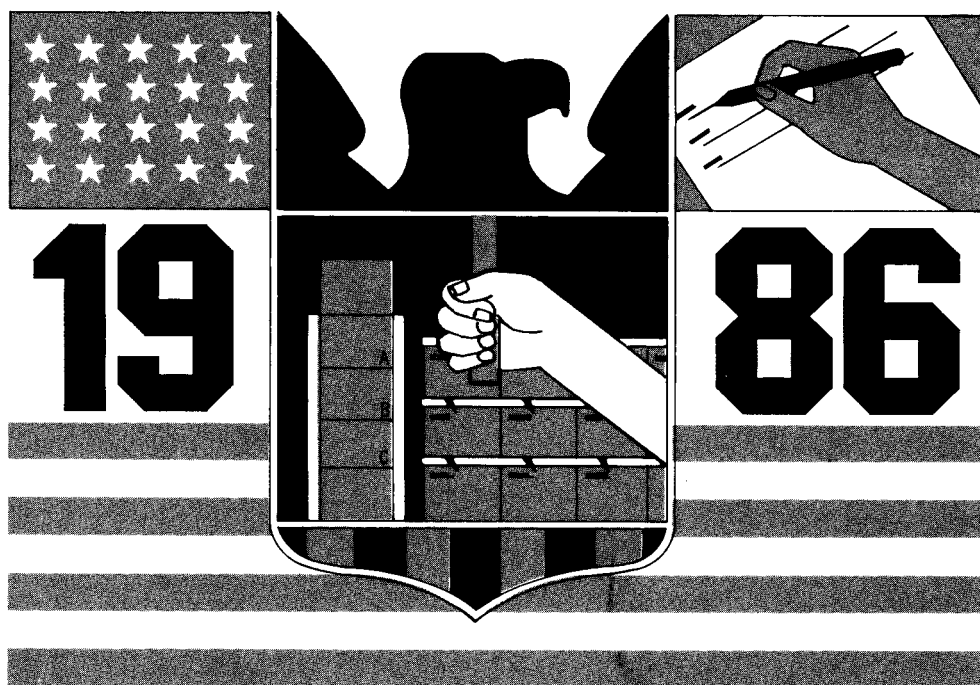


**Population
Characteristics**

Series P-20, No. 414

**Voting and
Registration
in the Election
of November
1986**



U.S. Department
of Commerce
BUREAU OF
THE CENSUS

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Series P-20, No. 414
Issued September 1987

**Voting and
Registration
in the Election
of November
1986**

U.S. Department of Commerce
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SYMBOLS USED IN TABLES

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

Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1986

INTRODUCTION

According to ballot counts, 64.8 million Americans voted in the November 1986 general elections. This is 3 million fewer than the 67.6 million voting in the 1982 elections, despite the addition of 8.4 million persons to the voting-age population (persons 18 years and over). The returns for 1986 represent 36 percent of the voting-age population, down from 40 percent voting in 1982.

Results from the November 1986 Current Population Survey (CPS), on which this report is based, show a *reported* voter turnout rate of 46 percent, based on the total population 18 years and over. This rate is about 3 points lower than the rate reported in the November 1982 CPS. The voting rate for persons who reported being registered in 1986 (72 percent), however, was about 25 points higher than for the total age-eligible population.

Voter turnout rates from household surveys are an important supplement to official counts because they provide estimates of turnout for population groups not identifiable

from 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 statistically reliable information on the social and economic characteristics of voters and nonvoters. Data from household surveys, however, have the limitation of generally overestimating voter turnout. For example, data from the November 1986 CPS indicate that 80.0 million persons reported voting in the 1986 elections, some 15.2 million more than actually voted, according to ballot counts. Factors accounting for differences between official returns and the CPS results are discussed in the section, "Evaluation of the Accuracy of the Data."

Most of the findings in this report are based on answers to a series of questions asked of persons of voting age approximately 2 weeks after the election of November 4, 1986. Data relate to the civilian noninstitutional population 18 years and over.

