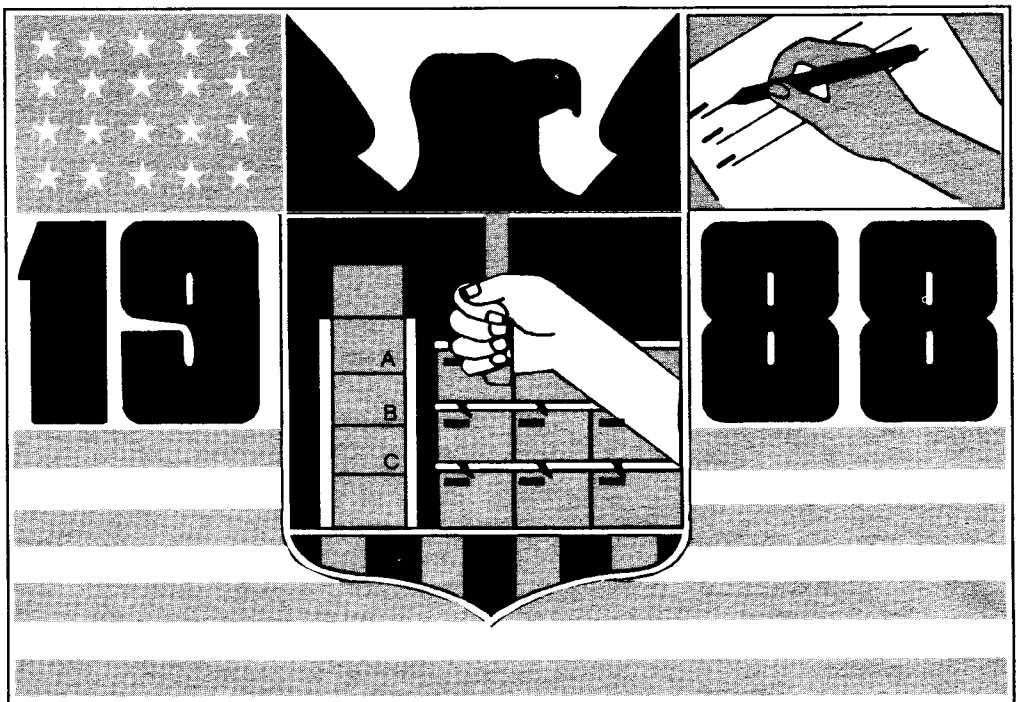


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**Population  
Characteristics**  
Series P-20, No. 440

# **Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1988**



**U.S. Department of Commerce  
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## Acknowledgments

**Jerry T. Jennings** prepared this report in Population Division, under the general supervision of **Martin O'Connell**, Chief of the Fertility Statistics Branch. Overall direction was provided by **Arthur J. Norton**, Assistant Division Chief.

In Demographic Surveys Division, **George M. Mitcham** and **Bach-Loan T. Nguyen** programmed the tables, and **Maria E. Reed** coordinated the survey operation.

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**Population  
Characteristics**

Series P-20, No. 440

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Registration  
in the Election  
of November 1988**

Issued October 1989



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# Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1988

## INTRODUCTION

Results from the November 1988 supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) show that 57 percent of persons 18 years old and over reported that they had voted in the 1988 Presidential election.<sup>1</sup> This is about 2 percentage points lower than in the Presidential elections of 1984 and 1980. Registration also declined, falling from 68 percent in 1984 to 67 percent in 1988. The figures show that despite an increase of 8.1 million in the age-eligible population, the number of voters did not increase significantly over the number reported voting in the 1984 election.

These findings are based on answers to a series of questions asked of persons of voting age in the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census. The data in this report relate to the civilian noninstitutional population 18 years and over.

Voter turnout rates from household surveys are an important supplement to official counts because they provide estimates of turnout for population groups not identified in official sources. The Current Population Survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census is the largest of these surveys and provides 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. Data from household surveys, however, have the limitation of generally overestimating voter turnout. For example, data from the November 1988 CPS indicate that 102.2 million persons reported voting in the 1988 elections, some 10.6 million more than actually voted, as recorded by the Clerk of the House, U.S. Congress. Comparable estimates of overstatement of registration are not available. Factors accounting for differences between official returns and the CPS results are discussed in the section, "Evaluation of the Accuracy of the Data."

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Overall voter turnout dropped to 57 ( $\pm 0.4$ ) percent in 1988, the first decline reported in CPS in a Presidential election since 1972 (table A).

