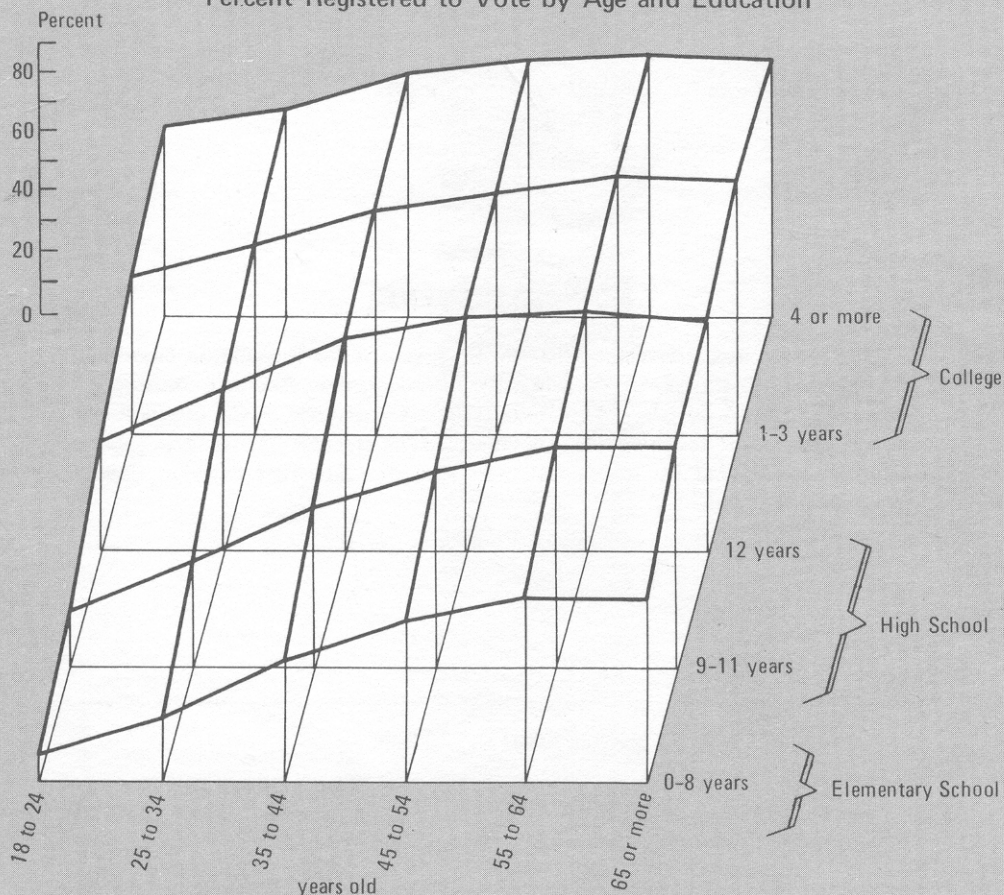


# Population Characteristics

Series P-20, No. 293  
Issued April 1976

## Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1974

Percent Registered to Vote by Age and Education





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# CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS

## Population Characteristics

### VOTING AND REGISTRATION IN THE ELECTION OF NOVEMBER 1974

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## VOTING AND REGISTRATION IN THE ELECTION OF NOVEMBER 1974

The voter turnout in the 1974 Congressional election of about 39 percent, according to official statistics, was the lowest in an off-year election since 1946. This low turnout is reflected in the results of the November 1974 Current Population Survey where 45 percent of all civilians age 18 and older, not residing in institutions, were reported as having cast ballots.<sup>1</sup> Voter participation in 1974 as reported by the survey was about 10 percentage points lower than in the previous Congressional election in 1970, and around 18 percentage points below the level attained in the 1972 Presidential election. That election had one of the lowest turnouts for a Presidential election in recent American history. The number of persons reported as being registered to vote but failing to cast ballots amounted to about 18 percent of the total electorate, while 32 percent were not registered to vote.<sup>2</sup>

This report presents selected findings from the 1974 voting survey. The "hard core" nonparticipants, that is, those who never vote or seldom vote, are examined in terms of their demographic profile and their reported reasons for not voting. In addition, the demographic characteristics associated with the low turnout in this election are compared with data from the 1970 Congressional and 1972 Presidential elections. New findings on the effect of length of residence and mobility on voting and registration are analyzed. Finally, an analysis is made of the "youth vote," those persons at the lower end of the age scale who have comprised a larger proportion of potential voters since the minimum voting age was uniformly lowered to 18 by the 26th Amendment.

