

Population Characteristics

U.S. Department of Commerce
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Series P-20, No. 344
Issued September 1979

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1978

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U.S. Department of Commerce

Juanita M. Kreps, Secretary
Luther H. Hodges, Jr.,
Under Secretary
Courtenay M. Slater,
Chief Economist

BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
Vincent P. Barabba,
Director



BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
Vincent P. Barabba, Director
Daniel B. Levine, Deputy Director
George E. Hall, Associate Director
for Demographic Fields

POPULATION DIVISION
Meyer Zitter, Chief

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SYMBOLS USED IN TABLES

—	Represents zero or rounds to zero.
B	Base less than 75,000.
...	Not applicable.
NA	Not available.
Z	Rounds to less than 0.05.

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1978

INTRODUCTION

Less than half of the civilian noninstitutional population of voting age actually voted in the November 1978 Congressional election, according to information reported in the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census in November 1978. The reported turnout in 1978 (46 percent) was close to the turnout reported in the 1974 Congressional election (45 percent), but substantially below that reported in the Presidential election of 1976 (59 percent).

Results of the Current Population Surveys of voting and registration over the past decade and a half almost invariably show higher voting rates for the middle to upper income, occupational, and educational groups whose members are old enough to have families and to be settled in their communities. Taken together, the factors of community attachment (approximated in this report by homeownership and duration of residence), family status, socioeconomic status, and age seem more predictive of voter turnout than any other variables identified in the CPS. While overall White voting rates appear to be considerably higher than Black rates, analyses of previous CPS results show that racial differences in voter turnout are largely a product of socioeconomic and age differences.¹

Some important findings resulting from the November 1978 survey of registration and voting are:

- Homeowners are twice as likely to vote as renters—59 percent and 28 percent, respectively.
- Persons who have lived in the same house for a long time are more likely to vote than persons who have recently moved.
- Married couples maintaining families are more likely to vote than other relatives living in their households, and twice as likely as nonrelatives.
- College graduates are more than twice as likely to vote as persons who did not complete elementary school—64 percent and 29 percent, respectively.
- White-collar workers are more likely to vote than persons in other occupation groups.

- Persons 65 years and over are nearly three times as likely to vote (56 percent) as persons 18 to 20 years old (20 percent).

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY STATUS AND VOTING

Home ownership. In 1978, the Bureau of the Census tabulated data from the CPS on homeownership and voting for the first time. The results were striking. Of all the variables related to registration and voting identified in the CPS, homeownership appeared to have one of the strongest relationships with voting. In the November 1978 election, homeowners were twice as likely to vote as those who rented. Fifty-nine percent of owners reported that they voted, whereas only 28 percent of renters reported having voted (table B). In every age and race group, the percent reported voting among homeowners exceeded that among renters by substantial amounts. Homeownership enhances citizens' ties with their communities and thereby increases voter participation because homeowners have a direct stake in administrative decisions at all levels of government.

Duration of residence. The voting rate in 1978 was significantly higher among persons who had lived at the same address for long periods of time. Sixty percent of primary family members who had lived in the same house for 6 years or more reported that they had voted in the 1978 elections. This figure compares with 22 percent of those who had lived at the same address for less than 1 month. The general association of duration of residence with voting occurred among both Blacks and Whites and for all age groups, although for Blacks the association was not as strong as it was for Whites (table C).

To some extent duration of residence is associated with age; young persons generally have lived at their current address for a shorter time than older persons. In 1978, for example, about 18 percent of persons 18 to 24 years old had lived at their current address for less than 1 year. Among persons 35 years and over, however, only 8 percent had lived at the same address for this short a time. The combination of youth and a short duration of residence resulted in a voting rate of only 15 percent for the 18-to 24-year olds who had lived at their current address for less than 30 days. In comparison, older persons who had lived in their communities for many years had voting rates not only much

¹U.S. Bureau of the Census, **Current Population Reports**, Series P-20, No. 322, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1976."

