

Voter Registration Among Young People in 2008

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In 2000, voter registration among young people reached its lowest level (55%). Since then, young voters' registration has been higher, and the rate stayed about the same in 2004 and 2008. According to analysis of the Census Current Population Survey November Voting Supplement, 61% of young people age 18-29 registered to vote in 2008 Presidential Election. Registration is important because registering to vote is sometimes more difficult than the act of voting itself.

Table 1 – Voter Registration Rates Among 18-29 year old Citizens, by type of Election Year

<i>Presidential Election Years</i>	<i>Voter Registration Rates Among 18-to 29-year-old Citizens</i>	<i>Midterm Election Years</i>	<i>Voter Registration Rates Among 18-to 29-year-old Citizens</i>
1972*	64%	1974*	48%
1976*	58%	1978	48%
1980	58%	1982	50%
1984	60%	1986	51%
1988	56%	1990	49%
1992	62%	1994	50%
1996	62%	1998	55%
2000	55%	2002	56%
2004	60%	2006	51%
2008	61%		

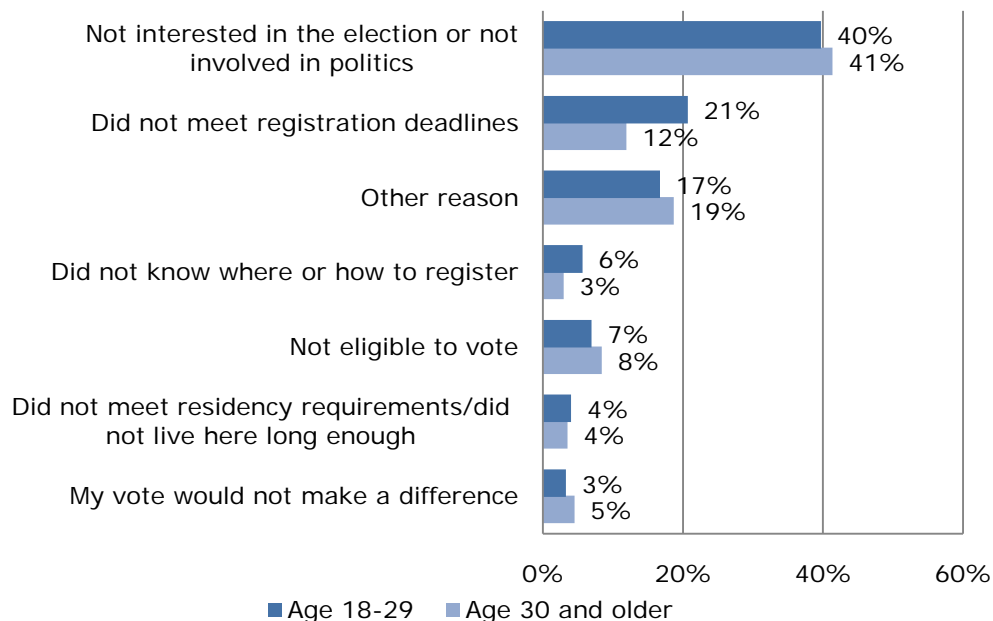
Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 1972-2008. 1972-1976 registration rates are computed for residents.

Registration itself is a multi-step process that requires knowledge about where to register, how to register, and registration deadlines. Some state lawmakers have taken

steps to streamline the process to make registering more easily accessible to citizens. Allowing people to register on Election Day registration is one such reform. According to CIRCLE Fact Sheet “State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout (2009),” Election Day registration (EDR) alleviates the step of knowing when the registration deadline. According to the research, “on average, 59% of young Americans whose home state offered EDR voted; nine percentage points higher than those who did not live in EDR states.”ⁱⁱ

Since 2004, the gap in registration rates between young people age 18 to 29 and adults age 30 and over has closed (from 15 percentage points in 2004 to 12 percentage points in 2008.) As seen in Figure 1, why people are not registered varies by age. EDR has the potential to especially affect young people – 21% of those age 18 to 29 who are not registered said it was because they did not meet registration deadlines, compared to 12% of those over age 30. Young people were no more likely than older people to cite lack of interest as the main reason they did not vote in 2008 (40% versus 41%, respectively.)

Figure 1: Main Reason that people Were Not Registered, 2008

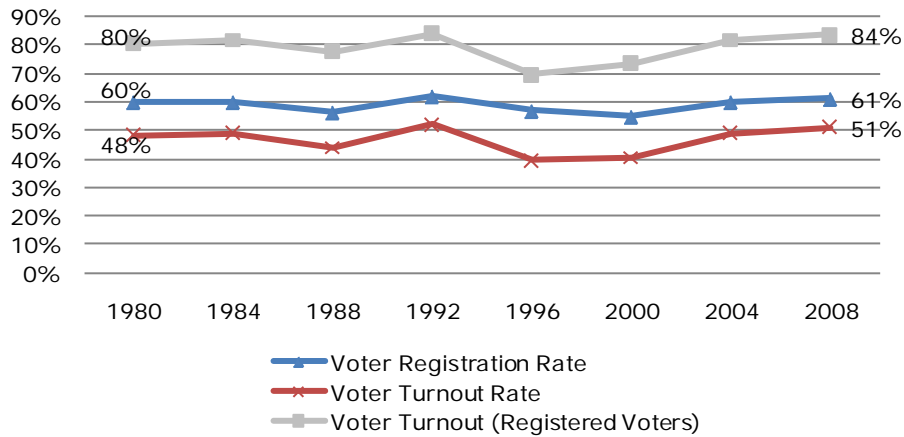


Source: Authors tabulations from the 2008 Current Population Survey November Supplement

Voter Registration and Voter Turnout Rates

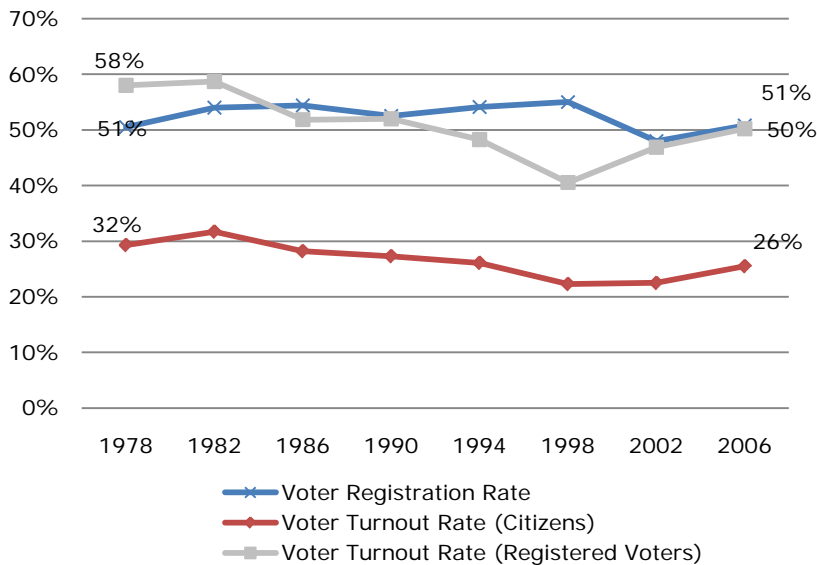
Voter turnout rates are positively related with voter registration rates in Presidential elections (with one exception since 1972). In 2008, voter turnout among registered voters was 84%, up two percentage points from 2004. This pattern does not hold true for midterm elections, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 2: Voter Turnout and Registration Rates (Ages 18-29) in Presidential Elections, 1980-2008



Source: Authors tabulations from the Current Population Survey, 1980-2008

Figure 3: Voter Turnout and Registration Rates (Ages 18-29) in Midterm Elections, 1978-2006



Source: Authors tabulations from the Current Population Survey, 1978 -2008

How Citizens Register to Vote

In 2008, young people ages 18 to 29 were most likely to register at the department of motor vehicles, whereas those 30 and older were the most likely to register at a town hall or county/government registration office.

Table 2 - How Citizens Registered to Vote in 2006 and 2004, by Age						
	18-29			30 and older		
	<i>2008</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2004</i>
<i>At a department of motor vehicles (for example, when obtaining a driver's license or other identification card)</i>	27%	30%	27%	20%	19%	18%
<i>Registered by mail</i>	15%	14%	14%	13%	13%	12%
<i>Don't Know</i>	14%	14%	13%	20%	18%	17%
<i>At a school, hospital, or on campus</i>	12%	13%	12%	5%	6%	4%
<i>Went to a town hall or county/government registration office</i>	13%	12%	14%	24%	23%	27%
<i>Filled out form at a registration drive (library, post office, or someone came to your door)</i>	7%	6%	9%	6%	6%	8%
<i>Registered at polling place (on election day or primary day)</i>	6%	6%	5%	7%	8%	7%
<i>Other</i>	5%	4%	5%	4%	6%	6%
<i>At a public assistance agency (for example, a Medicaid, AFDC, or Food Stamps office, an office serving disabled persons, or an unemployment office)</i>	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 2004-2008

Registration Rates by Demographic Subgroups, 1976 – 2008

Tables 3-5 show registration rates in presidential and midterm election year by gender, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, marital status and urbanicity.

Young women were more likely than young men to be registered to vote in 2008 (64.5% versus 57.7%). Young African Americans had the highest registration rate three times since 1972 (including 2008) in Presidential Election years. They were also more likely to have registered in three Midterm Elections compared to any other racial/ethnic group. In 2008, young African-Americans had the highest registration rate among all racial/ethnic groups (63.9%) for the first time since 2000.

Table 3 – Registration Rates of 18-29 year old Citizens by Gender and Race							
		Gender		Race and Ethnicity			
Presidential Election Years	<i>All 18-29s</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Latino</i>	<i>Asian</i>
1972	64.1%	63.4%	64.6%	65.3%	54.9%	***	***
1976	57.6%	57.0%	58.3%	60.2%	47.0%	40.5%	***
1980	57.8%	56.9%	58.7%	60.2%	49.8%	40.8%	***
1984	60.0%	57.9%	62.0%	60.8%	62.2%	47.7%	***
1988	56.4%	54.0%	58.5%	57.3%	56.0%	47.0%	***
1992	62.0%	60.0%	63.9%	63.9%	58.7%	51.3%	***
1996	62.4%	60.2%	64.5%	63.8%	63.2%	52.1%	58.5%
2000	54.9%	52.1%	57.5%	56.8%	56.9%	43.6%	40.7%
2004	60.0%	56.8%	63.2%	63.3%	59.8%	47.5%	42.1%
2008	61.0%	57.7%	64.5%	62.6%	63.9%	53.4%	52.8%
		Gender		Race and Ethnicity			
Midterm Election Years	<i>All 18-29s</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Latino</i>	<i>Asian</i>
1974	48.1%	48.1%	48.1%	49.7%	42.2%	34.8%	***
1978	47.9%	46.9%	48.8%	49.0%	44.8%	36.8%	***
1982	50.4%	49.8%	50.9%	51.5%	49.1%	37.7%	***
1986	50.9%	49.7%	52.1%	51.3%	54.2%	41.8%	***
1990	48.6%	47.7%	49.5%	49.6%	47.7%	40.8%	***
1994	49.6%	48.4%	50.8%	51.7%	47.0%	37.9%	37.7%
1998	55.0%	52.4%	57.5%	56.2%	57.3%	46.8%	42.3%
2002	56.2%	53.9%	58.3%	57.6%	58.6%	45.9%	49.6%
2006	50.8%	48.5%	53.0%	54.1%	46.2%	42.7%	37.8%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 1972-2008.
 '***' means that data was not available in these years.

