



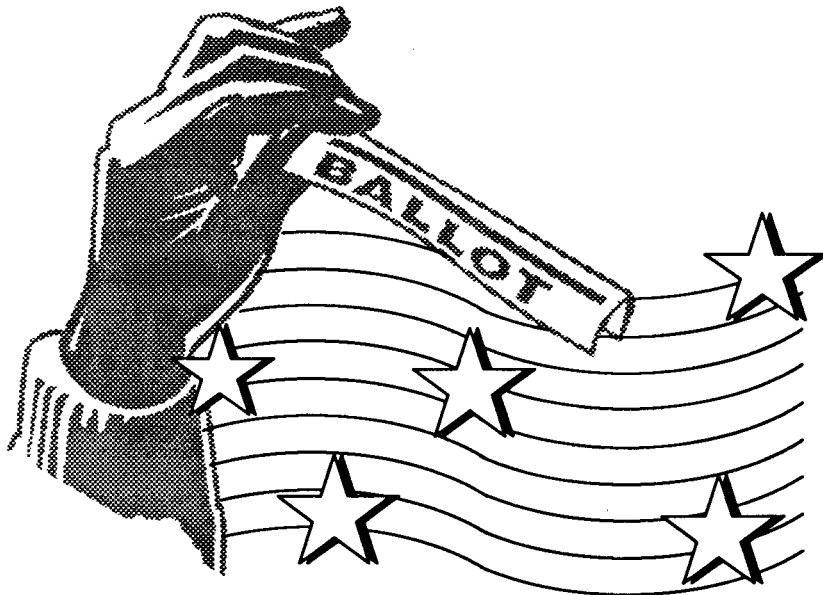
CURRENT POPULATION REPORTS

Population Characteristics

Series P-20, No. 453

by
Jerry T. Jennings

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1990



U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Acknowledgments

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Publications planning, design, composition, editorial review, and printing planning and procurement were performed by the staff of Administrative and Publications Services Division, **Walter C. Odom**, Chief; **Nelsa D. Brown** edited and coordinated the publication.

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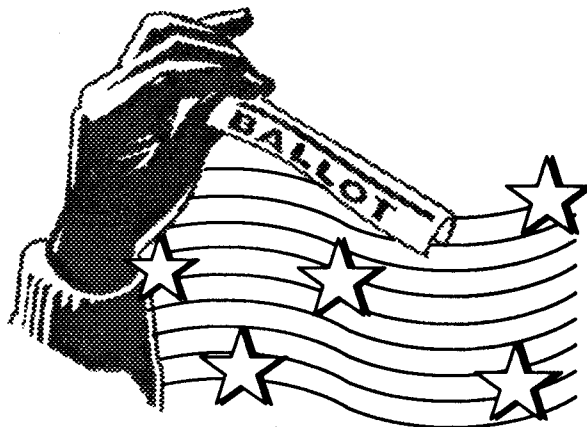
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SUGGESTED CITATION

U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No.453,
Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1990
U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1991.

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SYMBOLS USED IN TABLES

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

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1990

(The estimates in this report do not reflect the results of the 1990 Census. See Appendix C for information on the estimation procedures.)

INTRODUCTION

Results from the November 1990 supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) show that 45 percent of persons 18 years old and over reported that they voted in the 1990 Congressional elections. This is 1 percentage point lower than in the Congressional elections of 1986.

The survey also shows that 62 percent of those 18 years and over were registered to vote at the time of the 1990 Congressional elections, two percentage points lower than in 1986.

If noncitizens are removed from the denominators and the rates recomputed, then 66 percent of citizens

were reported as registered in 1990, and 48 percent were reported as having voted.

The findings in this report are based on answers to a series of questions asked of persons of voting age in the CPS conducted by the Bureau of the Census in November 1990. Data in the November CPS relate to the civilian noninstitutional population 18 years old and over.

Household surveys of registration and voting supplement official counts by providing estimates of registration and turnout for population groups not identified in official sources. The Current Population Survey is the largest of these surveys and provides

Table A. Percent Reported Voting in Congressional Election Years, by Region, Race, Hispanic origin, Sex, and Age: November 1966 to 1990

(Numbers in thousands)

Region, race, Hispanic origin, sex, and age	Congressional elections of—						
	1990	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966
UNITED STATES							
Total, voting age	182,118	173,890	165,483	151,646	141,299	120,701	112,800
Percent voted	45.0	46.0	48.5	45.9	44.7	54.6	55.4
White	46.7	47.0	49.9	47.3	46.3	56.0	57.0
Black	39.2	43.2	43.0	37.2	33.8	43.5	41.7
Hispanic origin ¹	21.0	24.2	25.3	23.5	22.9	(NA)	(NA)
Male	44.6	45.8	48.7	46.6	46.2	56.8	58.2
Female	45.4	46.1	48.4	45.3	43.4	52.7	53.0
18 to 24 years	20.4	21.9	24.8	23.5	23.8	2/30.4	2/31.1
25 to 44 years	40.7	41.4	45.4	43.1	42.2	51.9	53.1
45 to 64 years	55.8	58.7	62.2	58.5	56.9	64.2	64.5
65 years and over	60.3	60.9	59.9	55.9	51.4	57.0	56.1
NORTH AND WEST							
Total, voting age	119,740	114,689	110,126	102,894	98,505	83,515	78,355
Percent voted	46.4	47.5	51.9	48.9	48.8	59.0	60.9
White	48.2	48.7	53.1	50.0	50.0	59.8	61.7
Black	38.4	44.2	48.5	41.3	37.9	51.4	52.1
Hispanic origin ¹	20.5	23.8	25.8	23.9	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
SOUTH							
Total, voting age	62,378	59,201	55,357	48,752	44,794	37,186	34,445
Percent voted	42.4	43.0	41.8	39.6	36.0	44.7	43.0
White	43.5	43.5	42.9	41.1	37.4	46.4	45.1
Black	39.8	42.5	38.3	33.5	30.0	36.8	32.9
Hispanic origin ¹	22.1	25.0	24.2	22.5	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