Table A. Reported Voting Rates, by Region, Race, and Spanish Origin: November 1964 to 1978

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Region, race, and Spanish origin	Congressional elections				Presidential elections			
	1978	1974	1970	1966	1976	1972	1968	1964
UNITED STATES								
Total, voting age.....	151,646	141,299	120,701	112,800	146,548	136,203	116,535	110,604
Percent Reported Voted								
Total.....	45.9	44.7	54.6	55.4	59.2	63.0	67.8	69.3
White.....	47.3	46.3	56.0	57.0	60.9	64.5	69.1	70.7
Black.....	37.2	33.8	43.5	41.7	48.7	52.1	57.6	58.5
Spanish origin ¹	23.5	22.9	(NA)	(NA)	31.8	37.5	(NA)	(NA)
NORTH AND WEST								
Total, voting age.....	102,894	96,505	83,515	78,355	99,403	93,653	81,594	78,174
Percent Reported Voted								
Total.....	48.9	48.8	59.0	60.9	61.2	66.4	71.0	74.6
White.....	50.0	50.0	59.8	61.7	62.6	67.5	71.8	74.7
Black.....	41.3	37.9	51.4	52.1	52.2	56.7	64.8	² 72.0
SOUTH								
Total, voting age.....	48,752	44,794	37,186	34,445	47,145	42,550	34,941	32,429
Percent Reported Voted								
Total.....	39.6	36.0	44.7	43.0	54.9	55.4	60.1	56.7
White.....	41.1	37.4	46.4	45.1	57.1	57.0	61.9	59.5
Black.....	33.5	30.0	36.8	32.9	45.7	47.8	51.6	² 44.0

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.²Black and other races in 1964.**Table B. Percent Reported Voting of Primary Family Heads, by Age and Tenure: November 1978**

Tenure	Total, 18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years and over
Total ¹	50.4	19.3	42.6	60.3	64.1
Owner families.....	58.5	27.1	50.8	64.8	67.2
Renter families.....	28.0	15.6	25.2	35.9	51.0

¹Total includes persons who did not report on tenure and persons in the "No cash rent" category, not shown separately.

higher than younger residents, but also substantially higher than the national rate for persons of their age. Two-thirds of persons 35 years and over who had lived at their current address for 6 years or more reported that they voted in 1978; nationally, 56 percent of all persons of this age reported voting in 1978.

Family membership. Persons who live in families are more likely to vote than those who do not and persons maintaining families (including husbands and wives) are most likely of all family members to vote. In 1978, 51 percent of the persons maintaining primary families reported that they voted. Householders without relatives living with them (primary individuals) reported the next highest voting rate with 43 percent reported as having voted. Other relatives and nonrelatives were the least likely household members to have voted—29 percent and 23 percent, respectively (table D).

The age of family members is also important to their voting. Young adults maintaining families are unlikely to vote; only about 1 out of 5 of the 18 to 24 year old husbands or wives or other persons responsible for maintaining families reported that they had voted in 1978. At older ages, turnout increased to 59 percent of those 65 years and over. In the broad age range of 25 to 64 years, the voting rate of wives exceeded that of husbands or other persons maintaining families by about 3 percentage points; at the older ages of 65 years and over, the voting rates were

reversed. The voting rate of older nonrelatives is not much higher than that of younger nonrelatives.

The presence of children in the primary family when the parents are in the main childbearing ages of 25 to 44 years seems to enhance turnout slightly. In 1978, about 40 percent of persons of this age maintaining families without own children in the home reported that they had voted. Among those with children, 43 percent said they had voted. When children are present, their age seems to have some bearing on turnout; the voting rate is lower when all children are under 6 years old than when all are 6 to 17 years old (table E).

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND VOTING

Education. Formal schooling is one of the most important personal variables associated with voter turnout. At all ages, higher voting rates are found among persons with higher educational levels. It is likely that education directly affects voter turnout because it contributes to citizen awareness of the electoral process in general and to a habit of citizen concern with political issues. At least this seems a valid interpretation since the voting rate of all age and racial groups is higher among those with more education. Also, the direct effect of education is no doubt enhanced by the impact that education has on other variables significantly related to voting, such as occupation and income (table F).

Table C. Percent Reported Voting of Persons in Primary Families, by Age and Duration of Residence: November 1978

Duration of residence	Total, ¹ 18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 64 years	65 years and over
Total.....	48.8	25.1	41.1	58.7	59.8
Less than 1 month.....	21.6	14.5	21.0	31.1	23.3
1 to 6 months.....	24.6	17.4	25.2	31.0	36.5
7 to 11 months.....	31.0	20.0	30.5	39.2	48.5
1 to 2 years.....	39.2	23.6	40.4	46.2	49.9
3 to 5 years.....	51.3	27.8	50.7	57.8	58.7
6 years or more.....	60.3	31.5	51.6	67.3	65.1
Not reported.....	7.4	5.3	7.1	8.8	5.9

¹Excludes aliens.