As seen in Table 4, those who have higher levels of education are more likely to be registered to vote. Young people ages 18 to 29, with less than a high school diploma were registered at a rate of 35.2% in 2008, whereas 51.3% of young people with a high school diploma were registered. Young people with a B.A. or more were the most likely to register to vote (78.1%). In 2004, there was a small gap in registration rate between young married people and young single people. The married-single gap in registration is fairly new, appearing first around the 2000 Presidential election. In 2008, the gap widened; 67.3% of married young people were registered compared to the 59.8% of single young people ages 18 to 29.

Table 4 – Registration Rates of 18-to-29 year-old Citizens by Educational Attainment and Marital Status						
	<i>Educational Attainment</i>				<i>Marital Status</i>	
<i>Presidential Election Years</i>	<i>Less than High School</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>Some College</i>	<i>B.A. or more</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>
1972	37.0%	59.3%	77.0%	85.7%	***	***
1976	30.9%	49.9%	68.7%	82.8%	56.6%	58.8%
1980	29.3%	51.8%	68.2%	83.9%	57.9%	57.8%
1984	33.7%	53.4%	70.5%	83.6%	59.9%	60.1%
1988	31.6%	47.8%	66.0%	79.5%	56.0%	56.6%
1992	33.6%	52.4%	72.5%	85.5%	61.1%	62.6%
1996	37.1%	53.5%	71.6%	81.9%	62.2%	62.5%
2000	30.9%	46.1%	61.5%	80.0%	61.9%	52.4%
2004	34.4%	51.2%	68.9%	76.0%	63.1%	59.5%
2008	35.2%	51.3%	68.1%	78.1%	67.3%	59.8%
	<i>Educational Attainment</i>				<i>Marital Status</i>	
<i>Midterm Election Years</i>	<i>Less than High School</i>	<i>High School</i>	<i>Some College</i>	<i>B.A. or more</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Single</i>
1974	24.0%	44.3%	58.4%	65.9%	47.6%	48.8%
1978	25.4%	42.9%	57.2%	67.6%	48.4%	47.4%
1982	27.8%	46.5%	57.7%	70.8%	51.2%	49.7%
1986	29.3%	46.2%	58.9%	67.9%	52.1%	49.9%
1990	26.4%	41.1%	57.3%	66.9%	48.6%	48.7%
1994	25.5%	41.5%	58.8%	66.9%	50.7%	49.0%
1998	28.8%	47.1%	64.3%	72.3%	58.6%	53.2%
2002	31.6%	47.0%	64.0%	75.6%	53.5%	45.8%
2006	26.9%	42.0%	58.5%	65.7%	55.7%	48.9%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 1972-2008.
 '***' means that data was not available in these years.

Similar to 2004, in 2008 young people in rural areas had the lowest registration rates. Registration rates among young people in urban and suburban areas slightly increased between 2004 and 2008, compared to youth registration rate in rural areas which decreased approximately three percentage points.

Table 5 – Registration Rates of 18-to 29-year-old Citizens by Urbanicity

<i>Presidential Election Years</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
1972	***	***	***
1976	56.7%	58.1%	58.0%
1980	58.3%	55.7%	62.2%
1984	61.7%	56.7%	57.8%
1988	56.8%	54.5%	56.9%
1992	63.8%	63.8%	57.3%
1996	64.6%	62.8%	60.0%
2000	55.0%	54.5%	55.2%
2004	61.4%	59.9%	59.3%
2008	63.0%	61.2%	56.6%
<i>Midterm Election Years</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Suburban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
1974	48.9%	47.4%	48.3%
1978	48.1%	47.1%	49.5%
1982	50.3%	50.2%	51.9%
1986	50.3%	53.2%	48.6%
1990	49.6%	50.0%	48.9%
1994	50.0%	49.7%	49.7%
1998	54.5%	55.6%	55.3%
2002	56.6%	56.8%	54.6%
2006	50.4%	51.0%	51.3%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 1972-2008.
 '***' means that data was not available in these years.

State-by-State Look at Registration Rates among Young People

In 2008, young people (ages 18 to 29) in Washington DC, North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa and Michigan all reported high voter turnout.ⁱⁱⁱ According to previous research, three out of the five states have implemented election law reforms to ease the burden of voting.^{iv} North Dakota, for instance does not require advance registration. Moreover, Iowa and Michigan have both implemented reforms related to Election Day Registration. Iowa, Washington DC, and Minnesota also had three out of the five highest turnout rates among young voters.

Additionally, as seen in the appendix, the youth registration rates in Washington DC, Iowa and Michigan have been on an upward trajectory since 2000.

Table 6 Registration and Turnout Rates by State, Ages 18 to 29

State	18-to 29-Year-Old Registration Rate	18-to 29-Year-Old Voter Turnout	18-to 29-Year-Old Turnout Among Registered Voters
AL	66.7%	53.1%	79.6%
AK*	63.0%	49.3%	78.2%
AZ	63.6%	47.0%	73.9%
AR	46.6%	35.3%	75.7%
CA	59.9%	53.1%	88.7%
CO	58.0%	52.3%	90.2%
CT	58.0%	51.8%	89.4%
DE	63.3%	54.0%	85.3%
DC*	81.0%	76.0%	93.9%
FL	62.9%	53.3%	84.8%
GA	61.1%	50.9%	83.3%
HI	41.7%	30.9%	74.0%
ID*	52.9%	45.9%	86.8%
IL	60.1%	50.8%	84.5%
IN	59.5%	47.7%	80.2%
IA	72.7%	63.4%	87.2%
KS	52.5%	44.9%	85.6%
KY	61.3%	49.7%	81.1%
LA	66.1%	55.7%	84.2%
ME	65.6%	57.0%	86.8%
MD	63.4%	55.5%	87.6%
MA	55.4%	47.8%	86.3%
MI	70.8%	55.5%	78.4%
MN	74.4%	68.1%	91.5%
MS	65.5%	56.8%	86.7%
MO	68.4%	54.6%	79.9%
MT*	56.0%	46.4%	82.9%
NE	58.5%	47.6%	81.3%
NV	59.4%	48.6%	81.8%
NH	69.0%	62.0%	89.8%
NJ	63.1%	53.0%	84.0%
NM	59.3%	47.1%	79.4%
NY	55.9%	47.3%	84.7%
NC	65.3%	55.1%	84.3%
ND*	NA	56.6%	NA
OH	67.2%	55.2%	82.1%
OK	60.3%	47.6%	78.9%
OR	68.0%	59.2%	87.0%
PA	60.4%	52.9%	87.5%
RI*	62.3%	53.1%	85.3%
SC	61.6%	52.6%	85.4%
SD	57.9%	43.5%	75.1%
TN	56.9%	45.8%	80.5%
TX	54.8%	38.6%	70.5%
UT	44.3%	36.8%	83.0%
VT*	57.3%	48.4%	84.4%
VA	64.9%	58.7%	90.5%
WA	62.3%	55.3%	88.8%
WV	59.0%	47.5%	80.6%
WI	63.9%	57.5%	90.0%
WY*	61.6%	50.4%	81.9%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 2008

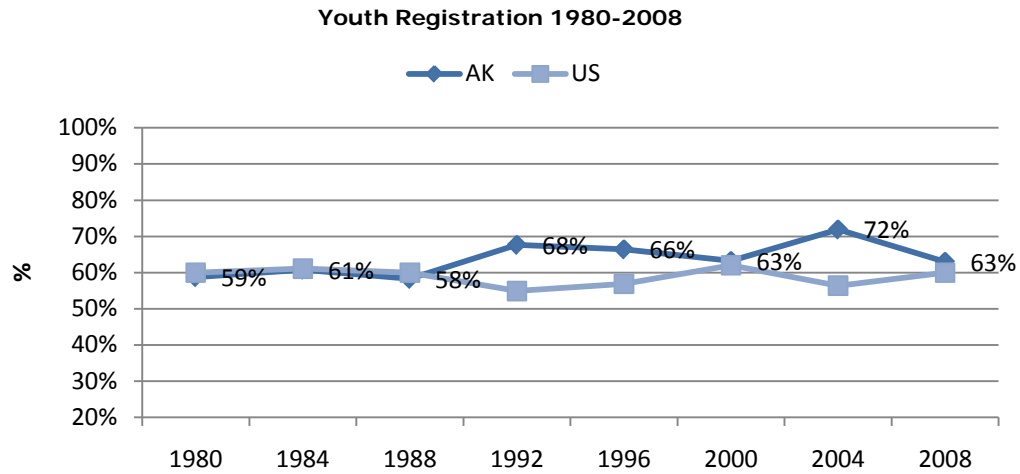
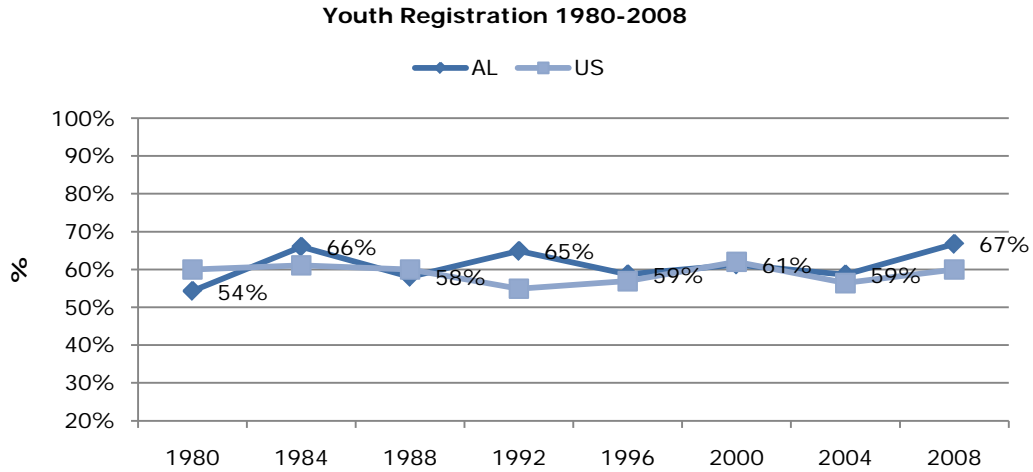
*Represents a small sample size.

Appendix

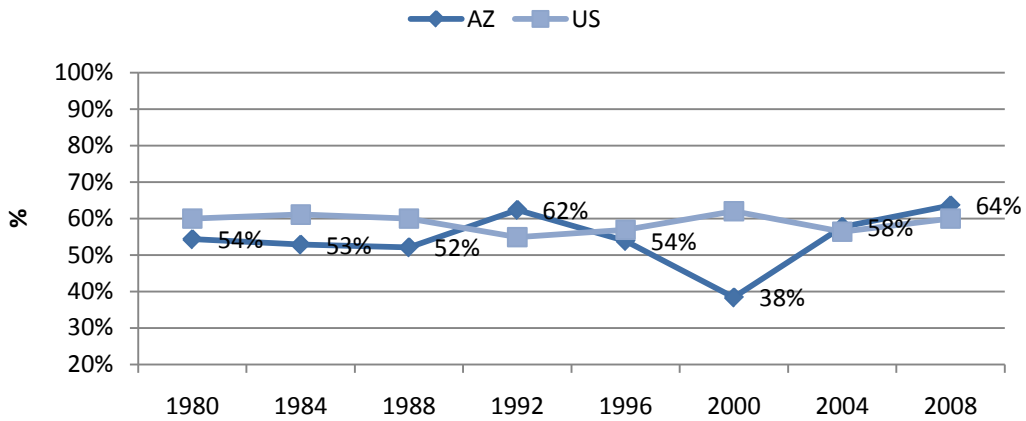
Youth Registration Rates by State (ages 18 to 29) 1980-2008

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, November (Voting) Supplement, 1980-2008.

