

Voting Behavior of Naturalized Citizens: 1996-2006

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. foreign-born population is 36.5 million, with 14.4 million naturalized citizens. Research documents that naturalized citizens are less likely to register and vote than native citizens. Since Bass and Casper's (2002) baseline national estimates from the 1996 Current Population Survey (CPS), 5.7 million more citizens have naturalized. Given population changes and the increasing political debate over immigration, we explore how nativity influences voting behavior across a decade of elections. Using the CPS, we address whether naturalized citizens continue to be less likely to register and vote, and whether the nativity status effect is consistent across time and in both presidential and congressional elections. Our results suggest that, net of social and demographic factors, naturalized citizens are less likely to register and vote than native citizens across all years. We find evidence that the nativity association has stayed at least as strong over the course of the decade. Furthermore, we find that nativity has at least as strong of an effect on voting behavior in congressional versus presidential elections.

This report is released to inform interested parties of (ongoing) research and to encourage discussion (of work in progress). The views expressed on (statistical, methodological, technical, or operational) issues are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the U.S. Census Bureau.

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2006 Current Population Survey, approximately 36.5 million foreign-born persons live in the United States, with 14.4 million naturalized citizens. Naturalized citizens age 18 and over can participate in the political process, but research suggests that they are less likely to register and vote than native citizens (Bass and Casper, 2002; Casper and Bass, 1998; Cassel, 2002; Day and Holder, 2004; DiSipio, Masouka, and Stout, 2006; Garcia, 2003; File, 2008; Holder, 2006; Hero, 1992; Jamieson, Shin, and Day, 2002; Manza and Brooks, 1999). Explanations for the nativity gap vary, but a broad theoretical framework of political participation suggests that citizens who are connected to and invested in society are more likely to participate in political endeavors such as voting (Brady, Cogan, and Fiorina, 2000; Campbell, Gurin, and Miller, 1960; Lazarfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1948; Lipset, 1980), while groups such as immigrants – who are potentially less connected and invested – are less likely to participate (Alba and Nee, 1997; DeSipio, 1996). Political scholarship highlights the consistent importance of social predictors of voting behavior, despite year-to-year variability in registration and voting rates (Jackson and Carsey, 1999; Manza and Brooks, 1999). Researchers cite socioeconomic characteristics, emerging cultural factors, and institutional barriers to participation – such as language differences – as reasons for the nativity gap in voting behaviors (Fraga and Segura, 2006; Jackson and Carsey, 1999; Jones-Correa, 2005; Manza and Brooks, 1999; Miller and Shanks, 1996; Segura, Barreto, and Woods, 2004; Segura, Nicholson, and Pantoja, 2007).

This research builds on the work of Bass and Casper (2002), who assessed naturalized citizens' registration and voting using the 1996 Current Population Survey,¹ and found that net of other factors, naturalized citizens were less likely to register and to vote than native citizens. Since these baseline estimates were produced, the U.S. population has added over 5 million new naturalized citizens (Rytina and Saeger, 2005), while little scholarly work has been produced to quantitatively assess the continued impact or size of the nativity gap. Furthermore, the political debate about immigration has become increasingly heated, as have academic debates regarding whether hot-button ideological issues matter more than social factors in terms of predicting voting behavior. Given these changes in the population, the centrality of the immigration issue, and the continued debate concerning the causal impact of social factors as voting predictors, our research seeks to extend Bass and Casper's (2002) findings through the most recent election data from the CPS.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Our analyses address three research questions. First, net of other predictors of voting behavior, are naturalized citizens less likely to register and to vote in elections held in the last decade? Second, has the magnitude of the nativity status effect changed over this time span? And finally, does nativity status have the same effect in different types of elections, namely between presidential and congressional election? We hypothesize that, due to factors such as societal investment and barriers to voting, nativity will influence voting behavior across all years. For our second question, we speculate that as the naturalized citizen population increases and diversifies, the magnitude of the nativity effect will increase across election years. Finally, we hypothesize that nativity

¹ In 1996 naturalization status was first available in the CPS during a presidential election year.

status will exert a stronger effect on participation in congressional elections since voter turnout is generally lower than in presidential elections, and is especially low for groups with large naturalized citizen populations (File, 2008; Holder, 2006).

