

An Analysis of the 2018 Congressional Election

Population Characteristics

Current Population Reports

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1964, the Voting and Registration Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) has collected data on the characteristics of voters and nonvoters immediately after each national election. As the only federal resource of its kind, data from the supplement have been used to show the effects of landmark changes to voting and registration policies in the United States, including the Voting Rights Act of 1964 and the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, also known as the Motor Voter Act.

The November 2018 election had the highest voter turnout of any congressional election since 1978.¹ This report summarizes the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of those who voted and registered in this election and in congressional elections since 1978.²

National elections fall into two categories—congressional elections in which congressional seats are the highest offices decided, and presidential elections in which voters decide on the office of the president and congressional seats. Given that voter participation differs between these two types of elections,

¹ This report relies on data since 1978, the year the CPS began to collect citizenship data, which are needed for calculating turnout for the citizen population aged 18 and over.

² The U.S. Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board and Disclosure Avoidance officers reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. CBDRB-FY21-POP001-0188077.

analyses in this report are restricted to congressional elections. Analyses of characteristics of voters focus on age, race and Hispanic origin, sex, and educational attainment, characteristics historically associated with turnout.³

This report's first section, "Understanding Voting," includes an overview of the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement and defines common population universes used in voting analyses. The second section, "Voting Trends Over Time: Congressional Elections 1978-2018," shows how national voting and registration rates and the composition of voters have varied over time, specifically in terms of age, race and Hispanic origin, educational attainment, and sex. The third section, "The 2018 Voting Population," describes characteristics of citizen voting age, voting, and registered populations in the 2018 election. This section also focuses on 18- to 29-year-olds, who dramatically increased their share of the voting population relative to the previous election in 2014. The fourth section, "How Voters Vote: Traditional and Nontraditional Methods of Voting," shows the rise in the use of

³ Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza, "Social Cleavages and Political Alignments: U.S. Presidential Elections, 1960 to 1992," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, No. 6, 1997, pp. 937-946.

Kelly Dittmar, "Women Voters," In *Minority Voting in the United States*, eds., 2015.

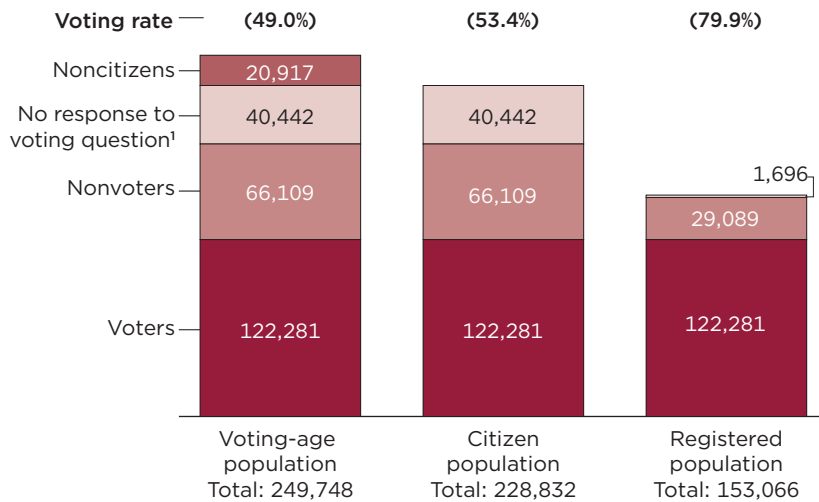
Thom File, "The Diversifying Electorate—Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin in 2012 (and Other Recent Elections)," *Population Characteristics*, P20-568, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2013.

Thom File, "Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964-2012," *Population Characteristics*, P20-573, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2014.

Figure 1.

Voters Among the Total, Citizen, and Registered Voting-Age Populations: 2018

(Population aged 18 and older, in thousands)



¹ Represents those who were registered with no response to the initial voting question.
 Note: Details may not sum to totals because of rounding.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: November 2018.

alternative voting methods, including voting early and by mail, and describes the characteristics of those who used these methods in 2018. The fifth section, “Why Nonvoters Don’t Vote or Register,” provides an overview of reasons why nonparticipants did not vote or register in the 2018 election and in previous elections. The final sections provide a “Summary of Key Findings” from the 2018 election and an overview of the “Accuracy of the Estimates” from the supplement.

UNDERSTANDING VOTING

The CPS Voting and Registration Supplement

The CPS is a national household survey that collects demographic, social, and economic data about the nation’s civilian, noninstitutionalized population. Responses to the CPS questions

are the primary source of monthly labor force statistics.

The CPS includes additional supplemental questions on a variety of topics. Among them is the Voting and Registration Supplement, which has been fielded every 2 years following national elections since 1964. In November 2018, the CPS sample contained approximately 51,000 households. The supplement is administered to U.S. citizens who are 18 years and older in households that completed the core CPS survey. Age and citizenship criteria are determined using responses to the CPS core survey questions.

The supplement includes several questions about voting and registration. First, sample members are asked if they voted in the most recent election. Those who report that they did vote are assumed to have been registered, while those who report that they did not

vote are asked whether they were registered to vote. Voters are then asked how and when they voted, and those who were registered are asked how they registered. Those who did not vote or register are instead asked why they did not. All respondents receive a final question about how long they have lived at their current address, which can be used to predict the likelihood that an individual voted or registered.

Common Population Universes in Analyses of Voting and Registration

Analyses of voting and registration vary depending on the selected population universe. Typical population universes include the voting-age population, the citizen voting-age population, and the registered population (Figure 1).

- **Voting-age population (VAP):** Those who are 18 years and older. Includes noncitizens who were not eligible to receive the Voting and Registration Supplement, those who did not respond to the voting question, those who did not vote in the election, and those who did vote.
- **Citizen voting-age population (CVAP):** Citizens who are 18 years and older. Includes those who did not respond to the voting question, those who did not vote in the election, and those who did vote.
- **Registered population:** Those who were registered to vote in the election. Includes citizens 18 years and older who responded to the voting question.

As the population universe decreases, the calculated voting rate increases. In 2018, 49.0 percent of the VAP voted, 53.4 percent of the CVAP voted, and

79.9 percent of the registered population voted.

The CVAP is the primary focus of this report.

VOTING TRENDS OVER TIME: CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS 1978–2018

National Estimates

Voting and registration rates in congressional elections have fluctuated over time (Table 1). A higher percentage of the CVAP voted in the November 2018 election than in any other congressional election since 1978.⁴ The voting rate increased 11.5 percentage points from 41.9 percent in 2014, the lowest congressional election turnout over this period, to 53.4 percent in 2018. This is the largest percentage-point jump in voter turnout among congressional elections in this series. However, the percentage of the CVAP that was registered to vote

⁴ The CPS began collecting citizenship information in 1978, making this the first year that the citizen voting-age population—the universe for voting analyses in this report—could be defined.

COMPARING CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY (CPS) VOTING ESTIMATES TO OFFICIAL REPORTS

Estimates in this report are based on responses to the Voting and Registration Supplement to the CPS, which surveys the civilian, noninstitutionalized population in the United States. Voting and registration estimates from the supplement and other sample surveys have historically differed from those based on administrative records, such as official reports from each state disseminated collectively by the clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Federal Elections Commission. In general, surveys on voting and registration tend to yield higher estimates than these official results.¹ Potential explanations for overestimation include misreporting, lack of knowledge of household members' behavior, and methodological issues related to question wording, method of survey administration, and survey nonresponse bias. More information about these factors can be found in the last section of this report.

Despite observed differences between the CPS voting estimates and official tallies, the supplement remains the best data source available for examining the demographic and socioeconomic composition of American voters in federal elections, particularly when examining broad historical results.²

¹ Mary G. Powers and Richard W. Dodge, "Voter Participation in the National Election November 1964," *Current Population Reports*, P20-143, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1965; and DeBell, Matthew and Jon A. Krosnick, et. al., "The Turnout Gap in Surveys: Explanations and Solutions," *Sociological Methods & Research*, May 7, 2018.

² Michael P. McDonald, "The True Electorate: A Cross-Validation of Voter Registration Files and Election Survey Demographics," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 71, Issue 4, 2007, pp. 588–602.

Table 1.