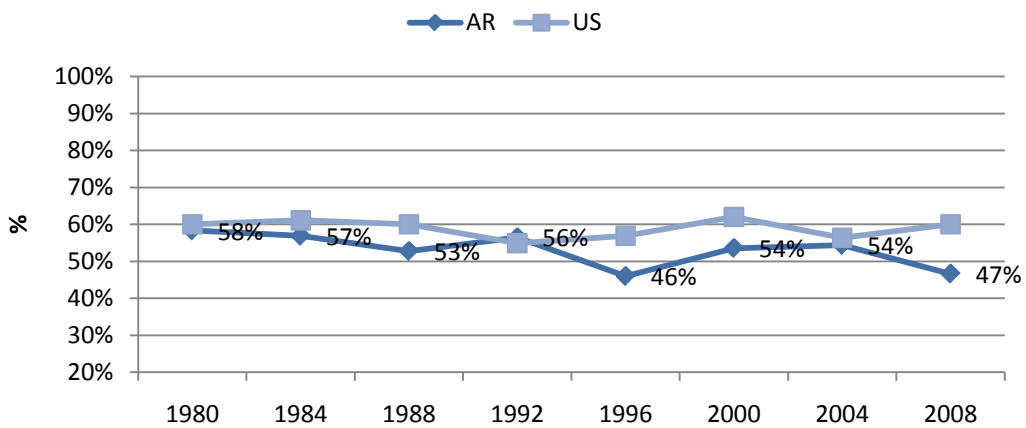
*North Dakota does not require registration, there is no graph below for ND.



