

A REPORT BY

INNOVATION
OHIO

EDUCATION FUND

A Justice Agenda

OHIO'S MISSING VOTERS



Acknowledgement Letter



Innovation Ohio Education Fund (IOEF) is thrilled to present another installment to our 2023 project, A Justice Agenda: “Ohio’s Missing Voters”. For this report, IOEF undertook a comprehensive analysis of publicly-maintained and commercial voter lists within the Ohio voter file. Our objective was to gain deeper insights into the population of unregistered and inactive voters across our great state. Leveraging data sources from Catalist, the US Census, and the Ohio Secretary of State, this report seeks to estimate both the size and characteristics of significant groups. Our focus, as outlined in this report, will be on the geographical distribution of these voters, their demographic composition, and provide potential recommendations. This report was made possible by the dedicated staff at Innovation Ohio Education Fund.

Ohio has always played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's political direction, and it is our responsibility to ensure that every eligible citizen's voice is heard in our democratic process.

The findings in this report will shed light on the untapped potential of Ohio's missing voters and will serve as a critical foundation for informed discussions and policy decisions. We believe that addressing this issue is vital to promoting justice, equity, and the true representation of our diverse population in our electoral system.

We would also like to thank all activists and thought leaders who have dedicated their lives to making the lives of others better. We hope to continue to dive into the research, data, and statistics in the coming months to advance solution-oriented change for a better Ohio.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Desiree Tims".

Desiree Tims
President/CEO
Innovation Ohio Education Fund



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Background

In July and August 2023, Innovation Ohio Education Fund (IOEF) conducted an analysis of publicly-maintained and commercial lists of voters in the Ohio voter file. The goal was to gain insights into the population of unregistered and inactive voters in the state. Utilizing data from Catalist, the US Census, and the Ohio Secretary of State, this report aims to estimate the size and characteristics of these voter groups. We focus on voter geographical distribution, demographic makeup, and their significance in the context of Ohio's elections.



In recent years, particularly since 2018, Ohio has witnessed significant declines in voter turnout, especially in densely populated urban counties, with some of the largest declines coming in the state's three biggest cities. This trend is concerning and underscores the need for strategies not only to register voters but also to motivate active participation.

To identify ways to stem this decreased participation, Innovation Ohio Education Fund sought to determine the number of eligible Ohio residents of voting age who were not actively participating in the electoral process, either due to inactivity or failure to remain registered. Our investigation also examined where these voters reside and their demographic characteristics, yielding critical insights.

Our analysis unveiled over **700,000 inactive voters in Ohio**—individuals registered to vote but not participating in the last three federal elections. Notably, this group includes a higher proportion of Black, younger and women voters compared to all registered Ohio voters. We additionally estimate that **Ohio is home to approximately 2 million eligible but unregistered voters**. Reflecting that most of Ohio's population live in metropolitan areas, most of these unregistered and inactive voters also are concentrated in urban counties.

These findings highlight the importance of engaging with unregistered and inactive voters, particularly in urban areas, where Black and young voters represent a significant portion of inactive voters. **Recognizing their potential to contribute to a resurgence in voter participation, we emphasize the significance of targeted outreach efforts and structural democracy reforms to offset recent turnout declines and revitalize Ohio's democratic process.**

Summary



Analytical Approach

IOEF reviewed data from publicly-maintained and commercial lists of voters to better understand the size and nature of the population of unregistered and inactive voters in the state. We utilized data from Catalist, the US Census and the Ohio Secretary of State.

Key Definitions

- **Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP):** An estimate of US citizens aged 18 and older in each county, drawn from the US Census Bureau's American Communities Survey.
- **Registered Voters:** Individuals registered to vote in a specific geographic area, maintained by Catalist, which combines administrative data and commercial sources.
- **Inactive Voters:** Registered voters who have not participated in the last three federal elections but remain on the voter rolls.
- **Unregistered Voters:** Individuals who are not registered to vote, estimated by Catalist using commercial data sources.

(Catalist is a commercial vendor that maintains a database on the US voting-age population, drawing data from a wide range of commercial and public sources of data, including the Secretary of State's voter file, to build a comprehensive picture of voters, allowing them to be better understood and targeted in electoral campaigns)

In recent years, Ohio has witnessed significant declines in voter turnout, especially in densely populated urban counties. From the 2018 to 2022 midterms, turnout in Ohio dropped 3.4 points, largely driven by drops in turnout in urban counties, with turnout in Cuyahoga (Cleveland), Franklin (Columbus) and Hamilton (Cincinnati) counties all seeing 6-to-8 point declines.

The decline in turnout in urban areas means that these counties had a turnout rate in 2022 several points lower than turnout in the state as a whole. Lower turnout in urban counties – areas with higher populations of Black voters, young voters, and Inactive Voters - highlights the need to not only register voters but also ensure that they are motivated to continue voting during elections.

Current Landscape

The Ohio Electorate

OHIO IS HOME TO AROUND 7.8 MILLION REGISTERED VOTERS.

Ohio's Registered Voter electorate is diverse, with variations in age and race.

Black and Latino registered voters tend to skew younger compared to white registered voters.

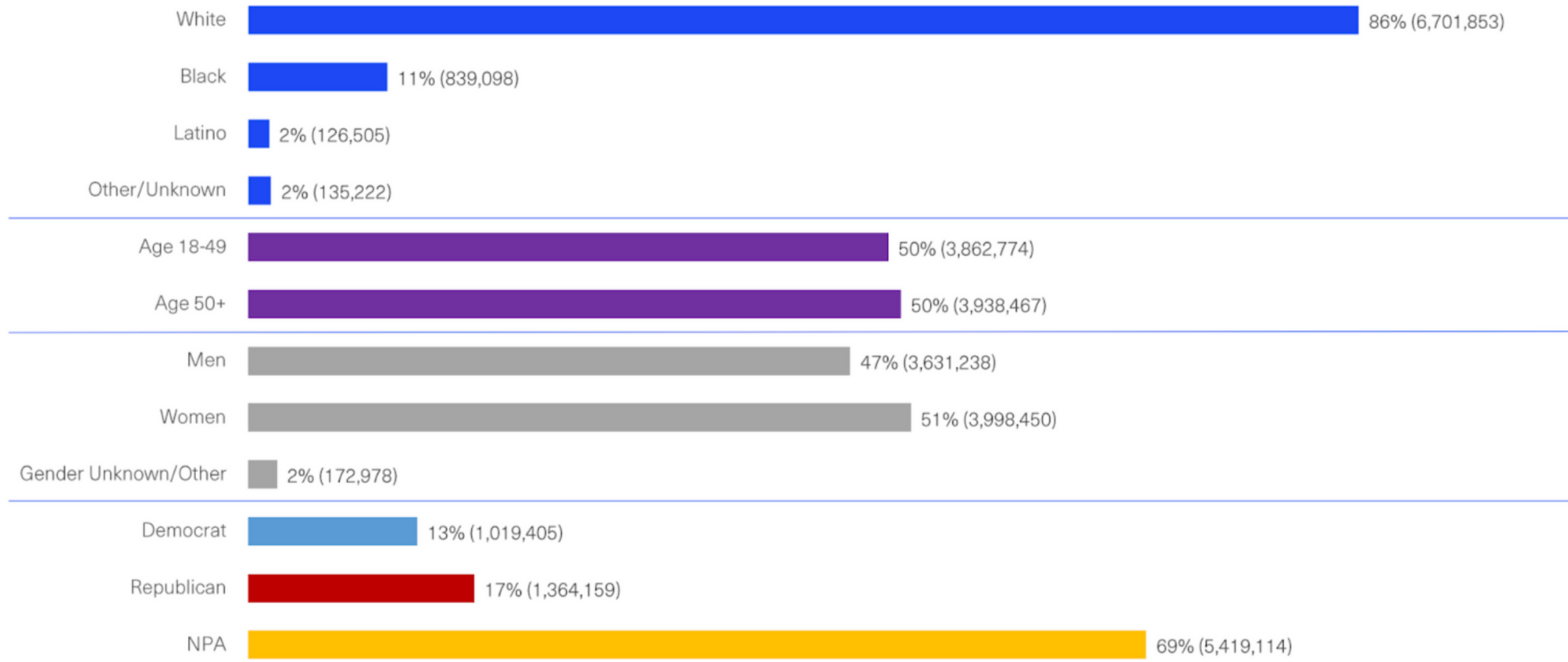
Women make up a significant portion of voting blocs across races.