Voting and Registration: Congressional Elections 1978–2018

(Numbers in thousands)

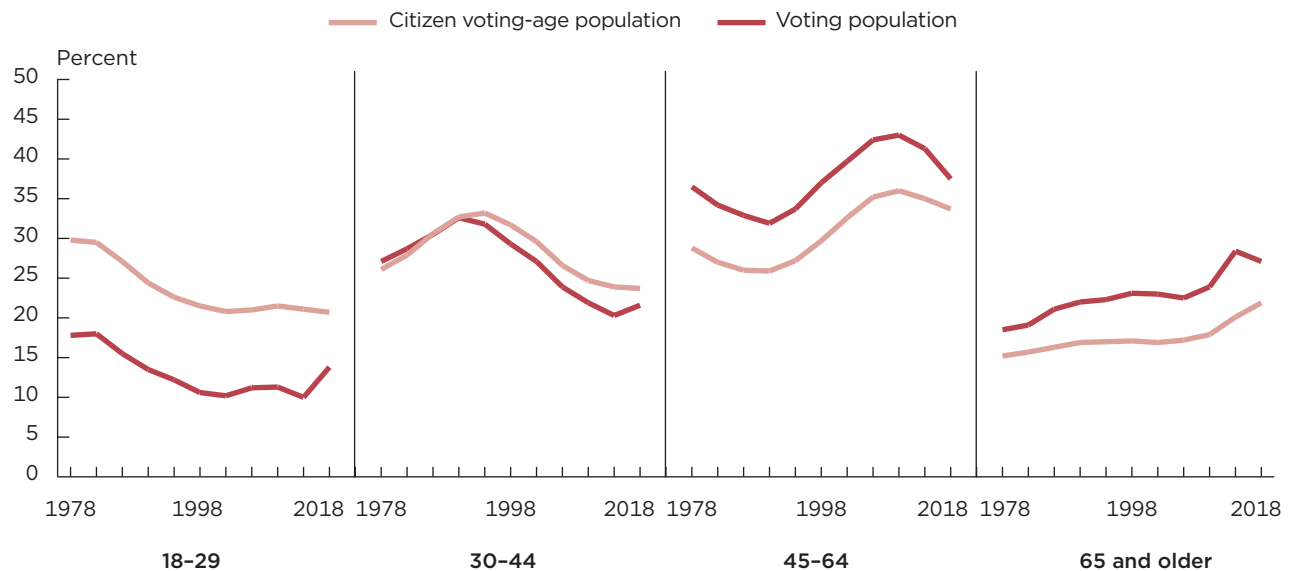
Congressional election year	Total 18 and older	Citizens						
		Total	Registered			Voted		
			Number	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Number	Percent	Margin of error (±)
2018	249,748	228,832	153,066	66.9	0.3	122,281	53.4	0.3
2014	239,874	219,941	142,166	64.6	0.3	92,251	41.9	0.3
2010	229,690	210,800	137,263	65.1	0.3	95,987	45.5	0.3
2006	220,603	201,073	135,847	67.6	0.3	96,119	47.8	0.3
2002	206,611	190,250	126,596	66.5	0.3	87,762	46.1	0.3
1998	198,228	183,451	123,104	67.1	0.3	83,098	45.3	0.3
1994	190,267	177,260	118,994	67.1	0.3	85,702	48.3	0.3
1990	182,118	166,151	113,248	68.2	0.3	81,991	49.3	0.4
1986	173,890	161,944	111,728	69.0	0.3	79,954	49.4	0.4
1982	165,483	154,858	105,996	68.4	0.3	80,310	51.9	0.3
1978	151,646	142,308	94,883	66.7	0.3	69,587	48.9	0.3

Note: Numbers are based on weighted reports of voting behavior derived from a survey sample.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: November 1978–2018.

Figure 2.

Composition of the Citizen Voting-Age Population and Voters by Age: Congressional Elections, 1978-2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 1978-2018.

in 2018 was lower than the rate in 1982, 1986, 1990, and 2006.⁵

Voting and registration rates have fluctuated in previous congressional election years. Relative to the preceding congressional election, the voting rate increased in 1982, 2002, 2006, and 2018; the voting rate decreased in 1986, 1994, 1998, 2010, and 2014. The voting rate in 1990 did not have a statistically significant decrease from the preceding congressional election.

Registration rates have also fluctuated. The percentage of the CVAP that was registered to vote increased in 1982, 1986, 2006, and 2018, while the registration rate decreased in 1990, 1994, 2002, 2010, and 2014. There was no significant increase in 1998.

⁵ The percentage of the CVAP that was registered to vote in 2018 is not significantly different from the percentage in congressional election years 1978, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2010, and 2014.

Composition of Voters

This section focuses on how the composition of voters has changed with respect to age, educational attainment, race and Hispanic origin, and sex.

For reference, changes in the composition of voters are presented alongside changes in the composition of the CVAP. Analyzed together, readers can understand how the demographic composition of voters has changed as a result of shifts in voter turnout and characteristics of the voting-eligible population.

When a population accounts for a higher share of voters than of the CVAP, that population is overrepresented among voters. On the other hand, when a population makes up a smaller share of voters than of the CVAP, that population is underrepresented among voters.

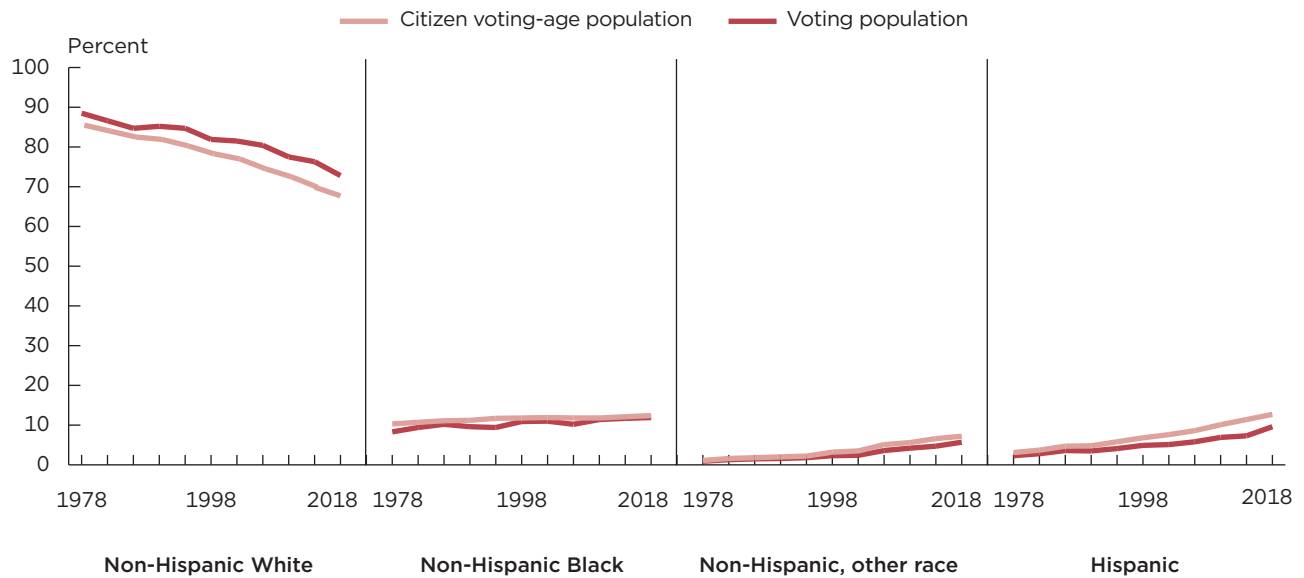
Age (Figure 2): The age composition of the CVAP and voting population has shifted over time, which is in large part a reflection of the large Baby Boom generation.⁶ For instance, the 65-years-and-older population grew from 15.2 percent of the CVAP in 1978 to 21.9 percent in 2018, as the majority of Baby Boomers became 65 or older.

From 1978 to 2018, 18- to 29-year-olds have made up between 20.7 and 29.8 percent of the CVAP, and between 10.0 and 18.0 percent of the voting population. That is to say, 18- to 29-year-olds have been underrepresented among voters in congressional elections throughout this series. Those aged 45 to

⁶ The Baby Boom generation consists of individuals born in the United States between 1946 and 1964. See Sandra Colby and Jennifer Ortman, "The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060," *Current Population Reports*, P25-1141, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, May 2014, <www.census.gov/library/publications/2014/demo/p25-1141.html>.

Figure 3.

Composition of the Citizen Voting-Age Population and Voters by Race and Hispanic Origin: Congressional Elections, 1978–2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 1978–2018.

64 and 65 and older have been overrepresented throughout this series. Since 1994, 30- to 44-year-olds have been underrepresented among voters.⁷

In 2018, the percentage of the voting population that was aged 18 to 29 and 30 to 44 spiked, reflecting the highest increases in voter composition for each of these age groups in a congressional election. On the other hand, the percentage of the voting population that was 65 years of age or older decreased from 28.4 percent in 2014 to 27.1 percent in 2018.

Race and Hispanic Origin (Figure 3): In each congressional election since 1978, those who were non-Hispanic White alone have been overrepresented in the voting

⁷ In 1986 and 1990, there was no significant difference between the percentage of the CVAP and the voting population that was 30 to 44 years of age.

population, while non-Hispanic Black alone, Hispanic, and other non-Hispanic populations have been underrepresented. From 1978 to 2018, the share of the CVAP that was non-Hispanic White decreased from 85.5 percent to 67.7 percent, while their share of the voting population decreased from 88.5 percent to 72.8 percent. On the other hand, the share of the CVAP that was Hispanic increased from 3.1 percent to 12.7 percent, while their share of the voting population increased from 2.3 percent to 9.6 percent.

