

# The Ride to Vote

**CASE STUDY:** REAL WORLD IMPACT OF RESEARCH



In 2018, major ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft offered free or discounted rides to the polls on Election Day.

This initiative was the direct result of research from Tisch College's CIRCLE showing that lack of transportation was a major reason why many young people—especially youth of color—did not cast a ballot in previous elections. It's a powerful example of the real-world impact of our research.

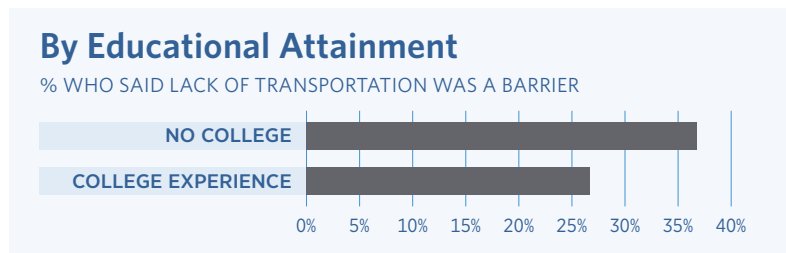
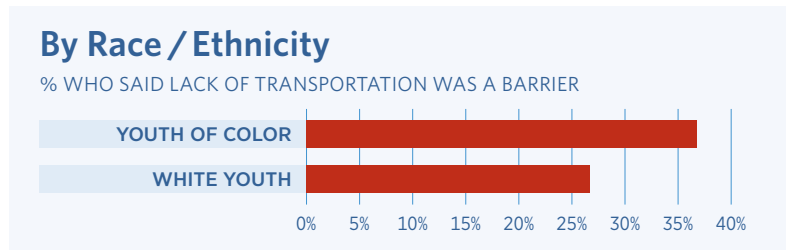
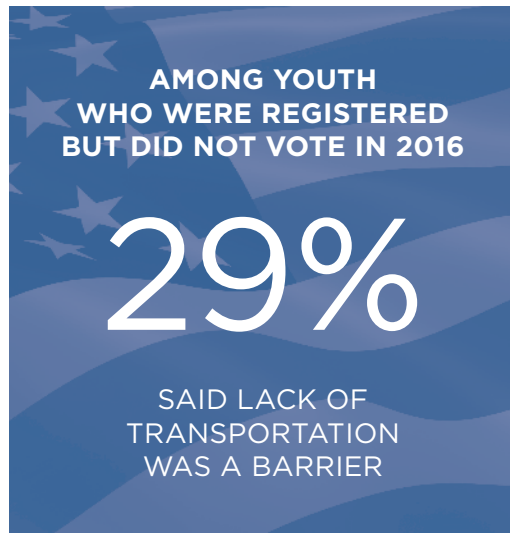
## The Story

CIRCLE Director Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg serves on the Executive Board of the TurboVote Challenge, a coalition that advises corporate giants like Amazon, Facebook, Google, Starbucks, and Microsoft on how to advance and support nonpartisan voter education and engagement. In 2018, she and CIRCLE's Director of Impact, Abby Kiesa, participated in the plenary session of the TurboVote Challenge Summit, where they presented brand-new research on barriers to voting, such as lack of transportation. After the panel, a representative from Lyft approached the CIRCLE leaders and asked them to publish the research so she could share it with the company's leadership team.

As a result, in August 2018, Lyft announced it would offer half-price rides to the polls for all customers, and free rides for marginalized communities through several nonprofit partners. In October, Uber followed suit by offering its own discounted or free rides to the polls. By Election Day, other major transportation companies like Lime, ZipCar, and Citi Bike had joined the club. Young people, who are by far the most frequent users of ride-sharing services, were especially poised to benefit.

## The Data

Decades of research have shown that young people can face significant barriers when trying to vote. Many register to vote but do not end up casting a ballot—we call this undermobilization. In a survey of young people (ages 18-29) who were registered but did not go on to vote in 2016, 29% said not having a ride to the polls was a factor in why they didn't cast a ballot. For some segments of the youth population, the numbers were higher: 38% of young people of color said lack of transportation prevented them from voting, as did 35% of youth without college experience. These disparities are especially troubling. They both reflect and perpetuate profound inequities in political engagement by race and educational attainment, and they threaten the foundational principle that all people, equally, should have the ability to participate in our democracy.



## The Impact

While we do not know exactly how many people took advantage of free or discounted rides, we do know that 2018 was a watershed year for young people's political engagement. Youth voter turnout (the percentage of eligible young people who cast a ballot) was the highest in decades for a midterm election. We estimate that 28% of young people voted in 2018, more than double the approximately 13% of youth who voted in 2014. Their votes mattered, making a difference in House and Senate races around the country.

Beyond increased voter participation in the 2018 midterms, the ride-share initiatives were part of a larger, important trend of corporate leaders using their massive platforms to promote political engagement. Lyft gave drivers voter registration handouts and used push notifications to remind users about registration deadlines. Uber created a "Get to the Polls" button that helped riders find their voting location and book a ride; it also shared registration resources through its app. They joined social media giants like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat in rolling out tools to facilitate, encourage, and celebrate voting. ■

**The critical task of increasing and diversifying youth civic engagement belongs to all of us, in a range of sectors.** When private enterprises are given timely, actionable research, they can do their part to support young voters and strengthen access to the democratic process.