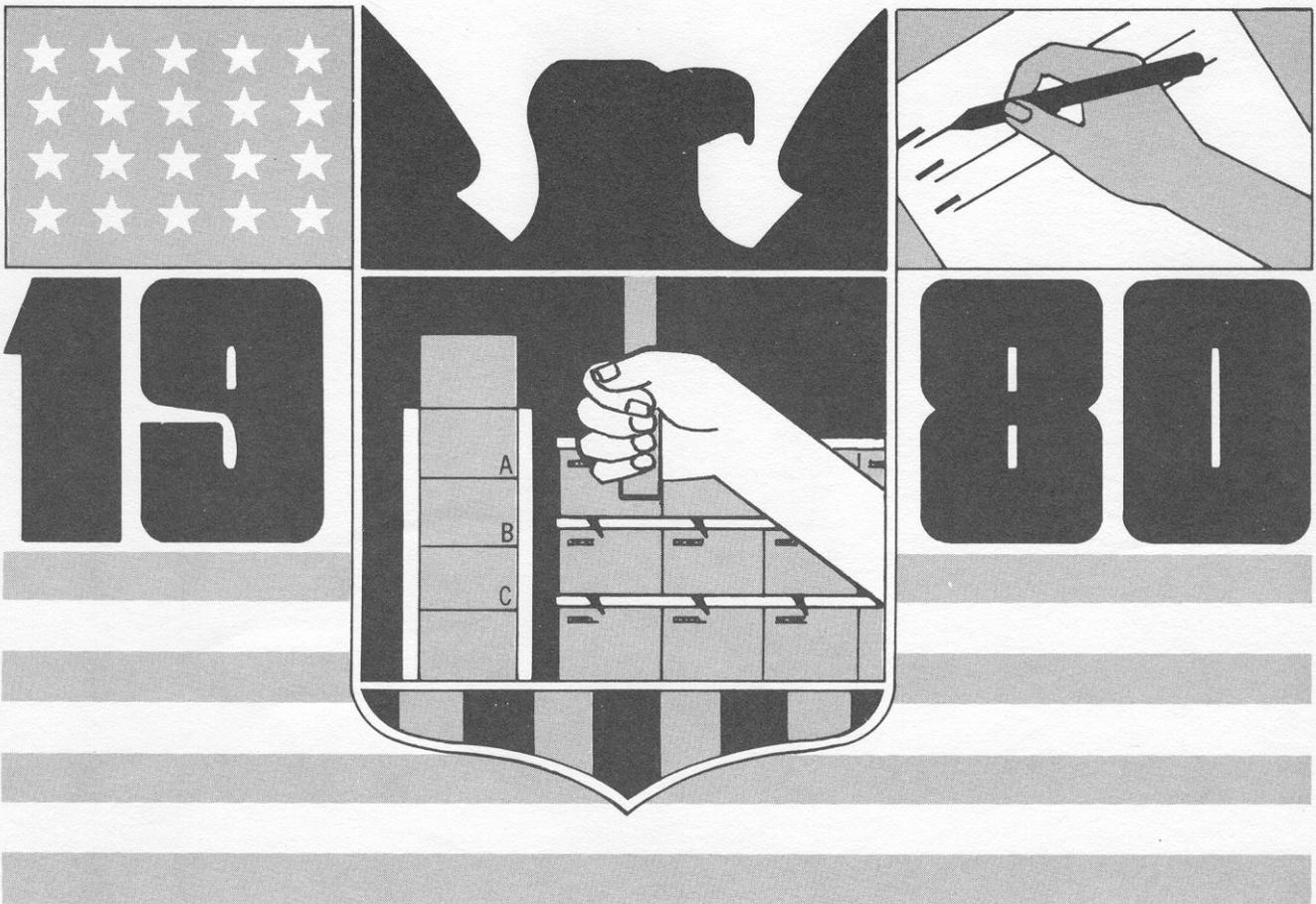


Population Characteristics

Series P-20, No. 370

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1980



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Series P-20, No. 370
Issued April 1982

**Voting and
Registration
in the Election of
November 1980**



U.S. Department of Commerce
Malcolm Baldrige, Secretary
Joseph R. Wright, Jr., Deputy Secretary
Robert G. Dederick, Assistant Secretary for
Economic Affairs