In 2018, non-Hispanic White voters made up a smaller share of the voting population and the CVAP than they did in earlier elections in this series, making the 2018 congressional election the most diverse in this period. Compared to the 2014 election, Hispanic voters had the highest increase in voter

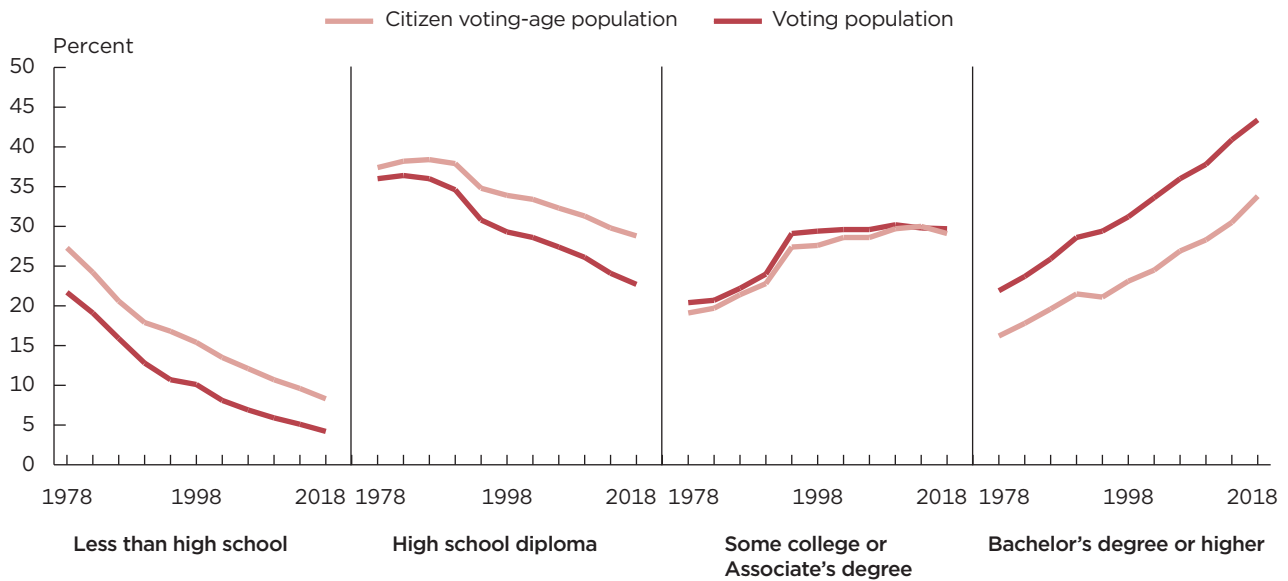
composition compared to other racial and ethnic groups, with an increase of 2.3 percentage points.⁸

Educational Attainment (Figure 4): As the CVAP has become increasingly college-educated, so have American voters. From 1978 to 2018, the share of the CVAP with a bachelor's or higher degree climbed by 17.6 percentage points, while the share of voters with this level of education increased by 21.5 percentage points. Since 1978, those with less than a high school diploma and those with a high school diploma have made up a decreasing percentage of the CVAP and the voting population. The share of the CVAP with less than a high school diploma

⁸ Compared to the 2014 election, the percentage of voters who were non-Hispanic White decreased by 3.5 percentage points, and there was no significant difference in the percentage of voters who were non-Hispanic Black.

Figure 4.

Composition of the Citizen Voting-Age Population and Voters by Educational Attainment: Congressional Elections, 1978-2018¹

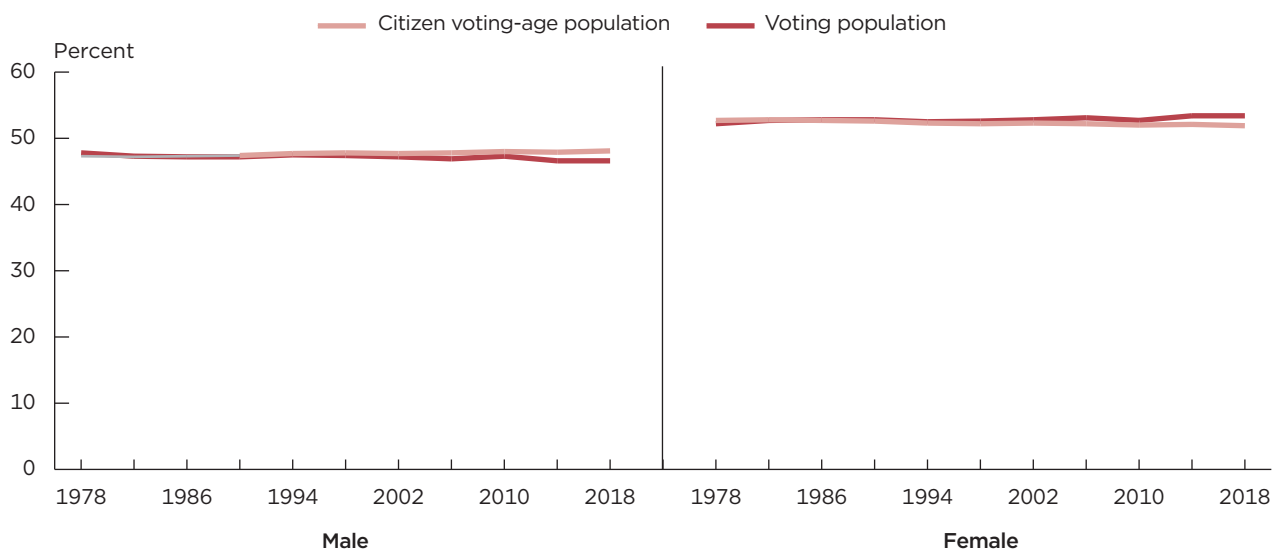


¹ From 1978-1990, Current Population Survey respondents were asked the highest grade or year of schooling they completed. In later years, respondents have also been asked the highest degree they received. For estimates in congressional election years 1978-1990, those who completed 4 or more years of high school are assumed to have their high school diploma, and those who completed 4 or more years of college are assumed to have their bachelor's degree or higher.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 1978-2018.

Figure 5.

Composition of the Citizen Voting-Age Population and Voters by Sex: Congressional Elections, 1978-2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 1978-2018.

declined 19.0 percentage points, and the share of voters declined 17.5 points from 1978 to 2018. Those with a high school diploma have decreased as well, by 8.6 points in the CVAP and 13.3 points among voters. They have also become increasingly underrepresented in the voting population—the difference between the voting population and the CVAP was -1.4 percentage points in 1978 and -6.1 points in 2018.

On the other hand, the percentage of voters with some college education or an associate's degree has fluctuated only slightly between 29.1 and 30.2 since 1994.⁹ Since 1998, a larger percentage of voters has had a bachelor's degree or higher than other educational attainment levels.¹⁰

Sex (Figure 5): In every congressional election, women have made up more than one-half the voting population and the CVAP. Women have become overrepresented in the voting population since 2002. In 2002, 52.3 percent of the CVAP and 52.8 percent of voters were women, a 0.5 percentage-point gap. In 2018, 51.9 percent of the CVAP were women and 53.4 percent of voters were women, a 1.5 percentage-point gap.

THE 2018 VOTING POPULATION

The previous section described trends in the CVAP and in voting by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin,

and education. In this section, the list of characteristics is expanded, while the focus is narrowed to the 2018 election. As in the previous section, the compositions of the voting and registered populations are presented alongside the composition of the CVAP for reference. Demographic groups that make up a larger share of the voting or registered populations than they do of the CVAP are overrepresented in those populations because they tend to turn out or register at higher rates.

Typically, groups that were overrepresented in the registered population were also overrepresented in the voting population (Table 2):

- **Age:** Those aged 65 and older were overrepresented relative to people in other age groups.
- **Sex:** Women were overrepresented relative to men.
- **Race and Hispanic origin:** Non-Hispanic White people were overrepresented relative to other race and Hispanic origin groups.
- **Nativity status:** The native-born were overrepresented relative to naturalized citizens.
- **Marital status:** Those who were married, spouse present were overrepresented relative to other marital status groups.
- **Employment status:** Government workers were overrepresented relative to other classes of workers, the unemployed, and those not in the labor force.
- **Duration of residence:** Those who lived at their current address for 5 years or longer were overrepresented relative to those who had lived at their current address for less time.
- **Region:** Residents of the Midwest were overrepresented

relative to residents of other regions.