Table A. Percent Reported Voting, by Region, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age: November 1964 to 1986
(Numbers in thousands)

Region, race, Spanish origin, sex, and age	Congressional elections						Presidential elections				
	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966	1984	1980	1976	1972	1964
United States											
Total, voting age	173,890	165,483	151,646	141,299	120,701	112,800	169,963	157,085	146,548	136,203	110,604
Percent voted	46.0	48.5	45.9	44.7	54.6	55.4	59.9	59.2	59.2	63.0	69.3
White	47.0	49.9	47.3	46.3	56.0	57.0	61.4	60.9	60.9	64.5	70.7
Black	43.2	43.0	37.2	33.8	43.5	41.7	55.8	50.5	48.7	52.1	58.5
Hispanic ¹	24.2	25.3	23.5	22.9	(NA)	(NA)	32.6	29.9	31.8	37.5	(NA)
Male	45.8	48.7	46.6	46.2	56.8	58.2	59.0	59.1	59.6	64.1	71.9
Female	46.1	48.4	45.3	43.4	52.7	53.0	60.8	59.4	58.8	62.0	67.0
18 to 24 years	21.9	24.8	23.5	23.8	² 30.4	² 31.1	40.8	39.9	42.2	49.6	² 50.9
25 to 44 years	41.4	45.4	43.1	42.2	51.9	53.1	58.4	58.7	58.7	62.7	69.0
45 to 64 years	58.7	62.2	58.5	56.9	64.2	64.5	69.8	69.3	68.7	70.8	75.9
65 years and over	60.9	59.9	55.9	51.4	57.0	56.1	67.7	65.1	62.2	63.5	66.3
North and West											
Total, voting age	114,689	110,126	102,894	96,505	83,515	78,355	112,376	106,524	99,403	93,653	78,174
Percent voted	47.5	51.9	48.9	48.8	59.0	60.9	61.6	61.0	61.2	66.4	74.6
White	48.7	53.1	50.0	50.0	59.8	61.7	63.0	62.4	62.6	67.5	74.7
Black	44.2	48.5	41.3	37.9	51.4	52.1	58.9	52.8	52.2	56.7	³ 72.0
South											
Total, voting age	59,201	55,357	48,752	44,794	37,186	34,445	57,587	50,561	47,145	42,550	32,429
Percent voted	43.0	41.8	39.6	36.0	44.7	43.0	56.8	55.6	54.9	55.4	56.7
White	43.5	42.9	41.1	37.4	46.4	45.1	58.1	57.4	57.1	57.0	59.5
Black	42.5	38.3	33.5	30.0	36.8	32.9	53.2	48.2	45.7	47.8	³ 44.0

NA Not available.

¹Hispanics may be of any race.

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

³Black and other races in 1964.

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 143, 174, 228, 253, 293, 322, 344, 370, 383, 405, and table 2 of this report.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Overall turnout in the 1986 Congressional election was 46 percent, a rate distinctly lower than the 49 percent recorded in 1982, but the same as that reported in 1978. A decline between 1982 and 1986 occurred among all age groups except those 65 years and over.
- Voter turnout remained unchanged from 1982 levels for Blacks (43 percent), Hispanics (24 percent), and persons 65 years and over (61 percent). Turnout fell for Whites from 50 percent in 1982 to 47 percent in 1986.
- Turnout for women, which rose above that for men in the 1984 Presidential election, reverted to parity with men in 1986 (46 percent). For women 18 to 44 years old, however, turnout was 37 percent in 1986, 2 points above that for men of the same age.
- Gains in turnout were posted by Blacks in the South (43 percent in 1986, compared with 38 percent in 1982); registration for this group also increased, from 57 percent to 65 percent.
- Young Blacks 18 to 24 years old, whose turnout and registration rates caught up to those for Whites in 1984, moved ahead of Whites in 1986 both in voter turnout, 25 to 22 percent, and in registration, 46 to 42 percent.
- Among college graduates, 63 percent reported voting, compared with 44 percent of those with exactly 4 years of high school, and only 34 percent among persons who attended but did not complete high school.
- More homeowners reported voting (59 percent) than did renters (28 percent).