BUREAU OF THE CENSUS
Bruce Chapman,
Director



BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Bruce Chapman, Director

C. L. Kincannon, Deputy Director

James R. Wetzel, Acting Associate Director
for Demographic Fields

POPULATION DIVISION

Roger A. Herriot, Chief

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This report was prepared by **Jerry T. Jennings**, Demographic Statistician, Population Division. **Mary Hawkins** provided statistical assistance in the preparation of the tables and manuscript typing assistance was provided by **Kathy A. Italiano**. Overall supervision was provided by **Martin O'Connell**, Chief, Fertility Statistics Branch. Overall direction was provided by **Arthur J. Norton**, Assistant Division Chief (Demographic and Social Statistics Program). **Campbell J. Gibson**, Demographic Advisor, Population Division, reviewed the content of the textual materials. Statistical review was performed by **Ivey Chen**, Statistical Methods Division, and **Gregory Weyland**, Demographic Surveys Division, coordinated the survey operations.

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Symbols Used in Tables

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

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1980

According to official counts, 86.5 million Americans voted in the November 1980 Presidential election. This is the largest number of votes ever cast in a general election in the United States, exceeding by 4.9 million the number of votes cast for President in 1976. Despite this numerical increase, only 54 percent of the voting age population (18 years old and over) voted in the 1980 Presidential election, the same proportion as voted in 1976.

Results from the November 1980 Current Population Survey (CPS) indicated a reported voter turnout rate of 59 percent both in 1980 and 1976.¹ Thus, both official ballot counts and survey results indicate that the increase in the total number of voters between 1976 and 1980 was due to the increase in the size of the voting age population between the two election dates and not to an increase in voter participation. An exception to this trend was evident in a slight increase in the Black voter participation rate from 49 percent in 1976 to 51 percent in 1980.²

Most of the findings in this report are based on answers to a series of questions asked of persons of voting age in the Current Population Survey approximately 2 weeks after the election of November 4, 1980. The data in this report relate to the civilian noninstitutional population 18 years old and over. The CPS supplement on voting and registration is designed primarily to facilitate comparisons of voter turnout among different population groups and is the principal source of such data for the Nation. Data from the November 1980 CPS indicate that 93.1 million persons reported voting in the November 1980 election, some 6.6 million more than actually voted for President in 1980, according to official returns. Some of the factors accounting for differences between official election returns and the CPS results are discussed in the section of this report entitled "Evaluation of the Accuracy of the Data."

For successive Presidential elections between 1964 and 1976 and successive Congressional elections between 1966 and 1974, the voter participation rate declined (table A). Results from the Congressional elections of 1978 and the Presidential election of 1980, however, indicate a possible stabilization in the rate. With the anticipated general aging

of the electorate in the next decade, an increase in the number of people voting might occur due to the changing age composition of the electorate and the relatively high voter participation rates among the middle-age and older population.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Voter participation rates are higher among Whites (61 percent) than among Blacks (51 percent) or persons of Spanish origin (30 percent). The very low voter participation rate for the Hispanic population is due principally to the large proportion of this population who reported that they were not citizens (32 percent) and therefore were not eligible to vote.
- Voter participation was found to be relatively higher among white-collar (71 percent) than blue-collar (48 percent) workers, among college graduates (80 percent) than high school graduates (59 percent), and among homeowners (68 percent) than among renters (45 percent).
- Of the 37.2 million people reporting that they had not registered to vote, 47 percent said that they had not done so because they did not prefer any of the likely candidates or that they were not interested in the election. The same reasons were given by 27 percent of the 12.0 million people who registered to vote but did not go to the polls. In all, lack of interest in either the candidates or the election accounted for approximately 21 million people not voting in the November 1980 election.
- In 1980, for the first time since the Bureau of the Census began collecting data on voting in 1964, no difference was found between voter turnout rates for men and women (59 percent). Previous surveys have shown that men report slightly higher rates than women.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VOTERS

Voter participation rates are highly related to the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the electorate. As shown in table B, voter turnout is higher among the White population (61 percent) than either the Black or Hispanic

¹Data from the November 1980 CPS show that 93.1 million persons reported voting in the November 1980 election, up from 86.7 million as reported in the November 1976 CPS.

²Throughout this report, the phrases "voter participation rate" and "voter turnout rate" are used interchangeably. They both refer to the percent of the voting age population that reported to have voted in the specified election.