Despite the unusually low level of participation in the 1974 election, the demographic characteristics that have usually been associated with registration and voting, as reported both in earlier surveys in this series as well as by independent studies, remained generally consistent in their relative rankings in 1974, even though their

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<sup>1</sup> The disparity between official results and estimates from the survey has been noted in other surveys, and is due in part to differences between the sample universe and the electorate, and also to certain aspects of the survey process, such as a tendency among respondents to overreport voting participation to interviewers. See Evaluation of the Accuracy of the Data on p. 8 of this report.

<sup>2</sup> In addition, registration of approximately 6 percent of the electorate was not reported or not known to the person responding for other household members. In most of the tables in this report, this group is included in the total of those not registered.

absolute levels declined.<sup>3</sup> High and low percentages of registration and voting were found among the following groups:

### High voting and registration

Persons 45 to 74 years old  
Residence outside the South  
College graduates  
Annual income of \$25,000 and above  
Professional and technical workers

### Low voting and registration

Persons 18 to 24 years old  
Residence in the South  
Less than 8 years of school  
Annual income under \$5,000  
Laborers

In addition to these characteristics, men were more likely to vote than were women, although women were slightly less likely to be registered; and blacks were less likely to vote and register than whites.

**Nonvoting.** Nonvoting has been a significant feature of recent American political history. Nonvoters comprised about 55 percent of the population of voting age in 1974 and 37 percent in the Presidential election of 1972 (see table A). Cumbersome registration procedures have often been cited as discouraging many potential voters from participating in elections. In recent years registration hours have been lengthened, more registration places have been provided, registration by mail is permitted in a few areas, and laws have been enacted prohibiting outright discrimination against minorities.<sup>4</sup> Despite these measures, the level of registration in 1974 was below that in 1970, the last Congressional election.

It is evident that a larger proportion of people fail to register to vote than fail to vote once registered. In the 1974 election, for example, about 65 percent of citizens who had satisfied residency requirements were registered, but about 72 percent of all registered persons

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<sup>3</sup> However, the registration rate of persons 18 to 24 years old did not decline between 1970 and 1974.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, The Voting Rights Act: Ten Years After, January 1975. Chapter 4, "Barriers to Registration." Also, Kevin Phillips and Paul Blackman, Electoral Reform and Voter Participation, AEI-Hoover Policy Study, Washington, D.C., 1975.

Table A. Percent Reported Voting or Registering by Age: 1970 to 1974

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Age	Percent registered			Percent voted		
	1974	1972	1970	1974	1972	1970
All ages.....	62.2	72.3	68.1	44.7	63.0	54.6
18 to 20 years.....	36.4	58.1	<sup>1</sup> 41.3	20.8	48.3	<sup>1</sup> 25.6
21 to 24 years.....	45.3	59.5	40.8	26.4	50.7	30.4
25 to 29 years.....	51.4	66.1	54.4	33.8	57.8	41.3
30 to 34 years.....	58.6	71.2	63.5	40.7	61.9	50.3
35 to 44 years.....	66.7	74.8	71.3	49.1	66.3	58.1
45 to 54 years.....	72.5	79.3	76.6	55.9	70.9	63.8
55 to 64 years.....	75.1	80.2	78.6	58.3	70.7	64.7
65 to 74 years.....	73.0	78.5	76.4	55.8	68.1	61.2
75 years and over.....	65.2	70.7	69.2	43.7	55.6	50.1

<sup>1</sup>In 1970, 18- to 20-year-olds were eligible to vote only in Georgia and Kentucky; 19- and 20-year-olds in Alaska; and 20-year-olds in Hawaii.

went to the polls on election day.<sup>5</sup> Further insight into this matter can be found in the reasons people offer as to why they did not vote even though they were registered, and why they were not registered. About 45 percent of the registered nonvoters were reported as staying away from the polls for reasons that were essentially beyond their control, such as illness or physical disability, or because they could not take time off from work, or were out of town. Another 31 percent could be classed as apathetic about politics or the particular election, including those who indicated lack of interest, a general dislike of politics, no preference among the candidates, or a belief that their vote would not matter. The remainder (24 percent) gave miscellaneous reasons or failed to report. The distribution of reasons was substantially the same as in 1972 when the number of registered nonvoters was half as large (that is, no category of reasons changed by more than 5 percentage points). Reasons for not voting in 1974 are shown in table 10. For comparable data for the 1972 election, see P-20, No. 275.