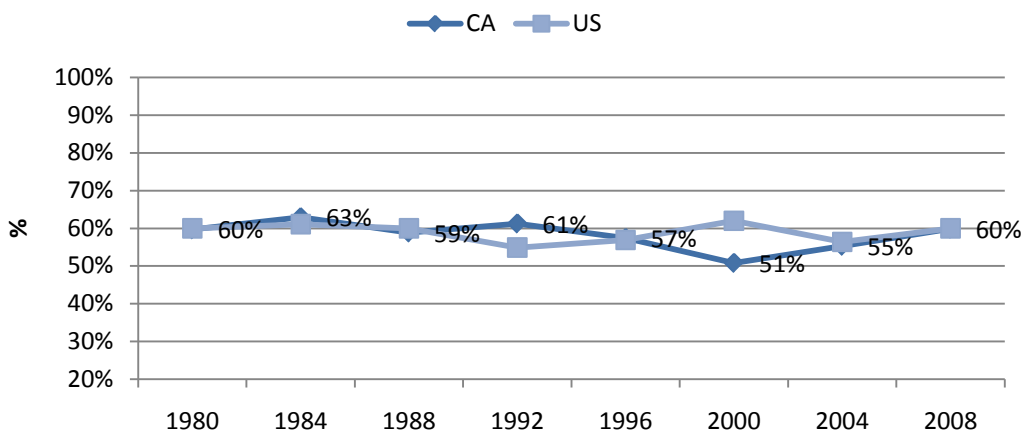
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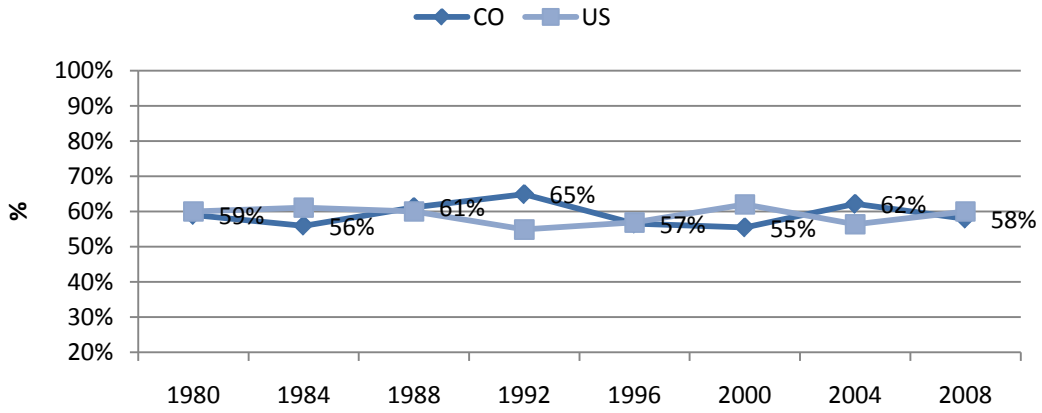
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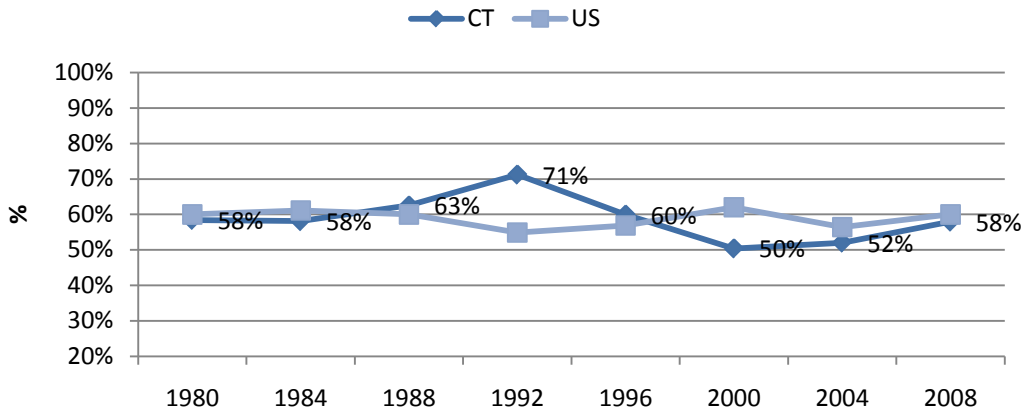
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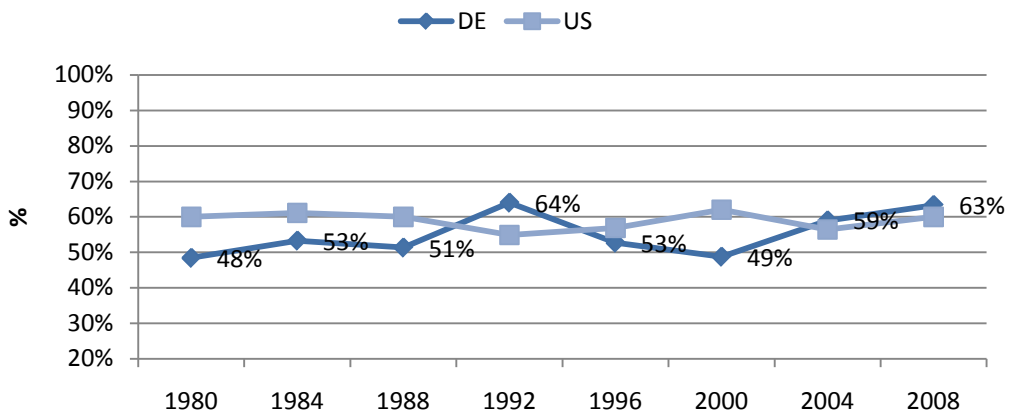
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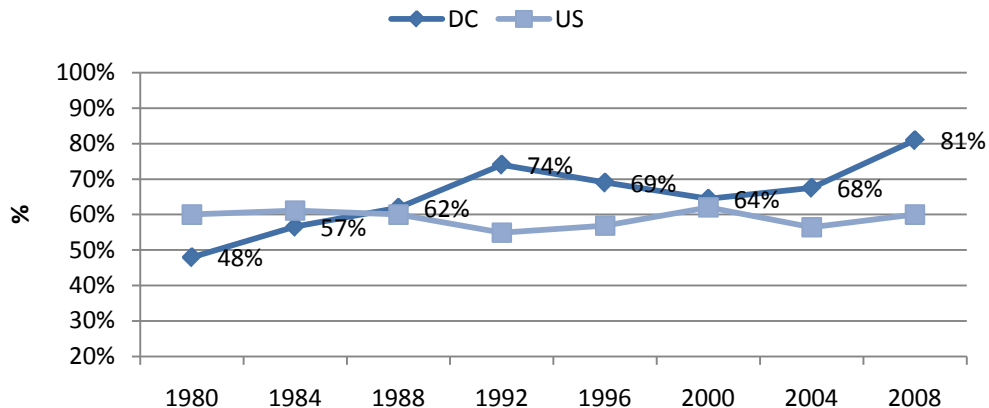
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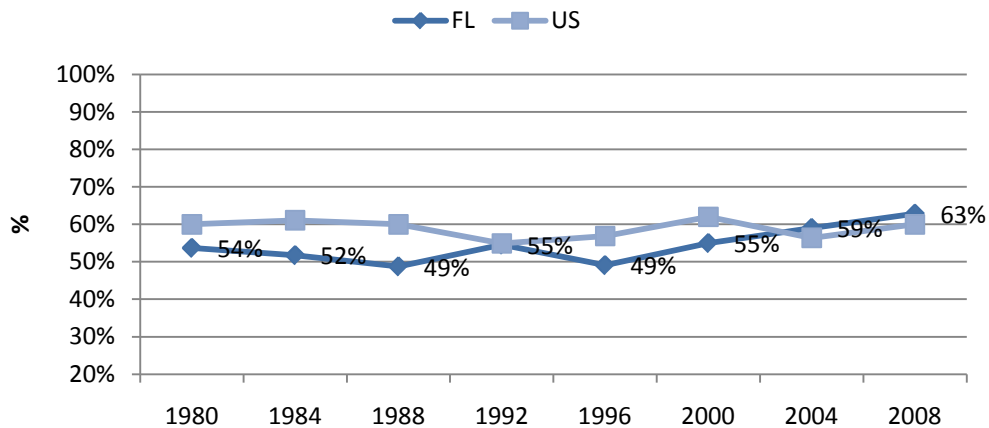
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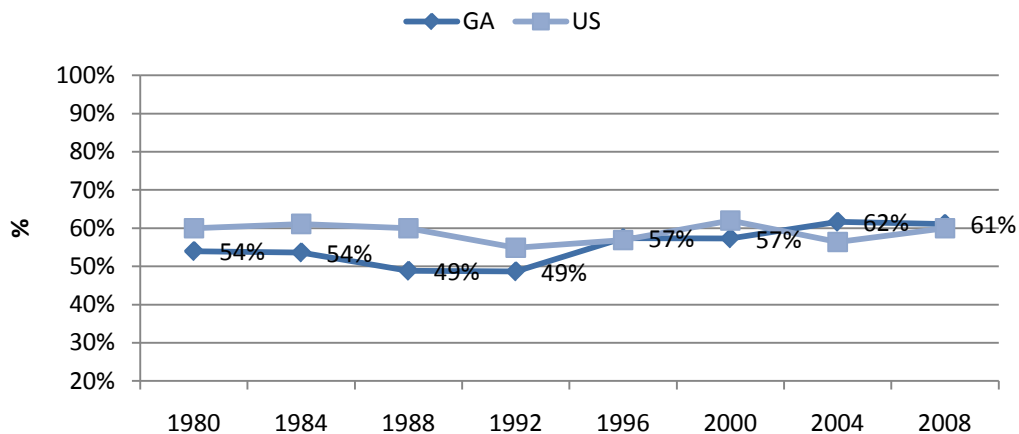
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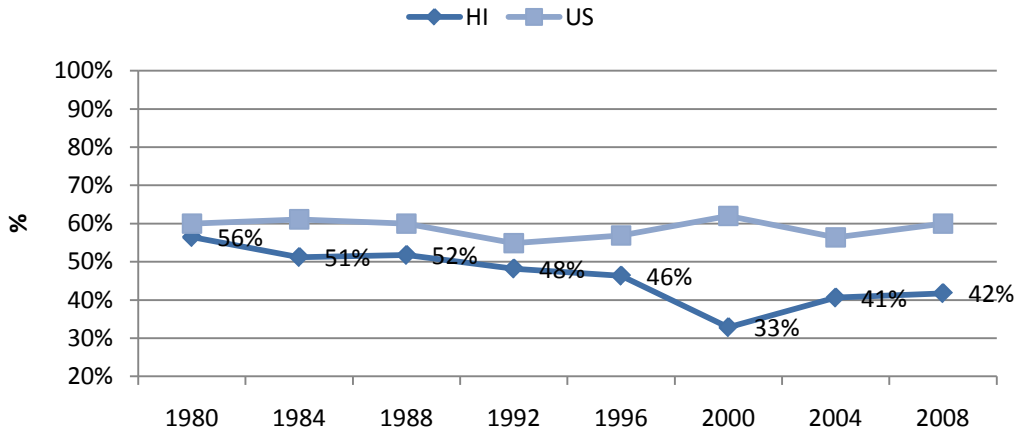
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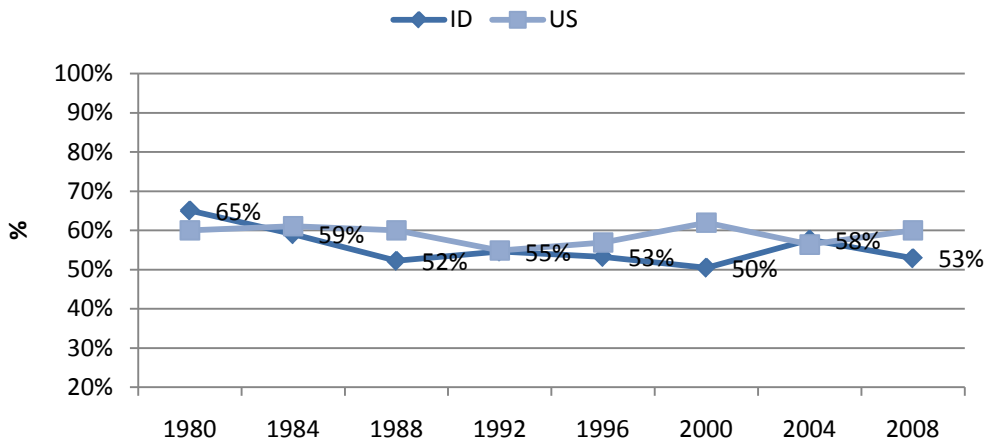
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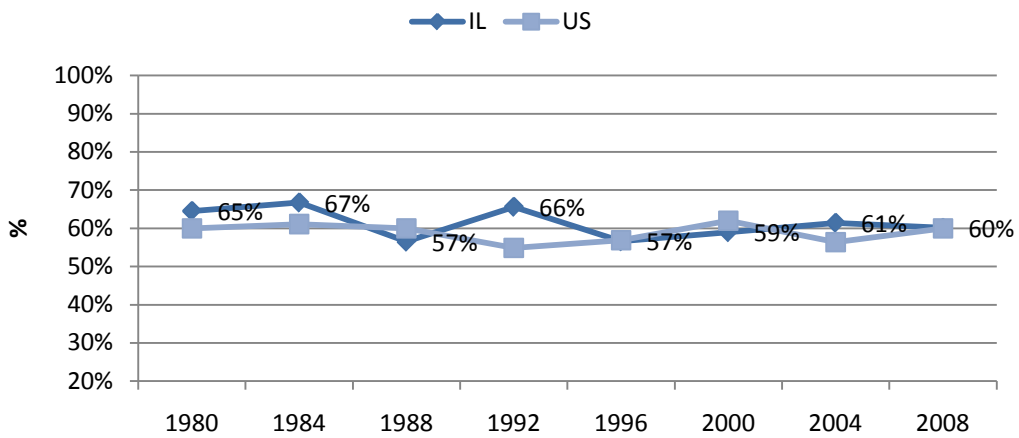
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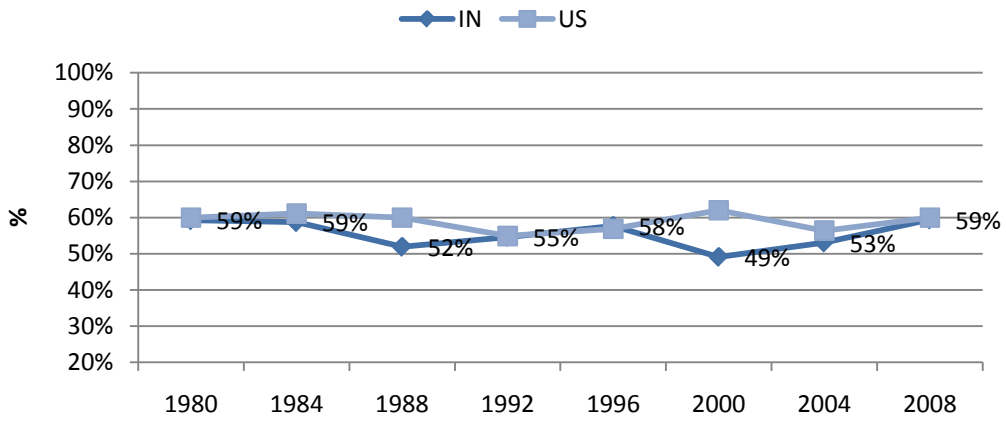
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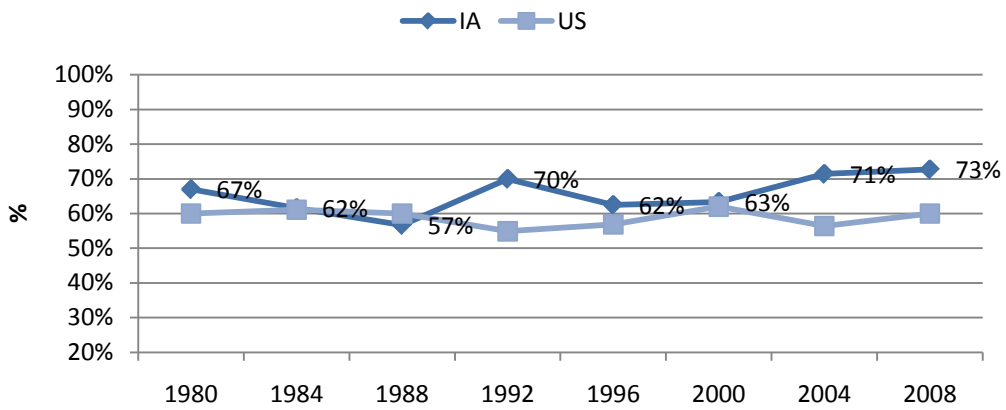
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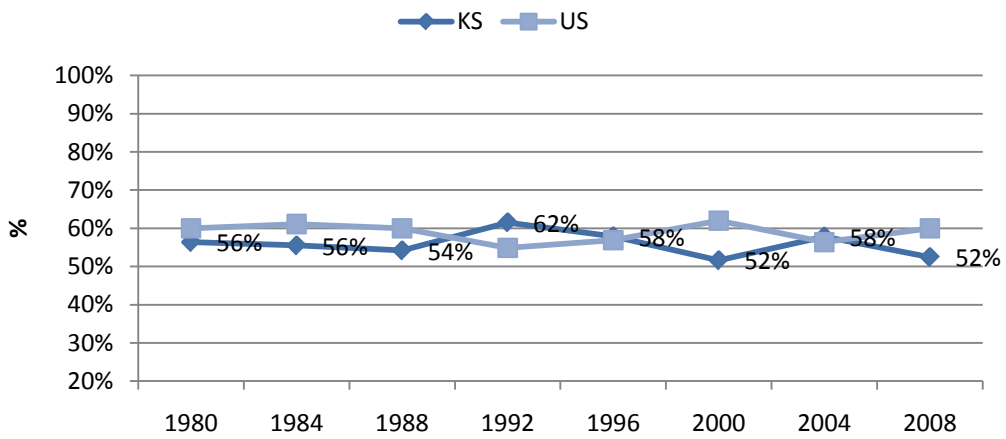