Table A. Percent Reported Voting, by Region, Race, and Spanish Origin: November 1964 to 1980

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Region, race, and Spanish Origin	Presidential elections					Congressional elections			
	1980	1976	1972	1968	1964	1978	1974	1970	1966
UNITED STATES									
Total, voting age.....	157,085	146,548	136,203	116,535	110,604	151,646	141,299	120,701	112,800
Percent voted.....	59.2	59.2	63.0	67.8	69.3	45.9	44.7	54.6	55.4
White.....	60.9	60.9	64.5	69.1	70.7	47.3	46.3	56.0	57.0
Black.....	50.5	48.7	52.1	57.6	58.5	37.2	33.8	43.5	41.7
Spanish origin ¹	29.9	31.8	37.5	(NA)	(NA)	23.5	22.9	(NA)	(NA)
NORTH AND WEST									
Total, voting age.....	106,524	99,403	93,653	81,594	78,174	102,894	96,505	83,515	78,355
Percent voted.....	61.0	61.2	66.4	71.0	74.6	48.9	48.8	59.0	60.9
White.....	62.4	62.6	67.5	71.8	74.7	50.0	50.0	59.8	61.7
Black.....	52.8	52.2	56.7	64.8	² 72.0	41.3	37.9	51.4	52.1
SOUTH									
Total, voting age.....	50,561	47,145	42,550	34,941	32,429	48,752	44,794	37,186	34,445
Percent voted.....	55.6	54.9	55.4	60.1	56.7	39.6	36.0	44.7	43.0
White.....	57.4	57.1	57.0	61.9	59.5	41.1	37.4	46.4	45.1
Black.....	48.2	45.7	47.8	51.6	² 44.0	33.5	30.0	36.8	32.9

NA Not available.

¹Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.²Black and other races in 1964.

populations (51 and 30 percent, respectively),³ higher among middleaged persons 45 to 64 years old (69 percent) than older or younger age groups shown in the table; and highest among residents of the North Central States (66 percent).

Education is one of the most important socioeconomic characteristics related to voting since it affects not only the person's occupation and related economic characteristics but may also influence the individual's commitment to the political process. In 1980, college graduates were nearly twice as likely to have voted (80 percent) as persons who had attended only elementary school (43 percent); persons with 4 years of high school had an intermediate voter participation rate of 59 percent. Overall, persons with at least 4 years of college constituted only 15 percent of the total voting age population 18 years old and over, but they made up 21 percent of the persons who reported to have voted (table 10 and figure 1).

Whether or not a person is employed is an important indicator of the person's probability of voting in an election. In the November 1980 election, 62 percent of employed persons reported to have voted compared to only 41 percent of unemployed persons. Among employed persons in non-agricultural industries, government workers (federal, state, and local) reported voting at a significantly higher level (77

percent) than either wage or salary workers in private industry (58 percent) or self-employed workers (67 percent). Persons not in the labor force, a group which includes many retired persons, reported a voter participation rate of 57 percent, which was slightly less than the 60 percent reported by all persons in the labor force (employed and unemployed combined). Persons who were in white-collar occupations were also more likely to vote (71 percent) than persons in blue-collar occupations (48 percent).

Data shown in table B also indicate that the relatively wealthier, more established segments of the population participate to a greater extent in the electoral process than other population groups. Almost three-fourths of the voting age population living in families whose family income was \$25,000 or more voted in the election, compared with only 39 percent for those persons with a family income of less than \$5,000. Altogether, one-third of the persons who voted in the November 1980 election had family incomes in excess of \$25,000 (figure 1).

Persons who had more established residences, as measured by homeownership and duration of residence in the community, voted to a greater extent than persons who rented housing or recently moved into their homes. Sixty-eight percent of homeowners reported to have voted, compared with 45 percent of persons who rented housing. Similarly, persons who had lived in the same house for 6 or more years had a higher voter participation rate (73 percent) than persons who had lived at their current residence for shorter durations of time.

³ The voter participation rate for the Spanish origin population is very low due to the large proportion (32 percent) of this population who are not citizens and, therefore, cannot vote. See the section of this report on "Reasons for Not Voting or Registering" for a discussion of this issue.