- All age groups, except the oldest, showed declines in turnout in 1988; for persons 65 years and over turnout remained at the 1984 level of 68 ( $\pm 0.9$ ) percent (table A).
- Black turnout fell to 52 ( $\pm 1.3$ ) percent, down about 4 percentage points from 1984; White turnout also dropped by about 2 percentage points to 59 ( $\pm 0.4$ ) percent in 1988 (table A). Hispanic turnout dropped from 33 ( $\pm 2.4$ ) percent in 1984 to 29 ( $\pm 1.5$ ) percent in 1988.
- Turnout for women exceeded that for men in 1988, 58 ( $\pm 0.5$ ) percent versus 56 ( $\pm 0.5$ ) percent, as it had in 1984, 61 ( $\pm 0.5$ ) percent versus 59 ( $\pm 0.5$ ) percent (table A).
- All regions of the country showed a decline between 2 and 3 percentage points from their 1984 levels (table C).
- Registration rates declined correspondingly with voting rates, except for persons 65 years and over, whose registration increased slightly to 78 ( $\pm 0.2$ ) percent in 1988 (table B).
- Of the 118.6 million persons who reported being registered in 1988, 11.7 million (10 percent) reported that they had registered specifically for the 1988 election.
- Among those who said they had registered specifically for the 1988 election, first-time registrants were a little less likely to report having voted, 84 ( $\pm 1.8$ ) percent, than other 1988 registrants, 92 ( $\pm 1.1$ ) percent.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF VOTERS

Voting and registration rates are closely related to the social and demographic characteristics of the electorate (table C). Turnout in 1988 was higher among Whites (59 percent) than among either Blacks (52 percent) or Hispanics (29 percent), higher among persons 45 years and over (68 percent) than among younger age groups, and highest among residents of the Midwest (63 percent). Rates for Hispanics are much lower partly because one-third (37 percent) of those aged 18 and over were not eligible to vote because they were not U.S. citizens at the time of the November 1988 election.

<sup>1</sup>This compares with 50 percent voting, according to tabulated votes cast for President. See the section on Evaluation of the Accuracy of the Data.

**Table A. Reported Voting, by Region, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age: November 1964 to 1988**

(Numbers in thousands)

Region, race, Hispanic origin, sex, and age	Presidential elections							Congressional elections			
	1988	1984	1980	1976	1972	1968	1964	1986	1982	1978	1974
<b>UNITED STATES</b>											
Total, voting age.....	178,098	169,963	157,085	146,548	136,203	116,535	110,604	173,890	165,483	151,646	141,299
Percent voted.....	57.4	59.9	59.2	59.2	63.0	67.8	69.3	46.0	48.5	45.9	44.7
White.....	59.1	61.4	60.9	60.9	64.5	69.1	70.7	47.0	49.9	47.3	46.3
Black.....	51.5	55.8	50.5	48.7	52.1	57.6	<sup>2</sup> 58.5	43.2	43.0	37.2	33.8
Hispanic origin <sup>1</sup> .....	28.8	32.6	29.9	31.8	37.5	(NA)	(NA)	24.2	25.3	23.5	22.9
Male.....	56.4	59.0	59.1	59.6	64.1	69.8	71.9	45.8	48.7	46.6	46.2
Female.....	58.3	60.8	59.4	58.8	62.0	66.0	67.0	46.1	48.4	45.3	43.4
18 to 24 years.....	36.2	40.8	39.9	42.2	49.6	<sup>2</sup> 50.4	<sup>3</sup> 50.9	21.9	24.8	23.5	23.8
25 to 44 years.....	54.0	58.4	58.7	58.7	62.7	66.6	69.0	41.4	45.4	43.1	42.2
45 to 64 years.....	67.9	69.8	69.3	68.7	70.8	74.9	75.9	58.7	62.2	58.5	56.9
65 years and over.....	68.8	67.7	65.1	62.2	63.5	65.8	66.3	60.9	59.9	55.9	51.4
<b>NORTH AND WEST</b>											
Total, voting age.....	117,373	112,376	106,524	99,403	93,653	81,594	78,174	114,689	110,126	102,894	96,505
Percent voted.....	58.9	61.6	61.0	61.2	66.4	71.0	74.6	47.5	51.9	48.9	48.8
White.....	60.4	63.0	62.4	62.6	67.5	71.8	74.7	48.7	53.1	50.0	50.0
Black.....	55.6	58.9	52.8	52.2	56.7	64.8	<sup>2</sup> 72.0	44.2	48.5	41.3	37.9
<b>SOUTH</b>											
Total, voting age.....	60,725	57,587	50,561	47,145	42,550	34,941	32,429	59,201	55,357	48,752	44,794
Percent voted.....	54.5	56.8	55.6	54.9	55.4	60.1	56.7	43.0	41.8	39.6	36.0
White.....	56.4	58.1	57.4	57.1	57.0	61.9	59.5	43.5	42.9	41.1	37.4
Black.....	48.0	53.2	48.2	45.7	47.8	51.6	<sup>2</sup> 44.0	42.5	38.3	33.5	30.0

NA Not available.

