"The goal of any fully functioning democracy should be to expand the electoral franchise," said Chanelle P. Hardy, senior vice president and executive director of the National Urban League Policy Institute. The National Urban League Policy Institute (www.nul.org) today released an analysis of 2008 voting patterns, which found that, for the first time, African-Americans achieved near-parity with white voters in turnout and played a decisive role in the outcome in key swing states. The report, entitled "The Hidden Swing Voters: Impact of African-Americans in 2012," uses a state-by-state analysis to establish that the extraordinary increase in African-American turnout in 2008 decided the outcome in several battleground states, and led to the victory of then-Sen. Barack Obama. Additionally, the report estimates that if African-American voter turnout in 2012 declines to levels that existed before 2008, there would be a different outcome in several battleground states. The report also estimates that as many as 3 million additional African-American voters could join the electorate by boosting registration rates above the 2008 numbers. The report identifies key milestones for African-Americans in 2008:

-- African-Americans had the highest real turnout increase-

African-American turnout grew at twice its citizen, 18+ population while

other groups grew at/below their citizen, 18+ population;

-- African-American turnout rate of 64.7% in 2008 was the highest

African-American turnout rate for any national election and the

narrowest gap with white voters -a mere -1.4 points;

-- African-Americans between 18-44 years old had higher turnout rates than

their white counterparts - the first time any race/ethnic group has

surpassed white turnout;

-- When registered to vote, African-Americans were the most likely to vote in 2008 - 92.8% of registered African-Americans voted, compared to 90% of registered whites;

This extraordinary growth in African-American turnout decided the 2008 election outcome in North Carolina and was critical to deciding the outcome in Virginia, Indiana and Florida:

-- In North Carolina, the additional 127,000 African-Americans who voted represented nearly nine times the margin of victory, which was 14,177 votes;

-- In Virginia, the additional African-American who voted in 2008 was nearly equal to the margin of victory in 2008;

-- In Indiana and Florida, the additional African-American who voted in 2008 represented nearly 80% of the margin of victory in those states.

The report estimates that a decline in African-American turnout in 2012 to what it was in 2004 would lead to a loss of enough votes to change the outcome in North Carolina, Ohio and Virginia. For example, in North Carolina, the loss of votes would be more than four times the 2008 margin of victory in that state.

"The lack of public discourse about the power of the African-American vote in 2012 because it overwhelmingly went to one candidate in 2008 is to ignore a much larger story," said Marc H. Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. "After centuries of struggle, for the first-time, African-Americans were at the table of equality in terms of voter turnout. We cannot let 2008 be just a one-time occurrence. It is crucial for us to build on the gains of 2008 with more voter education, registration and activation. As African-Americans, we can no longer afford to stay hidden."

"The goal of any fully functioning democracy should be to expand the electoral franchise," said Chanelle P. Hardy, senior vice president and executive director of the National Urban League Policy Institute. "This report should put to rest the notion that voting has little impact these days. Indeed, it underscores in real and tangible ways that every vote counts."

About the National Urban League

The National Urban League is a historic civil rights organization dedicated to economic empowerment in historically underserved urban communities. Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the Urban League provides direct, community-based services through its nationwide network of affiliates that impact more than 2 million people. Celebrating its 50 anniversary, the National Urban League Policy Institute spearheads the League's public policy, research and advocacy efforts in Washington, DC.