Table B. Characteristics of the Voting Age Population Reported Registered or Voting: November 1980

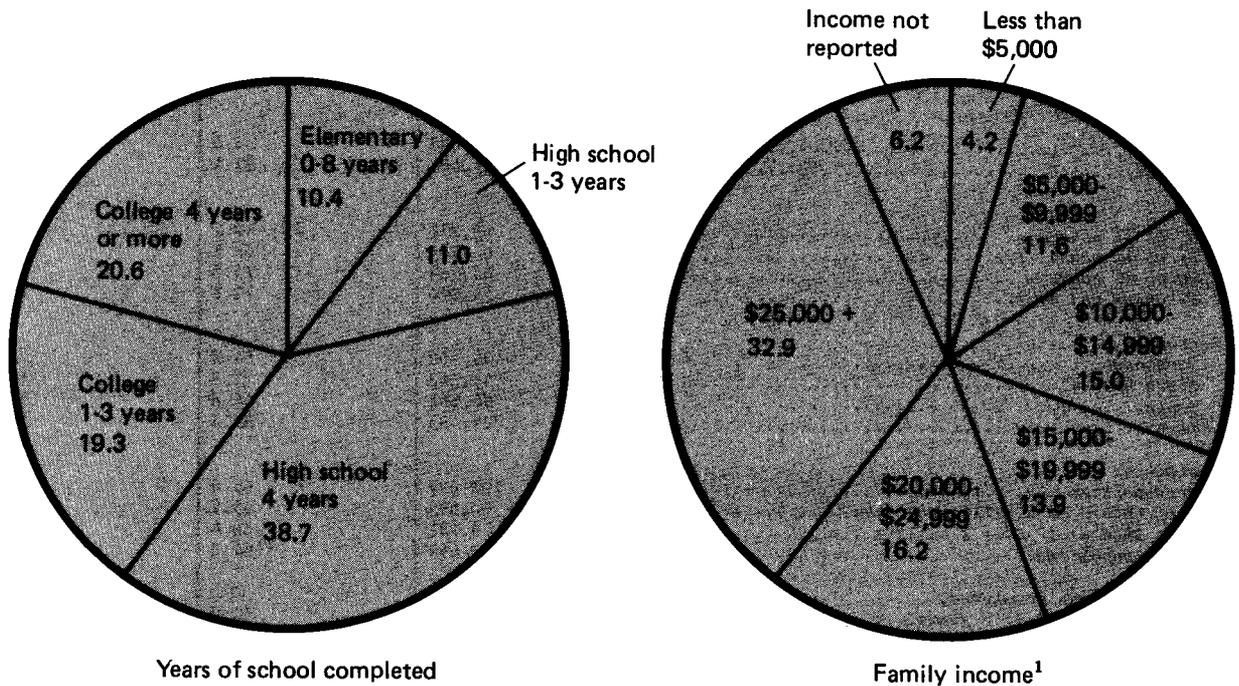
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristics	Number of persons	Percent registered	Percent voted
Total, 18 years and over.....	157,085	66.9	59.2
Race and Spanish origin:			
White.....	137,676	68.4	60.9
Black.....	16,423	60.0	50.5
Spanish origin ¹	8,210	36.3	29.9
Sex:			
Male.....	74,082	66.6	59.1
Female.....	83,003	67.1	59.4
Age:			
18 to 24 years.....	28,138	49.2	39.9
25 to 44 years.....	61,285	65.6	58.7
45 to 64 years.....	43,569	75.8	69.3
65 years and over.....	24,094	74.6	65.1
Region:			
Northeast.....	35,500	64.8	58.5
North Central.....	41,542	73.8	65.8
South.....	50,561	64.8	55.6
West.....	29,483	63.3	57.2
Residence:			
Metropolitan.....	106,627	65.8	58.8
In SMSA's of 1 million or more.....	60,895	65.2	58.6
In SMSA's of under 1 million.....	45,731	66.4	59.0
Nonmetropolitan.....	50,459	69.2	60.2
Years of school completed:			
Elementary: 0 to 8 years.....	22,656	53.0	42.6
High school: 1 to 3 years.....	22,477	54.6	45.6
4 years.....	61,165	66.4	58.9
College: 1 to 3 years.....	26,747	74.4	67.2
4 years or more.....	24,040	84.3	79.9
Labor force status and class of worker:			
In civilian labor force.....	101,934	67.4	60.4
Employed.....	95,041	68.7	61.8
Agriculture.....	3,015	68.1	60.0
Nonagricultural industries.....	92,026	68.7	61.9
Private wage and salary workers.....	69,161	65.1	57.9
Government workers.....	15,801	82.0	77.0
Self-employed workers ²	7,063	73.7	67.0
Unemployed.....	6,893	50.3	41.2
Not in labor force.....	55,151	65.8	57.0
Occupation³:			
White-collar workers.....	52,772	76.5	70.9
Blue-collar workers.....	33,382	56.6	48.0
Service workers.....	12,713	59.4	51.3
Farm workers.....	2,579	68.0	59.9
No previous full-time work experience.....	488	34.4	28.0
Family income⁴:			
Under \$5,000.....	8,567	50.4	39.4
\$5,000 to \$9,999.....	18,873	58.4	48.8
\$10,000 to \$14,999.....	21,746	63.6	54.8
\$15,000 to \$19,999.....	18,359	66.8	60.3
\$20,000 to \$24,999.....	19,100	73.5	67.2
\$25,000 and over.....	35,427	79.2	73.8
Tenure⁵:			
Owner occupied.....	98,362	75.3	68.3
Renter occupied.....	25,494	53.8	44.6
Duration of residence⁵:			
Less than 1 year.....	16,005	54.4	45.1
1 to 2 years.....	18,366	66.3	58.8
3 to 5 years.....	21,063	73.6	66.4
6 years or more.....	64,178	80.3	72.6