<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.<sup>2</sup>Black and other races in 1964.<sup>3</sup>Prior to 1972, includes persons 18 to 20 years old in Georgia and Kentucky, 19 and 20 in Alaska, and 20 years old in Hawaii.

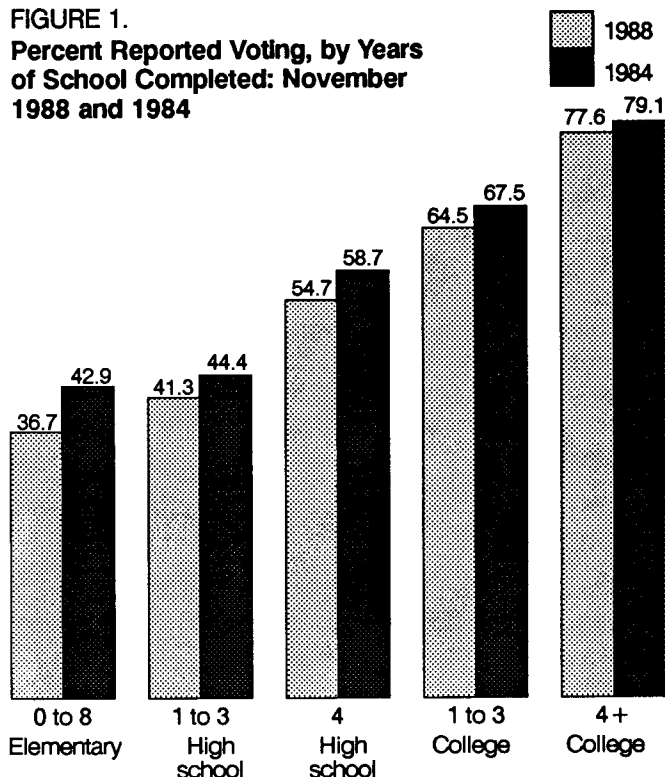
Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 293, 322, 344, 370, 383, 405, 414, and table 2 of this report.

Education is one of the most important socioeconomic characteristics related to voting. In 1988, college graduates were more than twice as likely to report having voted (78 percent) as persons who had attended only elementary school (37 percent). (See figure 1.) Still, the 1988 turnout among most education groups declined; voting among college graduates dropped only slightly, from 79 percent in 1984 to 78 percent in 1988.

Employment status is another important indicator of the likelihood of voting. In the November 1988 election, 58 percent of employed persons reported that they voted, compared with only 39 percent of unemployed persons.

Among persons employed in nonagricultural industries, government workers (Federal, State, and local) reported voting at a significantly higher level (75 percent) than wage or salary workers in private industry (55 percent). Turnout of government workers did not decline between 1984 and 1988, while turnout for workers in private industry fell 4 percentage points.

Data in table C also indicate that higher income groups are more likely to vote than groups with lower incomes. In the 1988 election, 76 percent of persons 18 years and over living in families with incomes of \$50,000 or more voted, compared with only 35 percent of those in families with incomes of less than \$5,000.

**FIGURE 1.  
Percent Reported Voting, by Years  
of School Completed: November  
1988 and 1984**

Source: Table C.



Table B. **Reported Registration, by Region, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age: November 1968 to 1988**

(Numbers in thousands)