DATA AND METHODS

Data and Measures

Data. To explore these questions, we use data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) – a nationally representative survey of the civilian, non-institutionalized population administered monthly to a sample of approximately 72,000 housing units. Since 1964, the November CPS has included a bi-annual supplement on voting and registration to coincide with national congressional and presidential elections. This includes questions about voting, registration, mode and timing of voting, and reasons for not voting, and is asked of all household members who are U.S. citizens aged 18 and over. Our analyses use data from the six November Voting Supplements collected from 1996 to 2006, with sample sizes ranging from about 77,000 to 89,000 unweighted cases (see Tables 2 and 3 for sample sizes for each year).²

Dependent Variables. We focus on two dependent variables: voter registration and voting. The first question in the supplement refers to voting in the most recent election and asks: “In any election some people are not able to vote because they are sick or busy or have some other reason, and others do not want to vote. Did (you/name) vote in the election held on Tuesday, November (date), (year)?”. Respondents who say “no”

² The data in this report are from the 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006 Voting supplements to the November Current Population Survey, and the estimates in it are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. Further information about the source and accuracy of the estimates is available in Attachment 16 of www.census.gov/aprd/techdoc/cps/cpsnov06.pdf. Full documentation can be found in the complete document.

are then asked the registration question: “(Were you/Was name) registered to vote in the November (day), (year) election?” We constructed a dichotomous variable for each outcome (1=yes, 0=no). Respondents who report “yes” for the voting question are coded as “yes” for registering to vote. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of the adult citizen population who registered to vote and voted across each year.

Independent Variables. The focal independent variable is nativity status, which we operationalized as a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent was native or was foreign born and became a citizen via naturalization (1=naturalized, 0=ative). Table 1 displays the distribution of the native and naturalized citizens for the adult U.S. citizen population across survey years, as well as the distribution across the dependent variables. Apart from the nativity status variable, our analyses include a set of control variables for demographic, social, and economic characteristics associated with voting behaviors (see Bass and Casper, 2002 for information on variable construction).

Analytical Plan

We estimate multivariate models predicting the effect of nativity status on the two outcomes for each survey year. Due to the complex sampling design of the CPS, analyses are weighted using a normalized person weight and design effects are used to adjust standard errors. Models for individual years address the first research question of whether, net of the control variables, nativity status is statistically significantly associated with the voting behavior outcomes. We address the second research question about variation in this association across time by testing whether the nativity status coefficients vary from each other across years within the same type of election. Finally, we address the third research question about the pattern of association between nativity status and

voting across type of election, by comparing the results from the presidential elections to congressional election in proximate years.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 show the size of the total U.S. citizen population age 18 and over, by nativity status and year. Over this 10-year period, the population eligible to vote has increased from 180 million to 201 million as the number of naturalized citizens increased from around 8 million to 14 million³. While naturalized citizens comprised a small percentage of the population overall, the proportion of naturalized citizens in the voting population grew over this decade. In 1996, naturalized citizens represented about 5% of the adult citizen population. By 2006, this percentage had risen to about 7 percent. In each election year, a larger percentage of native citizens reported registering to vote and voting compared to naturalized citizens. For instance, in the most recent election of 2006, 69% of native citizens registered to vote, compared to 54% of naturalized citizens. In the same year, 49% of native citizens reported voting versus 37% of naturalized citizens.

Table 2 displays results from logistic regression analyses predicting voter registration across survey year.⁴ In each year, naturalized citizens are less likely than native citizens to register to vote. For instance, in 1996 the odds that a naturalized citizen registered to vote were 36% less than the odds that a native citizen registered. In 2002, naturalized citizens were half as likely as native citizens to register to vote. Table 3

³ The estimates in this paper are based on responses from a sample of the population. As with all surveys, estimates may vary from the actual values because of sampling variation or other factors. All comparisons made in this paper have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

⁴ Results are displayed as odds ratios, with values above 1 indicating higher odds of registering to vote compared to the reference group and values below 1 indicating lower odds. An asterisk indicates that the odds ratio is statistically different from 1 at the 90-percent confidence level.

displays these same analyses predicting reported voting. Similar to the findings for registration, net of control variables, naturalized citizens were less likely to vote across all years relative to native citizens. In 1996, naturalized citizens were about 25% less likely than native citizens to vote. In 2006, the odds that a naturalized citizen voted were only 58% of the odds that a native citizen voted.