Demographic	Citizen Voting Age Population	Registered Voters	Gap % (CVAP-RV)	Unregistered Voters	Inactive Voters
White	7,312,475	6,701,853	8.4%	1,664,260	544,542
Black	1,109,835	839,098	24.4%	241,185	135,316
Latino	251,655	126,505	49.7%	50,317	16,399
Age 18-49		3,862,774		607,433	455,822
Age 50+		3,938,467		1,417,119	251,543
Men		3,631,283		1,165,551	324,509
Women		3,998,450		784,082	368,176

*CVAP subgroup data available for race only

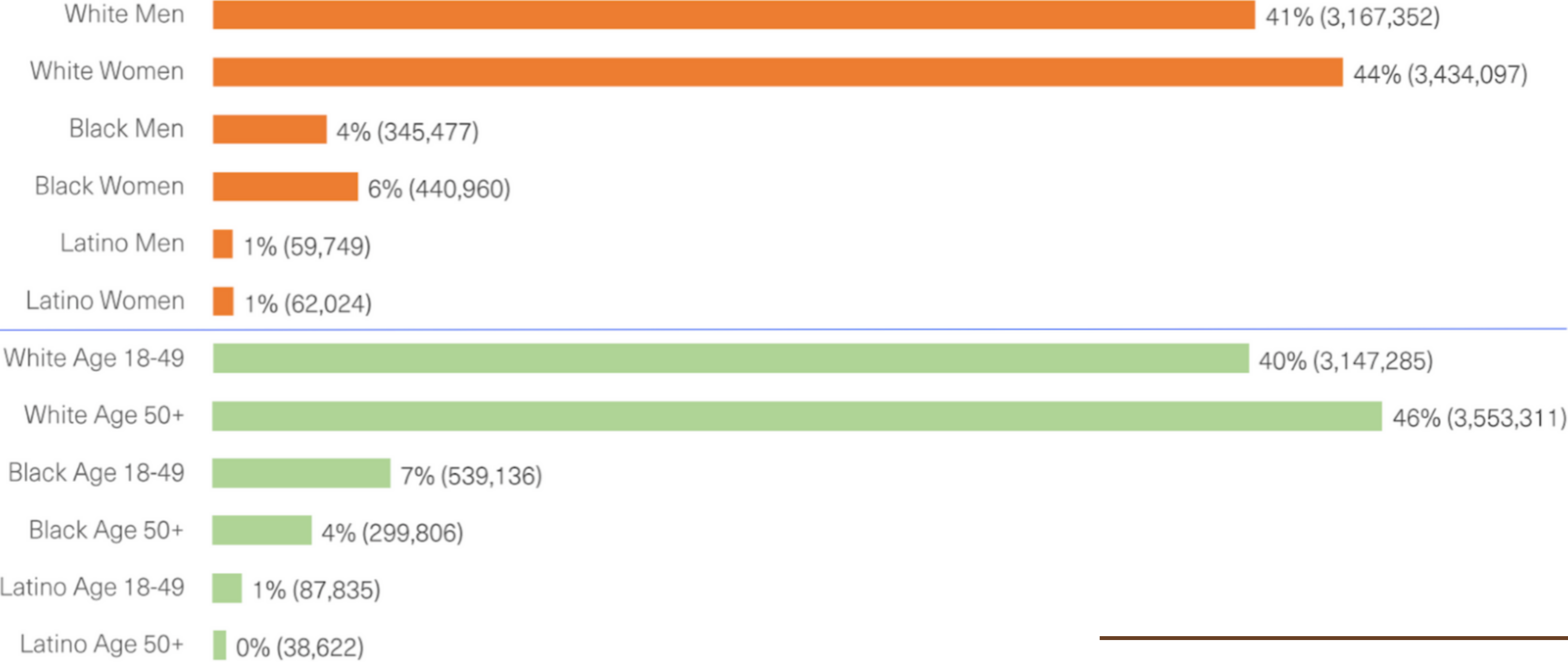
Our analysis found that Ohio's Registered Voter electorate is about 86% white, compared to 82% of the citizen voting age population who are white. While the registered voter population is more white than the population at large, there is a more even split of voters by age. Most voters are unaffiliated with a specific political party.