¹Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.²Includes unpaid family workers.³Includes all persons in the civilian labor force.⁴Restricted to members of primary families.⁵Restricted to members of primary families. Excludes noncitizens.

Sources: Tables 2, 3, 10, 11, 12.

Percent Distribution of Voters in the November 1980 Election, by Years of School Completed and Family Income



¹ Restricted to persons living in primary families.

² Source: Tables 10 and 13 of this report.

VOTING RATES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

For the first time since 1964 when the Census Bureau first began collecting data on voting behavior, no significant difference was observed between the reported voter participation rates for men and women, each reporting a voter turnout rate of 59 percent (table C). This is in contrast to the November 1964 election when voter participation for men (72 percent) was 5 percentage points higher than the rate for women (67 percent).

The trend toward equality in the overall voter participation rate occurred in a period of a general decline in voter turnout for both men and women. Two trends appear to be largely responsible for eliminating the voter turnout differences between men and women in 1980: changes in the voting rates of persons under 45 years of age and changes in the age structure of the electorate.

With the enfranchisement of all 18 to 20 year olds in 1972, voter participation rates for women 18 to 44 years old (59 percent) approximated those of men while in the previous two Presidential elections voter participation rates among men under 45 years old had been greater than those reported by women. By 1980, the voter participation rate for women 18 to 44 years old was 54 percent, some 3 percentage points higher than that reported by men in the same age group. In addition, among persons 45 years old and over, the difference in voter participation between men and

women has declined from 8 percentage points higher for men than for women in 1964 to a difference of 4 percentage points in 1980.

Secondly, between 1964 and 1980, the proportion of the voting age population under 45 years old increased from 50 percent to 57 percent.⁴ Thus, the higher voter turnout rate among younger women than men, a decrease in the sex differential in voter turnout for persons 45 years and over, and an increase in the proportion of the voting age population under 45 years old resulted in eliminating, by the November 1980 election, differences in the overall turnout rate between men and women.

REASONS FOR NOT VOTING OR REGISTERING

Differences in voter participation rates among population groups are closely related to the proportion of the population that registers to vote. For all population groups, especially those persons of Spanish origin, not being a citizen presents the principal barrier to registration. Originally, citizenship status had not been asked directly in the CPS supplement on voting and registration. Instead, noncitizens were identified by their response of "not a U.S. citizen" to the question on reason for not registering to vote. Beginning

⁴ For a discussion of the effects of changes in the age distribution on voter turnout, see Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 322, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1972*.

Table C. Percent Reported Voted in the Presidential Election, by Age and Sex: November 1964 to 1980

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	18 years old and over		18 to 44 years old		45 years old and over	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
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 ¹						
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 ¹						
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

¹Data are for persons of voting age, usually 21 years old and over in most States prior to 1972.