Table B. Percent Reported Registered, by Region, Race, Hispanic Origin, Sex, and Age: November 1966 to 1986
(Numbers in thousands)

Region, race, Spanish origin, sex, and age	Congressional elections						Presidential elections				
	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966	1984	1980	1976	1972	1968
United States											
Total, voting age	64.3	64.1	62.6	62.2	68.1	70.3	68.3	66.9	66.7	72.3	74.3
White	65.3	65.6	63.8	63.5	69.1	71.6	69.6	68.4	68.3	73.4	75.4
Black	64.0	59.1	57.1	54.9	60.8	60.2	66.3	60.0	58.5	65.5	66.2
Hispanic ¹	35.9	35.3	32.9	34.9	(NA)	(NA)	40.1	36.3	37.8	44.4	(NA)
Male	63.4	63.7	62.6	62.8	69.6	72.2	67.3	66.6	67.1	73.1	76.0
Female	65.0	64.4	62.5	61.7	66.8	68.6	69.3	67.1	66.4	71.6	72.8
18 to 24 years	42.0	42.4	40.5	41.3	² 40.9	² 44.1	51.3	49.2	51.3	58.9	² 56.0
25 to 44 years	61.1	61.5	60.2	59.9	65.0	67.6	66.6	65.6	65.5	71.3	72.4
45 to 64 years	74.8	75.6	74.3	73.6	77.5	78.9	76.6	75.8	75.5	79.7	81.1
65 years and over	76.9	75.2	72.8	70.2	73.7	73.5	76.9	74.6	71.4	75.6	75.6
North and West											
Total, voting age	64.9	65.2	63.8	63.3	70.0	73.8	69.0	67.9	67.7	73.9	76.5
White	66.2	66.7	64.9	64.6	70.8	74.5	70.5	69.3	69.0	74.9	77.2
Black	63.1	61.7	58.0	54.2	64.5	68.8	67.2	60.6	60.9	67.0	71.8
South											
Total, voting age	63.0	61.7	60.1	59.8	63.8	62.2	66.9	64.8	64.6	68.7	69.2
White	63.2	63.2	61.2	61.0	65.1	64.3	67.8	66.2	66.7	69.8	70.8
Black	64.6	56.9	56.2	55.5	57.5	52.9	65.6	59.3	56.4	64.0	61.6

NA Not available.

¹Hispanics may be of any race.

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

Source: Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 192, 228, 253, 293, 322, 344, 370, 383, 405, and table 2 of this report.

TRENDS IN VOTER TURNOUT

Since 1964, when the Bureau of the Census first began collecting voting and registration data in its Current Population Survey, the general trend in voter turnout has been downward. Between 1966 and 1974, turnout rates estimated from the CPS showed a 10 percentage point decline in Congressional only election years, from 55 to 45 percent. Beginning in 1978 the downward trend reversed for Congressional election years, turnout rising that year to 46 percent. Turnout rose again in 1982 to 49 percent but fell to 46 percent in 1986, the same level as in 1978.

In Presidential election years during this period, turnout also declined 10 percentage points from 69 percent in 1964 to 59 percent in 1976, where it remained in 1980, before rising by 1 point in 1984 to 60 percent, the highest turnout figure recorded in CPS since the election of 1972.

A significant part of the decline in turnout over the past two decades is attributable to the entry into the voting-age population of the Baby Boom cohorts born between 1946 and 1964. The earliest of these cohorts began entering the electorate in the mid-1960's, substantially raising the number of persons in the low-turnout youthful ages. Ratification of the 26th Amendment, which lowered the voting age in national elections to 18 years, hastened entry of an additional 11 million young persons into the electorate in time to affect turnout in the 1972 Presidential election.¹ By 1980, these 18-to-34-year-olds made up 41 percent of the total age-eligible

electorate, an increase of 33 million in the age group over the number in 1964. These young people had a voting rate in the 1980 Presidential election of 48 percent, compared with 67 percent for those 35 years and over.

In 1982, the last of the large Baby Boom cohorts entered the voting-age population, bringing "Baby Boomers," now persons 18 to 36 years old, to 74.7 million, or to 45 percent of the total voting-age population. By 1986, these young people were 22 to 40 years old and constituted 43 percent of the voting-age population; they had a voting rate of 37 percent, compared with 59 percent for those of all older ages.