- **Educational attainment:** Those with a bachelor's degree or advanced degree were overrepresented relative to other educational attainment groups.
- **Veteran status:** Veterans were overrepresented relative to nonveterans.
- **Annual family income:** Those in families with an annual income of \$100,000 or more were overrepresented relative to those with lower incomes.

While the groups listed above were overrepresented in both the voting and registered populations in 2018, metropolitan residents were underrepresented in the registered population and overrepresented in the voting population.

Youth Voters in the 2018 Election

Voters under 30 years of age turned out in record numbers in the 2018 congressional election. Voters aged 18 to 29 have historically been underrepresented in the voting population, as shown in the second section in this report. In 1978, this group was underrepresented by 12.0 percentage points. However, the gap between the composition of the CVAP and the voting population that were 18 to 29 years of age narrowed dramatically, from 11.1 percent in the previous congressional election in 2014 to 6.9 percent in 2018 (Figure 2). In 2014, 10.0 percent of voters were in this age group, while 13.8 percent were in 2018. This represents the largest increase in the percentage of voters under 30 years of age in this series.

Here, we delve into how selected characteristics of these young voters changed relative to the 2014 election. As in earlier sections of this report, the percentage-point

⁹ Among congressional election years 1994 to 2018, the percentage of voters with some college education or an associate's degree was not statistically different from one another with the following exceptions: the rate for 2010 was significantly different than the rates for 1994, 1998, and 2006; the voting rate for 1994 was significantly different than the rates for 2010, 2014, and 2018.

¹⁰ In congressional elections prior to 1998, a higher percentage of voters had a high school diploma than other educational attainment levels.

Table 2.

Registration and Voter Characteristics: 2018

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Citizen voting-age		Registered		Voted	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	228,832	100.0	153,066	100.0	122,281	100.0
Age						
18 to 29	47,468	20.7	25,128	16.4	16,884	13.8
30 to 44	54,165	23.7	34,837	22.8	26,428	21.6
45 to 64	77,085	33.7	55,032	36.0	45,829	37.5
65 and older	50,113	21.9	38,068	24.9	33,139	27.1
Sex						
Male	110,006	48.1	71,726	46.9	56,964	46.6
Female	118,826	51.9	81,340	53.1	65,317	53.4
Race and Hispanic Origin						
Non-Hispanic, White alone	154,982	67.7	110,054	71.9	89,075	72.8
Non-Hispanic, Black alone	28,355	12.4	18,281	11.9	14,569	11.9
Non-Hispanic, Asian alone	10,766	4.7	5,651	3.7	4,326	3.5
Non-Hispanic, other race	5,774	2.5	3,522	2.3	2,616	2.1
Hispanic (any race)	28,955	12.7	15,558	10.2	11,695	9.6
Nativity Status						
Native-born	207,022	90.5	140,377	91.7	112,303	91.8
Naturalized citizen	21,810	9.5	12,689	8.3	9,978	8.2
Marital Status						
Married, spouse present	115,460	50.5	84,391	55.1	71,230	58.3
Married, spouse absent	3,418	1.5	2,056	1.3	1,556	1.3
Widowed	14,494	6.3	10,236	6.7	8,080	6.6
Divorced	24,925	10.9	16,841	11.0	12,981	10.6
Separated	4,139	1.8	2,363	1.5	1,689	1.4
Never married	66,396	29.0	37,180	24.3	26,746	21.9
Employment Status						
In civilian labor force	147,031	64.3	100,498	65.7	79,554	65.1
Government workers	20,652	9.0	16,169	10.6	13,837	11.3
Private industry	112,611	49.2	75,090	49.1	58,342	47.7
Self-employed	8,792	3.8	6,145	4.0	5,172	4.2
Unemployed	4,977	2.2	3,094	2.0	2,203	1.8
Not in labor force	81,800	35.7	52,568	34.3	42,727	34.9
Duration of Residence¹						
Less than 1 year	23,537	10.3	15,372	10.0	10,346	8.5
1 to 2 years	26,750	11.7	19,407	12.7	14,794	12.1
3 to 4 years	26,367	11.5	20,312	13.3	15,839	13.0
5 years or longer	114,172	49.9	95,869	62.6	79,628	65.1
Not reported	38,006	16.6	2,106	1.4	1,673	1.4
Region						
Northeast	40,243	17.6	26,820	17.5	21,378	17.5
Midwest	49,448	21.6	34,958	22.8	27,696	22.6
South	86,875	38.0	57,479	37.6	44,723	36.6
West	52,265	22.8	33,809	22.1	28,483	23.3
Metropolitan Status						
Metropolitan	195,853	85.6	130,691	85.4	105,110	86.0
Nonmetropolitan	32,979	14.4	22,375	14.6	17,171	14.0
Educational Attainment						
Less than high school	18,966	8.3	8,148	5.3	5,162	4.2
High school graduate	66,007	28.8	38,013	24.8	27,778	22.7
Some college or associate's degree	66,562	29.1	46,529	30.4	36,267	29.7
Bachelor's degree	49,992	21.8	37,935	24.8	32,867	26.9
Advanced degree	27,305	11.9	22,441	14.7	20,207	16.5

Footnotes provided at end of table.

Table 2.
Registration and Voter Characteristics: 2018—Con.
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Citizen voting-age		Registered		Voting	
	Number	Percent	Registered	Percent	Voted	Percent
Veteran Status²						
Veteran	18,949	8.3	14,295	9.3	12,060	9.9
Nonveteran	209,947	91.7	138,787	90.7	110,203	90.1
Annual Family Income³						
Total family members	164,046	100.0	111,754	100.0	90,599	100.0
Under \$20,000	9,398	5.7	5,398	4.8	3,607	4.0
\$20,000 to \$49,999	29,108	17.7	18,886	16.9	14,048	15.5
\$50,000 to \$99,999	44,095	26.9	32,385	29.0	26,311	29.0
\$100,000 and over	46,252	28.2	37,676	33.7	32,176	35.5
Income not reported	35,194	21.5	17,408	15.6	14,457	16.0

¹ Some states have durational residency requirements in order to register and to vote.

² The veterans estimates were derived using the veteran weight, which uses different procedures for construction than the person weight used to produce the other turnout estimates in 2018.

³ Limited to families of the survey respondent.

Note: Numbers are based on weighted reports of voting behavior derived from a survey sample.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, November 2018.

difference between the composition of voters and the CVAP for a particular demographic characteristic is used to show whether that group was over- or under-represented in the election. For context, changes in representation of young voters by demographic group are presented alongside changes among voters 30 years and older.

Non-Hispanic Black voters (Figure 6): In 2014, among 18- to 29-year-olds, the share of the voting population that was non-Hispanic Black exceeded the share of the CVAP by 3.0 percentage points. Young non-Hispanic Black voters were neither under- nor over-represented in 2018. In contrast, there was no statistical change for non-Hispanic Black voters aged 30 and over who were under-represented by 0.4 percentage points in 2014 and 0.3 percentage points in 2018.¹¹

Female voters (Figure 7): Women were overrepresented among voters in 2014 and 2018, both

¹¹ The difference between the share of voting population and the CVAP in young non-Hispanic Black voters in 2018 was not statistically significant.

those older and younger than 30 years. Women under the age of 30 have been overrepresented in their share of voters relative to their share of the CVAP since 1986 (with the exception of 2010, when the difference was not statistically significant; numbers not shown here).

Metropolitan voters (Figure 8): In 2018, metropolitan residents made up a larger share of voters than of the CVAP by 2.3 percentage points among those under the age of 30, and by 0.2 percentage points for those aged 30 and older. For both age groups, this represents an increase in metropolitan voter turnout in 2018 relative to 2014. In 2014, metropolitan residents under the age of 30 were neither over- nor underrepresented among the voting population.¹² Among those aged 30 and older, metropolitan residents were a smaller share of voters than of the CVAP by 0.8 percentage points.

¹² Among those aged 18 to 29, the percentage of voters who resided in metropolitan areas (relative to nonmetropolitan areas) in 2014 was not significantly different from the percentage of all citizens who resided in metropolitan areas.

HOW VOTERS VOTE: TRADITIONAL AND NONTRADITIONAL METHODS OF VOTING

Nontraditional methods of voting include any method other than voting in person on Election Day, such as early voting and voting by mail. This section describes how the use of nontraditional voting methods has increased over time, and how the use of nontraditional voting methods has varied by age, race and Hispanic origin, and educational attainment in 2018. Estimates in this section are based on responses to two questions in the supplement. One asks whether the respondent voted on or before Election Day, and the other asks whether he or she voted by mail or in person.