²Prior to 1972, includes persons 18 to 20 years old in Georgia and Kentucky, 19 and 20 in Alaska, and 20 years old in Hawaii.

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, 414, and table 2 of this report.

Note: See Appendix A for more detailed historical data.

the Nation's most reliable information on the social and economic characteristics of voters and nonvoters, as well as on the number and characteristics of persons registered to vote.

Voting data from household surveys, however, have the limitation of generally overestimating turnout. For example, the November 1990 CPS indicates that 82.0 million persons voted in the 1990 elections, 13.0 more than the 69.0 million who actually voted, according to the Election Research Center, using official election results from individual state boards of elections. Factors accounting for differences between official returns and CPS results are discussed in the section, "Evaluation of the Accuracy of the Data."

Because of inconsistent practices among States in purging registration records, CPS estimates of registration, although probably higher than true registration, are also probably more reliable than national estimates derived by summing official state registration records.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Overall voter turnout dropped 1 percentage point to 45 (± 0.3) percent between the 1986 and 1990 Congressional elections (table A).
- None of the individual regions showed a significant decline in turnout except the West, where turnout dropped from 48 (± 0.8) percent in 1986 to 45 (± 0.7) percent in 1990 (table C).
- White turnout remained at 47 (± 0.4) percent in 1990. Black turnout dropped from 43 (± 1.2) to 39 (± 1.1) percent, Hispanic from 24 (± 1.7) to 21 (± 1.5) percent (table A).
- Turnout for women, which reached parity with men in the Congressional elections in 1982, moved slightly ahead of men in 1990 (table A).
- Turnout among youth (persons 18 to 24 years old) in the 1990 election dropped about 2 points overall. For White youth, turnout in 1990 was about 21 (± 0.8) percent; for Blacks it was 20 (± 2.3) percent (not significantly different from the rate for White youth), and for Hispanics, 9 (± 2.4) percent (tables C and D).

Table B. Percent Reported Registered in Congressional Election Years, by Region, Race, Hispanic origin, Sex, and Age: November 1966 to 1990

(Numbers in thousands)

Region, race, Hispanic origin, sex, and age	Congressional elections of—						
	1990	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966
UNITED STATES							
Total, voting age	182,118	173,890	165,483	151,646	141,299	120,701	112,800
Percent registered	62.2	64.3	64.1	62.6	62.2	68.1	70.3
White	63.8	65.3	65.6	63.8	63.5	69.1	71.6
Black	58.8	64.0	59.1	57.1	54.9	60.8	60.2
Hispanic origin ¹	32.3	35.9	35.3	32.9	34.9	(NA)	(NA)
Male	61.2	63.4	63.7	62.6	62.8	69.6	72.2
Female	63.1	65.0	64.4	62.5	61.7	66.8	68.6
18 to 24 years	39.9	42.0	42.4	40.5	41.3	² 40.9	2/44.1
25 to 44 years	58.4	61.1	61.5	60.2	59.9	65.0	67.6
45 to 64 years	71.4	74.8	75.6	74.3	73.6	77.5	78.9
65 years and over	76.5	76.9	75.2	72.8	70.2	73.7	73.5
NORTH AND WEST							
Total, voting age	119,740	114,689	110,126	102,894	96,505	83,515	78,355
Percent registered	62.6	64.9	65.2	63.8	63.3	70.0	73.8
White	64.4	66.2	66.7	64.9	64.6	70.8	74.5
Black	58.4	63.1	61.7	58.0	54.2	64.5	68.8
Hispanic origin ¹	30.4	33.2	33.9	32.0	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
SOUTH							
Total, voting age	62,378	59,201	55,357	48,752	44,794	37,186	34,445
Percent registered	61.3	63.0	61.7	60.1	59.8	63.8	62.2
White	62.5	63.2	63.2	61.2	61.0	65.1	64.3
Black	59.0	64.6	56.9	56.2	55.5	57.5	52.9
Hispanic origin ¹	36.1	41.0	38.3	34.9	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

²Prior to 1972, includes persons 18 to 20 years old in Georgia and Kentucky, 19 and 20 in Alaska, and 20 years old in Hawaii.

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, 414, and table 2 of this report.

Note: See Appendix A for more detailed historical data.