While sudden and large changes in turnout rarely occur for any identifiable population group, young Blacks 18 to 24 recorded a notable exception: an abrupt 12 point increase in registration, and an 11 point increase in voting, in the 1984 Presidential election.² More frequently changes in turnout are gradual, such as the shift in turnout among the younger portion of the electorate. Men 18 to 44 years old had a 2-point lead over women in 1966; this gradually reversed until 1986, when women had a 2-point lead (table C).

Gradual changes have also been taking place in turnout among Blacks in recent years. In general, Black voter turnout declined between the 1966 and 1974 elections from 42 percent in 1966 to 34 percent in 1974. Since then, Black turnout in Congressional elections has generally tended upward, reaching 43 percent both in 1982 and 1986. The

¹Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 479; and Series P-20, No. 230.

²Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 405.

Table C. Percent Reported Having Voted in Congressional Elections, by Age and Sex: November 1966 to 1986
(Numbers in thousands)

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

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

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

White rate in this same period fell from 57 percent in 1966 to 46 percent in 1974. By 1986, it was still only 47 percent. The result of these changes is that the differential in turnout dropped from a 15-percentage point lead for Whites in 1966, to a 4-point lead in 1986. Younger Blacks in 1986 (under 45 years old) now vote at about the same rate as young Whites, around 36 or 37 percent (table D). Among older Blacks (45 years and over) turnout in Congressional election years has actually risen since 1966 by around 11 percentage points (to 56 percent in 1986), while that for Whites of this age has dropped 3 points to 61 percent.

There have also been major regional changes in voter turnout in the past 20 years. In the North and West Regions combined, turnout dropped by 13 percentage points for Whites and by 8 points for Blacks between 1966 and 1986. In the South, however, White voting percentages dropped only slightly (from 45 to 44 percent) over the decade, while Black turnout actually increased about 10 percentage points, from 33 to 43 percent. The net effect of these changes was to reduce the North and West edge over the South in 1986 (48 to 43 percent), and the nationwide advantage of Whites over Blacks (47 to 43 percent).

Table D. Percent Reported Voted in Congressional Elections, by Age and Race: November 1966 to 1986

(Numbers in thousands)

Year	18 years and over		18 to 44 years		45 years and over	
	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black
1986						
Number	149,899	19,020	85,839	12,186	64,059	6,834
Percent voted	47.0	43.2	36.9	36.4	60.6	55.5
1982						
Number	143,607	17,624	81,458	11,284	62,149	6,340
Percent voted	49.9	43.0	40.1	37.4	62.8	53.1
1978						
Number	133,370	15,636	73,827	9,634	59,543	6,002
Percent voted	47.3	37.2	37.9	30.7	59.0	47.5
1974						
Number	125,132	14,175	67,491	8,556	57,641	5,620
Percent voted	46.3	33.8	37.6	27.3	56.5	43.6
1970¹						
Number	107,997	11,472	52,923	6,423	55,074	5,049
Percent voted	56.0	43.5	48.4	38.9	63.2	49.4
1966¹						
Number	101,205	10,533	49,332	5,767	51,873	4,766
Percent voted	57.1	41.8	50.3	39.3	63.6	44.8

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

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, 383, and table 2 of this report.

YOUTH VOTING

Historically, turnout of young people has been low. Since 1974, turnout of 18-to-24-year-olds in Congressional election years has hovered around 25 percent (table E). In 1986, this rate dropped to 22 percent; registration, however, remained at its 1982 level of about 42 percent (table F).

Prior to 1978, turnout among young Blacks trailed that of young Whites by about 9 to 10 percentage points. In 1978, the rate for young Blacks rose to 20 percent, while that for young Whites remained unchanged at around 24 percent. In 1982, the rate for young Blacks rose again, to 26 percent, but no corresponding gain was recorded for White youths.

Then, in 1986, the rates for young Whites dropped to 22 percent, while the rate for young Blacks remained at about 25 percent. The result of the recent increases for Black youth and the 1986 drop for White youth was that for the first time since the Bureau of the Census has collected voting and registration data, turnout among young Blacks in 1986 exceeded that of young Whites, 25 to 22 percent. Since registration rates of young Blacks rose proportionately with voting rates in both 1984 and 1986, a likely explanation for the increase in turnout among young Blacks is the intensive registration drive targeted at this group over the past two elections.