Region, race, Hispanic origin, sex, and age	Presidential elections						Congressional elections			
	1988	1984	1980	1976	1972	1968	1986	1982	1978	1974
<b>UNITED STATES</b>										
Total, voting age .....	178,098	169,963	157,085	146,548	136,203	116,535	173,890	165,483	151,646	141,299
Percent registered .....	66.6	68.3	66.9	66.7	72.3	74.3	64.3	64.1	62.6	62.2
White .....	67.9	69.6	68.4	68.3	73.4	75.4	65.3	65.6	63.8	63.5
Black .....	64.5	66.3	60.0	58.5	65.5	66.2	64.0	59.1	57.1	54.9
Hispanic origin <sup>1</sup> .....	35.5	40.1	36.3	37.8	44.4	(NA)	35.9	35.3	32.9	34.9
Male .....	65.2	67.3	66.6	67.1	73.1	76.0	63.4	63.7	62.6	62.8
Female .....	67.8	69.3	67.1	66.4	71.6	72.8	65.0	64.4	62.5	61.7
18 to 24 years .....	48.2	51.3	49.2	51.3	58.9	<sup>3</sup> 56.0	42.0	42.4	40.5	41.3
25 to 44 years .....	63.0	66.6	65.6	65.5	71.3	72.4	61.1	61.5	60.2	59.9
45 to 64 years .....	75.5	76.6	75.8	75.5	79.7	81.1	74.8	75.6	74.3	73.6
65 years and over .....	78.4	76.9	74.6	71.4	75.6	75.6	76.9	75.2	72.8	70.2
<b>NORTH AND WEST</b>										
Total, voting age .....	117,373	112,376	106,524	99,403	93,653	81,594	114,689	110,126	102,894	96,505
Percent registered .....	67.1	69.0	67.9	67.7	73.9	76.5	64.9	65.2	63.8	63.3
White .....	68.5	70.5	69.3	69.0	74.9	77.2	66.2	66.7	64.9	64.6
Black .....	65.9	67.2	60.6	60.9	67.0	71.8	63.1	61.7	58.0	54.2
<b>SOUTH</b>										
Total, voting age .....	60,725	57,587	50,561	47,145	42,550	34,941	59,201	55,357	48,752	44,794
Percent registered .....	65.6	66.9	64.8	64.6	68.7	69.2	63.0	61.7	60.1	59.8
White .....	66.6	67.8	66.2	66.7	69.8	70.8	63.2	63.2	61.2	61.0
Black .....	63.3	65.6	59.3	56.4	64.0	61.6	64.6	56.9	56.2	55.5

NA Not available.

<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.<sup>2</sup>Black and other races in 1964.<sup>3</sup>Prior 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. 192, 253, 293, 322, 344, 370, 383, 405, 414, and table 2 of this report.

Homeownership is another characteristic highly related to voter turnout. In the November 1988 election, 70 percent of homeowners reported having voted, compared with 40 percent of renters.

Among young people, college attendance has a significant effect on the likelihood of registration and voting (table D). In 1988 as in 1984, both registration and voter turnout were much higher for young people attending college than for young people of the same age not going to college<sup>2</sup>. Among persons 18 to 24 years old in 1988, about 6 out of every 10 of those attending college reported that they were registered; about half (48 percent) reported that they voted. Among those not enrolled in college, about 4 out of every 10 reported that they were registered and about one-third (31 percent) reported that they voted.

Data in table D compare the effect of college attendance on the voting rates of young Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. In 1988, the turnout rate for young Whites in college (50 percent) was considerably above the rate for those not in college (31 percent). Among young Blacks, those attending college reported a voting rate of

42 percent, while the rate for those not in college was 33 percent (not significantly different from the 31 percent for young Whites not in college); among young Hispanics, turnout was 28 percent for those attending college and 14 percent for those not enrolled. It appears that while White college students are more likely to vote than Black students, no differences in voter turnout are found between young adults not enrolled in college regardless of race.

## RECENT CHANGES IN TURNOUT

**Changes by race.** White voter turnout dropped 2 percentage points between 1984 and 1988 (61 to 59 percent) and Black turnout dropped by 4 percentage points, to 52 percent in 1988 (table E). During this period, Hispanic voter turnout also dropped from 33 to 29 percent (table A).

For Whites, voter turnout for persons 45 years and over remained unchanged between 1984 and 1988 at 70 percent, while turnout dropped 4 percentage points, (to 51 percent) in 1988 for persons under 45 years of age (table E). The decline in voting among Blacks also occurred only for those under 45 years old, whose turnout dropped from 51 percent in 1984 to 44 percent

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 405, p. 8.