The number of persons who were not registered was about twice as large as the number who were registered but did not vote. About 9 percent of those not registered were not citizens and therefore unable to register

even if they wanted to (see table 12). Another 15 percent cited reasons associated with a recent move as their reason for not registering. Barriers to registration (in addition to those that may have been included in a recent move) were reported in 8 percent of the cases (physical disability, no transportation to a registration site, or inconvenient hours or location of the registration place). The largest share of the nonregistrants (about 51 percent) gave reasons that reflected apathy or cynicism regarding politics. About 12 percent gave miscellaneous reasons and about 6 percent were not reported.

A further perspective on the large portion of the eligible population who did not vote in 1974 was obtained by inquiring whether these individuals had ever voted in a National, State, or local election and, if so, when was the last time (see table 24). About 57 percent of the citizens not registered in 1974 had never voted. And about 13 percent had not voted since before 1968. Those who had not voted since before 1968 or in four consecutive National elections, will be referred to as "seldom voted" in the following paragraphs. The remainder of the 1974 nonvoters, most of whom voted in 1972, will be referred to as "occasional voters."

The composition of nonvoters and seldom voters contrasts with the total eligible population as can be seen in table B. With respect to age, the seldom voters were older than average, with about 74 percent 45 years of age or over as compared with 45 percent of all persons. As would be expected, those who had never voted were predominantly young; about half were between 18 and 24 years of age and about three-quarters

<sup>5</sup>In other words, about 45 million of the eligible voting population were reported as not being registered to vote, including 4 million who were not citizens and 2 million who did not meet residency requirements; whereas 25 million were reported as registered but failed to vote. "Eligible" as used in the remainder of this report refers to those persons of voting age on election day, that is, 18 years old and over in 1974.

were under 35.<sup>6</sup> Persons who seldom vote were also disproportionately of lower educational attainment than all persons; 40 percent had completed only elementary school as compared with about 17 percent for all persons. A relatively high proportion of those who were reported as never having voted had completed high school grades 1 through 4, but a relatively low proportion had completed 1 or more years of college (see table B).

As would be expected, only a small proportion of those who had never voted and those who seldom voted (that is, "occasional voters") were registered to vote in 1974 (see table B). Barriers associated with recent moves, including not meeting the residence requirements and not registering following a recent move, bulked largest with the occasional voters; 36 percent cited this as the main reason they were not registered compared with about 8 percent of the never voted and

7 percent of the seldom voted (see table C). Other hindrances especially physical disability, were more important to the seldom voted than to the others. Lack of interest was given as a reason for not registering by one-half of those who had never voted, as contrasted with 41 percent of those who had not voted since before 1968 and 28 percent for occasional voters.

In summary, nonvoters in 1974 were made up of groups that contrasted sharply with each other in demographic characteristics and in the reasons they gave for not voting in the Congressional election. Some were persons who generally vote, but were prevented from doing so in 1974 by unavoidable circumstances; others made up a group who vote in Presidential years, but are not sufficiently motivated to vote in a Congressional election. Persons who had not voted in recent years were older than the average, possibly gradually withdrawing from political activity, in some cases because of the infirmities of advancing age. Those who never voted, on the other hand, were younger than the average and perhaps can be expected gradually to involve themselves in voting to reach levels of participation at least comparable with those attained by those currently in their 40's and 50's. Among persons in the age

<sup>6</sup>For purposes of this discussion, noncitizens have been excluded from the never voted group.

**Table B. Age and Education of Persons of Voting Age Who Reported They Had Last Voted in 1967 or Earlier and for Citizens Who Never Voted**

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Age and education	All persons	Last voted in 1967 or earlier	Never voted (citizens only)
All ages.....	141,299	6,521	23,666
Percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
18 to 24 years.....	18.2	0.3	49.2
25 to 34 years.....	20.7	9.4	24.8
35 to 44 years.....	15.8	16.1	9.9
45 to 64 years.....	30.4	41.1	10.7
65 years and over.....	14.8	33.2	5.4
All educational levels.....	141,299	6,521	23,666
Percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0
Elementary: 0 to 7 years.....	8.7	21.7	10.8
8 years.....	8.6	18.6	6.7
High school: 1 to 3 years.....	15.4	22.7	21.3
4 years.....	36.6	27.9	42.5
College: 1 to 3 years.....	16.8	6.0	15.3
4 years or more.....	14.0	3.1	3.5
Percent registered in 1974.....	62.2	13.6	8.6



groups most likely to vote, 35 to 64 years old, approximately 10 percent reported that they had never voted in a public election in the United States.