OHIO'S REGISTERED VOTER ELECTORATE



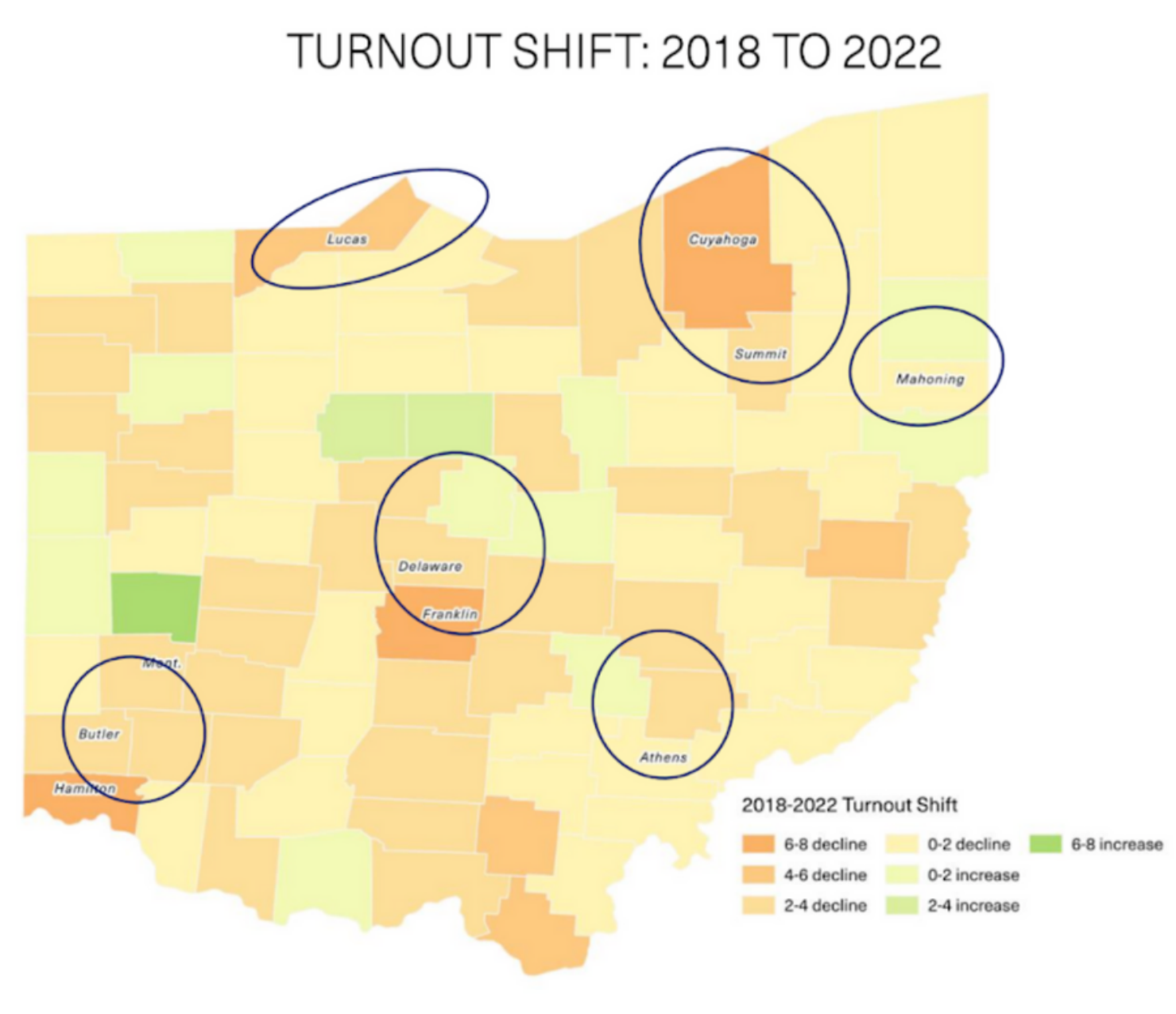
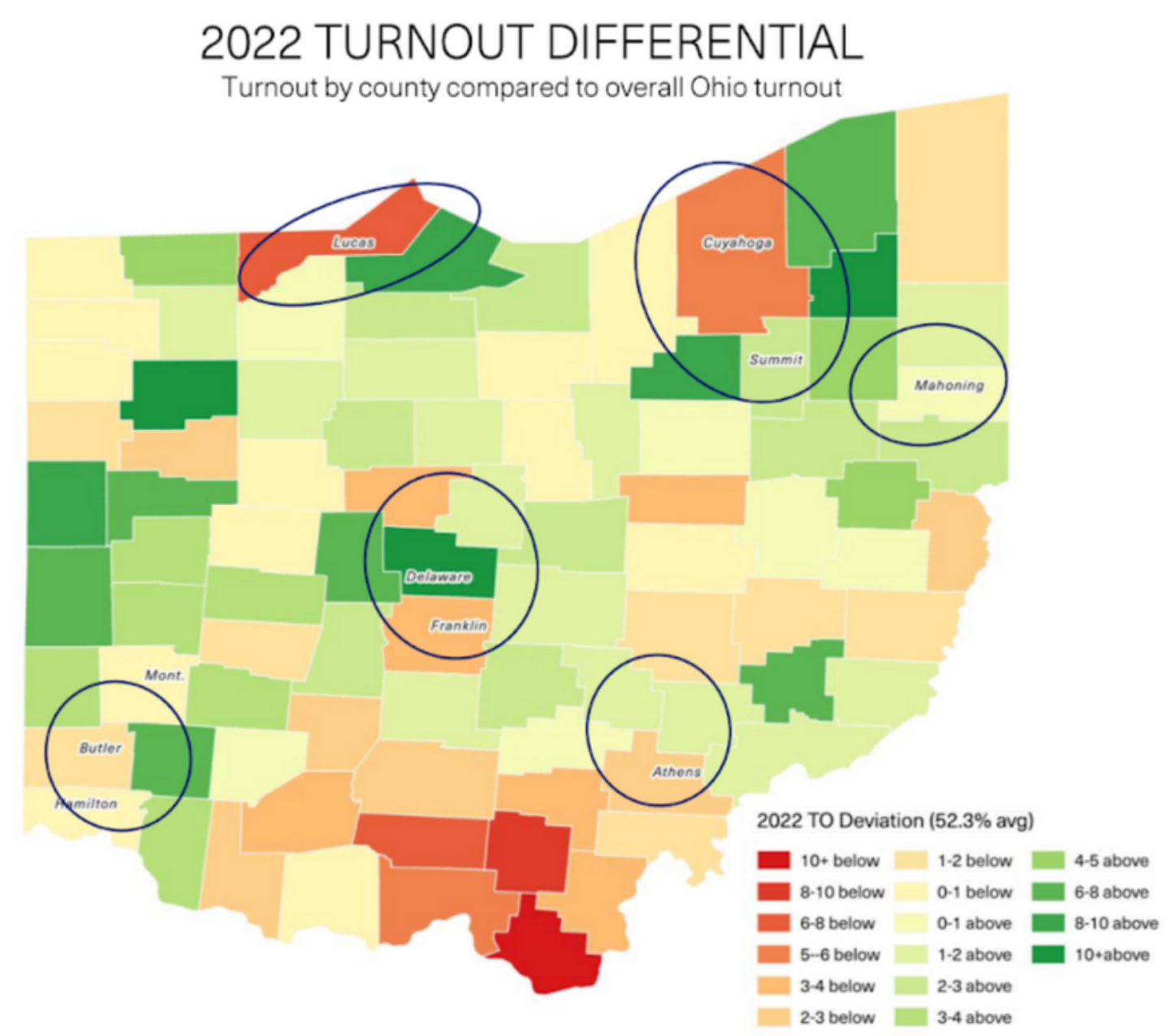
Black and Latino Registered Voters tend to skew younger compared to white Registered Voters; women make up a majority of voting blocs across race.