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

Table D. Percent Reported Registered and Reported Voted, by Citizenship Status: November 1980

Race, Spanish origin, and age	Percent reported registered		Percent reported voted	
	All persons	All persons, excluding noncitizens ¹	All persons	All persons, excluding noncitizens ¹
Total.....	66.9	69.7	59.2	61.7
RACE				
White.....	68.4	70.8	60.9	63.1
Black.....	60.0	61.7	50.5	52.0
Spanish origin ²	36.3	53.6	29.9	44.1
AGE				
18 to 24 years.....	49.2	51.8	39.9	41.9
25 to 44 years.....	65.6	69.0	58.7	61.7
45 to 64 years.....	75.8	78.2	69.3	71.5
65 years and over.....	74.6	76.4	65.1	66.7

¹Includes a relatively small percentage of persons (3 percent) with no report on citizenship status.²Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.

Source: Derived from table 2 of this report.

in 1978, a question was first asked of all respondents "Is (this person) a citizen of the United States?" as an introduction to the questions on voting and registration. The exclusion of persons identified as noncitizens (6.3 million) from the denominator in the computation of voting and registration rates, slightly raises for the nation as a whole the registration rate from 67 to 70 percent and the voter

participation rate from 59 to 62 percent (table D). For persons of Spanish origin, the registration rate increased from 36 percent to 54 percent and the voter participation rate increased from 30 to 44 percent when the reported number of noncitizens (2.6 million) are removed from the denominator before calculating the voting rate. Voter participation rates based on total population statistics are of

sociological and political importance since they indicate the degree to which different population groups play a role in the electoral process.

It is evident from the survey data that once people make the effort to register to vote, they vote the vast majority of time. For example, difference in the percentage of the total population of voting age that voted ranges from a high of 67 percent for the White population to 51 percent for the Black population to 30 percent for the Spanish-origin population. However, among those who registered to vote, 89 percent of the White, 84 percent of the Black, and 82 percent of the Spanish-origin population reported to have voted (table E).⁵

Table E. Percent of Persons Registered to Vote Who Reported to Have Voted, by Race, Spanish Origin, and Age: November 1980

(Numbers in thousands)

Race, Spanish origin, and age	Reported registered	Reported voted	Percent of those registered who voted
Total.....	105,035	93,066	88.6
RACE			
White.....	94,112	83,855	89.1
Black.....	9,849	8,287	84.1
Spanish origin ¹ .	2,984	2,453	82.2
AGE			
18 to 24 years..	13,852	11,225	81.0
25 to 44 years..	40,187	35,958	89.5
45 to 64 years..	33,029	30,205	91.4
65 years and over.....	17,968	15,677	87.2

¹Spanish origin may be of any race.

Source: Table 2 of this report.

Overall, about 4 out of every 10 persons of voting age (64 million persons) did not vote in 1980. Among the nonvoting respondents who had registered to vote (12 million) 16 percent stated that they did not prefer any of the candidates, and 11 percent stated that they were not interested in voting (table F). Another 17 percent stated that sickness or a family emergency prevented them from voting.

Expressions of lack of interest in voting by persons who had previously registered but who did not vote showed no statistical difference between Whites (11 percent) and Blacks (10 percent). However, the reason "did not prefer any candidates" was reported more frequently among White nonvoters (17 percent) than among Black nonvoters (12 percent) who had registered but did not vote. These differences should be

⁵ The difference, now, between the Black and Spanish-origin populations in voter turnout is not statistically significant.

interpreted with caution since a higher proportion of Blacks (20 percent) than Whites (13 percent) did not give any reason for not voting or did not respond to the question.

Sickness or family emergencies were the predominant reasons for not voting among the population 65 years old and over (43 percent), while only 4 percent of the youngest age group gave similar reasons. Among younger respondents, being away from home or out of town on election day constituted the principal specified reason for not voting (21 percent, table 17). Lack of preference for any candidate was reported by 19 to 20 percent of the age groups 25 to 44 and 45 to 64 years old while the youngest and oldest age groups gave this reason in only 11 to 12 percent of the cases.