- Turnout dropped between 1986 and 1990 among all education groups except those completing at least 1 year of college, whose turnout remained at 56 (± 0.5) percent (table C).
- The only identifiable economic groups showing an increase in turnout between 1986 and 1990 were persons in families at the very bottom or the very top of the income distribution (table C). Persons in families with incomes of less than \$5,000 had a turnout rate in 1990 of 32 (± 1.6) percent versus 26 (± 1.4) percent in 1986, while persons in families with incomes of \$50,000 and over had a turnout rate of 59 (± 0.8) percent in 1990, compared with 58 (± 0.9) percent in 1986.
- Total registration dropped 2 percentage points, from 64 (± 0.3) percent in 1986 to 62 (± 0.3) percent in 1990; Black registration dropped 5 points, to 59 (± 1.2) percent, and Hispanic registration dropped about 4 points, to 32 (± 1.7) percent.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VOTERS

Voting and registration are closely related to the social and demographic characteristics of the electorate (table C). Turnout in 1990 was higher among Whites (47 percent) than among either Blacks (39 percent) or Hispanics (21 percent). A turnout of 21 percent for Hispanics reflects in part the high proportion of noncitizens among this group (38 percent in 1990); Hispanics may be of any race. Turnout was also higher among middle-aged persons, those 45 to 64 years, (56 percent) than among younger age groups, and highest among residents of the Midwest (49 percent).

Education is one of the most important socioeconomic characteristics related to voting, since it usually affects not only a person's occupation and related economic characteristics, but may also influence perception of the efficacy of voting and, hence, an individual's commitment to the electoral process. In 1990, 63 percent of college graduates reported voting, compared with only 28 percent of persons who had attended only elementary school; persons with 4 years of high school had an intermediate voting rate of 42 percent. These disparities in turnout among education groups result in more highly educated groups being disproportionately represented among voters. For instance, in 1990, college graduates (persons who completed 4 or more years of college) made up 20 percent of the voting-age population but cast 27 percent of all votes (tables C and 7).

Whether a person is employed is also an important indicator of the likelihood of voting in an election. In the November 1990 election, 45 percent of persons employed in both agricultural and nonagricultural industries reported that they voted, compared with 28

percent of unemployed persons (table C). Among persons employed in nonagricultural industries, government workers (Federal, State, and local) reported voting at a significantly higher level (63 percent) than either wage or salary workers in private industry (41 percent) or self-employed workers (52 percent). Persons in managerial and professional occupations had the highest turnout rates (60 percent), while persons who were in occupations classified as operatives, fabricators, and laborers had the lowest rate, 31 percent (tables 11). Persons not in the labor force, a group that includes many retired and older persons, reported a voter participation rate of 47 percent, slightly above the 44 percent for the total labor force (employed and unemployed combined).

Data in table C also indicate that voter turnout increases with income. About 61 percent of persons 18 and over living in families whose incomes were \$50,000 or more voted in the 1990 election, compared with 32 percent of those in families with incomes less than \$5,000. With income, as with education, those at the upper end of the distribution made up a disproportionate share of voters; in the 1990 elections, 16 percent of all voters were members of families with incomes of \$50,000 or more, while only 12 percent of persons of voting age were members of families with incomes this high (tables 2 and 12).

Homeownership and duration of residence are other economic characteristics highly related to voter turnout. In the November 1990 election, 53 percent of persons living in owner-occupied housing units reported having voted, compared with 27 percent of those in renter-occupied units (table C). Turnout among persons who had lived for less than one year at their current address was 22 percent, compared with 58 percent for those who had lived at the same address for 5 years or longer (table 14).

TRENDS IN TURNOUT

Between 1966 and 1974, turnout rates estimated from the CPS showed a 10 percentage point decline in Congressional only election years, from 55 to 45 percent (table A). Beginning in 1978, the downward trend reversed for Congressional election years, turnout rising that year to 46 percent. Turnout rose again in 1982 to 49 percent, but fell to 46 percent in 1986, and then to 45 percent in 1990.

A significant part of the decline in turnout over the past two decades is attributable to the entry into the voting-age population of the baby boom cohorts born between 1946 and 1964. The earliest of these cohorts began entering the electorate in the mid-1960s, substantially raising the number of persons in the low-turnout youthful ages. Ratification of the 26th Amendment, which lowered the voting age in national elections

Table C. Characteristics of the Voting-Age Population Reported Having Registered or Voted: November 1990 and 1986