Table D. Percent Reported Voting, by Age and Household Relationship: November 1978

Household relationship	Total, 18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 64 years	65 years and over
Total.....	45.9	23.5	49.7	55.9
Head with other relatives (including wife) in household.....	50.8	19.9	50.8	64.1
Head with no other relatives in household....	42.6	22.0	41.6	51.7
Wife of head.....	51.0	22.1	53.5	60.4
Other relatives of head.....	29.2	26.0	38.0	27.6
Nonrelatives of head.....	22.6	17.4	26.6	29.9

Table E. Percent Reported Voting of Primary Family Heads, by Age and Presence of Own Children Under 18: November 1978

Presence of own children	Total, 18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 years and over
Total.....	50.4	19.3	42.6	60.3	64.1
No own children.....	56.3	23.4	40.2	61.5	64.3
With own children.....	44.9	15.8	43.1	58.3	55.8
1 child.....	44.7	17.3	40.0	60.5	59.5
2 children.....	46.0	13.5	45.7	57.9	60.5
3 children or more.....	43.7	11.9	42.7	52.3	31.6
All under 6 years.....	33.3	16.0	39.7	38.5	42.7
All 6 to 17 years.....	51.0	23.2	45.8	59.2	57.0

Table F. Percent Reported Voting, by Age and Years of School Completed: November 1978

Years of school completed	Total, 18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 64 years	65 years and over
Total.....	45.9	23.5	38.0	55.5	55.9
Elementary: Less than 8 years	28.7	4.1	8.4	27.2	36.7
8 years.....	41.4	6.5	15.0	40.2	50.4
High school: 1 to 3 years.....	35.1	11.0	18.5	43.1	56.5
4 years.....	45.3	21.4	33.1	58.9	66.1
College: 1 to 3 years.....	51.5	33.2	45.0	66.6	71.8
4 years or more..	63.9	40.2	54.5	73.1	77.0

Occupation. A significantly higher proportion of employed than of unemployed persons of voting age were reported as having voted—47 percent and 27 percent, respectively. Within broad occupation categories, a higher voting rate was associated with white-collar occupations. Blue-collar workers recorded the lowest voter turnout (35 percent) of the major occupation groups. The patterns of association between occupation and voting occurred to about an equal degree among men and women workers and among White and Black workers (table G).

Family income. Among persons in primary families, higher voter turnout was associated with higher family income. Only about 31 percent of persons in families with incomes under \$5,000 reported that they voted in 1978. Among persons in families with incomes of \$25,000 or more, 60 percent reported that they had voted. The positive association of income and voting persisted in each age group, with the lowest voting rate being reported by the youngest age group in the lowest income category (table H).

Table G. Percent Reported Voting of Employed Persons, by Major Occupation Group and Sex: November 1978

Occupation group	Both sexes	Male	Female
Total employed...	45.8	46.1	45.5
White collar.....	55.1	58.6	51.9
Blue collar.....	34.6	35.4	31.2
Service workers.....	39.1	43.6	36.7
Farm workers.....	48.1	49.6	40.9

EVALUATION OF THE ACCURACY OF THE DATA

In the November 1978 Current Population Survey supplement on voting, 69.6 million of the 151.6 million persons of voting age in the civilian noninstitutional population were reported (by themselves or by members of their households) as having voted in the November 1978 election. Official counts showed 59.5 million votes cast, or a difference of 10.1 million votes between the two sources. This difference is greater than can be accounted for by sampling variability. Moreover, the population covered in the survey excluded

Table H. Percent Reported Voting of Persons in Primary Families, by Age and Family Income: November 1978

Family income	Total, 18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 64 years	65 years and over
Total.....	47.1	24.2	39.1	56.8	58.3
Under \$5,000.....	30.6	14.4	21.0	34.0	43.9
\$5,000 to \$9,999.....	39.2	18.4	26.0	43.7	59.8
\$10,000 to \$14,999.....	44.0	23.4	36.3	52.1	67.1
\$15,000 to \$19,999.....	49.8	27.5	44.0	59.2	64.3
\$20,000 to \$24,999.....	53.1	27.9	46.3	63.3	65.4
\$25,000 and over.....	60.1	32.5	52.2	70.9	66.1
Not reported.....	44.8	20.9	34.6	52.4	54.2

members of the Armed Forces and institutional inmates.² Since the proportion of voters in these population groups is somewhat lower than in the rest of the population, their omission leads to a minor understatement of the size of the difference.

This bias has been noted in other surveys of voting behavior but both the methods of measuring it and estimates of its size have varied considerably.³ On balance, the overstatement varies between 5 and 15 percent of the total number of persons reported as having voted.⁴ Possible reasons for the differences follow.