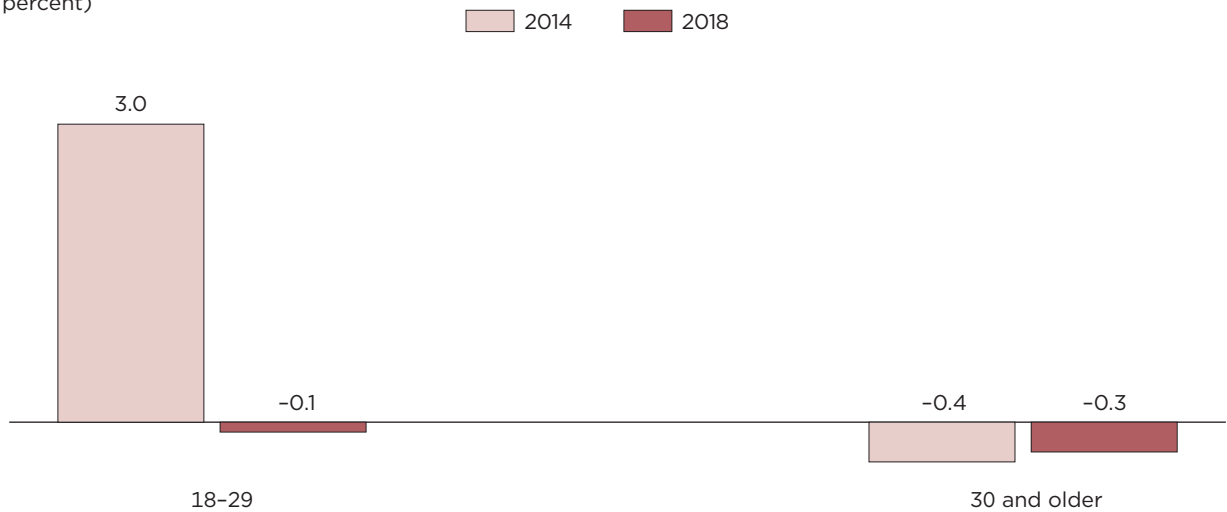
Available methods of voting vary by state. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) provides the following summary of methods of voting offered for national elections.¹³

¹³ More information on NCSL and their summary on voting methods available in each state is available at <www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx>.

Figure 6.

Difference Between Share of the Voting Population and Citizen Voting-Age Population That Were Non-Hispanic Black by Age: 2014 and 2018

(In percent)

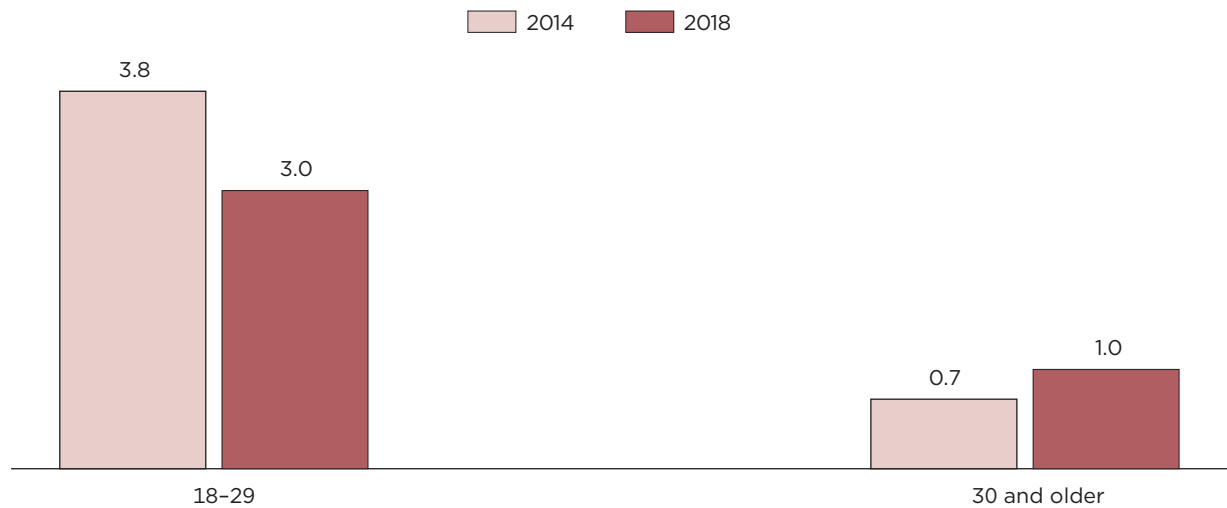


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 2014-2018.

Figure 7.

Difference Between Share of the Voting Population and Citizen Voting-Age Population That Were Female by Age: 2014 and 2018

(In percent)

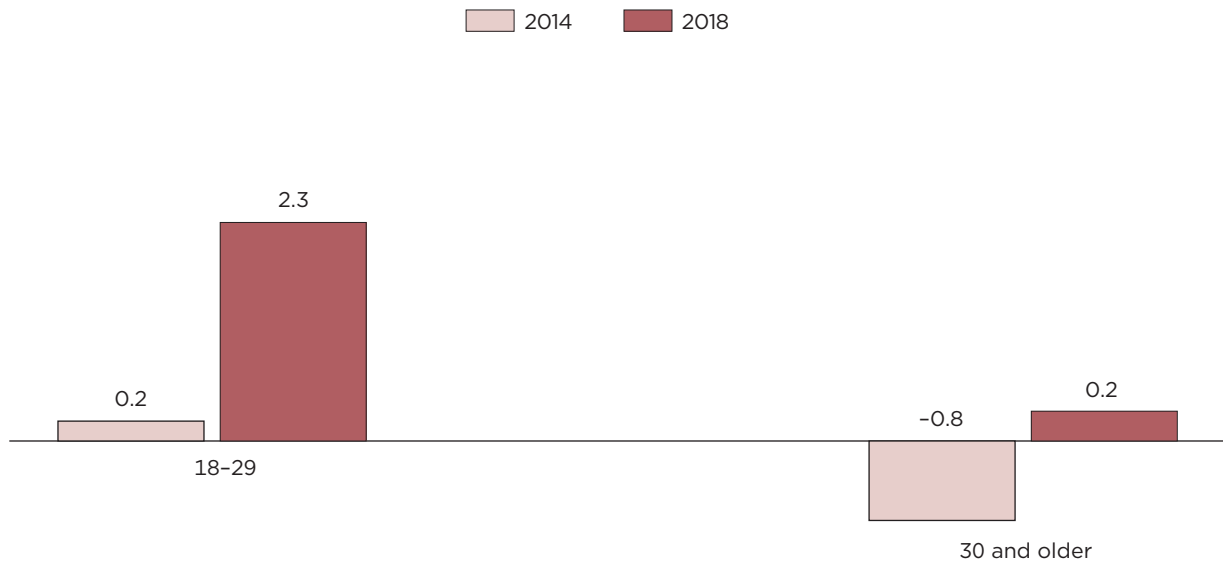


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 2014-2018.

Figure 8.

Difference Between Share of the Voting Population and Citizen Voting-Age Population in Metropolitan Areas by Age: 2014 and 2018

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 2014–2018.

Early voting: In 36 states, including the District of Columbia, voters could cast ballots in person before Election Day without an excuse or justification.

Absentee voting: In all states, voters could receive a ballot in the mail if they requested one, which they could return in person or by mail. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia allowed voters to vote absentee without an excuse (known as no-excuse absentee voting), while 19 states required an excuse. Some states offer a permanent absentee ballot list, in which those who request to be included on the list receive an absentee ballot for all future elections.

All mail voting: Three states automatically mail ballots to every eligible voter without requiring a request: Colorado, Oregon, and Washington. In-person voting sites

are also available in these states for those who prefer to vote in person.

According to the NCSL, there were 11 states where early voting was not offered and an excuse was required to vote with an absentee ballot.

Early voting and voting by mail have increased since 1998, the first congressional election in which the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement began asking respondents how they voted. From 1998 to 2018, the percentage of votes cast by mail increased from 8.4 to 23.2 percent (Figure 9). Early voting has also increased throughout this time, with 2.4 percent of voters casting ballots early in 1998, and 16.7 percent doing so in 2018. The percentage of voters who used nontraditional methods of voting on Election Day in 2018 (40.0 percent) increased 9.0 percentage

points from 31.2 percent in the 2014 congressional election.