Tables 4 and 5 display results of the statistical tests comparing logistic regression coefficients across years. In these tables, cells marked with an asterisk indicate a statistical difference between the coefficients at the 90% confidence level. The second research question asks about differences in the nativity effect by election year. We address this by comparing the magnitude of the naturalized citizen coefficient across years, but only within the same election type. The solid shaded cells represent comparisons of presidential years, while the striped cells are congressional years. For registration models (Table 4), the magnitude (in terms of absolute values) of the coefficient in presidential year 1996 was statistically smaller than 2000 and 2004. While there was a nominal increase in the magnitude of the coefficients across congressional elections, none of these differences reached statistical significance. For voting models (Table 5), there was a statistically significant difference between presidential years 1996 and 2004. For congressional years, there was a statistically significant difference between 1998 and 2006. Overall, this suggests that there is some difference in the nativity status effect across years for most cases, but this may be limited to comparisons across the earliest and latest year.

The final research question addresses variation in the nativity effect by election type. In Tables 4 and 5, this research question is addressed in the top diagonal line of

boxes (outlined in bold), by comparing across election type within proximate years. In the voter registration coefficients presented in Table 4, two comparisons in the diagonal are statistically different: 1996-1998 and 2004-2006. In these pairings, the absolute value of the congressional year coefficient is larger than the presidential year. This suggests that in these two comparisons, the effect of nativity on voter registration was stronger in congressional elections than presidential elections. The pattern of stronger effects in congressional years was present in two comparisons in the models predicting voting (Table 5): 2000 – 2002 and 2004 – 2006. This suggests little variation in the nativity effect on voting by election type.

CONCLUSIONS

These results provide support for our first hypothesis that naturalized citizens are less likely to register and to vote compared to native citizens. This suggests that Bass and Casper's (2002) findings for nativity status and voting behaviors were not isolated to the 1996 election and that the effect of nativity status remains a relevant predictor of voting behavior across all elections since then. In the most recent election (2006), we found that naturalized citizens are about half as likely to register to vote, and only slightly more than half as likely to vote compared to native citizens.

We find mixed support for our second hypothesis about the increasing importance of nativity over time. When comparing across the earliest and latest election years, there was evidence that the effect of nativity increased for voting, but only over presidential years for voter registration. While the effect of nativity is not abating over time, findings were not robust enough to draw strong conclusions about a linear trend. For our third hypothesis, we found tentative evidence of differences across election type. The

magnitude of the nativity effect was at least as strong, if not more so, in congressional versus presidential years. These results should be interpreted with extreme caution, as it's generally understood that congressional and presidential elections are too different to be directly comparable.

Taken together, this research suggests that nativity status is an important determinant of voting behavior. Despite the growth in the foreign-born population and the focus on immigration issues in the political sphere, naturalized citizens do not appear to be capitalizing on their rights as citizens to participate in the electoral process, and were less likely to do so in the most recent election compared to the previous decade. This finding correlates strongly with the recent literature that identifies social predictors as consistently relevant predictors of electoral behavior.

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Table 1. Voter Registration and Voting, by Nativity Status and Year
(Numbers in Thousands)