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	1990			1986		
	Number of persons	Percent registered	Percent voted	Number of persons	Percent registered	Percent voted
Total, 18 years and over	182,118	62.2	45.0	173,890	64.3	46.0
Race and Hispanic origin:						
White	155,587	63.8	46.7	149,899	65.3	47.0
Black	20,371	58.8	39.2	19,020	64.0	43.2
Hispanic origin ¹	13,756	32.3	21.0	11,832	35.9	24.2
Sex:						
Male	86,621	61.2	44.6	82,364	63.4	45.8
Female	95,496	63.1	45.4	91,526	65.0	46.1
Age:						
18 to 24 years	24,831	39.9	20.4	26,425	42.0	21.9
25 to 44 years	80,541	58.4	40.7	74,927	61.1	41.4
45 to 64 years	46,871	71.4	55.8	44,825	74.8	58.7
65 years and over	29,874	76.5	60.3	27,712	76.9	60.9
Region:						
Northeast	38,134	61.0	45.2	37,283	62.0	44.4
Midwest	43,923	68.2	48.6	42,778	70.7	49.5
South	62,378	61.3	42.4	59,201	63.0	43.0
West	37,683	57.7	45.0	34,628	60.8	48.4
Years of school completed:						
Elementary: 0 to 8 years	17,731	44.0	27.7	19,628	50.5	32.7
High school: 1 to 3 years	20,956	47.9	30.9	21,366	52.4	33.8
4 years	71,492	60.0	42.2	68,550	62.9	44.1
College: 1 to 3 years	36,300	68.7	50.0	33,030	70.0	49.9
4 years or more	35,638	77.3	62.5	31,316	77.8	62.5
Labor force status and class of worker:						
In civilian labor force	122,198	61.6	44.2	115,636	63.5	44.7
Employed	115,469	62.6	45.1	108,456	64.4	45.7
Agriculture	2,990	60.0	44.7	3,000	64.3	47.8
Nonagricultural industries	112,480	62.6	45.1	105,457	64.5	45.6
Private wage and salary wkrs	85,511	58.8	40.8	80,441	60.8	41.1
Government workers	17,879	78.0	62.7	16,563	79.6	64.5
Self-employed workers ²	9,090	68.1	51.7	8,452	69.2	51.8
Unemployed	6,729	44.6	27.9	7,179	49.4	30.4
Not in labor force	59,920	63.4	46.7	58,254	65.7	48.4
Family income: ³						
Under \$5,000	6,799	50.7	32.2	6,999	46.3	26.0
\$5,000 to \$9,999	9,808	48.3	30.9	13,272	51.8	34.0
\$10,000 to \$14,999	13,759	54.8	37.7	16,340	59.6	41.1
\$15,000 to \$19,999	10,496	56.8	38.8	15,043	63.1	45.1
\$20,000 to \$24,999	12,304	58.0	41.3	14,460	64.4	46.2
\$25,000 to \$34,999	23,627	63.9	46.4	25,742	67.9	50.0
\$35,000 to \$49,999	25,367	68.3	51.0	24,090	72.7	54.8
\$50,000 and over	32,818	76.4	59.2	21,515	76.3	58.0
Income not reported	11,576	57.6	43.3	4,695	61.2	45.6
Tenure: ⁴						
Owner occupied	125,422	70.5	53.0	⁵ 46,436	77.1	59.4
Renter occupied	53,859	43.4	27.1	⁵ 17,244	47.1	28.3

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

²Includes unpaid family workers.

³Restricted to members of families. Income in current dollars.

⁴Excludes persons with no cash rent and not reported on homeownership.

⁵Restricted to family householders. Source of 1986 data: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 414.

to 18 years in all States, hastened entry of an additional 11 million young persons into the electorate in time to affect turnout in the 1972 Presidential election.¹

In 1982, the last of the Baby Boom cohorts entered the voting-age population, bringing "baby boomers," then persons 18 to 36 years old, to 74.7 million, or to 45 percent of the total voting-age population. By 1990, these young people were 26 to 44 years old and constituted 42 percent of the voting-age population; they had a voting rate of 42 percent in 1990, compared with 58 percent for older persons.

Geographical trends. While turnout for the nation as a whole dropped 10 percentage points (from 55 to 45 percent) in Congressional elections between 1966 and

1990, in the South, turnout was not significantly lower in 1990 than it had been in 1966, around 43 percent (table A). During the intervening period, only between 1970 and 1974 did turnout in the South show a significant decline between adjacent Congressional elections.

Among Blacks in the South during the past quarter century, turnout has actually risen by 7 percentage points, from 33 percent in 1966 to 40 percent in 1990 (table A).

In the North and West combined regions, that is, all of the U.S. except the South, turnout in Congressional elections since the mid-1960s has dropped substantially, (table A). For Blacks outside the South, turnout dropped 14 percentage points, from 52 percent in 1966 to 38 percent in 1990. Whites outside the South showed a similar 14 point decline during the period, from 62 percent to 48 percent (table A).

¹For information on voter turnout during Presidential election years, see Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 440.

Table D. Percent of Persons 18 to 24 Years Old Voting in Congressional Elections, by Race and Hispanic Origin: November 1966 to 1990

(Numbers in thousands)

Race and Hispanic origin	1990	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966
White							
Total, 18 to 24 years	20,357	21,957	24,133	23,669	22,187	11,345	9,405
Voted	4,233	4,746	6,029	5,736	5,584	3,571	3,066
Percent	20.8	21.6	25.0	24.2	25.2	31.5	32.6
Black							
Total, 18 to 24 years	3,525	3,651	3,850	3,462	3,113	1,542	1,208
Voted	712	916	980	696	501	345	264
Percent	20.2	25.1	25.5	20.1	16.1	22.4	21.9
Hispanic origin¹							
Total, 18 to 24 years	2,711	2,543	2,019	1,606	1,481	(NA)	(NA)
Voted	237	294	287	184	197	(NA)	(NA)
Percent	8.7	11.6	14.2	11.5	13.3	(NA)	(NA)

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, 414, and table 2 of this report.