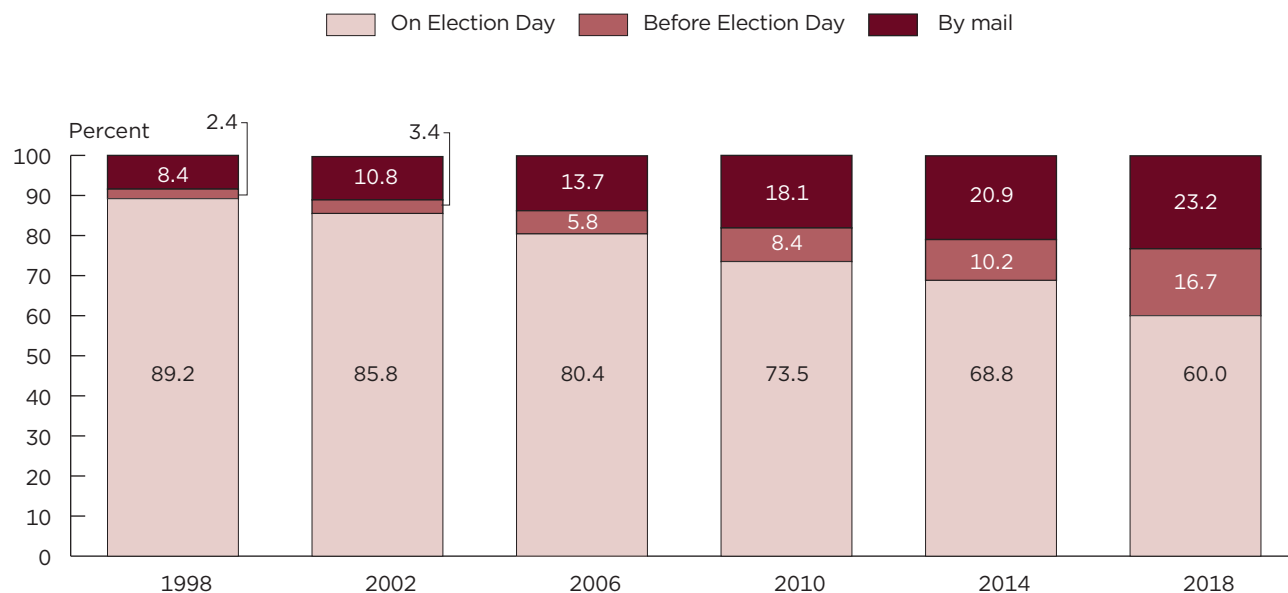
Methods of Voting by Characteristic in 2018

The use of nontraditional methods of voting varied by age, race and Hispanic origin, and educational attainment in 2018 (Table 3).

Relative to other age groups, voters aged 30 to 44 had the highest rate of voting in person on Election Day (65.3 percent), while voters aged 45 to 64 and 65 and older had the highest rates of voting in person before Election Day (17.7 percent and 18.3 percent, respectively).¹⁴ Those aged 65 and older had the highest rate of voting by mail (30.2 percent).

¹⁴ The percentage of voters aged 45 to 64 that voted in person before Election Day and the percentage of voters aged 65 and older that voted in person before Election Day were not statistically different.

Figure 9.
Methods of Voting: Congressional Elections, 1998-2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 1998-2018.

Table 3.
Methods of Voting by Characteristic: 2018
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	On Election Day		Before Election Day ¹		By mail	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	72,842	60.0	20,332	16.7	28,223	23.2
Age						
18 to 29	10,471	62.9	2,457	14.8	3,724	22.4
30 to 44	17,146	65.3	3,787	14.4	5,323	20.3
45 to 64	28,258	62.0	8,062	17.7	9,249	20.3
65 and older	16,967	51.5	6,026	18.3	9,927	30.2
Race and Hispanic Origin						
Non-Hispanic, White alone	53,499	60.4	14,186	16.0	20,887	23.6
Non-Hispanic, Black alone	9,616	66.8	3,208	22.3	1,579	11.0
Non-Hispanic, Asian alone	2,047	47.7	478	11.1	1,762	41.1
Non-Hispanic, other race	1,415	54.5	379	14.6	805	31.0
Hispanic (any race)	6,266	54.3	2,081	18.0	3,190	27.6
Educational Attainment						
Less than high school	3,275	64.1	702	13.7	1,135	22.2
High school graduate	17,671	64.1	4,072	14.8	5,806	21.1
Some college or associate's degree	21,753	60.4	6,003	16.7	8,265	22.9
Bachelor's degree	18,935	58.0	5,680	17.4	8,019	24.6
Advanced degree	11,207	55.8	3,876	19.3	4,997	24.9

¹ Voted in person before Election Day.

Note: Numbers are based on weighted reports of voting behavior derived from a survey sample.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, November 2018.

Among racial and ethnic groups, voters who were non-Hispanic Black alone had the highest rates of voting in person on Election Day (66.8 percent) and voting in person before Election Day (22.3 percent). A higher percentage of voters who were non-Hispanic Asian alone voted by mail than any other racial or ethnic group (41.1 percent).

Methods of voting also varied by educational attainment. Those with less than a high school diploma and those with a high school diploma had the highest rates of voting in person on Election Day (64.1 percent).¹⁵ Those with an advanced degree had the highest rate of voting in person before Election Day (19.3 percent). Those with a bachelor's degree and those with an advanced degree had the highest rates of voting by mail (24.6 percent and 24.9 percent, respectively).¹⁶

WHY NONVOTERS DON'T VOTE OR REGISTER

The CPS Voting and Registration Supplement includes questions on why respondents did not vote or register. Reasons for nonparticipation differed by race and Hispanic origin, age, and educational attainment in 2018 and have varied over time.

Since the 1998 election, respondents who reported that they were registered to vote and did not vote in the recent election have been asked why they chose not to vote.

¹⁵ The percentage of voters with less than a high school diploma that voted in person before Election Day and the percentage of voters with a high school diploma that voted in person before Election Day were not statistically different.

¹⁶ The percentage of voters with a bachelor's degree that voted by mail and the percentage of voters with an advanced degree that voted by mail were not statistically different.

Since 2004, those who reported that they were not registered have been asked why they chose not to register. With both nonparticipation questions, respondents can only select one main reason.¹⁷

In 2018, there were approximately 29 million registered nonvoters (Table 4). The top three reasons that registered nonvoters gave for not voting were that they were too busy or had a conflicting schedule (26.9 percent), were not interested in the election (15.5 percent), and had an illness or disability (12.8 percent).¹⁸

Registered nonvoters reported being too busy as the most common reason for not voting across race and Hispanic origin groups (Table 4). For example, 26.6 percent and 24.8 percent of registered nonvoters who were non-Hispanic White alone and non-Hispanic Black alone, respectively, selected this response, while 29.9 percent of registered non-Hispanic Asian nonvoters indicated the same.¹⁹

Being too busy or having conflicting schedules was also the most common reason for not voting across age groups, except those who were aged 65 and older. In 2018, 33.3 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds, 35.1 percent of 30- to

¹⁷ The supplement is only administered to respondents who indicate being 18 years or older and U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization. The Census Bureau does not inquire about additional eligibility criteria, including residency requirements or felony disenfranchisement.

¹⁸ Registered nonvoters gave "other" as their reason for not voting 11.8 percent of the time, which was not significantly different from the percentage who cited illness or disability.

¹⁹ The percentage of registered nonvoters that reported being too busy to vote was not significantly different across race groups with the following exceptions: non-Hispanic Black voters relative to non-Hispanic Asian voters, and Hispanic voters relative to non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black voters.

44-year-olds, and 25.3 percent of 45- to 64-year-olds selected this reason.²⁰ In contrast, the most common reason for not voting among registered nonvoters who were aged 65 and older was having an illness or disability (37.6 percent).

Being too busy or having conflicting schedules was also the most common reason for not voting across educational attainment groups, except for those with less than a high school education. Approximately a quarter (25.3 percent) of those with a high school diploma, 28.9 percent of those with some college education or an associate's degree, and 30.2 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher reported this as the main reason for not voting.²¹ Among registered nonvoters with less than a high school diploma, the most common reason for not voting was having an illness or disability (24.0 percent).

The top three reasons for not registering to vote in the 2018 election were not being interested in the election (40.5 percent), missing the registration deadline (11.8 percent), and not being eligible (8.0 percent).²² Those who were not registered to vote reported not being interested as the most common reason for not registering across all race and Hispanic origin,