Year		U.S. Citizen Population 18+			Registered			Voting		
		Total	Native	Naturalized	Total	Native	Naturalized	Total	Native	Naturalized
1996	Number	179,936	171,713	8,223	127,611	122,431	5,180	105,017	100,623	4,334
	Percent		95.4	4.6	70.9	71.3	63.0	58.4	58.6	52.7
	90-percent confidence interval		95.2-95.6	4.4-4.8	70.6-71.2	71.0-71.6	61.2-64.8	58.0-58.7	58.2-59.0	50.8-54.6
1998	Number	183,451	173,862	9,588	123,104	117,847	5,257	83,098	79,453	3,645
	Percent		94.8	5.2	67.1	67.8	54.8	45.3	45.7	38.0
	90-percent confidence interval		94.6-95.0	5.0-5.4	66.8-67.4	67.4-68.1	53.1-56.6	45.0-45.6	45.3-46.1	36.3-39.7
2000	Number	186,366	175,679	10,687	129,549	123,337	6,212	110,826	105,420	5,406
	Percent		94.3	5.7	69.5	70.2	58.1	59.5	60.0	50.6
	90-percent confidence interval		94.1-94.5	5.5-6.0	69.2-69.8	69.9-70.5	56.5-59.7	59.1-59.8	59.7-60.4	48.9-52.2
2002	Number	192,656	180,473	12,183	128,154	121,526	6,628	88,903	84,490	4,413
	Percent		93.7	6.3	66.5	67.3	54.4	46.1	46.8	36.2
	90-percent confidence interval		93.5-93.9	6.1-6.5	66.2-66.8	67.0-67.6	53.0-55.9	45.8-46.5	46.5-47.1	34.8-37.6
2004	Number	197,005	183,880	13,125	142,070	134,039	8,030	125,736	118,693	7,042
	Percent		93.3	6.7	72.1	72.9	61.2	63.8	64.5	53.7
	90-percent confidence interval		93.1-93.5	6.4-6.9	71.8-72.4	72.6-73.2	59.8-62.6	63.5-64.1	64.2-64.9	52.3-55.1
2006	Number	201,073	187,132	13,941	135,847	128,282	7,565	96,119	91,010	5,109
	Percent		93.1	6.9	67.6	68.6	54.3	47.8	48.6	36.6
	90-percent confidence interval		92.9-93.3	6.7-7.2	67.3-67.9	68.2-68.9	52.9-55.6	47.5-48.1	48.3-49.0	35.3-38.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Voting Supplements: 1996-2006.
Technical documentation for CPS is available at www.census.gov/apspd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html

Table 2: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regressions Predicting Reported Voter Registration, by Year

	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
Nativity status						
Native born	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Naturalized ¹	0.64 *	0.53 *	0.56 *	0.50 *	0.56 *	0.48 *
Sex						
Female	1.22 *	1.19 *	1.23 *	1.23 *	1.26 *	1.22 *
Age	1.03 *	1.03 *	1.03 *	1.03 *	1.03 *	1.03 *
Race						
White, non-Hispanic	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Black, non-Hispanic	1.50 *	1.49 *	1.65 *	1.46 *	1.77 *	1.42 *
Hispanic	0.98	1.00	0.87 *	0.89 *	0.81 *	0.86 *
Other, non-Hispanic	0.64 *	0.61 *	0.59 *	0.66 *	0.55 *	0.67 *
Marital status						
Never married	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Married	1.20 *	1.43 *	1.41 *	1.42 *	1.19 *	1.28 *
Widowed, divorced, separated	0.87 *	0.99	0.86 *	0.88 *	0.84 *	0.83 *
Education						
High school or less	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Some college or more	2.92 *	2.61 *	2.86 *	2.69 *	3.00 *	2.65 *
Employment status						
Employed	1.18 *	1.25 *	1.19 *	1.30 *	1.26 *	1.32 *
Not employed	1.12 *	1.23 *	0.86 *	1.20 *	1.09	1.06
Not in labor force	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Occupation						
Professional	1.51 *	1.36 *	1.60 *	1.46 *	1.49 *	1.48 *
Other	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Income	1.12 *	1.09 *	1.11 *	1.08 *	1.12 *	1.09 *
Missing income	0.94	0.86 *	0.90 *	0.92 *	0.92 *	0.88 *
Tenure						
Owns	1.31 *	1.36 *	1.24 *	1.29 *	1.32 *	1.30 *
Rents	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Length of time at address						
Less than 1 year	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
1 to 4 years	1.30 *	1.49 *	1.32 *	1.45 *	1.28 *	1.54 *
5 or more years	1.96 *	2.31 *	1.85 *	2.19 *	1.73 *	2.31 *
Region of residence						
South	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Northeast	0.99	1.00	1.02	0.97	1.06 *	0.91 *
Midwest	1.20 *	1.12 *	1.14 *	1.13 *	1.31 *	1.18 *
West	1.08 *	0.97	0.92 *	0.85 *	1.08 *	0.83 *
N	78195	77263	88341	88724	86310	83236
Adjustment for design effect	1.44	1.65	1.66	1.73	1.66	1.61

Notes: * = $p < .10$ ¹ None of the 90-percent confidence intervals for nativity status exceeded +/- .06

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Voting Supplements: 1996-2006.