**Comparison with the 1970 and 1972 elections.** The 1974 election was a low turnout election when compared with the Congressional elections of 1970 and 1966 (see table A, P-20, No. 275). Levels of reported voting in 1974 were about 10 and 11 percentage points, respectively, below those in the earlier elections, and the proportion of eligible voters who reported that they were registered declined by somewhat smaller margins (see table A).

The turnout of voters in nonpresidential elections has always been lower than in years when a President was being selected. In 1974, the reported decline from 1972 voting levels amounted to 18 percentage points while registration was down 10 percentage points.

Although declines in voting and registration were the general rule when 1974 is compared with either of the two previous elections, these declines are not uniform for all age groups and educational levels. In fact, there was one notable exception to the trend: persons 21 to 24 years of age reported a registration rate for 1974 that was about 5 points higher than it had been 4 years

previously. Otherwise declines in voting and registration between 1974 and the two previous elections (1970 and 1972) were lower for persons 55 and over than for persons below that age.

Comparisons of 1974 registration and voting rates with 1970 and 1972 by educational level reveal contrasting patterns (see table D). The reported registration rates of persons with 1 or more years of college declined less than for persons with less education between the 2 Congressional elections; but this same group reported a greater than average decline between 1972 and 1974. As far as voting turnout is concerned, the greatest percentage point decline between 1970 and 1974 occurred among those who completed 4 years of high school only compared with those who did not complete high school and those who attended college. Between 1972 and 1974 the rate of decline in voting participation was greatest among those with some college education.

Despite the large swings in overall participation in American elections, voters in one election are more likely to vote in the next election and nonvoters are likely to continue to be nonvoters. Persons in the 1974 survey who were 20 years old and over were asked whether they had voted in the 1972 Presidential election (see table 15). About 67 percent of those who said they

**Table C. Reported Reasons for Not Registering by Year Last Voted for Citizens of Voting Age**

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Reason not registered to vote	Citizens not registered	Reported year last voted		
		1968 to 1973	1967 or earlier	Never
Total.....	140,773	12,390	5,815	21,009
Percent.....	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Residence requirement not satisfied....	4.7	9.7	1.8	2.6
Recently moved.....	11.6	26.1	4.8	4.9
No transportation.....	1.1	1.3	2.3	0.8
Hours or place inconvenient.....	3.3	3.8	2.7	3.1
Don't know how or where to vote.....	4.8	5.3	2.9	5.4
Physical disability.....	4.0	3.4	10.2	2.7
Not interested.....	41.1	28.0	41.0	49.3
Dislike politics.....	5.3	2.9	8.3	5.9
Did not prefer any candidate.....	3.0	3.3	4.5	2.4
Vote wouldn't matter.....	1.6	1.1	2.6	1.6
Other reason <sup>2</sup> .....	13.2	12.0	13.9	14.1
Not reported.....	6.3	3.2	5.1	7.1

<sup>1</sup>Includes persons not reporting year last voted.

<sup>2</sup>Includes persons reporting they had not changed registration, didn't know candidates, religious reason, forgot, and other miscellaneous reasons.

voted in 1972 also reported voting in 1974, and about 91 percent of those who were nonvoters in 1972 reported they did not vote in 1974.<sup>7</sup> Overall, 69 percent of the eligible electorate exhibited consistent voting behavior, either by voting in both elections (43 percent) or by voting in neither election (26 percent); whereas, about 75 percent were consistent in the 1968 and 1970 elections.

**Duration of residence and mobility.** Questions on duration of residence and mobility were added to the survey for the first time in 1974. Answers to these questions provide information on the effect on voting and registration of length of time lived in the community, and the effect of a change in residence from differing distances (whether within the same county, between counties, in the same State, or between States).

The less time a person lived at his current address, the less likely he was to have become registered (or maintained a previous registration), and once registered, the less likely he was to have voted in 1974.<sup>8</sup> Of all persons who had moved within the previous year (amounting to about 17 percent of the total), only about 38 percent

<sup>7</sup> Asking a retrospective question about voting behavior two years previously, even for an event as salient as a Presidential election, introduces memory biases into the data. However, a comparison of 1972 voting from the 1972 report with reported 1972 voting in 1974 reveals an increase of only 0.8 of a percentage point for the more recent report. See the section on Evaluation for more discussion of this matter.