**Table C. Characteristics of the Population Reported Having Registered or Voted: November 1988 and 1984**  
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	1988			1984		
	Number of persons	Percent registered	Percent voted	Number of persons	Percent registered	Percent voted
Total, 18 years and over .....	178,098	66.6	57.4	169,963	68.3	59.9
Race and Hispanic origin:						
White .....	152,848	67.9	59.1	146,761	69.6	61.4
Black .....	19,692	64.5	51.5	18,432	66.3	55.8
Hispanic <sup>1</sup> .....	12,893	35.5	28.8	9,471	40.1	32.6
Sex:						
Male .....	84,531	65.2	56.4	80,327	67.3	59.0
Female .....	93,568	67.8	58.3	89,636	69.3	60.8
Age:						
18 to 24 years .....	25,569	48.2	36.2	27,976	51.3	40.8
25 to 44 years .....	77,863	63.0	54.0	71,023	66.6	58.4
45 to 64 years .....	45,862	75.5	67.9	44,307	76.6	69.8
65 years and over .....	28,804	78.4	68.8	26,658	76.9	67.7
Region:						
Northeast .....	37,874	64.8	57.4	36,868	66.6	59.7
Midwest .....	43,309	72.5	62.9	42,136	74.6	65.7
South .....	60,725	65.6	54.5	57,587	66.9	56.8
West .....	36,190	63.0	55.6	33,372	64.7	58.5
Years of school completed:						
Elementary: 0 to 8 years .....	19,145	47.5	36.7	20,580	53.4	42.9
High school: 1 to 3 years .....	21,052	52.8	41.3	22,068	54.9	44.4
4 years .....	70,033	64.6	54.7	67,807	67.3	58.7
College: 1 to 3 years .....	34,264	73.5	64.5	30,915	75.7	67.5
4 years or more .....	33,604	83.1	77.6	28,593	83.8	79.1
Labor force status and class of worker:						
In civilian labor force .....	119,645	66.3	57.5	111,562	68.4	60.5
Employed .....	113,836	67.1	58.4	104,173	69.4	61.6
Agriculture .....	2,986	63.9	53.0	3,132	64.3	55.9
Nonagricultural industries .....	110,851	67.2	58.6	101,042	69.6	61.8
Private wage and salary wks .....	84,199	63.7	54.6	77,160	66.7	58.6
Government workers .....	17,640	82.4	75.2	15,813	82.0	75.9
Self-employed workers <sup>2</sup> .....	9,012	70.5	63.3	8,068	72.4	65.2
Unemployed .....	5,809	50.4	38.6	7,389	54.3	44.0
Not in labor force .....	58,453	67.2	57.3	58,401	68.1	58.9
Family income <sup>3</sup> :						
Under \$5,000 .....	5,954	47.6	34.7	7,843	49.8	37.5
\$5,000 to \$9,999 .....	10,929	52.8	41.3	14,594	56.8	46.2
\$10,000 to \$14,999 .....	15,682	57.4	47.7	18,131	62.9	53.5
\$15,000 to \$19,999 .....	25,009	63.2	53.5	15,997	65.5	57.1
\$20,000 to \$24,999 .....	12,296	67.4	57.8	14,790	68.7	61.1
\$25,000 to \$34,999 .....	22,995	71.9	64.0	25,322	74.2	67.0
\$35,000 to \$49,999 .....	24,452	77.9	70.3	20,058	79.8	72.9
\$50,000 and over .....	16,990	81.8	75.6	15,160	82.0	76.0
Income not reported .....	9,594	61.5	54.2	8,355	62.9	56.9
Tenure <sup>4</sup> :						
Owner occupied .....	47,540	78.1	70.0	45,433	79.1	71.8
Renter occupied .....	17,352	49.7	39.8	16,679	53.4	43.7

<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

<sup>2</sup>Includes unpaid family workers.

<sup>3</sup>Restricted to members of families. Income in current dollars.

<sup>4</sup>Restricted to family householders.

in 1988; turnout among Blacks 45 years and over remained unchanged at about 65 percent.

Turnout rates for young Whites and Blacks in 1988 were not significantly different, 37 versus 35 percent. However, turnout for Blacks 18 to 24 years old rose by

10 points between 1980 and 1984, but then dropped by 6 points in 1988. Among young Whites, turnout remained the same in both 1980 and 1984, before it dropped to 37 percent in 1988. Turnout of Hispanic youth did not change significantly between 1984 and 1988 (table F).

**Table D. Persons 18 to 24 Years Old Reported Having Voted and Registered, by College Enrollment Status, Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex: November 1988**

(In percent)

Race and sex	Reported registered			Reported voted		
	Total	In college	Not in college	Total	In college	Not in college
<b>RACE</b>						
Total.....	48.2	62.0	42.1	36.2	47.9	31.0
White.....	48.7	63.7	41.9	37.0	49.9	31.0
Black.....	49.8	62.8	46.2	35.0	42.3	33.0
Hispanic origin <sup>1</sup> .....	25.3	44.4	21.1	16.8	28.4	14.2
<b>SEX</b>						
Male.....	45.5	61.0	38.8	34.1	46.1	29.0
Female.....	50.8	62.9	45.3	38.2	49.6	33.0

<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: Table 6 of this report.

**Changes by age.** As shown in figure 2, most of the drop in turnout in the 1988 election occurred among persons under 45 years of age (table C). For those 18 to 24 years old, turnout dropped from 41 percent in 1984 to 36 percent in 1988; for those 25 to 44 years old, it declined from 58 to 54 percent, and for persons 45 to 64 years old, their drop in turnout was somewhat smaller, from 70 to 68 percent. For the 65-and-over group, no drop in turnout occurred in 1988.

**Changes by sex.** During the past 20 years, the difference in voter turnout of men and women in Presidential elections has reversed. In 1964, the first year the Bureau of the Census began collecting voting and registration data in the CPS, the voting rate for men exceeded that for women (72 to 67) percent. Since then, turnout for persons 45 and over has dropped more sharply for men, from 77 percent in 1964 to 70 percent in 1988, than the rate for women this age, from 69 percent to 67 percent (table G).