OHIO'S REGISTERED VOTER ELECTORATE



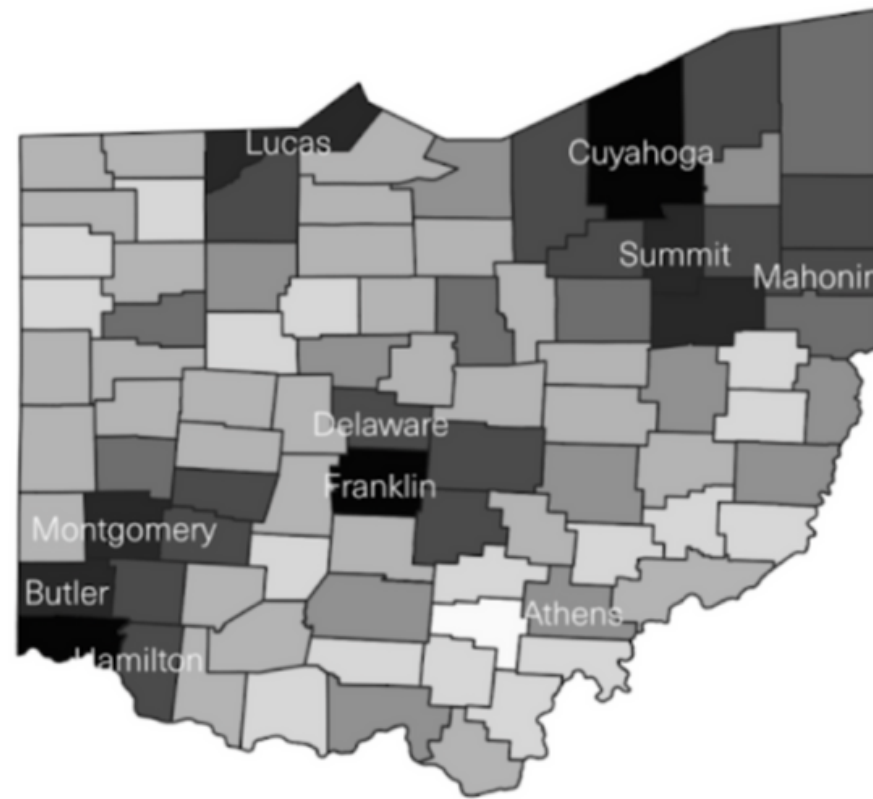
The three major urban areas - Cuyahoga and Summit counties (Cleveland, Akron & suburbs), Franklin and Delaware counties (Columbus and suburbs) and Hamilton and Butler counties (Cincinnati and its suburbs) contain a combined 3.08 million voters - 40% of all the Registered Voters in the state. Lucas County (Toledo) and Mahoning County (Youngstown) are also crucial - they contain an additional 447,000 Registered Voters. The three major urban areas were also the site of large voter turnout declines from the 2018 to the 2022 midterms. While turnout in Ohio dropped 3.4 points statewide, Cuyahoga, Franklin and Hamilton counties all saw 6-to-8 point declines.

Given their disproportionate representation in urban areas, lower turnout in those counties translates to drops in voter participation by Black and young voters. Our examination of voter activity and registration levels can provide a better understanding of how to reverse declining voter turnout, particularly in cities.

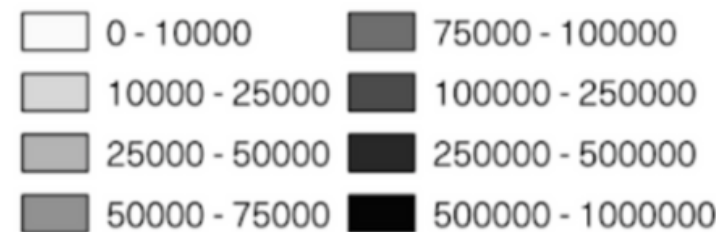


Disparities in Registration

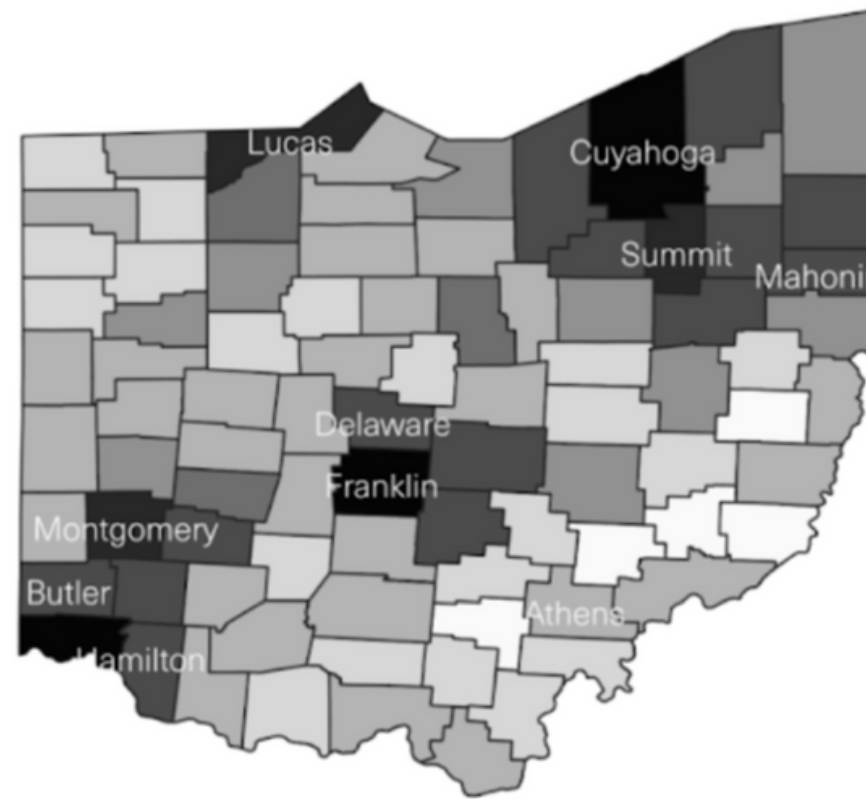
Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP)