Table E. Percent of Persons 18 to 24 Years Old Voting in Congressional Elections, by Race and Hispanic Origin: November 1966 to 1986

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Race and Spanish origin	1986	1982	1978	1974	1970	1966
White						
Total, 18 to 24 years	21,957	24,133	23,669	22,187	11,345	9,405
Voted	4,746	6,029	5,736	5,584	3,571	3,066
Percent	21.6	25.0	24.2	25.2	31.5	32.6
Black						
Total, 18 to 24 years	3,651	3,850	3,462	3,113	1,542	1,208
Voted	916	980	696	501	345	264
Percent	25.1	25.5	20.1	16.1	22.4	21.9
Hispanic¹						
Total, 18 to 24 years	2,543	2,019	1,606	1,481	(NA)	(NA)
Voted	294	287	184	197	(NA)	(NA)
Percent	11.6	14.2	11.5	13.3	(NA)	(NA)

¹Hispanics may be of any race.

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

CHARACTERISTICS OF VOTERS

Voting and registration rates remain closely related to the social and demographic characteristics of the electorate (table F). Turnout in 1986 (columns 3 and 7) was higher among Whites (47 percent) than among either Blacks (43 percent) or Hispanics (24 percent), higher among middle-aged persons, those 45 to 64 years (59 percent) than younger age groups, and highest among residents of the Midwest (50 percent). These same patterns of differences were also evident in the 1984 Presidential election and the 1982 Congressional elections.³

Education is one of the most important socioeconomic characteristics related to voting, since it usually affects not only a person's occupation and related economic characteristics, but may also influence perception of the efficacy of voting and, hence, an individual's commitment to the electoral process. In 1986, 63 percent of college graduates reported voting, compared with only 33 percent of persons

who had attended only elementary school; persons with 4 years of high school had an intermediate voting rate of 44 percent. Thus, more highly educated persons are disproportionately represented among voters, college graduates making up 18 percent of the voting-age population in 1986, but casting 24 percent of all votes.

Whether a person is employed is also an important indicator of the likelihood of voting in an election. In the November 1986 election, 46 percent of employed persons reported that they voted, compared with only 30 percent of unemployed persons. Among persons employed in nonagricultural industries, government workers (Federal, State, and local) reported voting at a significantly higher level (65 percent) than either wage or salary workers in private industry (41 percent) or self-employed workers (52 percent). Persons in managerial and professional occupations had the highest turnout rates (59 percent), while persons who were in occupations classified

³Current Population Reports, Series P-20, Nos. 383 and 405.

as operators, fabricators, and laborers had the lowest rate, 33 percent (tables 6 and 7). Persons not in the labor force, a group which includes many retired and older persons, reported a voter participation rate of 48 percent, slightly above that of the 45 percent reported by persons in the labor force (employed and unemployed combined).

Data in table F also indicate that voter participation rates increase with income. About 56 percent of persons 18 years and over living in families whose incomes were \$35,000 or more voted in the 1986 election, compared with only 26 percent of those living in families with incomes less than \$5,000. With income, as with education, those at the upper end of

Table F. Percent of Voting-Age Population and Percent of Registered Persons Who Reported Having Voted: November 1986 and 1982

(Numbers in thousands. Civilian noninstitutional population)

