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.