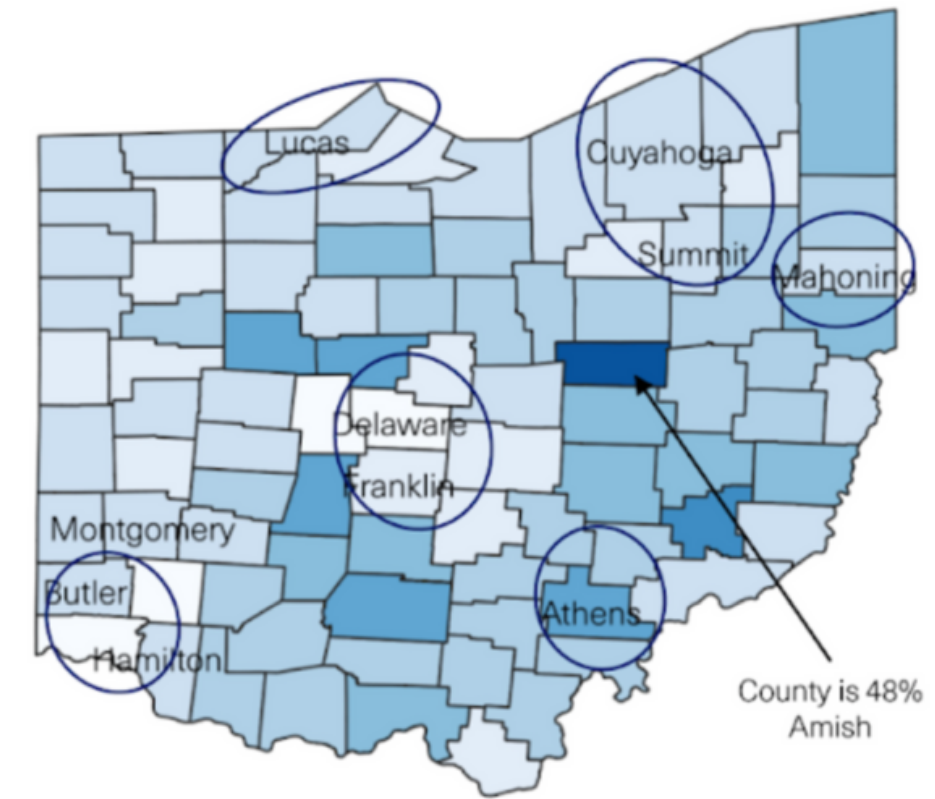
CVAP / RV Pop



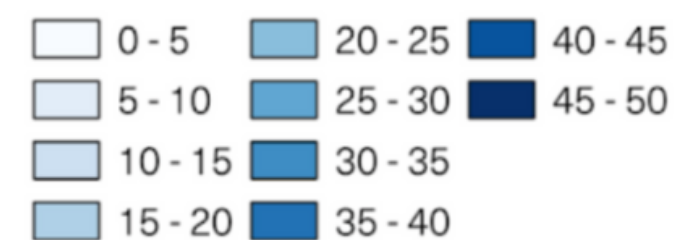
Registered Voters



Gap between CVAP and RV
(as a % of CVAP)

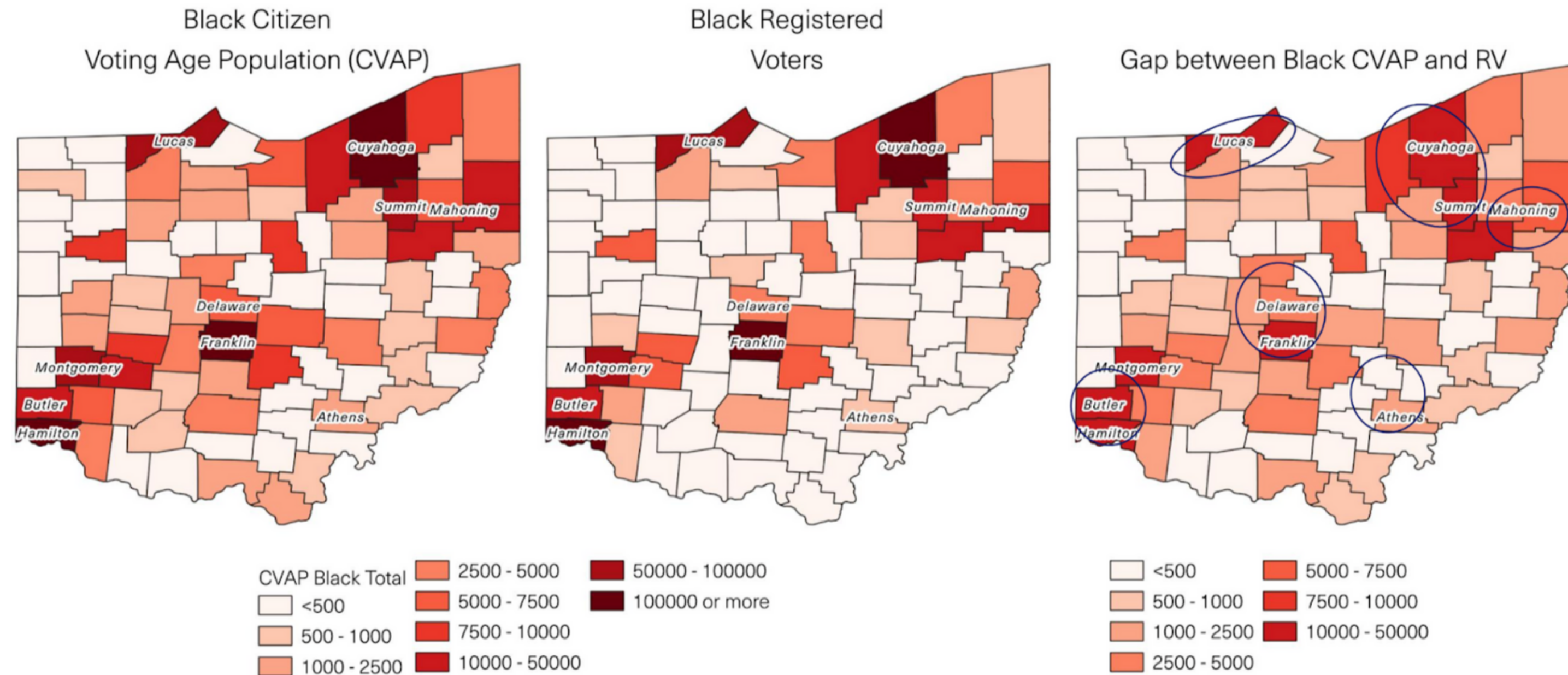


CVAP - RV Gap (%)



Several major urban and suburban counties, particularly Cuyahoga, Summit and Lucas have at least a 10-point gap between registered Democrats and the voting age population. In Cuyahoga county alone, this is equal to 114K Unregistered Voters.

Disparities in Registration



Black voters particularly show a significant gap between the voting age population and the number of registered voters. The suburban counties outside of major urban areas (e.g., Summit & Lorain outside of Cleveland, Butler outside of Cincinnati) show at least a 30-point gap between the Black CVAP and Black Registered Voters.

Unregistered Voters

- There are currently over 2 million Unregistered Voters in Ohio
 - These Unregistered Voters tend to mirror Ohio adults overall when it comes to their geographic distribution across the state – they are largely concentrated in dense, urban counties and their surrounding suburban counties.
 - Overwhelmingly (82%), Unregistered Voters in Ohio are white, followed by 12% who are Black. This mirrors Registered Voters (86% white, 11% Black).
 - A majority (57%) of Unregistered Voters are men, compared to just 39% who are women; this differs from Ohioans who make up Registered Voters, half (51%) of whom are women.
 - Unregistered Voters skew significantly older than Registered Voters in Ohio – 70% of Unregistered Voters in the state are 49 or older, compared to 50% of Registered Vote
-

Unregistered Voters

While the majority of unregistered voters in these urban counties are white, there is also a notable Black unregistered voter population. In Cuyahoga County, for instance, there is a significant number of unregistered Black voters, highlighting the need for inclusive voter registration campaigns that reach out to different racial groups.

Our analysis reveals that unregistered voters in these urban counties display distinct demographic characteristics compared to the general population. Unregistered voters in these urban counties tend to be relatively older. Around 70% of unregistered voters in the state are 49 years or older. This suggests that engaging older unregistered voters is a crucial part of any voter registration effort in these areas.