Lack of interest is a much more frequent reason given for not registering to vote than for not voting. Of those respondents who reported that they had not registered to vote (37 million persons), 9 percent had not done so because they did not prefer any of the likely candidates while another 39 percent had not registered because they had no interest in the election (table 19). These two categories combined accounted for slightly less than one-half of the responses for not registering to vote compared to only 27 percent given as reasons for not voting among persons who actually registered to vote. That these two reasons combined explain a greater portion of nonregistration than nonvoting behavior is understandable since persons who are generally motivated enough to register will probably follow-up the process by actually voting.

In all, about one-third of the persons who did not vote in the November 1980 election (21 million persons) stated that they lacked sufficient interest in the electoral process or in the candidates to register or, if registered previously, to vote in that specific election.

EVALUATION OF THE ACCURACY OF THE DATA

In the November 1980 Current Population Survey supplement on voting, 93.1 million of the 157.1 million persons of voting age in the civilian noninstitutional population were reported (by themselves or by members of their households) as having voted in the November 1980 election. Official counts showed 86.5 million votes cast, or a difference of 6.6 million votes between the two sources. This difference is greater than can be accounted for by sampling variability (table G). Moreover, the population covered in the survey excluded members of the Armed Forces and institutional inmates.⁶ Since the proportion of voters in these population groups is somewhat lower than in the rest of the population, their omission leads to a minor understatement of the size of the difference.

⁶ In the November 1974 Congressional election, the Department of Defense total voting rate for Armed Forces was 18.0 percent as compared with 44.7 percent for the civilian noninstitutional population; in the 1972 Presidential election, the corresponding voting rate for the Armed Forces was 47.6 as compared with 63.0 percent for the civilian noninstitutional population. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Research Affairs). "The Federal Voting Assistance Program," Tenth Report, 1975, and Ninth Report, 1973.

Table F. Reported Reason for Not Voting, for Persons Who Reported Registering But Not Voting, by Race, Spanish Origin, and Age: November 1980

(Numbers in thousands)

Race, Spanish origin, and age	Total reported registered but not voting	Reported reason for not voting						
		Percent of total	Sick or family emergency	Other reason unable to vote ¹	Did not prefer any of the candidates	Not interested, don't care, etc.	All other reasons not specified	Don't know reason not reported
Total.....	11,969	100.0	17.1	24.4	16.0	11.2	17.2	14.1
RACE								
White.....	10,257	100.0	17.1	24.8	16.7	11.3	17.0	13.1
Black.....	1,562	100.0	17.7	21.3	11.6	10.2	19.2	20.0
Spanish origin ²	531	100.0	15.1	26.7	13.1	10.6	23.6	10.7
AGE								
18 to 24 years.....	2,627	100.0	4.2	31.7	11.2	12.7	19.3	21.0
25 to 44 years.....	4,229	100.0	10.1	25.8	19.1	11.7	20.4	12.9
45 to 64 years.....	2,824	100.0	18.4	21.6	19.5	12.6	14.6	13.5
65 years and over....	2,290	100.0	43.2	16.9	11.7	6.8	12.3	9.0

¹This category includes the responses "no way to get to polls," "could not take time off from work," and "out of town or away from home."

²Persons of Spanish origin may be of any race.

Source: Table 17 of this report.

This bias has been noted in other surveys of voting behavior but both the methods of measuring it and estimates of its size have varied considerably.⁷ On balance, the overstatement varies between 5 and 15 percent of the total number of persons reported as having voted.⁸ Possible reasons for the differences follow.

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

1976, there were about 2 percent fewer votes cast for President than the total number voting in the election. In 1980, the difference was less than 1 percent.

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

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

A test was conducted in conjunction with the December 1972 Current Population Survey to examine another facet of the overreporting problem. The hypothesis was that by asking the presumably less sensitive question on registration first, the tendency to overreport on voting might be lessened. The results of this test were somewhat confounded by a nonreporting rate in December that was twice as high as that in

⁷Hugh J. Parry and Helen M. Crossley, "Validity of Responses to Survey Questions," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XIV (1950), pp. 61-80; Mungo Miller, "The Waukegan Study of Voter Turnout Prediction," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XVI (Fall 1952), pp. 381-398; and Helen Dinerman, "1948 Votes in the Making—A Preview," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XII (Winter 1948-49), pp. 585-598. For a more complete listing of similar studies, see David Adamany and Philip Dubois, "The 'Forgetful' Voter and the Underreported Vote," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, (Summer 1975), pp. 227-231.