<sup>8</sup> However, there is no statistically significant difference in the voting rates among registered persons who lived at the same address for 6-9 years compared with those residing 10 years or more at the same address shown in table E.

were registered (see table E). The likelihood of being registered increased to about 80 percent for those with 10 or more years at their current address. Living in a community for 1 year or more not only increases the proportion of persons who registered, but also the proportion voting of those registered. About 75 percent of registered persons who had lived at their current residence 6 years or more voted as compared with about 60 percent for those with less than a year's residence at their current address. The greater effort presumably needed to register at a new address did not lead those who made that effort to vote in greater proportions than long established residents who would more likely be registered. Some of the recent movers may have voted at their previous residence. However, only 5 percent of recent movers who voted, voted by absentee ballot. This fact suggests that most of those who moved within the last year, and were registered to vote, had registered at their new address.

Length of residence made substantial differences in voting and registration within each age group (see table E). Among 18 to 24 year olds, about 33 percent of those with less than 1 year at their current residence were registered, compared with 55 percent of the youth who had lived at the same address for at least 10 years. The highest proportion registered was among persons 45 to 64 years old with 10 years' length of residence; approximately 86 percent of them were registered. About 46 percent of these older persons who had moved within the year were registered to vote. As duration of residence increased, black political participation was lower relative to that for all persons. Thus, blacks who lived at the same address for 6 years or more were less likely to register and vote than were all persons.

Another dimension related to changing one's residence is the effect that moving across county or State lines has on registration and voting. This effect was

**Table D. Reported Voting and Registering by Years of School Completed: 1970 to 1974**

(Persons of voting age. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Years of school completed	Percent registered			Percent voted		
	1974	1972	1970	1974	1972	1970
All educational levels...	62.2	72.3	68.1	44.7	63.0	54.6
Elementary: 0 to 4 years.....	39.3	48.2	46.8	21.8	33.0	29.4
5 to 7 years.....	51.8	59.5	58.9	30.6	44.3	40.0
8 years.....	61.1	68.0	68.2	41.5	55.2	51.1
High school: 1 to 3 years.....	54.3	63.0	62.9	35.9	52.0	47.1
4 years.....	61.9	74.0	70.7	44.7	65.4	58.4
College: 1 to 3 years.....	66.9	81.7	71.9	49.6	74.9	61.3
4 years.....	74.8	87.1	77.3	58.3	82.3	68.7
5 years or more...	77.9	88.8	79.6	65.7	85.6	72.7

Table E. Reported Voting and Registration by Age and Length of Residence: November 1974

(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Length of residence at current address	Persons 18 years old and over	18 to 24 years old	25 to 34 years old	35 to 44 years old	45 to 64 years old	65 years old and over
<b>PERCENT REGISTERED</b>						
Total.....	62.2	41.3	54.7	66.7	73.6	70.2
Length of residence:						
Less than 1 year.....	37.5	32.9	38.0	38.8	45.6	42.9
1 to 2 years.....	51.8	41.4	54.1	51.4	58.0	55.8
3 to 5 years.....	65.5	45.7	66.8	69.7	70.0	66.2
6 to 9 years.....	73.3	47.0	71.1	79.6	78.9	71.9
10 years or more.....	79.4	55.1	70.3	82.0	85.7	80.5
<b>PERCENT VOTED</b>						
Total.....	44.7	23.8	37.0	49.1	56.9	51.4
Length of residence:						
Less than 1 year.....	22.4	17.2	23.3	24.9	30.2	26.9
1 to 2 years.....	35.9	25.4	37.0	36.7	43.9	39.7
3 to 5 years.....	46.5	27.2	45.6	51.3	52.1	50.0
6 to 9 years.....	54.7	26.7	50.6	60.8	61.5	54.5
10 years or more.....	59.4	33.0	49.7	61.0	67.6	58.9
<b>PERCENT VOTED OF THE REGISTERED</b>						
Total.....	71.9	57.7	67.6	73.6	77.3	73.2
Length of residence:						
Less than 1 year.....	59.8	52.3	61.5	64.3	66.3	62.8
1 to 2 years.....	69.3	61.3	68.4	71.4	75.6	71.2
3 to 5 years.....	71.0	59.5	68.2	73.6	74.4	75.5
6 to 9 years.....	74.6	56.9	71.1	76.4	77.9	75.8
10 years or more.....	74.9	59.9	70.8	74.4	78.9	73.2

Source: Table 20.

measured for three duration of residence categories: those who had lived at their current address for less than 1 year, for 1 to 2 years, and for 3 to 5 years. Those with the longest residence exhibited almost no difference in registration and voting behavior, whether they last moved within the same county, moved to another county in the same State, or moved to a different State. More recent movers were less likely to be registered and, to some extent, to have voted, if they moved to another county and especially so if they crossed State lines, than if they remained in the same county. The reduction of residence requirements to a maximum of 30 days makes mobility less of a barrier in Presidential elections.