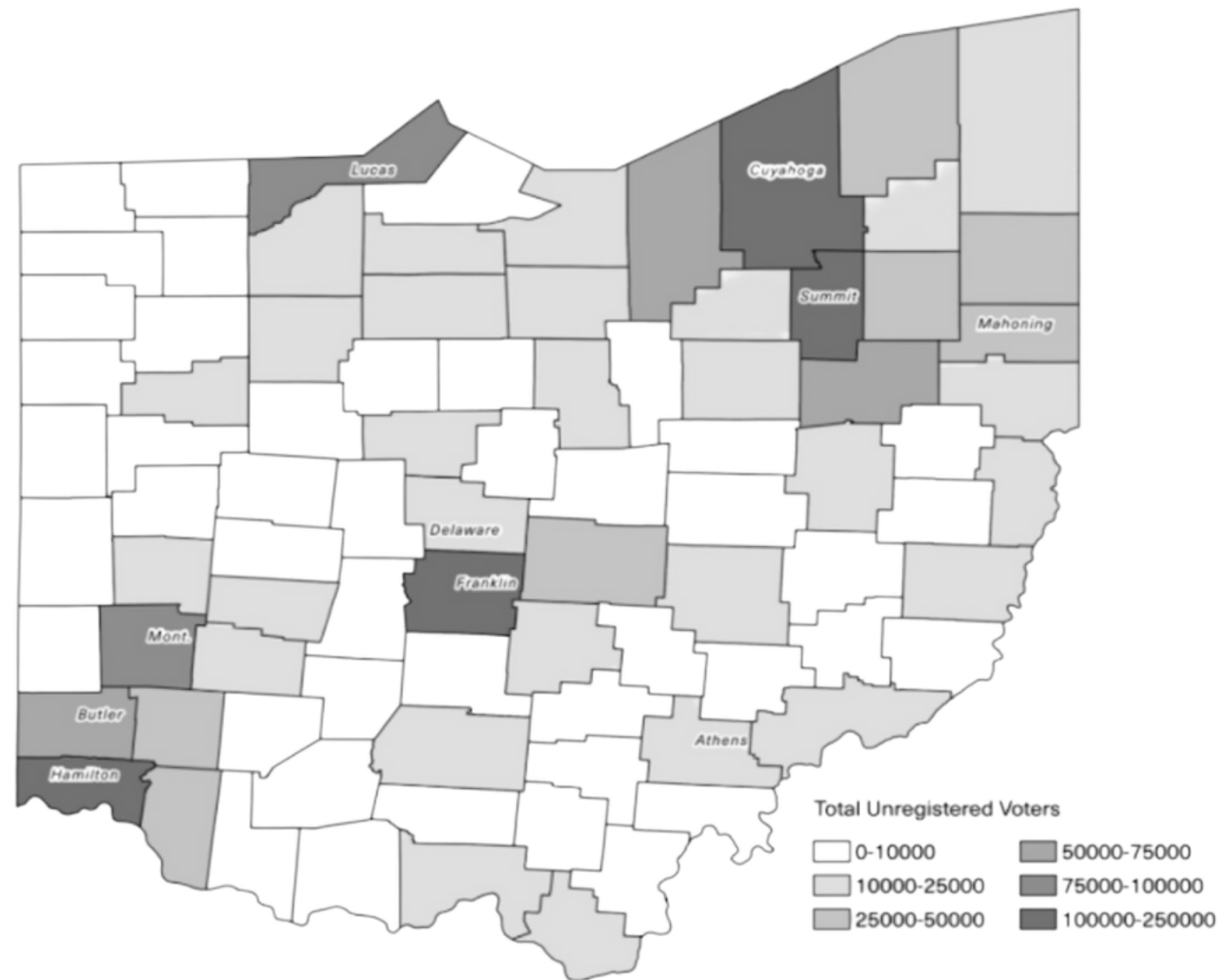
Unregistered voters tend to have a different gender distribution compared to registered voters. In these urban counties, the majority (57%) of unregistered voters are men, while only 39% are women. This gender disparity underscores the importance of tailoring voter registration outreach strategies to reach both men and women effectively.

Inactive Voters

There are currently over 700,000 Inactive Voters in Ohio, who, like Unregistered Voters, are concentrated around urban areas.

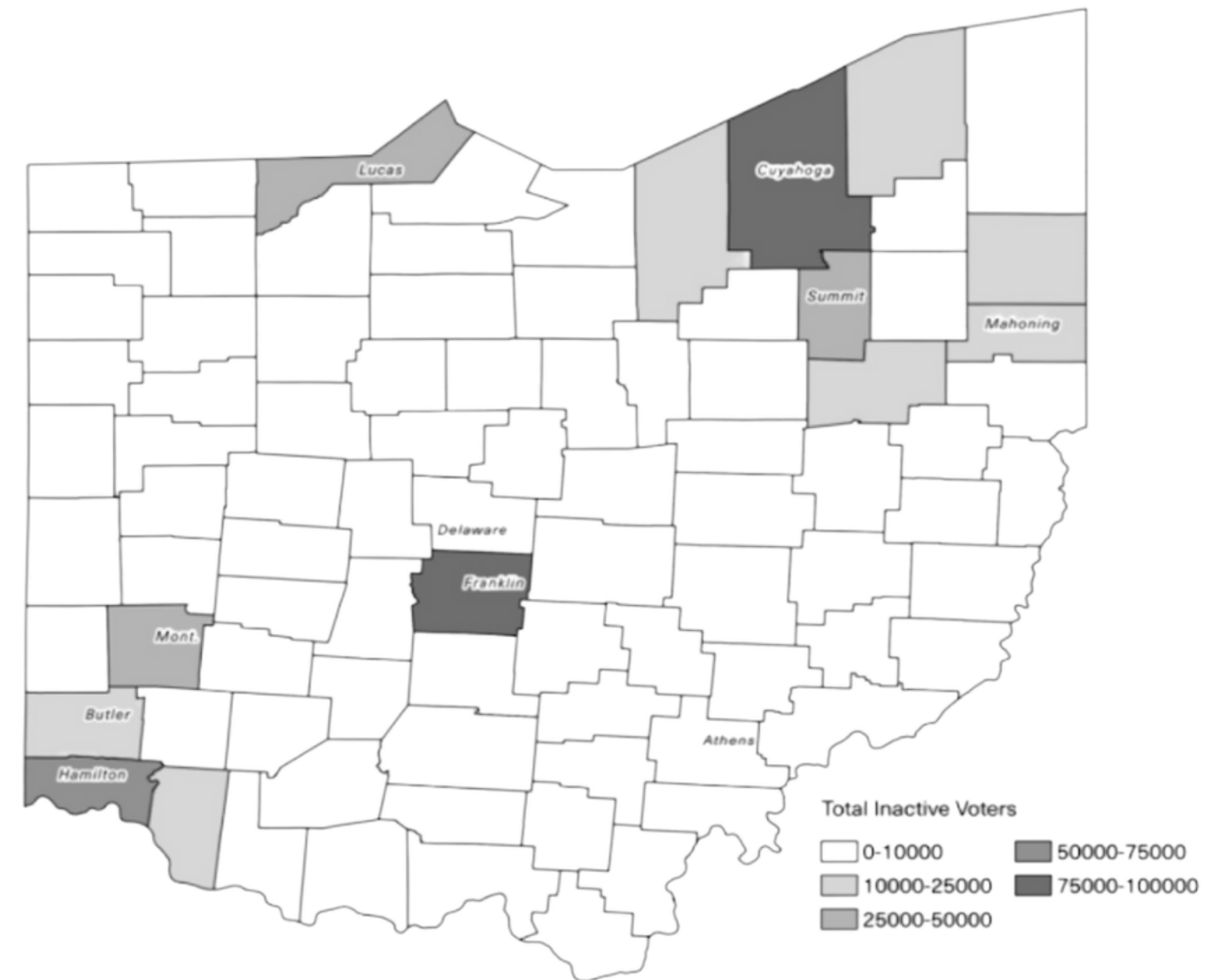
Unregistered TOTAL

(Total: 2,029,664)