Beginning in 1984 and continuing in 1988, the voting rate of women exceeded that of men for the total voting-age population. The turnout for younger women has been greater than for men 18 to 44 years old since 1976 (table G). At older ages, however, the voting rate for men continues to exceed that for women (table G).

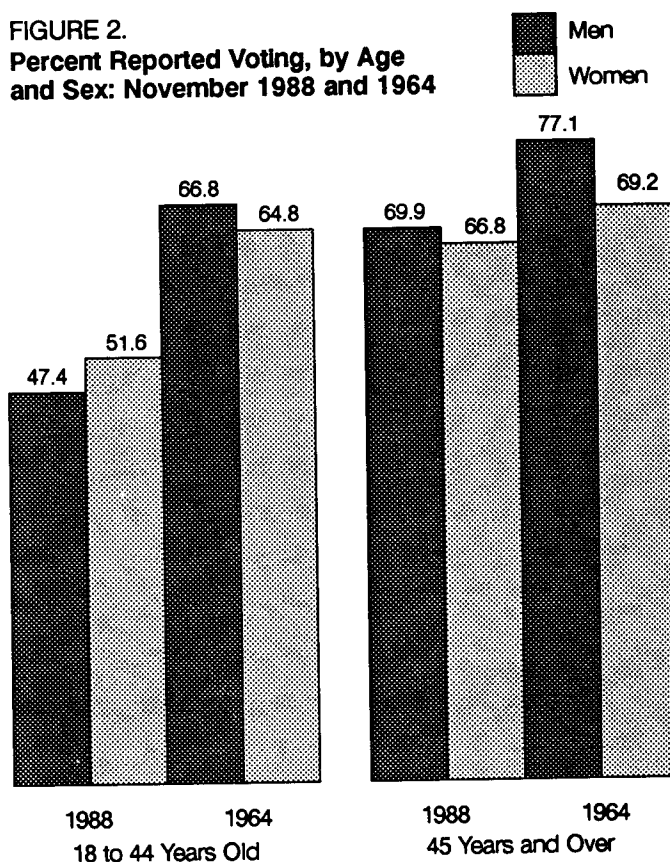
In 1988, declines in turnout occurred for both men and women under 45 years old, the rate for men falling from 51 percent in 1984 to 47 percent in 1988; for women, it declined from 56 to 52 percent. The rate for men 45 and over remained stable at about 70 percent, and for women in that age group, it declined slightly from 68 to 67 percent.

**Changes by socioeconomic group.** Just as turnout declined for demographic groups, socioeconomic groups also showed declines from 1984 to 1988 (table C). For instance, turnout for all education groups dropped in 1988: for those in the lowest education category (8 or

fewer years of school completed), voting dropped from 43 percent in 1984 to 37 percent in 1988; at the other extreme, turnout for college graduates dropped only about 1 percentage point, from 79 to 78 percent.

Among employed persons, turnout dropped from 62 percent in 1984 to 58 percent in 1988, while among unemployed persons, it declined from 44 percent in 1984 to 39 percent in 1988. Government workers, who had a turnout rate of 76 percent in 1984, showed no

**FIGURE 2.**  
**Percent Reported Voting, by Age and Sex: November 1988 and 1964**



Source: Table G.

**Table E. Voting in Presidential Elections, by Age and Race: November 1964 to 1988**

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	18 years and over		18 to 44 years		45 years and over	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
<b>1988:</b>						
Number .....	152,848	19,692	87,145	12,607	65,703	7,084
Percent voted .....	59.1	51.5	51.3	44.3	69.5	64.4
<b>1984:</b>						
Number .....	146,761	18,432	83,752	11,952	63,009	6,479
Percent voted .....	61.4	55.8	54.9	51.1	70.1	64.6
<b>1980:</b>						
Number .....	137,676	16,423	77,225	10,224	60,451	6,198
Percent voted .....	60.9	50.5	54.6	44.3	69.0	60.6
<b>1976:</b>						
Number .....	129,316	14,927	70,600	9,101	58,717	5,826
Percent voted .....	60.9	48.7	55.4	41.6	67.6	59.8
<b>1972:</b>						
Number .....	121,243	13,493	64,733	8,124	56,508	5,370
Percent voted .....	64.5	52.1	60.0	47.9	69.6	58.5
<b>1968<sup>1</sup>:</b>						
Number .....	104,521	10,935	51,013	6,157	53,508	4,878
Percent voted .....	69.1	57.6	64.6	55.4	73.3	60.4
<b>1964<sup>1</sup>:</b>						
Number .....	99,353	10,340	48,911	5,711	50,443	4,630
Percent voted .....	70.7	58.5	66.9	58.1	74.3	58.9

<sup>1</sup>Data 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. 143, 192, 253, 322, 370, 405, and table 2 of this report.

