Voter Turnout in the 2012 Presidential Election: Answer Key

1. Which state had the highest VAP Turnout Rate? The lowest? Explain the factors that might contribute to these numbers.

Minnesota had the highest VAP Turnout Rate at 71.3%, while Hawaii had the lowest at 40%. According to a 2012 CNN article, the most predominant factors in Minnesota’s high voter-turnout rate include same-day voter registration, a civic-minded culture, few barriers to voting, and a number of viable third parties. In a companion CNN article, one of the key factors in Hawaii’s low voter turnout rate is the population’s general feeling of disconnectedness to the rest of the U.S. This is mostly due to its distinctive geography and culture. Other factors include the state’s one-party dominance and the outsized role of money in political campaigns. As a result, many of the state’s residents are disillusioned about government and politics and opt not to vote.

2. Look at the states that have a large number of felons who are ineligible to vote. Which state has the largest felon population in comparison to other states? Why do you think this is the case?

Texas has 473,167 total ineligible felons, significantly higher than Florida (272,113), which only has four million fewer voting-age residents than Texas. Texas has historically been considered a law-and-order state and has tougher criminal penalties than many other states. Prisoners in Texas are also given longer sentences than their counterparts in the rest of the country.

3. Which three states have the largest percentage of non-citizens? Based on these states’ geographic locations and demographics, why might this be the case?

California (17.6%), Nevada (13.7%), and Texas (13.5%) have the largest non-citizen populations. Both California and Texas share a border with Mexico, which has historically accounted for significant migration to these areas. Nevada’s non-citizen population is reflected in Las Vegas, where millions have migrated to take advantage of plentiful job opportunities, lower costs of living, and retirement.

4. Compare the national and state VAP turnout rates for 2012 and 2008. What conclusion can be drawn about the differences in turnout for these two presidential elections?

Overall, the VAP turnout rates for 2008 were notably higher than in 2012. The U.S. VAP turnout rate in 2008 was 56.9%, compared to 53.6% in 2012. This was mostly due to the fact that 2008 featured an open seat for the presidency and an African-American presidential candidate. These two factors drove up voter participation in 2008, particularly among young and minority voters.