

How Science Can Help Get Out the Vote

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Scientific American Mind:

Only about half of the people who could vote in the 2012 U.S. presidential election actually did so (53.6 percent of the voting-age population). This puts turnout in the U.S. among the worst in developed countries. By way of contrast, 87.2 percent of Belgians, 80.5 percent of Australians and 73.1 percent of Finns voted in their last elections. In a nation quick to defend democracy both within its borders and beyond, why are more Americans not exercising what is arguably their biggest democratic right?

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In a field experiment conducted among 287,000 would-be voters in Pennsylvania during the 2008 Democratic primary election, researchers tried to see if voter turnout could be increased by helping people make a concrete plan to implement their intentions. One to three days before the November 2008 election, behavioral scientists David Nickerson, now at Temple University, and Todd Rogers of Harvard asked one group of would-be voters about their intentions to vote and a second group about their intentions and also about *when*, *where* and *how* they would accomplish the goal of voting.

Read the whole story: [*Scientific American Mind*](#)