1. *Understatement of total votes cast.* The only uniform count of the total number of voters available on a nationwide basis is the number of votes cast for President. This number is smaller than the total number of persons who voted because (a) a number of ballots are invalidated in the counting and (b) there are a number of valid ballots for which there was no vote cast for President. Precise estimates of the size of these sources of error are not available. Although the office of the President usually attracts the largest number of votes, not everyone who goes to the polls casts a vote for President. Some persons may, for example, vote for a U.S. Senator or member of the U.S. Congress but not for President. A tally of the data from the States which

² In the November 1974 Congressional election, the Department of Defense total voting rate for Armed Forces was 18.0 percent as compared with 44.7 percent for the civilian noninstitutional population; in the 1972 Presidential election, the corresponding voting rate for the Armed Forces was 47.6 as compared with 63.0 percent for the civilian noninstitutional population. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Research Affairs), "The Federal Voting Assistance Program," Tenth Report, 1975, and Ninth Report, 1973.

³ Hugh J. Parry and Helen M. Crossley, "Validity of Responses to Survey Questions," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XIV (1950), pp. 61-80; Mungo Miller, "The Waukegan Study of Voter Turnout Prediction," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XVI (Fall 1952), pp. 381-398; and Helen Dinerman, "1948 Votes in the Making—A Preview," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XII (Winter 1948-49), pp. 585-598. For a more complete listing of similar studies, see David Adamany and Philip Dubois, "The 'Forgetful' Voter and the Underreported Vote," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, (Summer 1975), pp. 227-231.

⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of the 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.

report information on the total number of votes cast shows that there were about 2 percent fewer votes cast for President in 1976 than the total number voting in the election.

2. *Overreporting of voting in the survey.* Some persons who actually did not vote were reluctant to so report, perhaps because they felt it was a "lapse in civic responsibility," and some respondents reporting on the voting behavior of other members of their household assumed the person in question had voted when, in fact, he or she had not. This latter problem may be especially relevant to reported voting of 18- to 20-year-olds, inasmuch as only about a quarter of this age group reported for themselves. Those away at college were almost certainly reported for by their parents. In addition, since men are more likely to be employed and at their jobs when the enumerator visits their home, another household member, usually the wife, is likely to report for them.

As a check on the work of the interviewer, a subsample of the households in the 1964 survey was reinterviewed by the supervisory staff. This reinterview showed no net error in reporting on voting. However, since the reinterviewer usually talked with the same household respondent (or respondents) as originally interviewed the previous week, it is likely that an original reporting error of this type would go undetected during a reinterview.

A test was conducted in conjunction with the December 1972 Current Population Survey to examine another facet of the overreporting problem. The hypothesis was that by asking the presumably less sensitive question on registration first, the tendency to overreport on voting might be lessened. The results of this test were somewhat confounded by a nonreporting rate in December that was twice as high as that in November, 4.2 percent compared with 1.9 percent. However, when the comparison was restricted to those who reported on voting, the study indicated that reversing the question order does not reduce the proportion of persons who report that they had voted.

3. *CPS estimating procedure.* A part of the difference between the official count of votes for President and the CPS estimate could be due to the estimation procedures in the

Table I. Comparisons of CPS Voting Estimates and Official Counts of Votes Cast: November 1964 to 1978

(Numbers in millions)

Year	CPS vote for President	Official vote for President ¹	Percent difference
1976.....	85.9	81.7	5.1
1972.....	84.6	77.6	9.0
1968.....	78.5	73.0	7.5
1964.....	² 76.7	70.6	8.6
	CPS vote for U.S. Representative	Official vote for U.S. Representative or highest office ¹	Percent difference
1978.....	² 69.6	³ 59.5	17.0
1974.....	² 63.2	³ 56.0	12.9
1970.....	² 65.9	³ 58.0	13.6
1966.....	57.6	¹ 52.9	8.9

¹U.S. Congress, Clerk of the House, Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election.²CPS estimate of total votes cast.³The "official vote" was obtained by summing the number of votes cast for U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, or Governor in each State, depending on which office received the highest number of votes.

CPS which essentially attribute the characteristics of interviewed persons to persons in noninterviewed households of similar types—about 4 percent of the total. This procedure may have a substantial effect on the results of a survey of voting if the noninterviewed households have a higher proportion of nonvoting members than interviewed households.