The effect of a highly mobile society, both in terms of length of residence and in distance of move, had a definite impact on voting and registration in 1974. Recent moves and moves across State lines have been shown to depress registration and voter participation at all ages. In addition, persons with higher educational levels were much more likely to register and vote, even those that had recently moved, than were persons with little education. However, with increasing age (up to the point where general voting participation declines among the elderly) and at higher educational levels, mobility became less of an obstacle.

**Youth.** Before 1972 when persons under 21 years old were not eligible to vote in National elections (except in 4 States), surveys of political participation indicated a low voting rate among all young persons under 25 years old. In States which allowed 18 to 20 year olds to vote, approximately one-fourth actually reported voting (see P-20, No. 228). About one-half of the newly enfranchised 18 to 20 year olds reported voting in the 1972 Presidential election; but in the 1974 Congressional election, only 21 percent of 18 to 20 year olds did so. Youth (persons 18 to 20 years old) constituted a small portion of the electorate, 8 percent of persons of voting age, 12 percent of nonvoters and 4 percent of voters. Although the turnout of 18 to 24 year olds was lower than in 1972, the voting rate of this age group did not by itself account for the low turnout in the 1974 Congressional election.

Some writers have predicted that the higher educational levels of young persons now 18 to 24 years old may lead to higher levels of political participation in the future.<sup>9</sup> It has been suggested that young people do not

<sup>9</sup> Louis M. Seagull, "The Youth Vote and Change in American Politics," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Volume No. 397 (September 1971): 88-96. Norval Glenn and Michael Grimes, "Aging, Voting and Political Interest," *American Sociological Review* (August 1968): 563-75.

vote because they are too geographically mobile to become acquainted with persons running for local offices and that they are less likely to have the family and work responsibilities which increase the feeling that one's vote is necessary. The data shown in tables 4, 5, and 20 indicate the extent to which young persons are more likely to move, are less likely to be married, and more likely to have some college education. The proportion of married young people who voted is lower than for young single persons. Data from the 1972 voting survey showed that those young adults in school or college were more likely to vote than those not enrolled.<sup>10</sup>

Table F shows the proportion of persons registered to vote by educational level and age. The level of education is strongly related to the probability of being registered to vote for persons at all ages (see cover chart). Registration rates were especially low among young persons without a high school education; but a high educational level does not insure that youth will vote at the same rate as older adults; voting rates were lower for 18 to 24 year olds than for older persons at every educational level.

<sup>10</sup> See *Current Population Reports*, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1972," Series P-20, No. 253, table D.

**Table F. Percent Reported Registered and Voted by Age and Years of School Completed: November 1974**  
(Civilian noninstitutional population)

Age	Total	Years of school completed				
		0 to 8 years	9 to 11 years	12 years	13 to 15 years	16 years or more
<b>PERCENT REGISTERED</b>						
Total.....	62.2	54.1	54.3	61.9	66.9	76.0
18 to 24 years.....	41.3	8.9	18.6	35.2	52.5	63.6
25 to 34 years.....	54.7	21.5	35.3	53.2	63.0	69.1
35 to 44 years.....	66.7	40.1	53.0	70.8	74.5	81.7
45 to 54 years.....	72.5	53.5	65.1	77.2	80.5	85.7
55 to 64 years.....	75.1	62.3	73.0	79.7	86.8	87.3
65 years and over.....	70.2	61.7	73.4	76.2	85.0	85.6
<b>PERCENT VOTED</b>						
Total.....	44.7	34.4	35.9	44.7	49.6	61.3
18 to 24 years.....	23.8	3.2	7.5	19.6	31.8	39.2
25 to 34 years.....	37.0	8.9	17.1	33.6	44.7	54.0
35 to 44 years.....	49.1	21.0	32.1	52.5	58.9	68.7
45 to 54 years.....	55.9	32.8	44.2	61.1	67.7	75.1
55 to 64 years.....	58.3	42.0	53.7	63.3	74.9	77.8
65 years and over.....	51.4	40.4	54.8	60.5	69.0	71.2

The low participation rates of youth in the 1974 Congressional election was largely due to their failure to become registered to vote. Only about 41 percent of those under 25 reported that they were registered. But of those registered, 58 percent reported voting.

