

## We Must Vote

By Bala Prasad

So, another national election is at hand. One of the basic civil rights that we have is our right to vote, and we must exercise this franchise.

The first group of American citizens were granted the power to vote after the Revolutionary War in the 18th century. But this came with some restraints. In order to vote, one had to be a property owner, pay taxes, and pass an education test. This resulted in only 6% of white American males eligible to vote.

The next wave of voters won the right to vote in the 19th century. Black males were given the right to vote but there were so many restrictions placed against them, most of them could not exercise this right. It took another century before these restrictions were removed. In the early 20th century, women won the right to vote and later in the 20th century, the voting age was reduced to eighteen. Today every American citizen can vote with the exception of convicted felons and the mentally incompetent.

Our voting rights came to us at different times and in different ways but they were all related to political or military upheaval. The right to vote for American males came after the Revolutionary War against the British; the right to vote for African Americans came after the Civil War which won them citizenship; women won the right to vote after World War I; and finally the voting age was lowered to eighteen after the Vietnam War.

Today people consider the right to vote as unimportant in election after election. However we forget that this right came slowly and with great difficulty. So pick a candidate, take a position, go to the polling booth, and vote!

Sincerely,

*Bala Prasad*

Election	Voting Age Population	Turnout	% Turnout of VAP
2004	215,694,000	122,295,345	56.7 %
2000	205,815,000	105,586,274	51.3 %
1996	196,511,000	96,456,345	49.1 %
1992	189,529,000	104,405,155	55.1 %
1988	182,778,000	91,594,693	50.1 %
1984	174,466,000	92,652,680	53.1 %
1980	164,597,000	86,515,221	52.6 %
1976	152,309,190	81,555,789	53.6 %
1972	140,776,000	77,718,554	55.2 %
1968	120,328,186	73,199,998	60.8 %
1964	114,090,000	70,644,592	60.9 %
1960	109,159,000	68,838,204	63.1 %

The voting age population includes all persons age 18 and over as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, which necessarily includes a significant number of persons ineligible to vote, such as non-citizens, felons, and the mentally incompetent. The actual number of *eligible voters* is somewhat lower, and the number of *registered voters* is lower still. The number of non-citizens in 1994 was approximately 13 million, and in 1996, felons numbered around 1.3 million, so it can be estimated that around 7-10% of the voting age population is ineligible to vote.

Note that the large drop in percentage turnout between 1968 and 1972 can be attributed (at least in part) to the expansion of the franchise to 18 year olds (previously restricted to those 21 and older).