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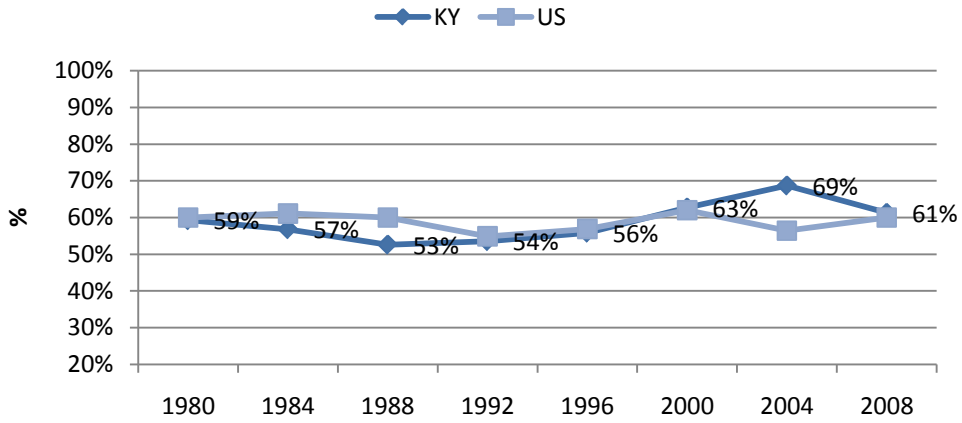
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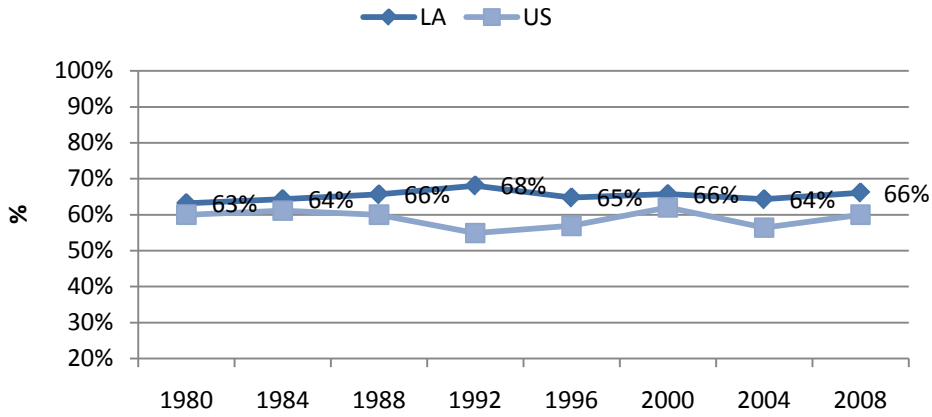
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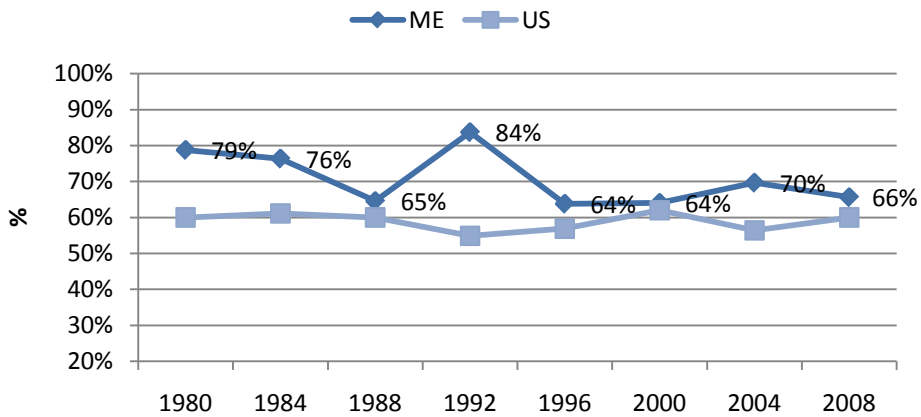
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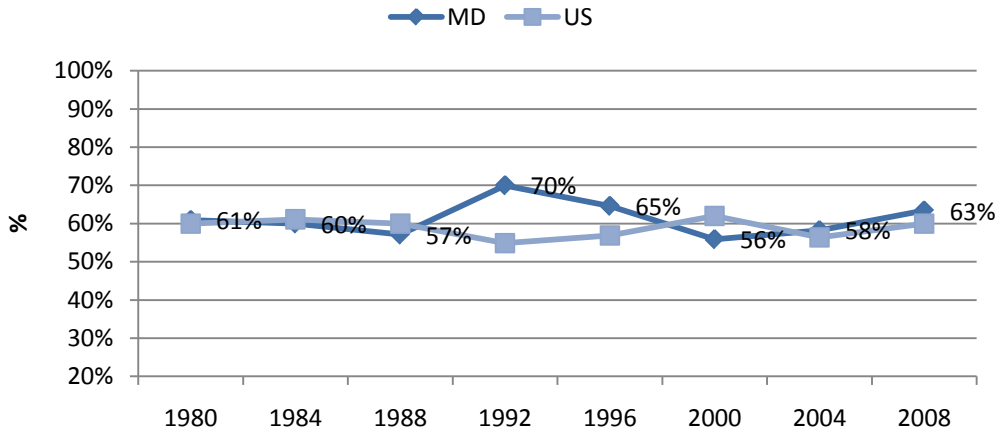
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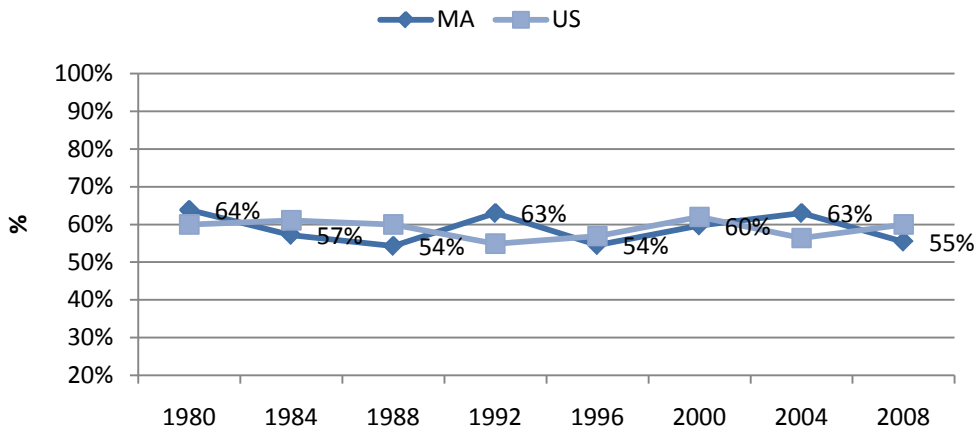
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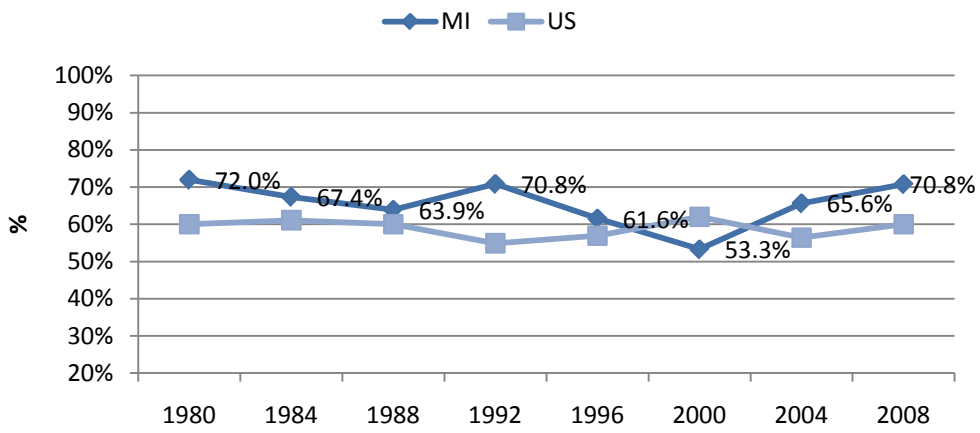
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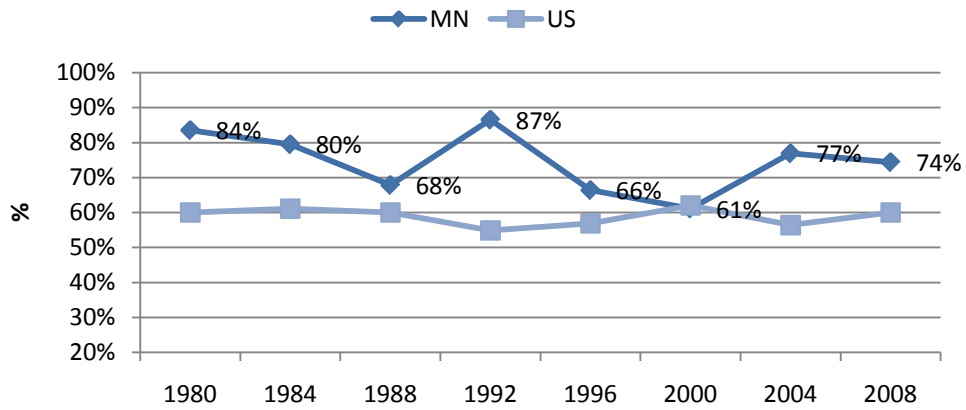
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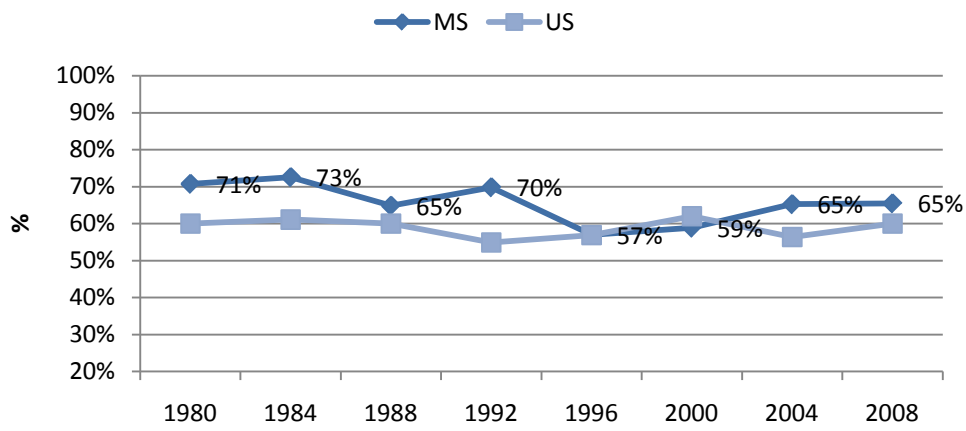
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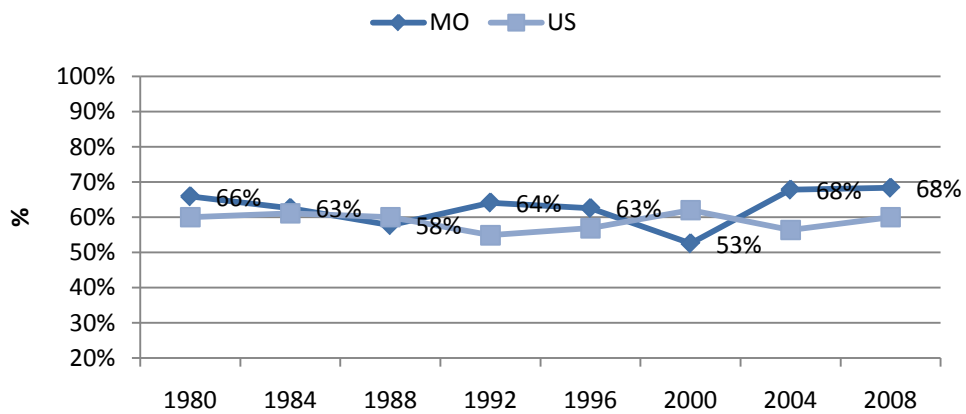
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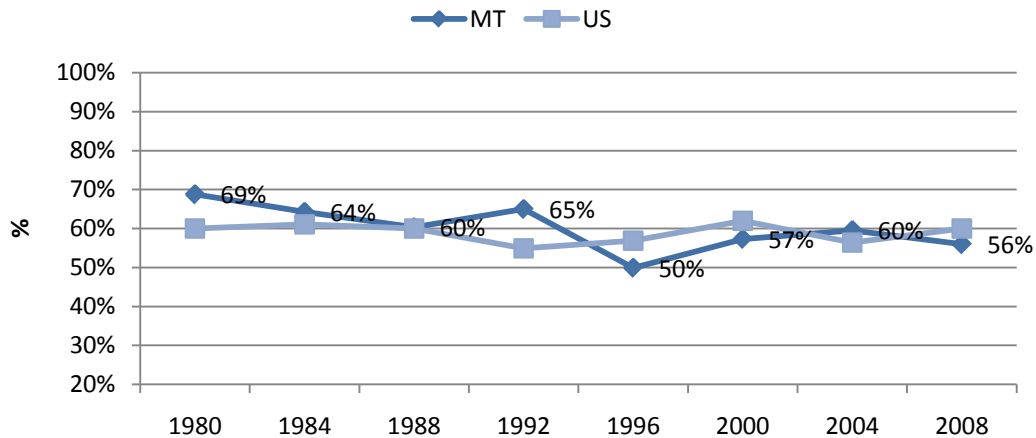
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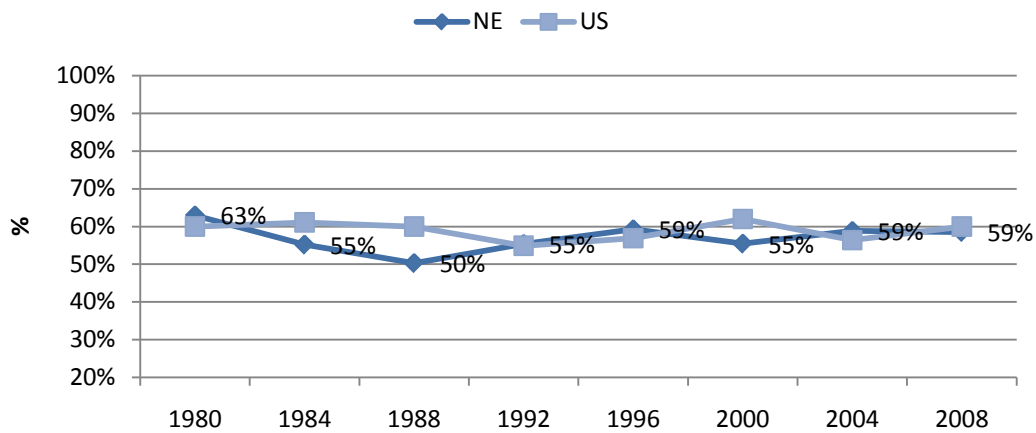
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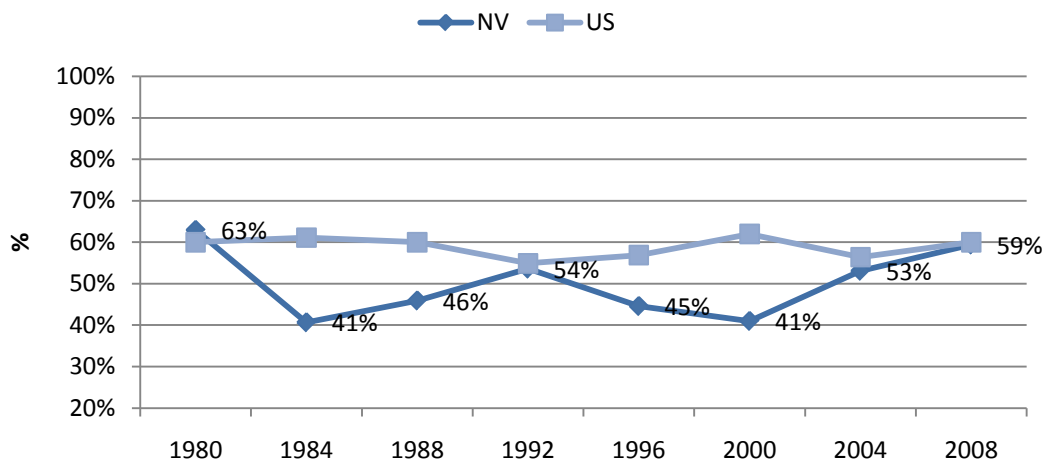
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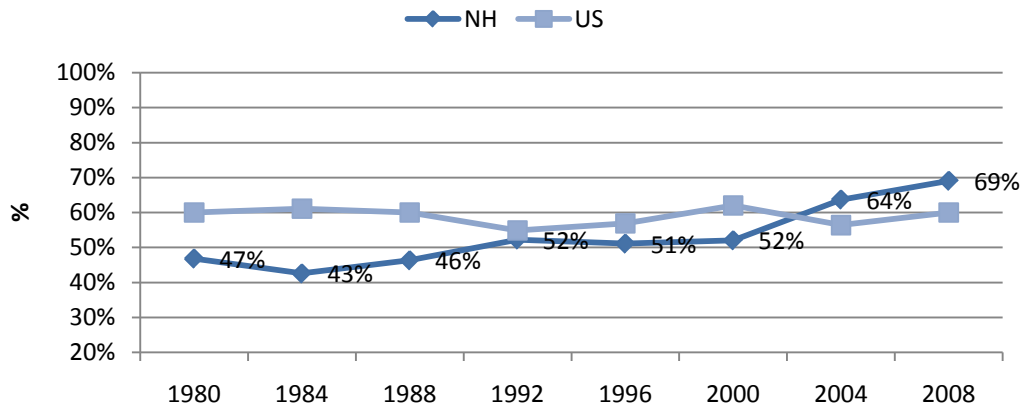
Youth Registration 1980-2008