Note: See appendix A for more detailed historical data.

significant change in 1988, while private wage and salary workers dropped from 59 percent in 1984 to 55 percent in 1988.

A similar pattern was found among family income groups: the 1984 turnout for those with less than \$5,000

family income was about 38 percent, while it was 76 percent for the group with family income of \$50,000 and above; in 1988, turnout for the lowest income group dropped to 35 percent, while that for the highest income group remained unchanged.

**Table F. Persons 18 to 24 Years Old Voting in Presidential Elections, by Race and Hispanic Origin: November 1964 to 1988**

(Numbers in thousands)

Race and Hispanic origin	1988	1984	1980	1976	1972	1968	1964
<b>WHITE</b>							
Total, 18 to 24 years .....	21,092	23,227	23,976	23,141	21,339	10,158	8,715
Voted .....	7,795	9,667	10,027	10,344	11,074	5,305	4,539
Percent .....	37.0	41.6	41.8	44.7	51.9	52.2	52.1
<b>BLACK</b>							
Total, 18 to 24 years .....	3,567	3,875	3,559	3,323	2,994	1,344	1,115
Voted .....	1,249	1,572	1,071	926	1,040	512	493
Percent .....	35.0	40.6	30.1	27.9	34.7	38.1	44.2
<b>HISPANIC ORIGIN<sup>1</sup></b>							
Total, 18 to 24 years .....	2,661	2,064	2,047	1,559	1,338	(NA)	(NA)
Voted .....	447	452	326	340	414	(NA)	(NA)
Percent .....	16.8	21.9	15.9	21.8	30.9	(NA)	(NA)

NA Not available.

<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 322, 370, 405, and table 2 of this report.

Note: See Appendix A for more detailed historical data.

**Table G. Voting in Presidential Elections, by Age and Sex: November 1964 to 1988**

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	18 years and over		18 to 44 years		45 years and over	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1988						
Number .....	84,531	93,568	50,652	52,781	33,878	40,788
Percent voted .....	56.4	58.3	47.4	51.6	69.9	66.8
1984:						
Number .....	80,327	89,636	48,429	50,570	31,899	39,065
Percent voted .....	59.0	60.8	51.3	55.5	70.6	67.8
1980:						
Number .....	74,082	83,003	43,326	46,097	30,757	36,906
Percent voted .....	59.1	59.4	51.3	54.2	70.0	66.0
1976:						
Number .....	68,957	77,591	39,259	41,995	29,699	35,596
Percent voted .....	59.6	58.8	52.3	54.1	69.2	64.3
1972:						
Number .....	63,833	72,370	35,395	38,390	28,439	33,979
Percent voted .....	64.1	62.0	57.9	58.7	71.7	65.7
1968 <sup>1</sup> :						
Number .....	54,464	62,071	27,284	30,420	27,180	31,651
Percent voted .....	69.8	66.0	64.0	62.8	75.6	69.0
1964 <sup>1</sup> :						
Number .....	52,123	58,482	26,144	29,070	25,977	29,413
Percent voted .....	71.9	67.0	66.8	64.8	77.1	69.2

<sup>1</sup>Data are for persons of voting age, 21 years old and over in most States prior to 1972, and table 2 of this report.

Note: See appendix A for more detailed historical data.

Among household tenure groups, turnout dropped from 72 percent of homeowners in 1984 to 70 percent in 1988; turnout for renters dropped from 44 percent to 40 percent.

## PERSONS WHO REGISTERED SPECIFICALLY FOR THE 1988 ELECTION

For the first time, the CPS supplement on voting and registration attempted to estimate the number of persons who registered for a specific election (the 1988 election), and the number of these registrants who voted.

Table 14 shows that of the 118.6 million persons who reported being registered in 1988, 11.7 million, or 10 percent, reported that they had registered specifically for this election. Most (81 percent) of these 1988 registrants were under 45 years old.

These 1988 registrants had the largest impact on registration in the West, where they made up 13 percent of all registered persons, and the smallest in the South, where they made up 8 percent of registrants. About 10 percent of all registered persons in the Northeast and Midwest said they had registered specifically for the 1988 election.

Men reported having registered specifically for the 1988 election a little more frequently than women. A smaller proportion of Blacks reported having registered

specifically for the 1988 election (8 percent) than either Whites (10 percent) or Hispanics (13 percent).