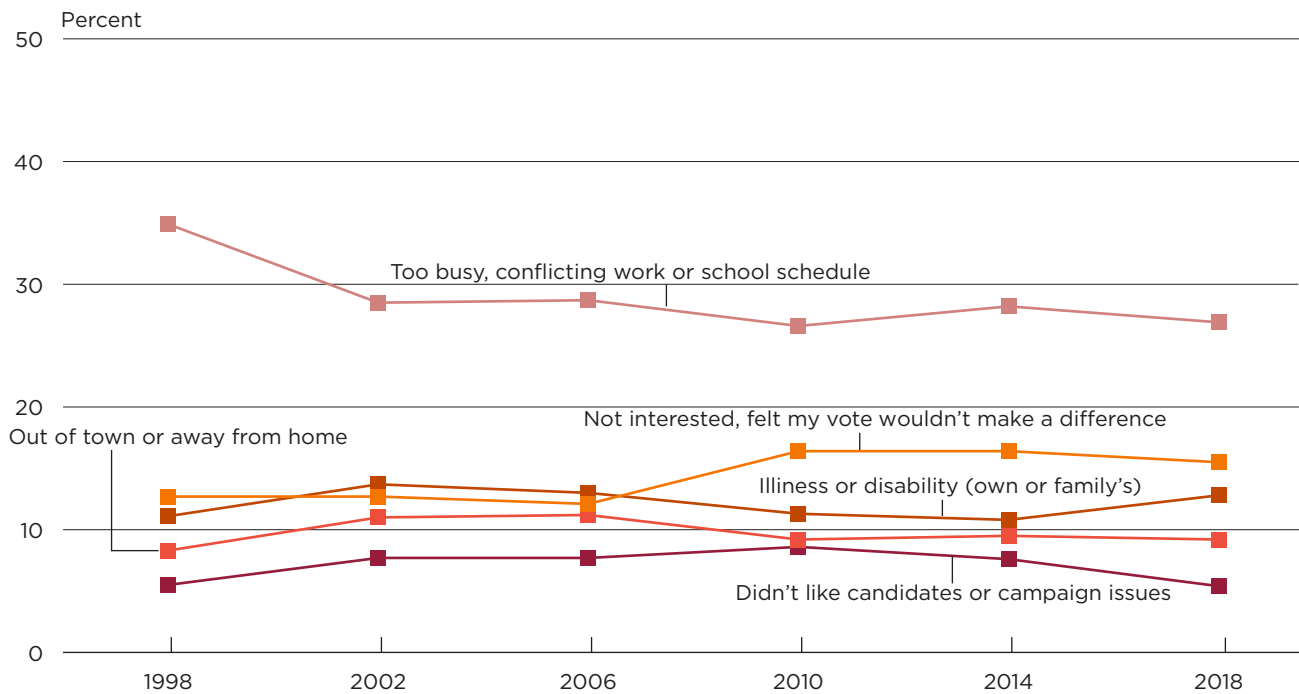
²⁰ There was no significant difference between the percentage of 18- to 29-year-old and 30- to 40-year-old registered nonvoters that reported being too busy to vote in 2018.

²¹ There was no significant difference between the percentage of those with some college education or an associate's degree and those with a bachelor's degree or higher that reported being too busy to vote in 2018.

²² While these are the three most common specific reasons given, the response category "other" was selected more than all specific response options except not being interested in the election. The "other" category was chosen by 15.9 percent of respondents.

Figure 10.

Reasons for Not Voting: Congressional Elections, 1998–2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 1998–2018.

age, and educational attainment groups (Table 4).

Reasons for Nonparticipation Over Time

Across congressional elections since 1998, the reasons why registered nonvoters did not vote have varied (Figure 10). While being too busy or having a conflicting work schedule has remained the most common reason throughout this series, the percentage of registered nonvoters that selected this reason has fluctuated with the highest percentage in 1998 (34.9 percent). In the 2010, 2014, and 2018 congressional elections, not being interested in the election was the second most common reason for not voting (16.4 percent in 2010 and 2014,²³ 15.5 percent in

²³ The percentage of registered nonvoters that did not vote because they were not interested in the election was not significantly different between 2010 and 2014.

2018), while illness or disability was the third most common reason (11.3 percent in 2010, 10.8 percent in 2014, and 12.8 percent in 2018).

Reasons for not registering to vote in congressional elections have varied only slightly across congressional elections since 2006 (Figure 11). Not being interested in the election has been the most common reason for not registering throughout this series, with the lowest rate being in 2018 (40.5 percent). Not meeting registration deadlines has been the second most common reason for not registering, ranging from 9.9 percent in 2014 to 13.1 percent in 2006.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The November 2018 election had the highest congressional election

turnout since 1978,²⁴ with 53.4 percent of the CVAP voting. This was an 11.5 percentage-point increase in turnout from the 2014 congressional election.

Both 18- to 29-year-olds and 30- to 44-year-olds increased their share of the voting population relative to 2014. For the 18- to 29-year-old group, the increase was larger than in any congressional election since 1978. Relative to the 2014 election, among 18- to 29-year-olds, non-Hispanic Black people were less represented in the voting population, while metropolitan residents were more represented. Looking at the overall share of Black, Other Race, and Hispanic voters, non-Hispanic Black voters'

²⁴ The CPS began collecting citizenship information in 1978, making this the first year that the citizen voting-age population—the universe for voting analyses in this report—could be defined.

Table 4. **Reasons for Not Registering and Not Voting by Selected Characteristics: 2018**
(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total	Percent distribution of reasons for not voting and registering											
		Race and Hispanic origin						Age			Educational attainment		
		White alone, non-Hispanic	Black alone, non-Hispanic	Asian alone, non-Hispanic	Other race, non-Hispanic	Hispanic (any race)	18-29	30-44	45-64	65 and older	Less than high school	High school diploma	Some college or associate's degree
Registered, nonvoters.....	29,089	100.0	1,243	862	3,564	7,476	7,978	8,825	4,810	2,899	9,735	9,606	6,860
Reasons for Not Voting¹													
Too busy.....	7,818	26.9	29.9	25.4	29.9	33.3	35.1	25.3	6.0	17.4	25.3	28.9	30.2
Not interested.....	4,506	15.5	14.0	16.1	17.1	16.2	16.5	15.9	12.0	16.2	17.9	14.8	12.7
Illness.....	3,718	12.8	15.2	9.0	8.9	4.5	6.0	12.4	37.6	24.0	13.2	11.3	9.4
Other reason.....	3,419	11.8	13.9	14.0	10.4	11.2	12.3	11.9	11.5	11.0	11.1	11.7	13.1
Out of town.....	2,680	9.2	5.0	13.4	9.7	10.3	8.7	10.5	6.1	4.9	6.9	9.7	13.5
Forgot.....	1,615	5.6	6.5	6.0	5.4	6.5	5.9	5.0	4.5	6.4	5.8	5.9	4.4
Did not like candidates.....	1,562	5.4	3.3	6.3	3.7	3.4	3.9	6.4	9.1	5.8	6.2	4.9	4.7
Inconvenient polling place.....	965	3.3	3.2	2.9	3.8	4.3	3.2	3.7	1.2	2.8	3.3	3.6	3.0
Registration problem.....	910	3.1	2.9	2.3	4.1	4.8	3.2	2.4	1.7	1.7	2.9	3.3	3.9
No response.....	883	3.0	3.7	4.2	3.0	3.8	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.2	3.3	3.1	2.9
Transportation.....	846	2.9	6.2	1.5	3.6	1.6	1.9	3.1	6.3	6.3	3.2	2.4	1.8
Bad weather.....	168	0.6	0.4	1.1	0.7	0.1	0.4	0.6	1.5	1.2	0.7	0.4	0.3
Not registered.....	33,791	100.0	3,753	2,209	6,994	11,092	9,039	9,152	4,508	6,393	13,907	8,555	4,936
Reasons for Not Registering²													
Not interested.....	13,679	40.5	32.9	41.8	33.1	38.9	39.4	44.1	39.2	39.9	44.4	40.4	30.3
Other reason.....	5,389	15.9	16.5	17.4	13.4	14.7	16.0	16.2	18.3	14.0	15.4	17.1	18.1
Registration deadline.....	3,987	11.8	14.4	10.8	10.3	17.1	12.0	8.1	5.8	8.0	9.8	14.1	18.3
Not eligible.....	2,696	8.0	9.4	11.9	5.3	14.9	10.2	9.2	5.2	11.6	6.8	7.3	7.9
Illness.....	1,861	5.5	8.6	3.5	4.4	3.6	3.1	5.7	14.7	9.1	6.6	2.4	3.0
No response.....	1,670	4.9	4.0	4.2	3.9	6.3	4.7	4.1	3.8	3.9	5.4	5.3	4.4
Did not know how.....	1,410	4.2	5.7	5.7	4.2	5.5	5.1	2.5	2.4	4.4	3.8	4.2	4.8
Residency requirements.....	1,250	3.7	3.4	3.8	6.9	4.0	4.6	3.4	1.9	2.2	2.3	4.5	8.1
Vote would not matter.....	1,168	3.5	3.4	2.3	5.6	3.0	3.4	3.7	4.3	3.0	3.6	3.4	3.8
Language.....	680	2.0	1.4	10.1	0.1	3.8	1.5	3.0	4.5	4.0	1.8	1.3	1.4