Table E. Percent of Persons 18 to 24 Years Old Reported Having Registered or Voted, by College Enrollment Status, Race, Hispanic origin, and Sex: November 1990

Hispanic origin, race, and sex	Reported registered			Reported voted		
	Total, 18 to 24 years	In college	Not in college	Total, 18 to 24 years	In college	Not in college
Race						
Total	39.9	53.4	33.4	20.4	28.1	16.8
White	40.5	55.4	33.2	20.8	29.1	16.7
Black	40.2	50.8	36.7	20.2	26.6	18.1
Hispanic origin ¹	19.3	38.8	15.4	8.7	23.5	5.8
Sex						
Male	39.5	53.8	32.7	19.8	27.7	16.1
Female	40.2	53.1	34.2	21.0	28.4	17.5

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Source: Table 6 of this report.

Young voters. Only about 1 in 5 young people ages 18 to 24 reported voting in the 1990 election. As table D shows, Black youth, who outvoted White youth in 1986, 25 percent to 22 percent, dropped 5 percentage points in 1990, returning to parity with White youth.

Enfranchisement of all 18 to 24 year olds in 1972 did not result in young people casting a larger proportion of the total vote. In 1966, youth made up 5 percent of all voters; in 1990, they still made up only 6 percent of voters. This is because turnout for persons 18 to 24 years old dropped from 31 percent in 1966 to 20 percent in 1990, including a 2 point drop between 1986 and 1990 (table 2).

Although turnout is generally low among youth, college attendance has a significant effect in encouraging young people to vote. In 1990, 18 to 24 years old attending college had a voting rate of 28 percent; in contrast 17 percent of those not in college reported voting. No significant difference in turnout was found between Black vs White or male vs female college students in the 1990 CPS (table E).

Older voters. Persons 65 years old and over made up the only major age group that had a higher turnout rate in the 1990 Congressional election (60 percent) than it had a quarter century earlier in the Congressional election of 1966 (56 percent) (tables A and F).

For older Whites the net increase over the period was also about 4 percentage points, from 58 percent in 1966 to 62 percent in 1990. For Blacks, however, the net increase amounted to 16 percentage points, from 35 percent in 1966 to 51 percent in 1990.

In addition to an increase in rate of turnout, older persons now make up a larger proportion of the all voters. In 1966, persons 65 and over made up 16 percent of all reported voters; in 1990, they made up 22 percent of all voters.

In the 1990 CPS for the first time, results were tabulated to show registration and voting for persons 85 years old and over. Table 1 indicates that these elderly persons had a turnout rate of 39 percent; this compares with 55 percent for the group 75 years and older (table 2).

Changes among men and women. After catching up to the rate for men in 1982, the overall voting rate for women passed that of men in 1990 (table G). Changes in the relative differences in the rates of younger men and women had begun much earlier, however. Among younger women, those 18 to 44 years old, turnout reached parity with men in 1974 (36 percent), exceeded the rate for men in 1978 (37 percent vs 36 percent), and has remained ahead in all elections since. This movement ahead for women occurred because the rate for younger men dropped about 2 percentage points between 1974 and 1990, while the rate for younger women rose by 1 percentage point during the period.

Turnout for women 45 years and over, which had been about 8 points below the rate for men in the same age group in 1966 (58 percent vs 66 percent), has shown less net decline in Congressional elections over the past quarter century than turnout among men, with the result that in 1990 turnout for women lagged only 4 points behind that for men, 56 percent to 60 percent.

Changes among Whites and Blacks. Between 1966 and 1990, White turnout in Congressional elections dropped 10 percentage points, from 57 to 47 percent (table H). During this period, the net decline for Blacks was only about 3 percentage points (from 42 to 39 percent). For Whites, all of the decline occurred before 1990 (by 1986), and remained unchanged in 1990. Black turnout, which had remained stable between 1966 and 1986, dropped from 43 percent in 1986 to 39 percent in 1990.

Table F. Percent of Persons 65 Years and Over Reported Voting in Congressional Elections, by Race and Hispanic Origin: November 1966 to 1990