Although a much higher proportion of younger persons were not registered to vote than were older adults, the reasons given for not registering were surprisingly similar for the two groups (see table 12). However, some differences did exist. For example, a higher proportion of persons 18 to 24 years old than older persons who had not registered indicated that they were "not interested" in registering. On the other hand, persons under 25 years of age were less apt than older persons to cite physical disability as a reason for not being registered and they were less inclined to give reasons that suggested negative attitudes toward politics (such as did not like politics in general, did not prefer any of the candidates, or vote wouldn't matter anyway).

There is no indication from the tables on reasons for not voting of those who were registered that youth were more "alienated" from the voting process than older persons. Registered youth were more likely to have been reported as away from home on election day; and they were less likely to say they were "unable to go to the polls" or to say they "disliked politics" than were older persons.

**Evaluation of the accuracy of the data.** In the November 1974 Current Population Survey supplement on voting, 63.2 million of the 141.3 million persons in the civilian noninstitutional population were reported (by themselves or by members of their households) as having voted in the 1974 Congressional election. The official count shows 56 million votes were cast. The survey estimate is 5 percentage points higher than the official count. The "official count" was obtained by summing the number of votes cast for either Senator, Congressman, or Governor in each State, depending on which office received the highest number of votes.<sup>11</sup>

The five previous surveys of voting conducted by the Bureau of the Census, beginning in 1964, also resulted

in higher estimates than the official count of votes cast. The reports of those surveys, Series P-20, Nos. 143, 174, 192, 228, and 253, contain analyses of possible reasons for this difference. Much of the discussion in those reports is applicable here.

In summary, several general reasons were advanced to account for the different estimates of the number of voters. There appears to be a tendency for persons to overreport their voter participation because of a reluctance to admit, either to an interviewer or in front of other family members, a dereliction in civic responsibility. Associated with this reason is an apparent tendency for the respondent to give another member of the household the benefit of the doubt and report that the person had voted when there was uncertainty about it. This problem may be especially relevant to reported voting of 18 to 20 year olds inasmuch as only about 33 percent of these respondents reported for themselves, since many were away at college and were reported for by their parents. Another factor is the Current Population Survey estimation procedure which attributes the characteristics of interviewed persons to persons in similar households where no interview was obtained. The coverage of the CPS sample and the independent population estimates to which the survey results were adjusted are known to underrepresent certain groups where nonvoting was found to be high. Finally, the total number of persons reporting that they cast votes could be expected to be higher than the official count because some ballots are invalidated or because some persons voted only for candidates at the city or county level, although precise estimates of the magnitude of these sources of error are not available.

A portion of the difference between the official count and the survey results may be attributable to the use of a household respondent to report on the registration and voting behavior of all eligible household members. An experiment was conducted in conjunction with the November 1974 CPS to assess the effects of this procedure. In approximately one-eighth of the sample households, interviewers were instructed to obtain the voting supplement information from each individual directly insofar as possible and within the time constraints imposed by the collection of the monthly labor force data, which is the primary purpose of the Current Population Survey. For the entire sample, 57 percent of all interviewed persons reported for themselves, as compared with about 76 percent for the test group. (The results of the test group interviewing were incorporated

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<sup>11</sup>Actual votes cast are reported in "Official 1974 Returns For Congress, Governors." Congressional Quarterly (April 5, 1975), pp. 716-23.

into the totals for the survey.) A comparison of the proportion of persons reported as registered and voting

for the test group, for persons reporting for themselves, and by a proxy is shown in the table below.<sup>12</sup>

Percent Registered and Voted as Reported in the Full CPS Sample and by Persons Reporting for Themselves

Percent registered and voting	Total	Full sample		Test group
		Reported by self	Reported by other (proxy)	
Percent registered.....	66.1	66.1	66.2	66.2
Percent voted.....	47.2	46.9	47.7	46.9

The differences between groups reporting for themselves or someone else are not significant. Thus, obtaining voting and registration information from a proxy rather than from the individual himself evidently does not account for the overestimate of voters obtained in household surveys.

A person's reasons as to why he or she did not vote or was not registered might be considered more susceptible to variation when these reasons are supplied by another household member, as they were in about 40 percent of the cases. However, an examination of the reasons obtained in the test group as compared with those from the full sample reveals that in all but one instance the estimated difference between the two sets of reasons is less than 2 percentage points. The proportion reported as "don't know" and "not reported" on reason for not voting was about 3 percentage points lower in the test group than in the full sample.