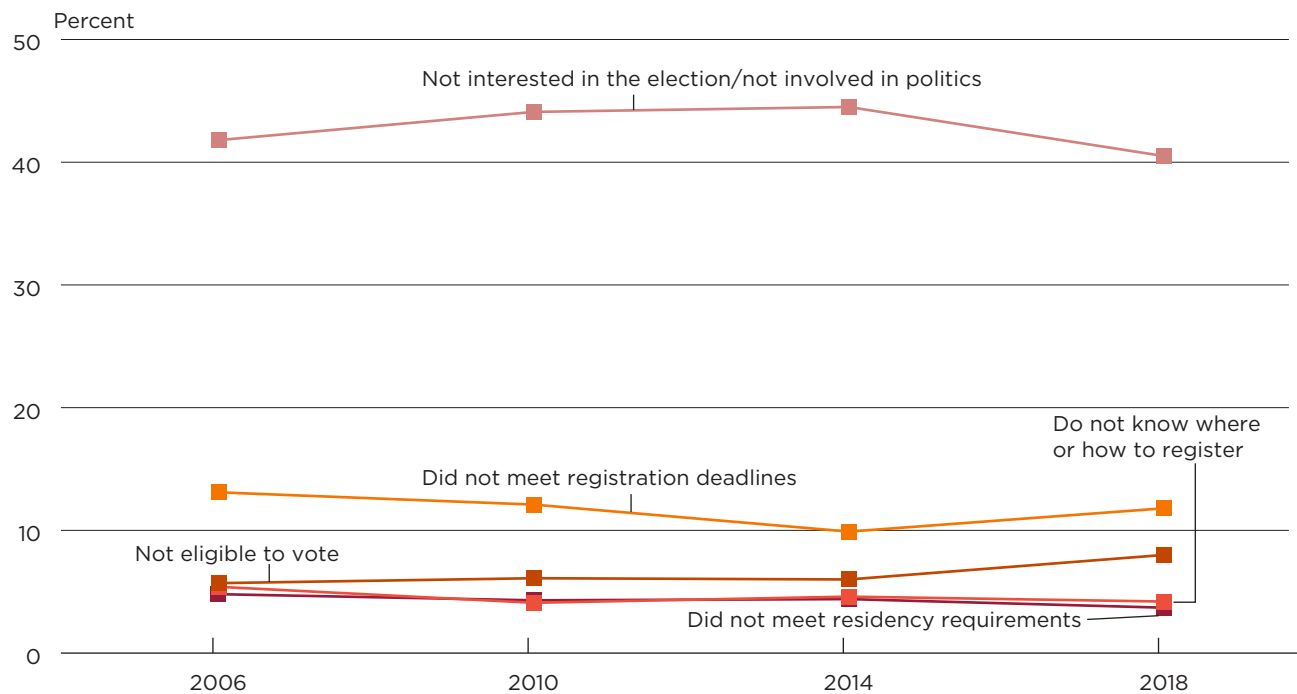
¹ Only individuals who reported being registered and also reported not voting were asked the question about the reason for not voting.

² Includes only those respondents who answered "no" to the question, "Were you registered in the election of November 2016?"

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplement, November 2018.

Figure 11.

Reasons for Not Registering: Presidential Elections, 2006–2018



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement: Congressional Elections, 2006–2018.

2018 share was not statistically different from 2014, but greater than their share in any congressional election from 1978 to 2010, while the shares of other non-Hispanic and of Hispanic voters were higher than at any previous congressional election since 1978. In this sense, the election of 2018 was the most diverse election in this series. Additionally, women and those with a bachelor’s degree or higher continued to be overrepresented in the voting population.

Forty percent of voters used non-traditional voting methods in 2018, an 8.8 percentage-point increase relative to 2014. Specifically, 16.7 percent of voters voted early in 2018, and 23.2 percent voted by mail.

The primary reasons for not voting or registering in the 2018 election were similar to previous elections. The top reason for not voting was being too busy or having a conflicting schedule (26.9 percent of registered nonvoters), and the top reason for not registering to vote was not being interested in the election (40.5 percent of those who reported not being registered).

ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES

The population represented (i.e., the population universe) in the CPS is the civilian, noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. In the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement, this population is further restricted

to those who report that they are citizens who are 18 years or older and have completed the core CPS survey.

Responses to this supplement are the basis for estimates in this report. The first question asked if respondents voted in the election held on Tuesday, November 6, 2018. Respondents who did not respond to the question, or answered “No” or “Do not know,” were asked if they were registered to vote in the election.

As in all surveys, estimates from the CPS and the November supplement are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into

account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.²⁵

Nonsampling error in surveys is attributable to a variety of sources, such as survey design, the respondents' interpretation of the questions, the respondents' willingness and ability to provide correct and accurate answers, and post-survey practices like question coding and response classification. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures in sample selection, the wording of questions, interviewing, coding, data processing, and data analysis.

The CPS weighting procedure uses ratio estimation to adjust sample estimates to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to undercoverage of certain populations, but biases may still be present when people are missed by the survey who differ from those interviewed in regards to other characteristics. We do not precisely know the effect of this weighting procedure on other variables in the survey. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

Further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, is available at <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/complete.html> or by contacting the Demographic

²⁵ All comparisons within this text are simple pair-wise comparisons; no multiple comparison adjustments were made to the tests. We acknowledge that some of the conclusions made in this text may not remain statistically significant if the multiple comparison adjustments were included.

Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at <dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov>.

The CPS estimates used in this report are an important analytic tool in election studies because they identify the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the voting population, registered population, and those who did not participate in the election. However, these estimates may differ from those based on administrative data or exit polls.

Every state's board of elections tabulates the vote counts for each national election, while the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives reports these state results in aggregate form for the entire country.²⁶ These tallies, which are typically viewed as the official results for a specific election, show the number of votes counted for select offices. In the elections discussed in this report, the official count of comparison is either the total number of votes cast for the office of the president (in presidential election years) or the total number of votes cast for a U.S. House of Representatives or Senate seat (in congressional election years).

In each election, there are discrepancies between the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement estimates and these official counts. The discrepancy has varied in each election year, with official tallies typically showing lower turnout than the estimates in these types of

²⁶ The official count of votes cast is available on the Web page of the clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives at <<http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>>, or on the Web page of the Federal Election Commission at <<https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/electionresults.shtm>>.

reports. Differences between the official counts and the November CPS supplement may be due to a combination of an understatement of official numbers and an overstatement of supplement estimates.

Understatement of Official Vote Tallies: Ballots are sometimes invalidated and thrown out during the vote counting process, and therefore do not appear in the official counts as reported by the clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. Official vote counts also frequently exclude mismatched, unreadable, or blank ballots. Additionally, because the total number of official votes cast is typically determined by counting votes for a specific office (such as president or U.S. representative), voters who did not vote for this specific office, but who did vote for a different office in the same election, may not be included in the official reported tally. In all of these instances, it is conceivable that individuals would be counted as voters in the CPS and not counted in official tallies.

Overstatement of Voting in the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement: Some of the error in estimating turnout using the CPS core questions and the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement is the result of population controls and survey coverage. Respondent misreporting is also a source of error in the estimates. Previous analyses based on reinterviews showed that respondents and proxy respondents are consistent in their reported answers, showing that misunderstanding the questions does not fully account for the difference between the

official counts and the survey estimates. However, studies that have matched survey responses with voting records indicate that part of the discrepancy between survey estimates and official counts is the result of respondent misreporting, particularly vote overreporting to appear to behave in a socially desirable way.²⁷

As discussed earlier, the issue of vote overreporting is not unique to the Voting and Registration Supplement. Other surveys consistently overstate voter turnout as well, including other highly respected national-level surveys like the American National Election Studies and the General Social Survey. Potential reasons why respondents might incorrectly report voting in an election are myriad, and include intentional misreporting, legitimate confusion over whether a vote was cast or not, and methodological issues related to question wording, method of survey

²⁷ Allyson L. Holbrook and Jon A. Krosnick, "Social Desirability Bias in Voter Turnout Reports: Tests Using the Item Count Technique," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Oxford University Press, Vol. 74, Issue 1, 2009.

administration, and specific question nonresponses.

Voting Not Captured in the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement: The CPS only covers the civilian, noninstitutionalized population residing in the United States. Therefore, the supplement does not capture voting for citizens living in institutions in the United States or voting for citizens, civilian or military, residing outside of the United States who cast absentee ballots.^{28, 29}

MORE INFORMATION

Detailed table packages are available that provide demographic characteristics of the population by voting and registration status. The Census Bureau also produces

²⁸ Demographic information for armed forces members (enumerated in off-base housing or on-base with their families) are included on the CPS data files. However, no labor force information is collected of armed forces members in any month. In March, supplemental data on income are included for armed forces members. This is the only month that nondemographic information is included for armed forces members.

²⁹ The Federal Voting Assistance Program offers voting assistance for service members, their families, and overseas citizens, and publishes estimates of overseas voting by U.S. citizens. More information on this valuable program is available at <www.fvap.gov/>.

additional data products based on the CPS Voting and Registration Supplement data. Electronic versions of these products are available at <www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting.html>.

CONTACT

U.S. Census Bureau Customer Service Center

Toll free at 1-800-923-8282

Visit <<https://ask.census.gov>>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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USER COMMENTS

The Census Bureau welcomes user comments and advice pertaining to our data and reports. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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