4. *CPS coverage.* An additional factor that increases the estimate of voters derives from the coverage of the CPS sample. There is evidence that the sample is less successful in representing certain groups in the population in which nonvoting may be expected to be high, for example, Black-and-other-races males 21 to 24 years of age. In addition, the CPS results are adjusted to independent population estimates based on the decennial census. Insofar as the census was also subject to net undercounts in selected age groups, this source of error will be reflected in estimates from the CPS.⁵

5. *Household respondent.* A portion of the difference between the official count and the survey results might be attributable to the use of a household respondent to report on the registration and voting of all eligible household members. An experiment was conducted in conjunction with the November 1974 CPS to assess the effects of proxy respondents on the voting rate. In approximately one-eighth of the sample households, interviewers were instructed to obtain the voting supplement information from each indi-

vidual directly. For the entire sample, 57 percent of all interviewed persons reported for themselves, as compared with about 76 percent for the test group. The differences between groups reporting for themselves or someone else were not significant. Thus, there is no evidence that obtaining voting and registration information for all household members from one respondent rather than from self-respondents only accounts for any part of the overestimates of voters obtained in household surveys.

6. *Nonreports on voting.* In 1966 a "do not know" category in each question of the voting survey was introduced (and retained in all subsequent surveys) on the theory that forcing people into a "yes-no" alternative might have been responsible for increasing the number of persons reported as voting. The introduction of the "do not know" category increased the overall proportion of those for whom a report on voting was not obtained from 1 percent in 1964 to 3 percent in 1966. Among Blacks the figure rose to almost 6 percent. The lower nonresponse figure from the 1964 report may have resulted in part from the fact that the "yes-no" alternative forced respondents to give answers which more properly should have been classified as "do not know."

Although there is no evidence that answers by proxy respondents account for the overreporting on voting, the value of asking people about their own behavior on such matters as voting and registering to vote can be shown by comparing the effect of self reports and reports by others on the "do not know" rate for whether voted in the election and whether registered to vote. For self-respondents, the "do not know" categories were almost nonexistent. At the other

⁵ See U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of Population: 1970, Vol. I, "Characteristics of the Population," App-65-67, for a discussion of errors in age groups in the 1970 census.

Table J. Percent of Citizens Who Reported "Do Not Know" to the Question on Voting, by Race and Type of Respondent: November 1978

Type of respondent and race	"Do not know" responses	
	Whether voted	If did not vote, whether registered
All persons ¹	2.6	3.3
White.....	2.4	3.3
Black.....	5.6	3.8
Reported by self.....	0.3	1.5
White.....	0.3	1.5
Black.....	0.6	1.3
Reported by other....	5.3	5.7
White.....	4.5	5.4
Black.....	12.5	7.8

¹Includes persons not reported on type of respondent, not shown separately.

extreme, 5 percent of respondents who reported on the voting behavior of other household members could not answer whether the other persons had voted. Among Blacks the corresponding figure was 13 percent (table J).

Voting in previous elections. Failure to remember is not considered to be a problem in the voting survey for a current election, since the data in each survey are collected during the week containing the 19th day of November, which is generally about 2 weeks after the election. However, since 1968, questions have also been asked in each survey about whether respondents had voted in the previous Presidential election. Asking retrospective questions of this kind introduces 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 1976, 1972, and 1968 Presidential elections.⁶ Some of the apparent changes in the voting rate shown in this table result from the combined effect of sampling differences and changes in the universe because of deaths, movement into and out of the Armed Forces or institutions, and international migration.

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 1978 election are contained in the report Series P-20, No. 332.

Data on voter participation by social and economic characteristics of the population of voting age in the 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1978 Presidential elections and in the 1966, 1970, and 1974 Congressional elections were published in the reports Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 174, 228, 293, and 322, 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, 1978 were published in **Current Population Reports**, Series P-25, No. 732.

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.

⁶ See **Current Population Reports**, Series P-20, No. 322, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1976," table E, page 5, and **Current Population Reports**, Series P-20, No. 293, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1974," table G, page 10, for a comparison of voting as reported in the year of the election and 2 years later.

NOTE

In the past the Census Bureau has designated a head of household to serve as the central reference person for the collection and tabulation of data for individual members of the household (or family). However, recent social changes have resulted in a trend toward recognition of more equal status for all members of the household (or family), making the term "head" less relevant in the analysis of household and family data. As a result, the Bureau is currently developing new techniques of enumeration and data presentation which will eliminate the concept of "head." While much of the data in this report are based on the concept of "head," methodology for future Census Bureau reports will reflect a gradual movement away from this traditional practice.