Some new registrants are included in these estimates not because they had never registered before, but because they had moved to a new address prior to the 1988 election and reported a change in place of registration rather than a new registration.

**First-time registrants.** Table 15 shows that of the 11.7 million persons who reported that they had registered specifically for the 1988 elections, one-third reported that this was the first time they had ever registered. Another 55 percent said they had been registered at some previous time; 12 percent did not report when they had first registered.

Both Blacks and Hispanics who registered specifically for the 1988 election were more likely to report that this was their first-time registration (42 and 51 percent, respectively) than were Whites (32 percent). However, between Hispanics and Blacks, the percentages reporting first registrations were not significantly different. Similarly, men and women were about equally likely to report first-time registrations in 1988.

Regionally, little variation occurred in the proportion of 1988 registrants who were first-time registrants, except that a slightly higher proportion of 1988 registrants were first-time registrants in the South and in the Northeast (about 35 percent) than in the Midwest (31 percent).

**Voting among first-time registrants.** Among persons who said that they had registered specifically for the 1988 election, first-time registrants were a little less likely to report having voted in 1988 (84 percent) than those who were not first time registrants (92 percent). Among all registered persons in 1988, 86 percent reported that they had voted. No difference in voter turnout among first-time registrants was noted by sex, but significantly more first-time White registrants voted (85 percent) than did first-time Black registrants (72 percent).

Lower voter turnout for first-time registrants (84 versus 86 percent for all registered persons) partly reflects the high proportion of young persons, who traditionally have lower voter turnout. Among first-time registrants, 95 percent were under 45 years old, compared with 74 percent for all other 1988 registrants. Turnout was lower among first-time registrants under 45 years old (84 percent) than among persons this same age who were not first-time registrants in 1988 (92 percent). For persons 45 years and over, no difference in turnout was found between the two registrant groups, with first-time registrants reporting a turnout rate of 89 percent, compared with 91 percent for the other group.

## EVALUATION OF THE ACCURACY OF THE DATA

In the November 1988 Current Population Survey supplement on voting, 102.2 million of the 178.1 million persons of voting age in the civilian noninstitutional population were reported as having voted in the November 1988 election. Official counts showed 91.6 million votes cast, or a difference of 10.6 million votes between the two sources. This difference is greater than can be accounted for by sampling variability (table H).

Moreover, the population covered in the survey excluded members of the Armed Forces and institutionalized persons.<sup>3</sup> Since the proportion of voters in these population 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 are some possible reasons for the differences:

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. Data from the 39 States that 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 cast in the

<sup>3</sup>In 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.

**Table H. Comparison of CPS Voting Estimates and Official Counts of Votes Cast: November 1964 to 1988**

(Numbers in millions)

Year	CPS vote estimate	Official vote for President	Percent difference	Year	CPS vote estimate	Official vote for U.S. Representative or highest office	Percent difference
1988.....	102.2	91.6	11.6	1986.....	80.0	<sup>2</sup> 64.8	23.4
1984.....	101.9	92.7	9.9	1982.....	80.3	<sup>2</sup> 67.6	18.8
1980.....	93.1	86.5	7.6	1978.....	69.6	<sup>2</sup> 59.5	17.0
1976.....	<sup>1</sup> 85.9	81.7	5.1	1974.....	63.2	<sup>2</sup> 56.0	12.9
1972.....	<sup>1</sup> 84.6	77.6	9.0	1970.....	<sup>3</sup> 65.9	<sup>2</sup> 58.2	13.6
1968.....	<sup>1</sup> 78.5	73.0	7.5	1966.....	<sup>3</sup> 57.6	<sup>3</sup> 52.9	8.9
1964.....	<sup>1</sup> 76.7	70.6	8.6				

<sup>1</sup>CPS estimate of votes cast for President.

<sup>2</sup>The "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.

<sup>3</sup> Refers 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.

election; for Representatives, this "dropoff" was 10.6 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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. Since voting and registration were more likely to be reported by a proxy respondent for young people (only about a quarter of the 18-20 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 most likely 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 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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 the report. Proxy respondents incorrectly reported an estimated 477,000 persons as either not voting or giving no report on voting, when

<sup>4</sup>Nonvoter Study '88-89 of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup>Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 293.

<sup>6</sup>Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 405.

**Table I. 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.

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 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 1984 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 322, 370, and 405, 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, 1988, were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 1019.

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.

## 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, DC 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 1988" tabulation package, or similar tabulations from the November 1986 or 1984 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, DC 20233  
Telephone: (301) 763-4547

(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:

## **USER COMMENTS**

We are interested in your reaction to the usefulness  
of this information and to the content of the questions  
used to provide the results contained in this report.

Current Survey Comments  
Population Division  
Bureau of the Census  
Washington, DC 20233