Characteristic	1986				1982			
	Number of persons (1)	Percent registered (2)	Percent voted		Number of persons (5)	Percent registered (6)	Percent voted	
			Persons (3)	Registered (4)			Persons (7)	Registered (8)
Total, 18 years and over	173,890	64.3	46.0	71.6	165,483	64.1	48.5	75.8
Race and Hispanic origin:								
White	149,899	65.3	47.0	72.0	143,607	65.6	49.9	76.1
Black	19,020	64.0	43.2	67.6	17,624	59.1	43.0	72.7
Hispanic ¹	11,832	35.9	24.2	67.5	8,765	35.3	25.3	71.7
Sex:								
Male	82,364	63.4	45.8	72.3	78,046	63.7	48.7	76.5
Female	91,526	65.0	46.1	70.9	87,437	64.4	48.4	75.1
Age:								
18 to 24 years	26,425	42.0	21.9	52.0	28,823	42.4	24.8	58.4
25 to 44 years	74,927	61.1	41.4	67.7	66,881	61.5	45.4	73.8
45 to 64 years	44,825	74.8	58.7	78.5	44,180	75.6	62.2	82.3
65 years and over	27,712	76.9	60.9	79.2	25,598	75.2	59.9	79.7
Region:								
Northeast	37,283	62.0	44.4	71.7	36,356	62.5	49.8	79.7
Midwest	42,778	70.7	49.5	70.0	41,891	71.1	54.7	76.9
South	59,201	63.0	43.0	68.2	55,357	61.7	41.8	67.8
West	34,628	60.8	48.4	79.6	31,879	60.6	50.7	83.6
Years of school completed:								
Elementary: 0 to 8 years	19,628	50.5	32.7	64.7	22,365	52.3	35.7	68.2
High school: 1 to 3 years	21,366	52.4	33.8	64.5	22,324	53.3	37.7	70.8
4 years	68,550	62.9	44.1	70.1	65,186	62.9	47.1	75.0
College: 1 to 3 years	33,030	70.0	49.9	71.3	28,751	70.0	53.3	76.2
4 years or more	31,316	77.8	62.5	80.3	26,858	79.4	66.5	83.7
Labor force status and class of worker:								
In civilian labor force	115,636	63.5	44.7	70.4	107,985	63.9	48.4	75.7
Employed	108,456	64.4	45.7	70.9	97,225	65.5	50.0	76.3
Agriculture	3,000	64.3	47.8	74.3	3,253	63.5	48.1	75.8
Nonagricultural industries	105,457	64.5	45.6	70.8	93,972	65.6	50.1	76.4
Private wage and salary workers	80,441	60.8	41.1	67.6	70,869	61.7	45.7	74.1
Government workers	16,563	79.6	64.5	81.0	15,548	79.8	66.5	83.3
Self-employed workers ²	8,452	69.2	51.8	74.8	7,555	72.1	57.0	79.0
Unemployed	7,179	49.4	30.4	61.4	10,760	49.8	34.1	68.5
Not in labor force	58,254	65.7	48.4	73.7	57,499	64.3	48.7	75.8
Family income: ³								
Under \$5,000	6,999	46.3	26.0	56.1	7,973	47.9	30.5	63.8
\$5,000 to \$9,999	13,272	51.8	34.0	65.5	17,441	54.5	38.7	70.9
\$10,000 to \$14,999	16,340	59.6	41.1	68.9	19,587	59.4	43.1	72.6
\$15,000 to \$19,999	15,043	63.1	45.1	71.4	17,194	62.8	47.5	75.6
\$20,000 to \$24,999	14,460	64.4	46.2	71.8	15,669	68.2	52.3	76.8
\$25,000 to \$34,999	25,742	67.9	50.0	73.7	23,429	70.6	55.6	78.8
\$35,000 and over	45,604	74.4	56.3	75.7	27,930	76.8	62.0	80.7
Income not reported	4,695	61.2	45.6	74.5	8,212	62.1	49.4	79.5
Tenure: ⁴								
Owner occupied	46,436	77.1	59.4	77.0	44,536	77.2	62.2	80.6
Renter occupied	17,244	47.1	28.3	60.1	16,016	47.4	31.9	67.3

¹Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

²Includes unpaid family workers.

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

⁴Restricted to family householders.

the distribution make up a larger share of voters; in the 1986 elections, 39 percent of all voters were members of families with incomes in excess of \$35,000, while only 33 percent of all persons of voting age were members of families with incomes this high.

Homeownership is another economic characteristic highly related to voter turnout. In the November 1986 election, 59 percent of homeowners reported having voted, compared with 28 percent of renters.

Table F also shows voting rates for registered persons (columns 4 and 8). It is informative to look at the differences for specific population groups. For example, after changing the base for the percentage to registered persons, the voting rate for those 65 years and over increased from 60 percent for the total in the age group to 79 percent for those who were registered, while for young persons 18 to 24 years, the rate for those registered jumped 30 points to 52 percent; among education groups, recomputation increased the voting rate from 33 to 65 percent for those with grade school educations, and from 63 to 80 percent for college graduates. Because of the large proportion of noncitizens among Hispanics (33 percent in 1986), it is especially useful to recompute the voting rate for this group; based on persons registered to vote, the voting rate for Hispanics (68 percent) is not much different from the rate for all registered persons (72 percent).