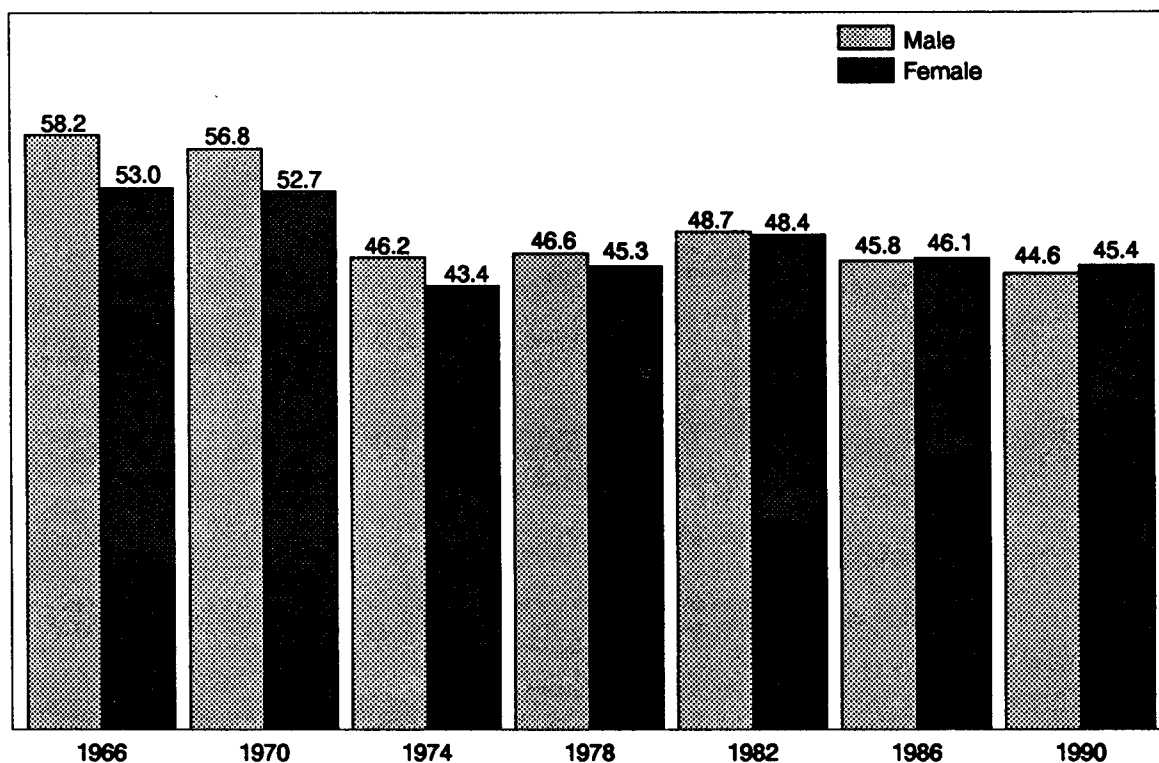
(Numbers in thousands)

Race and Hispanic origin	1990	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966
White							
Total, 65 years and over	26,807	24,982	23,139	20,798	19,058	17,583	16,413
Voted	16,550	15,464	14,135	11,892	10,058	10,307	9,504
Percent	61.7	61.9	61.1	57.2	52.8	58.6	57.9
Black							
Total, 65 years and over	2,528	2,318	2,132	1,943	1,710	1,413	1,316
Voted	1,296	1,236	1,083	886	659	556	464
Percent	51.3	53.3	50.8	45.6	38.5	39.3	35.3
Hispanic¹							
Total, 65 years and over	1,072	881	599	511	413	(NA)	(NA)
Voted	434	322	177	127	116	(NA)	(NA)
Percent	40.5	36.5	29.5	24.9	28.1	(NA)	(NA)

¹Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, 414, and table 2 of this report.

Figure
Percent Reported Voting, by Sex:
November 1966 to 1990



Source: Table G.

Table G. Percent Reported Voted in Congressional Elections, by Age and Sex: November 1966 to 1990

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	18 years and over		18 to 44 years		45 years and over	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1990						
Number	86,621	95,496	51,695	53,677	34,927	41,819
Percent voted	44.6	45.4	34.6	37.2	59.5	55.9
1986						
Number	82,364	91,526	49,558	51,795	32,806	39,732
Percent voted	45.8	46.1	35.3	37.2	61.6	57.8
1982						
Number	78,046	87,437	46,656	49,049	31,389	38,388
Percent voted	48.7	48.4	38.7	39.7	63.7	59.5
1978						
Number	71,465	80,181	41,228	43,986	30,238	36,196
Percent voted	46.6	45.3	36.2	37.2	60.7	55.1
1974						
Number	66,393	74,906	37,260	40,123	29,133	34,782
Percent voted	46.2	43.4	36.2	36.0	59.0	51.9
1970 ¹						
Number	56,431	64,270	28,583	31,503	27,848	32,767
Percent voted	56.8	52.7	47.8	46.7	66.1	58.4
1966 ¹						
Number	52,799	60,001	26,290	29,522	26,509	30,479
Percent voted	58.2	53.0	50.1	47.8	66.1	58.1

¹Data are for persons of voting age, 21 years old and over in most States prior to 1972. Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, 414, and table 2 of this report. Note: See Appendix A for more detailed historical data.