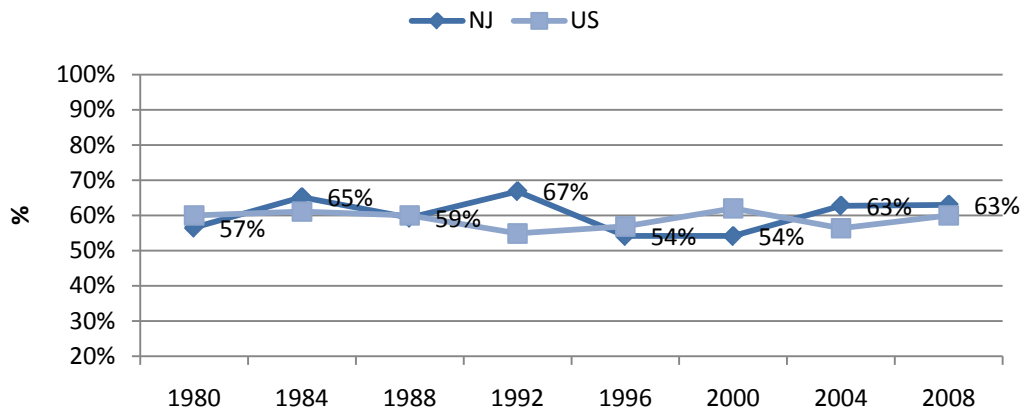
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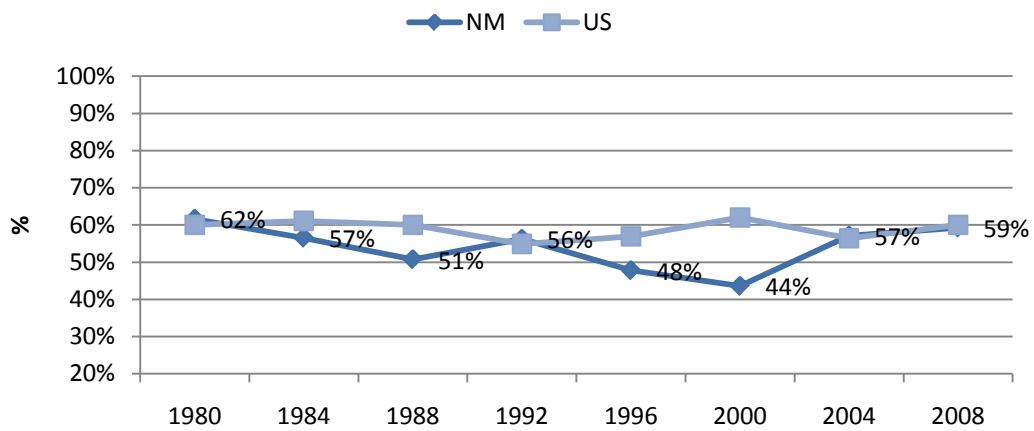
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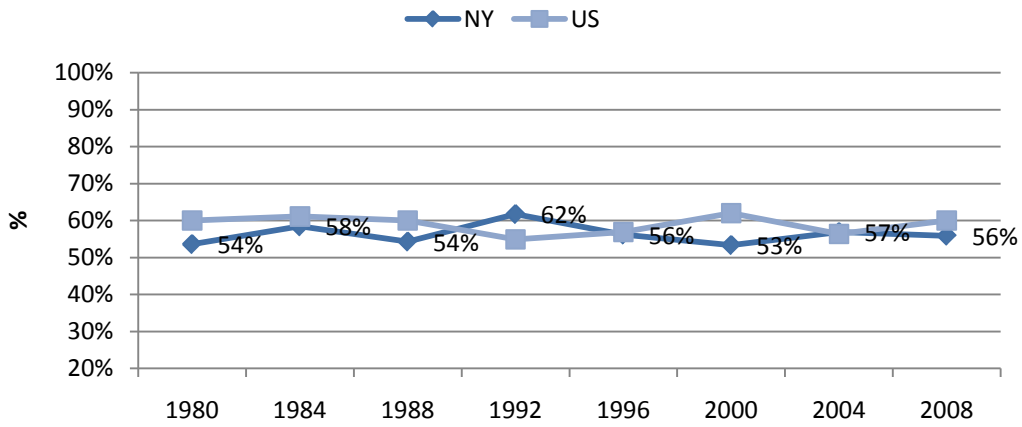
Youth Registration 1980-2008