Failure to remember is not considered to be a problem in the voting survey, since the data in each survey were collected during the week containing the 19th day of November, which was generally about 2 weeks after the election. However, in the 1974 and 1970 surveys, questions were also asked about whether respondents had voted in the previous Presidential election. Asking retrospective questions of this kind introduced possible memory biases into the data, and the net effect would be expected to be a further overstatement of voter participation. That effect is fairly small with regard to the 1968 and 1972 Presidential elections as table G shows.

The increase of 0.8 percent in the proportion voting in the 1972 election as reported in 1974 is smaller than the difference reported in the 1968 and 1970 surveys. Factors other than recall which may affect the voting rates are changes in the universe due to the combined effect of sampling difference, deaths, movement into

and out of the Armed Forces, and international migration. Persons with less than a high school education reported a higher level of voting in 1972 when asked retrospectively about it in 1974 than they did in 1972. These persons also reported a below average decline in voting in 1974 as compared with 1972. Persons with high school diplomas and beyond reported lower levels of 1972 voting in the 1974 survey than they did in 1972. These persons had greater than average declines in voting between the Presidential and Congressional elections.

In 1974, nonvoters were asked, for the first time, to recall whether they had ever voted. If there is some tendency for persons to be reluctant to report that they had not voted in a specific election, there must be even more reluctance to report that one has never voted, except where the reason poses no threat to an individual's sense of responsibility as a citizen, including persons who were citizens of another country. It is therefore believed that the number of persons who are reported as having never voted can be considered as a minimum estimate.

Estimates of voter participation that are higher than the official counts have been the common experience of other survey organizations which have studied voting behavior. Explanations similar to those cited in this report have been given by these groups to account for the discrepancies.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> To make the comparisons as nearly equivalent as possible, those who were reported as "don't know" or "not reported" on voting have been eliminated from these calculations.

<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this problem, including a comparison of the 1964 Bureau of the Census survey with that conducted by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, see Aage R. Clausen, "Response Validity: Vote Report," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, Winter 1968-69, pp. 588-606.

**Table G. Comparison of Reported Voter Participation in 1972 and 1968 as Reported in the Year of the Election and Two Years Later, by Years of School Completed**

Years of school completed	Percent reported voting in 1972			Percent reported voting in 1968		
	Reported in 1974	Reported in 1972	Difference (1974-1972)	Reported in 1970	Reported in 1968	Difference (1970-1968)
Total.....	63.8	63.0	+0.8	72.1	68.8	+3.3
Elementary: 0 to 4 years...	35.4	33.0	+2.4	45.6	38.4	+7.2
5 to 7 years...	47.0	44.3	+2.7	57.9	52.4	+5.5
8 years.....	58.9	55.2	+3.7	68.8	62.4	+6.4
High school: 1 to 3 years...	54.8	52.0	+2.8	66.4	61.3	+5.1
4 years.....	64.2	65.4	-1.2	75.8	72.5	+3.3
College: 1 to 3 years...	71.6	74.9	-3.3	80.7	78.4	+2.3
4 years.....	78.2	82.3	-4.1	85.0	83.1	+1.9
5 years or more	83.4	85.6	-2.2	85.5	85.7	-0.2

Source: Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 253, 228, and 192, and table 16 of this report.

### RELATED REPORTS

**Current population reports.** Advance data on reported voter participation and registration of the population of voting age, by race and sex, for the United States and regions in the November 1974 election are contained in the report Series P-20, No. 275.

Data on voter participation by social and economic characteristics of the population of voting age in the 1964, 1968, and 1972 Presidential elections and in the 1966, 1970, and 1974 Congressional elections were published in the reports Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 174, and 228, respectively.

Data on the social and economic characteristics of persons 18 to 24 years old who became eligible to vote

on the basis of age in 1972 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 230.

Projections of the population of voting age for the United States, regions, divisions, and States for November 1, 1974 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 526.

Data on the social and economic Characteristics by reported voter participation of the population of voting age in the 1966 and 1964 elections and estimates of the population of voting age for the United States, regions, divisions, and States, as of November 1, 1968, were published in a composite report Series P-20, No. 172.

The number of persons of voting age in 1960 and the votes cast for President in the elections of 1964 and 1960 for the United States, by States and counties, are contained in the report Series P-23, No. 14.