killed is something I don’t take for granted.” [Participant 081224]

“This generation doesn’t even know. They think that all that happened 100 years ago. No, that was not.” [Focus Group Pontiac]

Black voters also highlighted the need for more representation of young Black people in politics and policy to increase young Black voter engagement. Young Black voters need to see themselves in electoral politics to be convinced to participate in the electoral process.

“When we tell people to go vote. If you don’t see yourself, you’re not going to be able to.” [Focus Group Pontiac]

Black voters repeatedly brought up the notion that young voters don’t believe their vote matters. The fact that young voters don’t see themselves in the candidates or their policies was a central theme throughout the interviews and focus groups.

Furthermore, Black voters expressed a desire for more intergenerational dialogue and education about the struggle for the right to vote as tools to motivate younger voters. Black Americans, with ties to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, have a crucial role in infusing a voting ethos into the younger generation. Some Black voters even take responsibility for failing to convince younger Black voters that their votes mattered.

“I’m 65. I don’t think my age group has done a good job passing down that mindset (importance of voting) to younger voters” [Participant 505]

**Passing down this mindset is vital for increasing Black voter turnout.** Black voters in the YBLOC campaign highlight the importance of knowing one’s history about securing the legal right to vote in the United States as a way to increase young Black voter turnout.



## Conclusion



In this campaign, **YBLOC** sought to understand the current Black voting landscape, which is critical to the 2024 election and the future of American democracy. To do so, we examined Black voting experiences and unpacked the motivations for Black voters to engage in the electoral process. We conducted in-depth conversations with over 100 participants in four states – Michigan, Texas, Georgia and North Carolina – with Black voters directly providing insights through focus groups and interviews.

Our campaign highlights the need for more expansive strategies to promote Black voting participation. In their own words, Black voters are calling for a broader approach to Black voter engagement that emphasizes representation in politics and policy in addition to more intentional cultivation of the sacred duty to vote through intergenerational education and dialogue.

Many Black voters feel empowered to vote on behalf of their ancestors or those who cannot vote, and others feel a strong responsibility to vote on behalf of their families.

“I feel like when they gave me that sticker that said, “I Voted”, I feel it was important because now it’s like I supported my ancestors, Black people, or people who don’t have the right to vote. And I did it.” [Participant 1601]

“It’s my responsibility. I feel like I was raised by my grandparents. They remember not being able to vote. And so it was mandatory. So I think it’s just a part of my responsibility.”

[Georgia Focus Group]

To mobilize larger black voter turnout, voter engagement must prioritize representation and cultivate the revered commitment to vote through education and dialogue. **The future of the United States of America depends on it.**

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