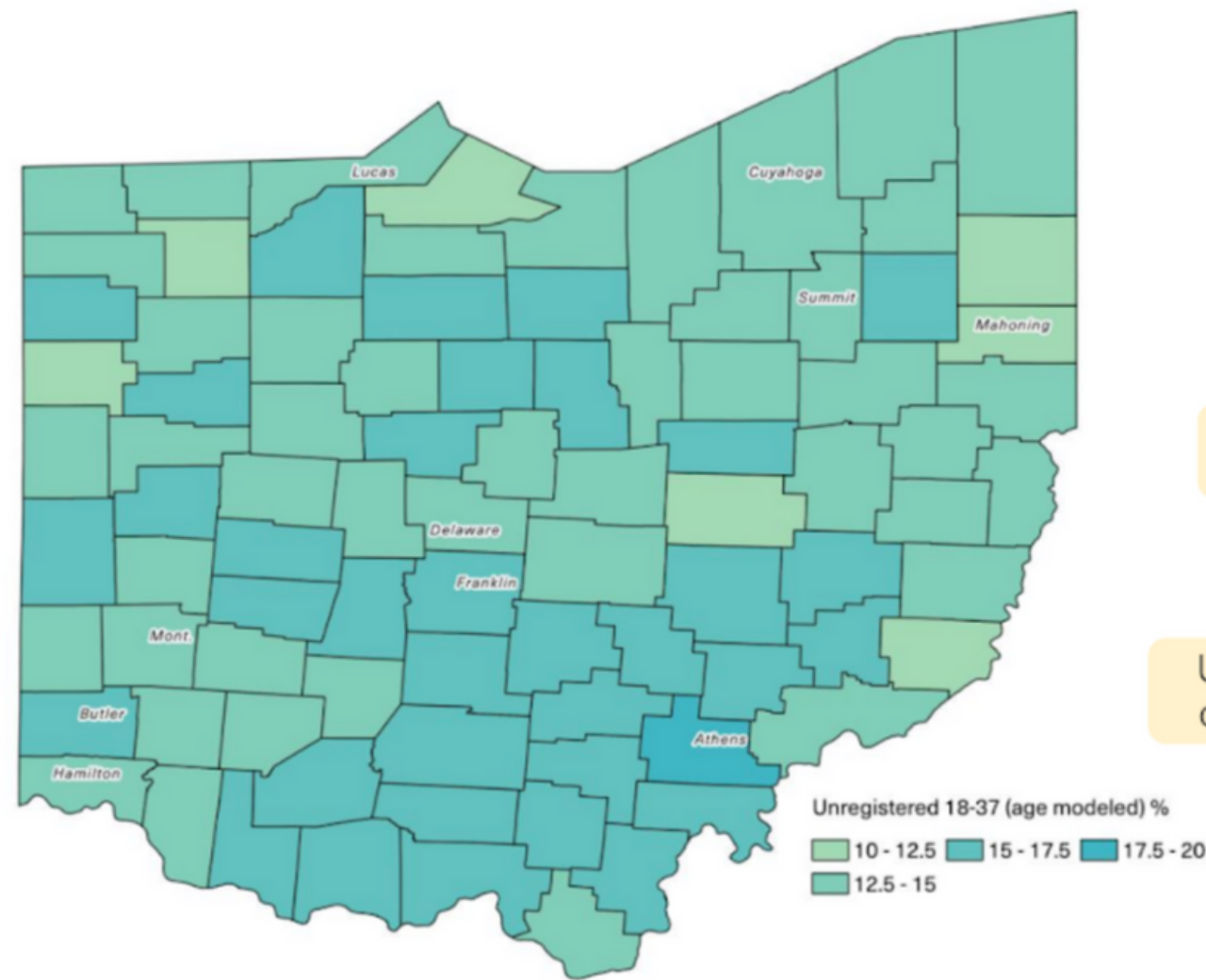


Inactive TOTAL

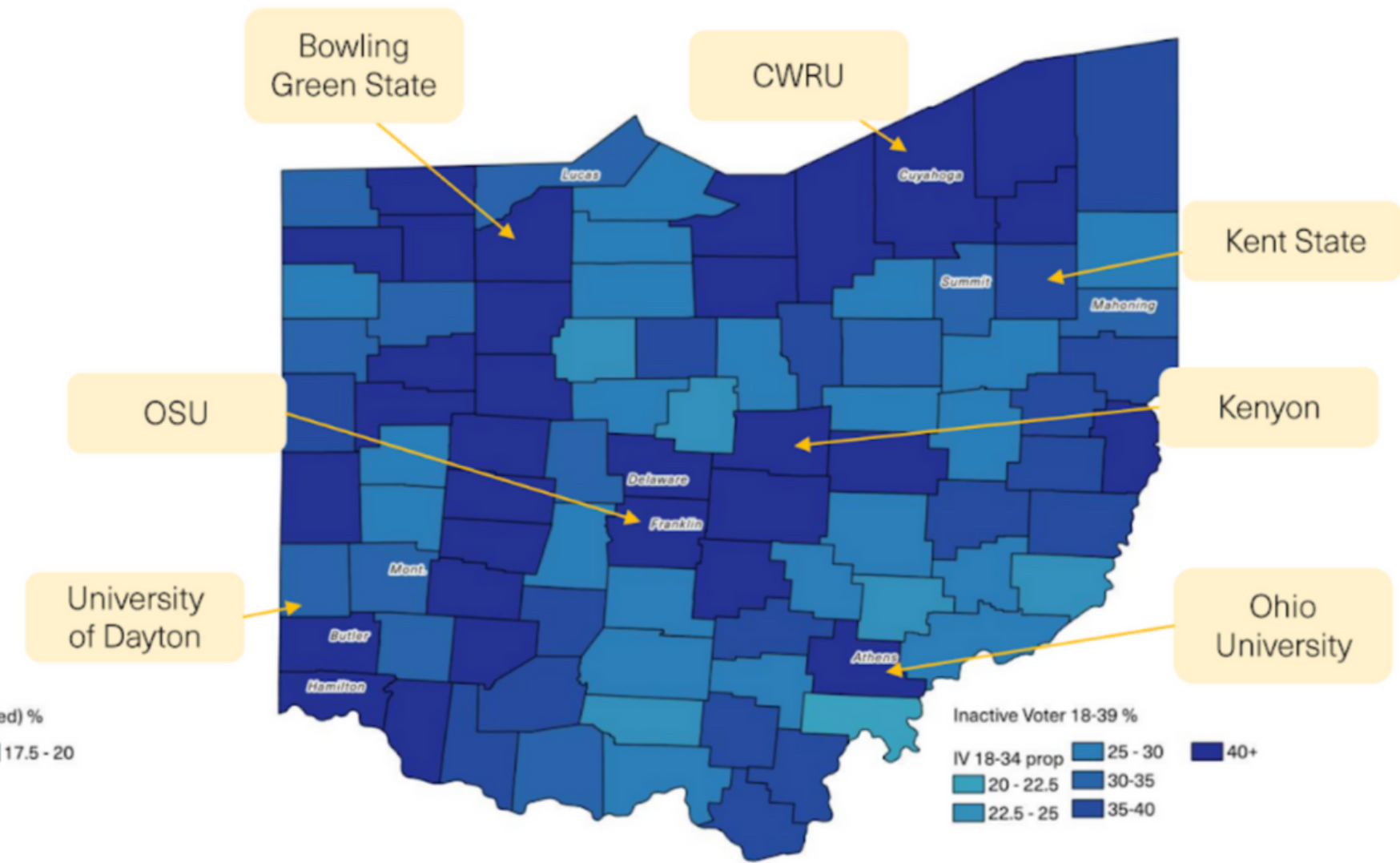
(Total: 707,382)