Table H. Percent Reported Voted in Congressional Elections, by Age and Race: November 1966 to 1990

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	18 years and over		18 to 44 years		45 years and over	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
1990						
Number	155,587	20,371	88,320	13,030	67,267	7,341
Percent voted	46.7	39.2	37.2	33.0	59.1	50.1
1986						
Number	149,899	19,020	85,839	12,186	64,059	6,834
Percent voted	47.0	43.2	36.9	36.4	60.6	55.5
1982						
Number	143,607	17,624	81,458	11,284	62,149	6,340
Percent voted	49.9	43.0	40.1	37.4	62.8	53.1
1978						
Number	133,370	15,636	73,827	9,634	59,543	6,002
Percent voted	47.3	37.2	37.9	30.7	59.0	47.5
1974						
Number	125,132	14,175	67,491	8,556	57,641	5,620
Percent voted	46.3	33.8	37.6	27.3	56.5	43.6
1970 ¹						
Number	107,997	11,472	52,923	6,423	55,074	5,049
Percent voted	56.0	43.5	48.4	38.9	63.2	49.4
1966 ¹						
Number	101,205	10,533	49,332	5,767	51,873	4,766
Percent voted	57.1	41.8	50.3	39.3	63.6	44.8

¹Data are for persons of voting age, 21 years old and over in most States prior to 1972. Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, 414, and table 2 of this report. Note: See Appendix A for more detailed historical data.

Gross changes in turnout for racial groups, however, mask much of the disparate ups and downs in turnout between younger and older groups within each racial category. Table H shows that while overall turnout for Whites dropped 10 points between 1966 and 1990, young Whites, those 18 to 44 years old, showed a net decline of 13 points (from 50 percent to 37 percent); older whites, those 45 years and over, showed a drop of 5 points during the period, from 64 to 59 percent.

Among younger and older Blacks the discrepancy in turnout change was even more striking. Between 1966 and 1990, turnout for young Blacks, those under 45 years old, declined by 6 percentage points, from 39 to 33 percent. For the older group of Blacks, those 45 years and over, net turnout actually rose by 5 percentage points, from 45 to 50 percent.

Changes among socioeconomic groups.

Most socioeconomic groups identified in the survey showed declines in turnout in 1990 (table C). For example, turnout dropped for all education groups except those with at least some college. Turnout for these groups remained at about 50 percent for those who attended but did not complete college, and at 63 percent for those who completed 4 years or more of college. For persons who had no more than an elementary school education, turnout dropped from 33 percent in 1986 to 28 percent in 1990.

Most family income groups also showed declines in turnout. Exceptions occurred among persons in families at the highest income category, \$50,000 and over, whose turnout in 1990 increased from 58 to 59 percent and persons in the lowest category under \$5,000, whose turnout increased from 26 to 32 percent (table C).

EVALUATION OF THE ACCURACY OF THE DATA

In the November 1990 Current Population Survey supplement on voting, 82.0 million of the 182.1 million persons of voting age in the civilian noninstitutional population were reported as having voted in the November 1990 election. Official counts showed 69.0 million votes cast, or a difference of 13.0 million votes between the two sources. This difference is greater than can be accounted for by sampling variability (table I).

The population covered in the survey excluded members of the Armed Forces and institutionalized persons.² Since the proportion of voters in these population

²In the November 1988 Presidential election, the Department of Defense reported a total voting rate for the Armed Forces of 63.5 percent, compared with 57.4 percent for the civilian noninstitutional population. Federal Voting Assistance, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 14th Report, 1988.

groups is somewhat lower than in the rest of the population, their omission leads to an additional overstatement in the estimated percentage voting.

The difference between survey results and actual vote counts has been noted in other surveys of voting but both the methods of measuring it and estimates of its size have varied considerably. On balance, the overstatement in Presidential election years varies between 10 and 20 percent of the total number of persons reported as having voted. Here is a summary of possible reasons for the differences:³

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 39 States which report information on the total number of votes cast shows that for 1988 about 1.3 percent fewer votes were cast for President than the total number of votes counted in the election. This "dropoff" between the number of votes cast for candidates for representative and the total number of votes cast is much greater. In 1988, in these same States votes for candidates for the House were 10.6 percent lower than the total number of votes cast, according to the Nonvoter Study '88-'89 of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, Washington, D. C.
2. *Over reporting 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. Since voting and registration were more likely to be reported by a proxy respondent for young people (only about a quarter of the 18-to 20-year old age group reported for themselves), the household respondent may have assumed that they had voted when in fact they had not. This latter problem was more likely to occur among young people away at college, whose parents almost certainly reported for them.

In the 1964 survey, as a check on the work of the interviewers, a subsample of households was reinterviewed by the supervisory staff. This reinterview showed overall consistency 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. *Nonreports on voting.* In 1966 a "do not know" category in each question of the voting supplement 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."
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. *Household respondent.* A portion of the difference between the official count and survey results might be attributable to the use of a household respondent to report on the registration and voting of all

³For a discussion of geographical differences in estimating voter turnout, changes in overestimation in recent Presidential elections, and a multivariate analysis of the relationship between race, education, and per capita income of states and their rates of net overestimation, see Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 168.