⁸For a comprehensive discussion of the problem, including a comparison of the 1964 Bureau of the Census survey with that conducted by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan, see Aage R. Clausen, "Response Validity: Vote Report," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, Winter 1968-69, pp. 588-606.

Table G. Comparisons of CPS Voting Estimates and Official Counts of Votes Cast: November 1964 to 1980

(Numbers in millions)

Year	CPS vote for President	Official vote for President ¹	Percent difference
1980.....	93.1	86.5	7.6
1976.....	85.9	81.7	5.1
1972.....	84.6	77.6	9.0
1968.....	78.5	73.0	7.5
1964.....	² 76.7	70.6	8.6

Year	CPS vote for U.S. Representative	Official vote for U.S. Representative or highest office ¹	Percent difference
1978.....	² 69.6	³ 59.4	17.0
1974.....	² 63.2	³ 56.0	12.9
1970.....	² 65.9	³ 58.0	13.6
1966.....	57.6	³ 52.9	8.9

¹U.S. Congress, Clerk of the House, Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election.

²CPS estimate of total votes cast.

³The "official vote" was obtained by summing the number of votes cast for U.S. Senator, U.S. Representative, or Governor in each State, depending on which office received the highest number of votes.

November, 4.2 percent compared with 1.9 percent. However, when the comparison was restricted to those who reported on voting, the study indicated that reversing the question order does not reduce the proportion of persons who report that they had voted.

3. CPS estimating procedure. A part of the difference between the official count of votes for President and the CPS estimate could be due to the estimation procedures in the CPS which essentially attribute the characteristics of interviewed persons to persons in noninterviewed households of similar types—about 4 percent of the total. This procedure may have a substantial effect on the results of a survey of voting if the noninterviewed households have a higher proportion of nonvoting members than interviewed households.

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

5. Household respondent. A portion of the difference between the official count and the survey results might be

attributable to the use of a household respondent to report on the registration and voting of all eligible household members. An experiment was conducted in conjunction with the November 1974 CPS to assess the effects of proxy respondents on the voting rate. In approximately one-eighth of the sample households, interviewers were instructed to obtain the voting supplement information from each 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 between groups reporting for themselves or someone else were not significant. Thus, there is no evidence that obtaining voting and registration information for all household members from one respondent rather than from self-respondents only accounts for any part of the overestimates of voters obtained in household surveys.

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

Although there is no evidence that answers by proxy respondents account for the overreporting on voting, the value of asking people about their own behavior on such matters as voting and registering to vote can be shown by comparing the effect of self reports and reports by others on the "do not know" rate for whether voted in the election and whether registered to vote. For self-respondents, the "do not know" categories were almost nonexistent (0.1 percent of all reports). At the other extreme, 3 percent of respondents who reported on the voting behavior of other household members could not answer whether or not the other persons had voted (table 22).

Voting in previous elections. Failure to remember is not considered to be a problem in the voting survey for a current election, since the data in each survey are collected during the week containing the 19th day of November, which is generally about 2 weeks after the election. However, since 1968, questions have also been asked in each survey about whether respondents had voted in the previous Presidential election. Asking retrospective questions of this kind introduces possible memory biases into the data, and the net effect would be expected to be a further overstatement of voter participation.

This effect seems minimal in the data presented in this report for the 1976 retrospective question. Table 16 indi-

cates that 88.4 million people 22 years old and over in 1980 reported to have voted in the 1976 Presidential election. Data from the November 1976 CPS voting supplement indicated that 86.7 million persons 18 years old and over voted in the 1976 election. Some of the apparent differences result from the effect of sampling differences in the two surveys and changes in the respondent universe because of deaths, movement into and out of the Armed Forces or institutions, and international migration.

RELATED REPORTS

Current Population Reports. Advance data on reported voter participation and registration of the population of voting age, by race and sex, for the United States and regions in the November 1980 election are contained in the report Series P-20, No. 359.

Data on voter participation by social and economic characteristics of the population of voting age in the 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976 Presidential elections and in the 1966, 1970,

1974, and 1978 Congressional elections were published in the reports Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 322, 174, 228, 293, and 344, respectively.

Data on the social and economic characteristics of persons 18 to 24 years old who became eligible to vote on the basis of age in 1972 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 230.

Projections of the population of voting age for the United States, regions, divisions, and States for November 1, 1980 were published in Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 879.

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

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