Unregistered Voters – AGES 18-37
(NOTE: Modeled Age)
Total: 305,557



Inactive Voters – AGES 18-34
Total: 218,384



Inactive Voters skew much younger than Unregistered Voters. While their geographic distribution mirrors that of Ohioans generally, younger Inactive Voters are additionally concentrated in counties with university presence, such as Athens (Ohio University) or Wood County (Bowling Green State University). Approximately two in three (64%) inactive voters are under the age of 50. This youthful demographic suggests that efforts to mobilize the youth vote should focus on individuals who are already registered but are not making it to the polls.

Overall, unlike unregistered voters, where a majority are men, a slight majority (52%) of inactive voters in these urban counties are women. This gender distribution is distinct from the broader registered voter population.

Compared to Unregistered Voters, Inactive Voters are more likely to be Black. One in five (19%) Inactive Voters are Black compared to 11% of Registered Voters overall. This racial disparity highlights the importance of continued voter outreach efforts to ensure that Black voters remain active and engaged. ***Statewide, the number of unregistered and inactive Black voters exceeds the margin of victory in the 2022 Senate Race.***

Unregistered Voters – BLACK
Total: 241,775

Top 5 Counties	Total Unregistered Voters
CUYAHOGA	80,734
FRANKLIN	43,968
HAMILTON	31,427
MONTGOMERY	21,188
LUCAS	14,505

Inactive Voters – BLACK
Total:134,860

Top 5 Counties	Total Inactive Voters
CUYAHOGA	44,472
FRANKLIN	24,314
HAMILTON	20,497
LUCAS	10,220
MONTGOMERY	9,819

Unregistered TOTAL
(Total: 2,029,664)

Top 5 Counties	Total Unregistered Voters
CUYAHOGA	247,408
FRANKLIN	208,819
HAMILTON	140,265
SUMMIT	107,454
LUCAS	87,430

Inactive TOTAL
(Total: 707,382)

Top 5 Counties	Total Inactive Voters
CUYAHOGA	94,774
FRANKLIN	78,636
HAMILTON	54,306
LUCAS	35,941
MONTGOMERY	32,581

Inactive Voters

Registered Voters	% who voted in last 3 elections
All Black voters	31%
Black men	30%
Black women	34%
Younger Black voters	19%
Older Black voters	49%

Within the Black voting population, there are gender and age gaps in participation rates. Black men are less likely to be regulars at the polls than their female counterparts. Young Black Registered Voters are less likely than older Black voters to be consistently voting every election.

Voter outreach efforts to Black voters cannot stop at registration but must continue after to ensure Black voters remain active.

Conclusion

The analysis of unregistered and inactive voters in Ohio underscores the urgency and importance of targeted strategies to revitalize the democratic process in the state. The decline in voter turnout, especially in densely populated urban counties, from 2018 to 2022 is a cause for concern. This report highlights several key findings and the potential actions that can be taken to address the challenges posed by unregistered and inactive voters.



KEY FINDINGS



- **Significant Turnout Decline:** Ohio experienced a substantial decline in voter turnout from the 2018 to the 2022 midterm elections, with turnout dropping by 3.4 percentage points statewide. This decline was most pronounced in densely populated urban counties, including Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton, where turnout dropped by 6 to 8 percentage points.
- **Urban Concentration:** Ohio's three major urban areas—Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton counties—contain a combined 3.08 million voters, representing 40% of all registered voters in the state. These urban counties witnessed significant voter turnout declines from 2018 to 2022.
- **Large Gaps in Registration:** Several major urban and suburban counties, such as Cuyahoga, Summit, and Lucas, exhibited significant gaps between the number of registered Democrats and the voting-age population. For example, Cuyahoga County had a 10-point gap, equivalent to 114,000 unregistered voters. Black voters in these areas also faced substantial registration gaps.
- **Sizeable Unregistered Voter Population:** Ohio is home to over 2 million unregistered voters, primarily concentrated in densely populated urban counties and their surrounding suburban areas. Approximately 82% of unregistered voters in Ohio are white, and 12% are Black. These unregistered voters tend to be relatively older, with about 70% aged 49 or older.
- **Large Inactive Voter Population:** The state has more than 700,000 inactive voters, who, like unregistered voters, are concentrated in urban areas. Inactive voters are generally younger than unregistered voters, with around 64% being under the age of 50. Notably, 19% of inactive voters are Black, compared to 11% of registered voters overall.
- **Missing Black Voters:** The 377,000 combined inactive Black voters (most in urban counties) and unregistered Black voters (in urban & key suburban counties) exceeds the 253,000 vote margin of victory in the 2022 race for US Senate.

These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted efforts to engage both unregistered and inactive voters, particularly in Ohio's major urban counties and suburban counties in Ohio's major metro areas. By addressing these gaps, Ohio can work toward revitalizing its democratic process, offsetting recent turnout declines, and ensuring a more inclusive and representative electoral system.

The Path Forward

Harnessing the potential of unregistered and inactive voters, particularly in urban areas, presents a substantial opportunity to offset recent declines in turnout and influence future elections in Ohio. Targeted outreach, comprehensive voter registration campaigns, and continued engagement efforts are essential components of this path forward.

Efforts must go beyond registration; they must focus on motivating voters to actively participate in elections, especially among demographic groups like young and Black voters. The collective power of these unregistered and inactive voters has the potential to reshape Ohio's electoral landscape and strengthen the foundation of its democratic process.

In conclusion, the findings of this report underscore the critical role that unregistered and inactive voters play in Ohio's electoral landscape. Addressing the challenges posed by declining turnout and demographic disparities requires immediate and sustained action. By implementing the recommended strategies, Ohio can build a more inclusive and representative democracy that reflects the diverse voices of its citizens.

A large, polished metal gavel rests on a tiered stone pedestal in the foreground. The background features a grand, multi-story classical building with numerous windows and ornate architectural details. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall tone is serious and authoritative.

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