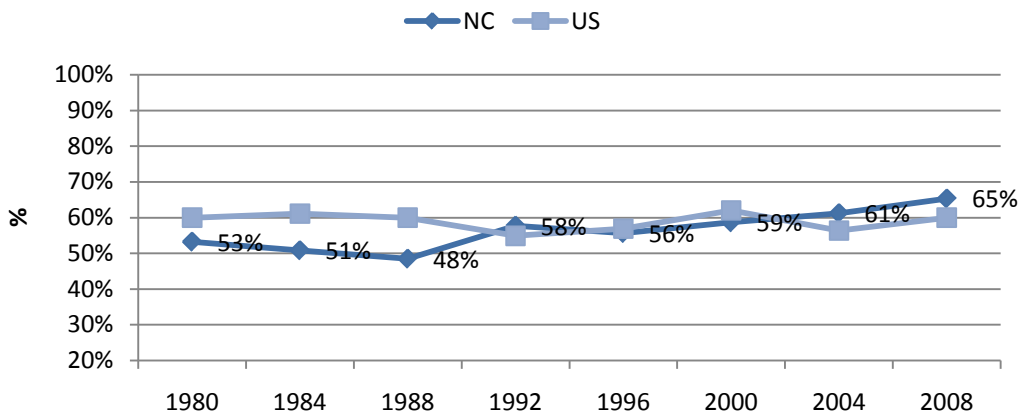
Youth Registration 1980-2008



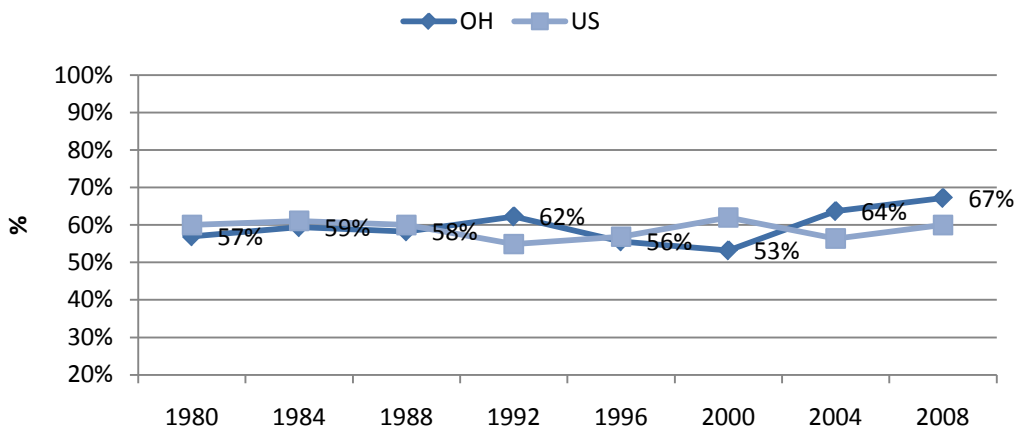
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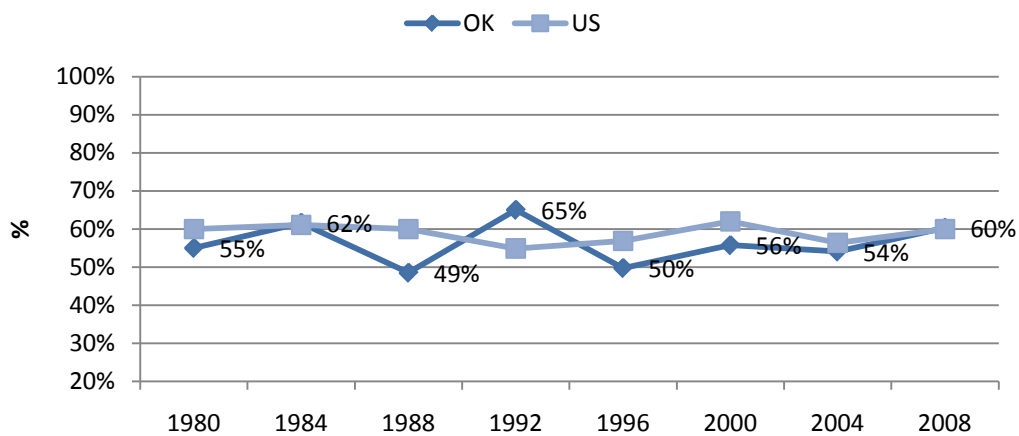
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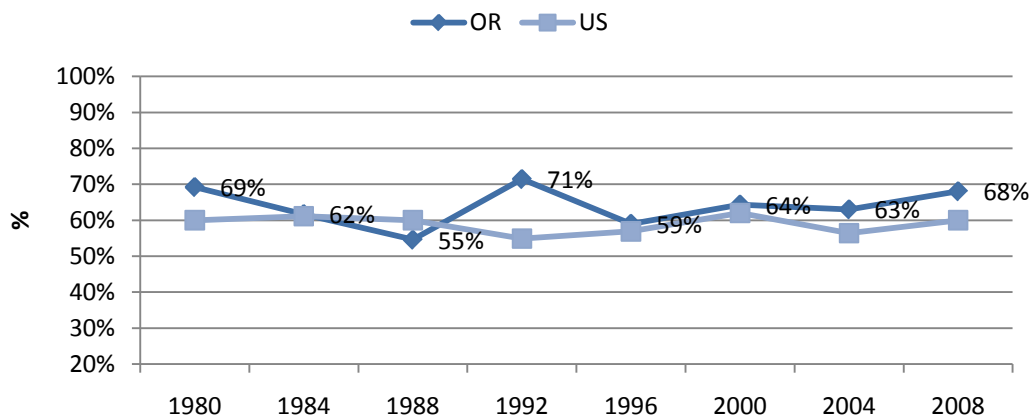
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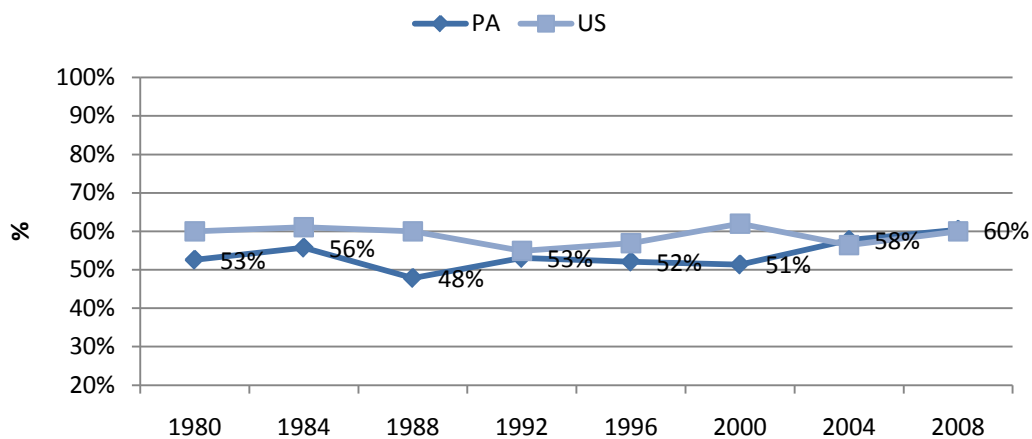
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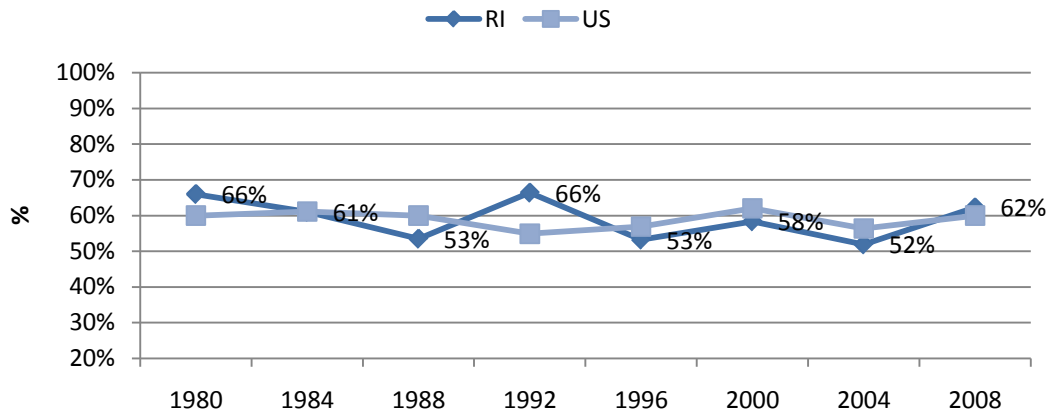
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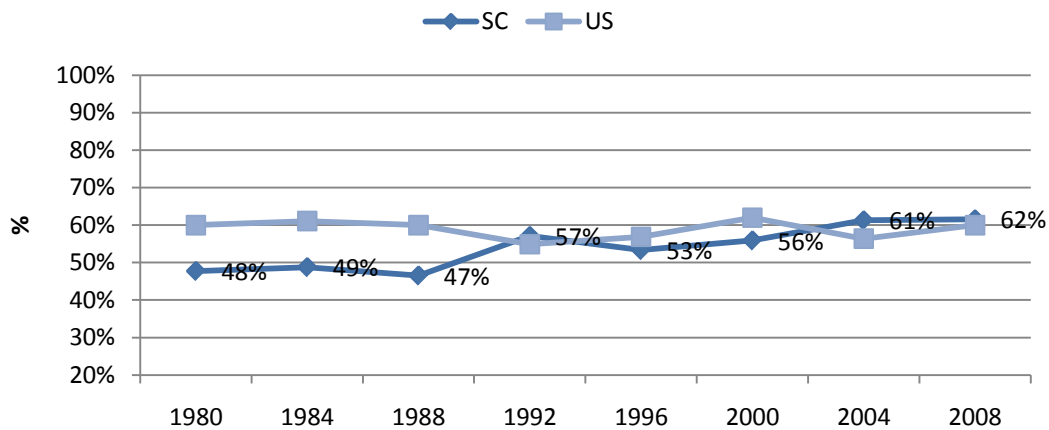
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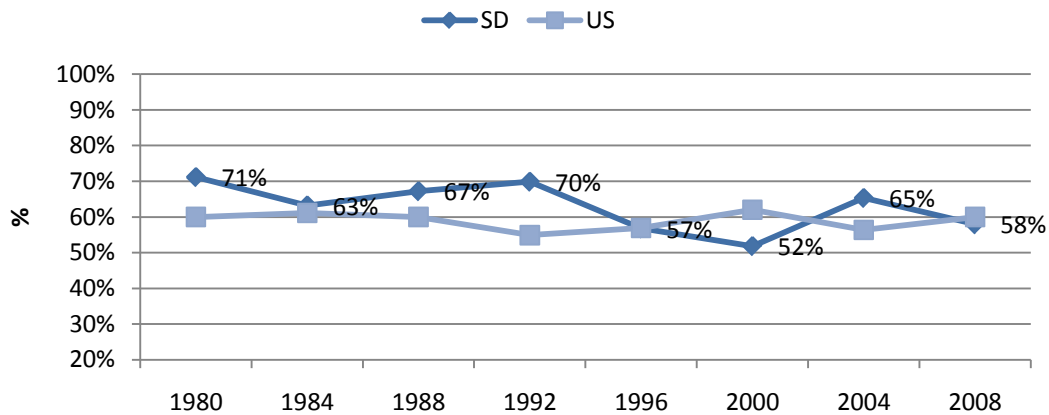
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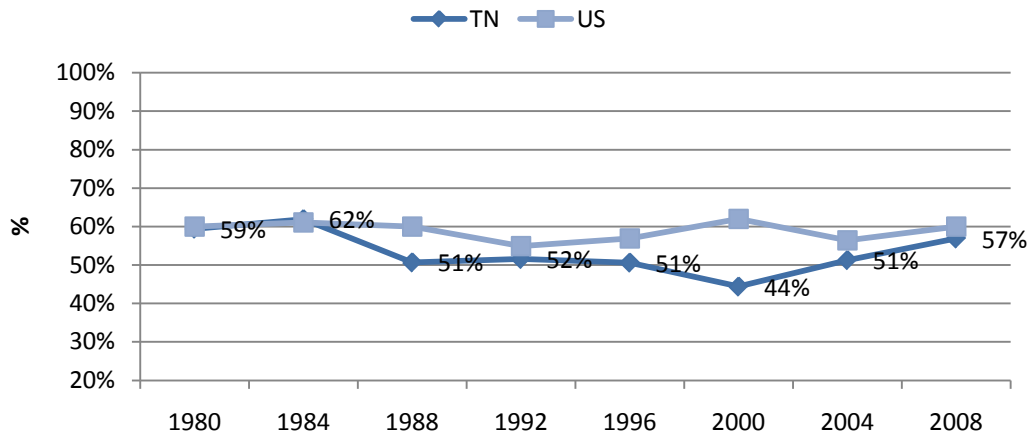
Youth Registration 1980-2008