Table I. Comparison of CPS Voting Estimates and Official Counts of Votes Cast: November 1964 to 1990

(Numbers in millions)

Year	CPS estimate voters	Official vote for President	Percent difference	Year	CPS estimate of voters	Official vote for U.S. Representative or highest office	Percent difference
1988.....	102.2	91.6	11.6	1990.....	82.0	² 69.0	18.8
1984.....	101.9	92.7	9.9	1986.....	80.0	² 64.8	23.4
1980.....	93.1	86.5	7.6	1982.....	80.3	² 67.6	18.8
1976.....	¹ 85.9	81.7	5.1	1978.....	69.6	² 59.5	17.0
1972.....	¹ 84.6	77.6	9.0	1974.....	63.2	² 56.0	12.9
¹ 1968.....	¹ 78.5	73.0	7.5	1970.....	³ 65.9	² 58.0	13.6
1964.....	¹ 76.7	70.6	8.6	1966.....	³ 57.6	² 52.9	8.9

¹CPS estimate of votes cast for President.²The "Official" vote was obtained by summing the number of votes cast for U.S. Senator, Representative, or Governor in each State, depending on which office received the highest number of votes.³Refers only to votes cast for U.S. Representative.

Source: Elections Research Center and U.S. Congress, Clerk of the House, Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Elections.

Table J. Comparison of Proxy Reports and Self Reports on Voter Turnout in the November 1984 Election

(Numbers in thousands. Citizens 18 years old and over. Data are weighted to national estimates)

Proxy responses	Self responses			
	Total	Voted	Did not vote	No report
Total.....	56,727	24,958	13,453	18,316
Reported voted.....	34,620	24,481	290	9,849
Reported did not vote.....	19,664	180	12,676	6,808
Reported do not know.....	2,271	290	464	1,517
No report.....	172	7	23	142

Note: Data are based on the special follow-up supplement administered to two rotation groups.

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 individual 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 in voter turnout between groups reporting for themselves (47 percent) or by someone else (48 percent) were not significant.⁴ Thus, there was no evidence from this test that proxy reporting of voting and registration information accounts for any part of the overestimates of voters obtained in household surveys.

The 1984 survey included a more rigorous test for the effects of proxy responses on CPS estimates of the number of persons who vote.⁵ In the two outgoing rotation groups of the November survey (approximately one-fourth of the total sample), respondents whose voting and registration

had been previously reported by another household member were followed up by the interviewer and asked the voting and registration questions directly. Table I summarizes the results of this test. Among persons for whom re-interviews were obtained, 99 percent of the respondents who had been reported for by another household member as having voted also reported for themselves that they voted; in addition, 99 percent of the followup interviews which initially reported that the respondent did not vote confirmed a previous report of not voting. Proxy respondents incorrectly reported an estimated 477,000 persons as either not voting or giving no report on voting, when in fact the persons in question reported having actually voted. However, overreports on voting by proxy respondents only amount to about 290,000 persons.

A comparison of the voting rates for the two test groups within the one-quarter subsample shows a voting rate of 63.8 percent for respondents reported by proxy (excluding don't know and no responses) and a rate of 65 percent when respondents reported for themselves. This difference in voter turnout rates for self and proxy respondents is not statistically significant, but the rates are higher for both

⁴Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 293.⁵Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 405.

groups than for the total CPS sample (60 percent), indicating that turnout for persons successfully followed up is higher than for those not found for direct interview.

In sum, results of this proxy verification test confirm the previous finding that misreports by proxy respondents do not account for the discrepancy between CPS estimates of voter turnout and the official count of the number of ballots cast.

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 registered to vote (table 16). For self-respondents, the "do not know"/"no report" responses were negligible. At the other extreme, 4.6 percent of respondents who reported on the voting behavior of other household members could not answer whether or not the other person had voted.

RELATED REPORTS

Current Population Reports. Data on voter participation by social and economic characteristics of the population of voting age in the Presidential elections of 1964 through 1988 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 322, 370, 405, and 440 respectively, and in the Congressional elections of 1966 through 1986 in Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, and 414, respectively.

A summary of results from the Current Population Survey supplements for Presidential election years 1964 to 1980 was published in Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 131 and also in Series P-20, No. 405. Similar summary data for Congressional election years from 1966 to 1982 were published in Series P-20, No. 414.

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 resident population of voting age for the United States, regions, divisions, and States, by age, sex, and race for November 1, 1990 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 1059.

Data on reported voter participation by social and economic characteristics 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 Current Population Reports, 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 Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 14.

An analysis of turnout estimation problems in the CPS was published in Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 168.

TAPES AND UNPUBLISHED

Data Users wishing to obtain copies of the November Current Population Survey data tape should contact:

Data User Services Division
Customer Services (Tape)
Bureau of the Census
Washington, D. C. 20233
Telephone: (301) 763-4100

Voting and registration statistics by State summarized in table 4, detailed by age, race, Hispanic origin, and sex categories, can be obtained for \$20.00 (Checks payable to Commerce—Census). This "Current Voting Indicators: November 1990" tabulation package, or similar tabulations from the November 1986 CPS, consists of approximately 60 pages each. To place an order for either of these packages of tabulations, contact:

Jerry T. Jennings
Population Division
Bureau of the Census
Washington, D. C. 20233
Telephone: (301) 763-4547

USER COMMENTS

We are interested in the reaction of users to the usefulness of the information presented in this report, and on the content of the questions used to provide the results contained in this report. (Appendix D contains a facsimile of the questionnaire.) We welcome your recommendations for improving our survey work. If you have suggestions or comments, please send them to:

Current Survey Comments
Population Division
Bureau of the Census
Washington, D.C. 20233