Technical documentation for CPS is available at www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html

Table 3: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regressions Predicting Reported Voting, by Year

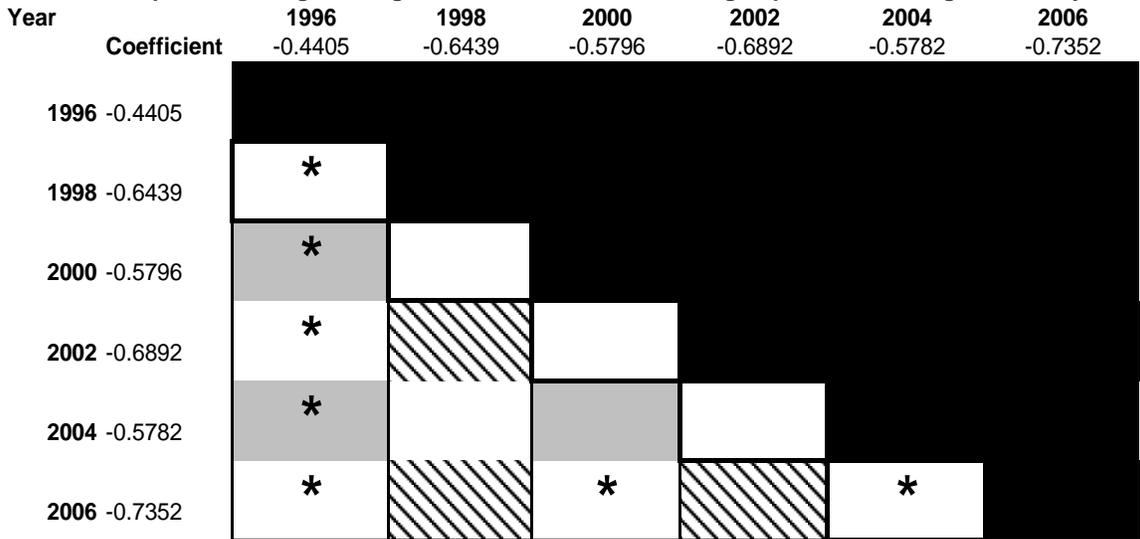
	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
Nativity status						
Native born	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Naturalized ¹	0.74 *	0.69 *	0.71 *	0.62 *	0.66 *	0.58 *
Sex						
Female	1.21 *	1.07 *	1.20 *	1.07 *	1.27 *	1.10 *
Age	1.03 *	1.04 *	1.03 *	1.04 *	1.03 *	1.04 *
Race						
White, non-Hispanic	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Black, non-Hispanic	1.54 *	1.65 *	1.66 *	1.60 *	1.74 *	1.48 *
Hispanic	0.92 *	0.92 *	0.82 *	0.83 *	0.75 *	0.79 *
Other, non-Hispanic	0.61 *	0.60 *	0.56 *	0.63 *	0.53 *	0.64 *
Marital status						
Never married	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Married	1.21 *	1.30 *	1.40 *	1.31 *	1.19 *	1.20 *
Widowed, divorced, separated	0.76 *	0.79 *	0.81 *	0.75 *	0.74 *	0.74 *
Education						
High school or less	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Some college or more	2.73 *	2.40 *	2.80 *	2.47 *	2.97 *	2.43 *
Employment status						
Employed	1.16 *	1.17 *	1.18 *	1.20 *	1.25 *	1.24 *
Not employed	1.02	1.25 *	0.89 *	1.08	1.11 *	1.05
Not in labor force	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Occupation						
Professional	1.44 *	1.29 *	1.56 *	1.40 *	1.50 *	1.36 *
Other	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Income	1.14 *	1.10 *	1.15 *	1.09 *	1.14 *	1.10 *
Missing income	0.95	0.94	0.95 *	0.97	0.88 *	0.93 *
Tenure						
Owns	1.34 *	1.36 *	1.26 *	1.41 *	1.38 *	1.41 *
Rents	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Length of time at address						
Less than 1 year	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
1 to 4 years	1.41 *	1.62 *	1.44 *	1.58 *	1.41 *	1.60 *
5 or more years	1.91 *	2.42 *	2.00 *	2.27 *	1.81 *	2.29 *
Region of residence						
South	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF	REF
Northeast	1.15 *	1.18 *	1.12 *	0.97	1.19 *	1.13 *
Midwest	1.26 *	1.41 *	1.23 *	1.17 *	1.39 *	1.50 *
West	1.32 *	1.64 *	1.14 *	1.10 *	1.30 *	1.42 *
N	78309	77553	88829	89184	86782	83929
Adjustment for design effect	1.44	1.65	1.66	1.73	1.66	1.61