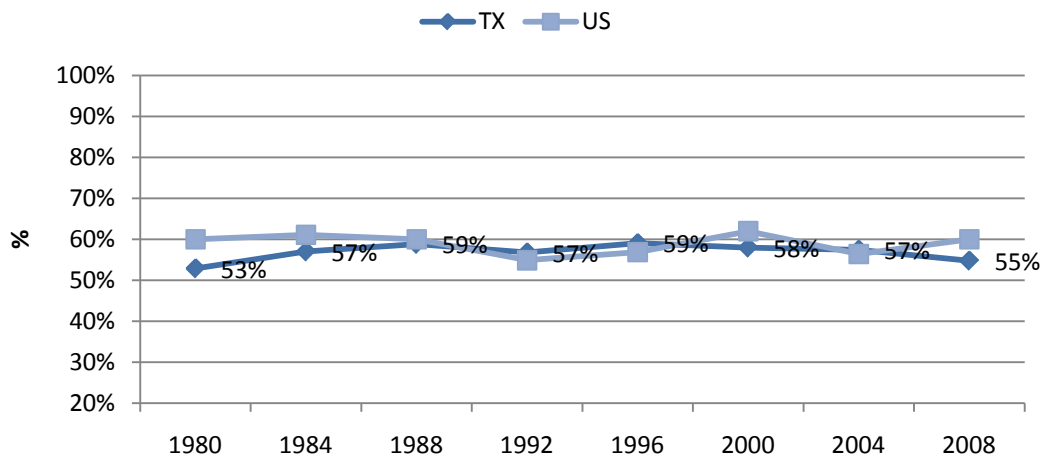
Youth Registration 1980-2008



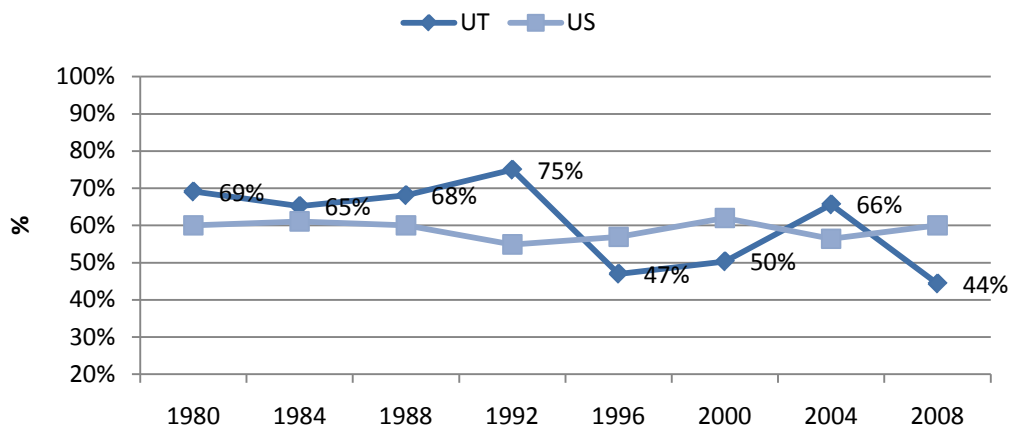
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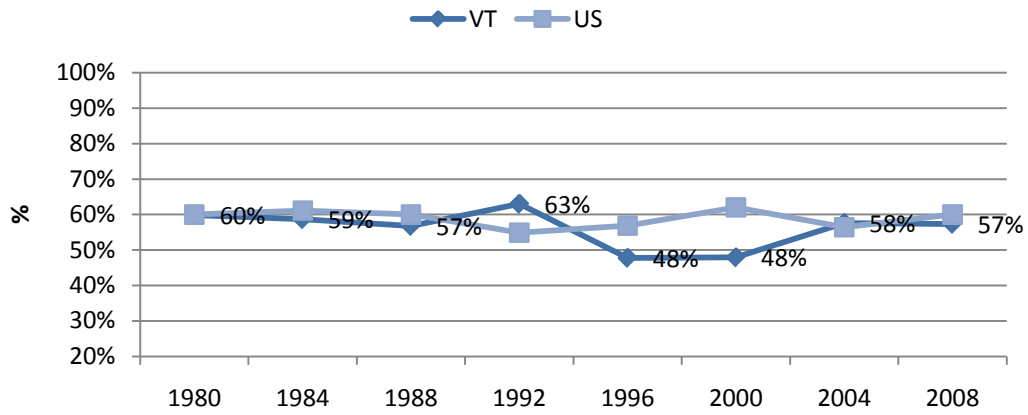
Youth Registration 1980-2008



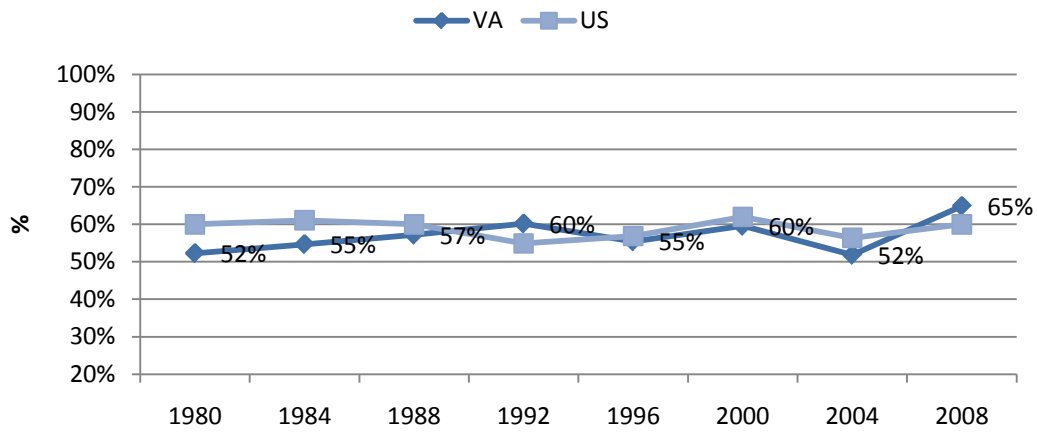
Youth Registration 1980-2008



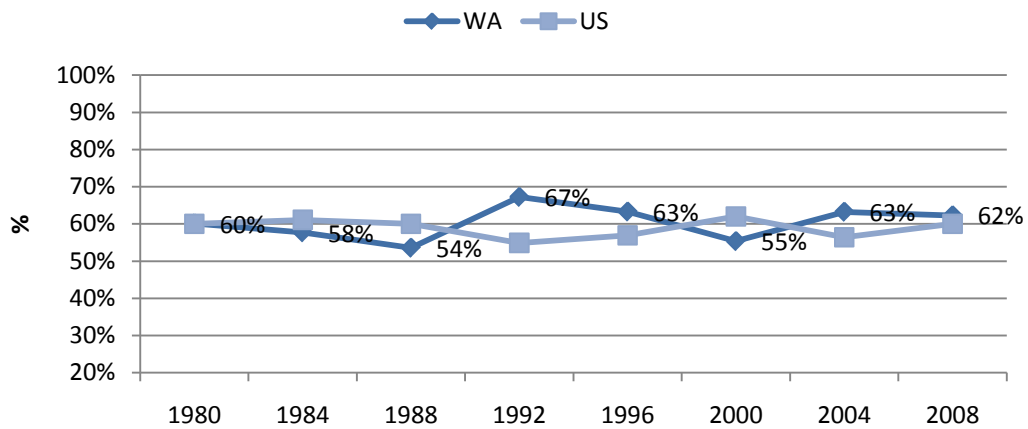
Youth Registration 1980-2008



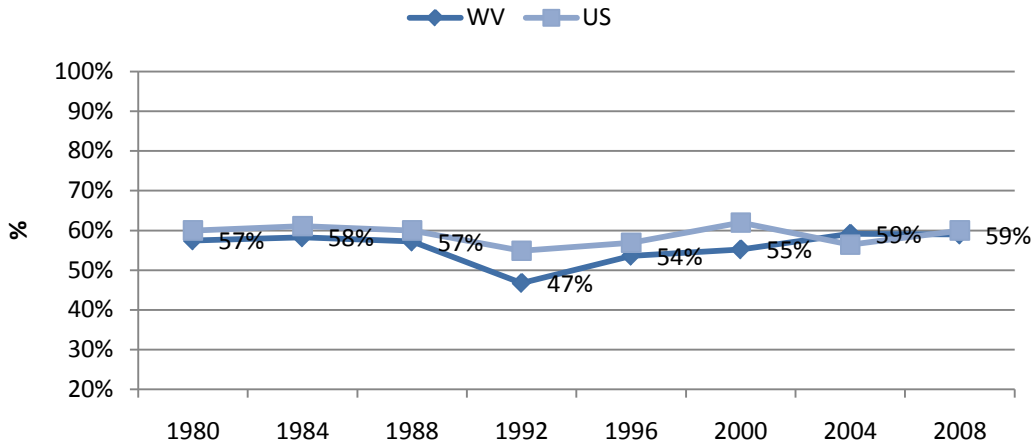
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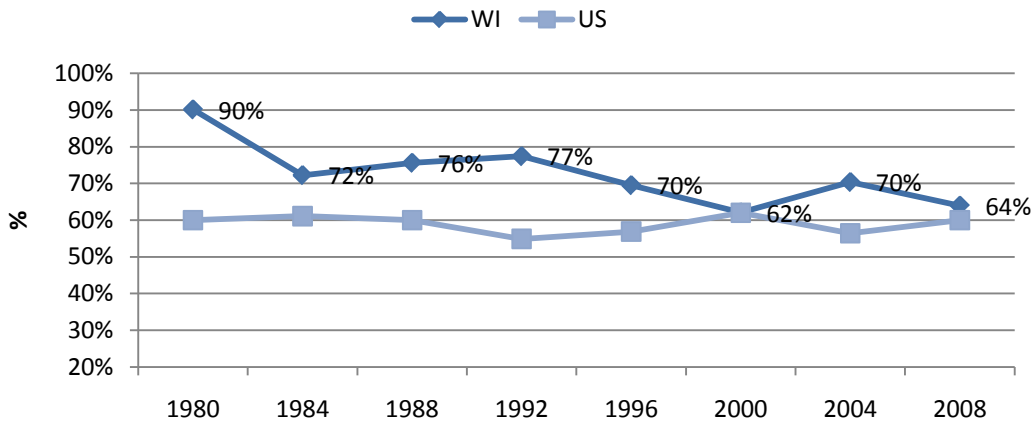
Youth Registration 1980-2008



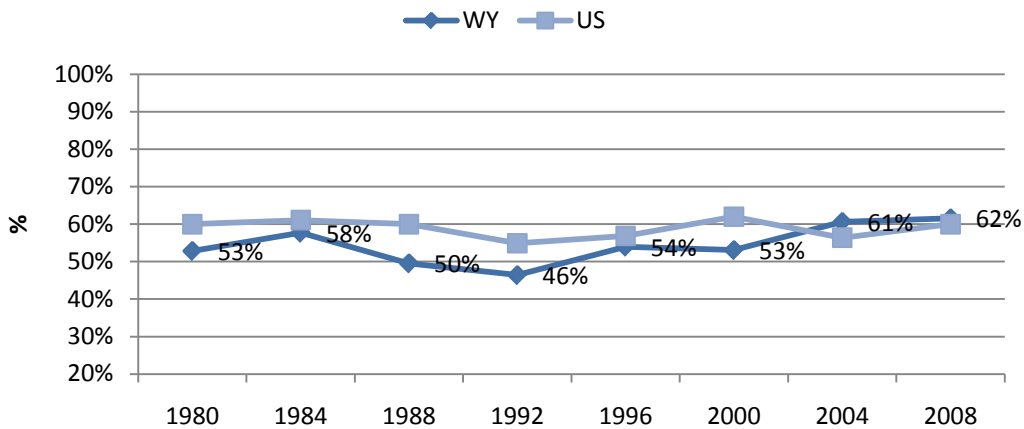
Youth Registration 1980-2008



Youth Registration 1980-2008



Youth Registration 1980-2008



NOTES

ⁱ Researcher at CIRCLE. I would like to thank Emily Kirby, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg and Peter Levine for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this fact sheet. I would also like to thank Karlo Barrios Marcelo for his fact sheet “Voter Registration Among Young People” updated in 2008, upon which this fact sheet is based. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

ⁱⁱ Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., Nover, A, Hoban-Kirby, E. (2009) State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout. Retrieved from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website:

http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State_law_and_youth_turnout_Final.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Although Current Population Survey by Census Bureau is the best available source of data for estimating youth turnout at the time of press, readers should note that CPS did not report turnout estimates for 18-24 year-olds in AK, De, DC, HI, MT, ND, RI, SD, VT, and WY due to small sample size.

^{iv} Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., Nover, A, Hoban-Kirby, E. (2009) State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout. Retrieved from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) website:

http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State_law_and_youth_turnout_Final.pdf