EVALUATION OF THE ACCURACY OF THE DATA

In the November 1986 Current Population Survey supplement on voting, 80.0 million of the 173.9 million persons of voting age in the civilian noninstitutional population were reported as having voted in the November 1986 election. Official counts showed 64.8 million votes cast, or a difference of 15.2 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.¹ 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 overstatement in the 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 varies between 5 and 15 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

¹In the November 1984 Presidential election, the Department of Defense reported a total voting rate for the Armed Forces of 55.3 percent, compared with 59.9 percent for the civilian noninstitutional population. Federal Voting Assistance Program, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 13th Report, 1985.

Table G. Comparisons of CPS Voting Estimates and Official Counts of Votes Cast: November 1964 to 1986

(Numbers in millions)

Year	CPS vote for President	Official vote for President	Percent difference
1984	1101.9	92.7	9.9
1980	193.1	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	176.7	70.6	8.6

Year	CPS vote for U.S. Representative	Official vote for U.S. Representative or highest office	Percent difference
1986	180.0	264.8	23.4
1982	180.3	267.6	18.8
1978	169.6	259.5	17.0
1974	163.2	256.0	12.9
1970	165.9	258.0	13.6
1966	57.6	352.9	8.9

¹CPS estimate of total votes cast.

²The "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.

³Refers only to votes cast for U.S. Representative.

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

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 and 1984 there were about 2 percent fewer votes cast for President than the total number voting in the election. Dropoff between the number of votes cast for candidates for representative and the total number of votes cast is much greater. In 1984, the latest year for which such data are available, in the 19 States providing counts of the total number of votes cast, votes for candidates for Congress were 10 percent lower than the total number of votes cast, according to *The Congressional Quarterly*.

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 since voting and registration were more likely to be reported by a proxy respondent for young people (only about a quarter of the 18-to 20-year old age group reported for themselves)

their 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, who were almost certainly reported for by their parents.

In the 1964 survey, as a check on the work of the interviewer, 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. *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 non-voting 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 under counts in selected age groups, this source of error will be reflected in estimates from the CPS.

4. *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 in voter turnout between groups reporting for themselves (47 percent) or by someone else (48 percent) were not significant.² 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.³ 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 H summarizes the results of this test. Among persons for whom re-interviews were obtained, 99 percent of the respondents who had been reported by another household member as having voted also reported for themselves that they voted; in addition, 99 percent of the followup interviews which initially reported that the respondent did not vote confirmed a previous report of not voting. Proxy respondents incorrectly reported an estimated 477,000 persons as either not voting or giving no report on voting while in fact the persons in question reported that they actually did vote. However, overreports on voting by proxy respondents only amounted to 290,000 persons.

Table H. 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.

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 a 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 of no evidence that misreports by proxy respondents account for the discrepancy between CPS estimates of voter turnout and the official count of the number of ballots cast by voters.

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

²Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 293.

³Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 405.

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 (table 9). For self-respondents, the "do not know"/"no report" categories were almost nonexistent. At the other extreme, 6.0 percent of respondents who reported on the voting behavior of other household members could not answer whether or not the other person had voted.

5. 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."

RELATED REPORTS

Current Population Reports. Data on voter participation by social and economic characteristics of the population of voting age in the Congressional elections of 1966, 1970, 1974, 1978, and 1982 were published in Series P-20, Nos. 174, 228, 293, 344, and 383, respectively, and in the Presidential elections of 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1984 in Series P-20, Nos. 143, 192, 253, 322, 370, and 405, respectively.

A summary of results from the Current Population Survey supplement for Presidential election years 1964 to 1980 was published in Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 131 and also in Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 405.

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 for November 1, 1986 were released in Census Bureau Press Release CB86-65, April 5, 1986.

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.

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

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

Voting and registration statistics by State summarized in table 4, detailed by age, race, Hispanic origin, and sex categories, can be obtained for \$20.00 (Checks payable to Commerce—Census).

This "Current Voting Indicators: November 1986" tabulation package, or a similar tabulation from the November 1984 CPS, consists of approximately 60 pages. To place an order for either of these packages of tabulations, contact:

Jerry T. Jennings
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