Notes: * = $p < .10$ ¹ None of the 90-percent confidence intervals for nativity status exceeded +/- .06

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Voting Supplements: 1996-2006.

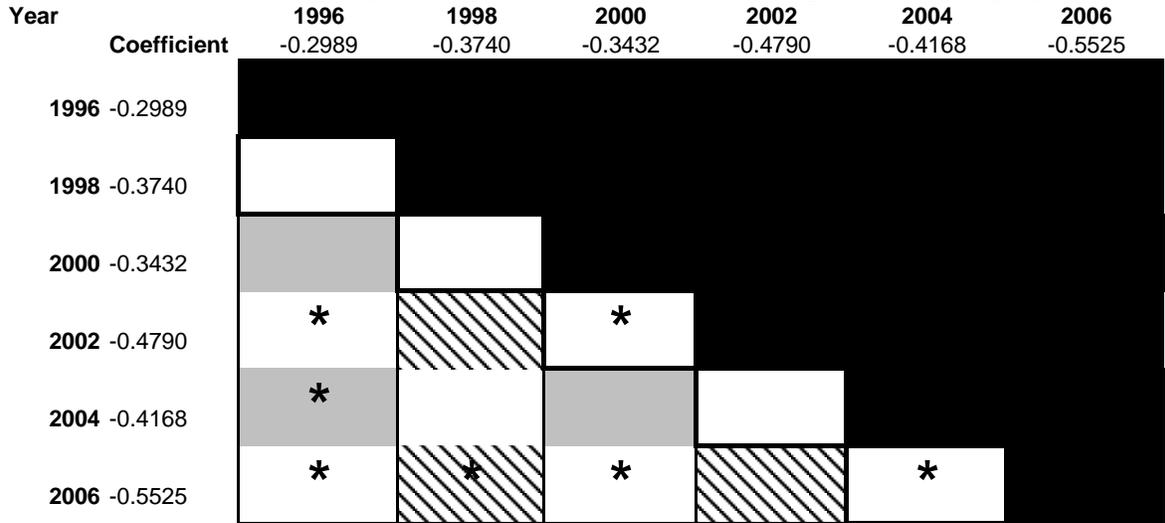
Technical documentation for CPS is available at www.census.gov/aprd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html

Table 4: Comparison of Logistic Regression Coefficients Predicting Reported Voter Registration, by Year



* Coefficients are statistically different from each other at the 90-percent confidence level
 Boxes shaded in solid reflect pairs of presidential election years, while those shaded in stripes are pairs of congressional election years. Boxes with no shading are pairs across election year type. The measures of error for these coefficients are roughly equivalent to those of the analogous odds ratios in Table 2.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Voting Supplements: 1996-2006.
 Technical documentation for CPS is available at www.census.gov/aprd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html

Table 5: Comparison of Logistic Regression Coefficients Predicting Reported Voting, by Year



* Coefficients are statistically different from each other at the 90-percent confidence level
 Boxes shaded in solid reflect pairs of presidential election years, while those shaded in stripes are pairs of congressional election years. Boxes with no shading are pairs across election year type. The measures of error for these coefficients are roughly equivalent to those of the analogous odds ratios in Table 3.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Voting Supplements: 1996-2006.
 Technical documentation for CPS is available at www.census.gov/aprd/techdoc/cps/cps-main.html