

# Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008

Issued May 2010

## Population Characteristics

P20-562

This report examines levels of voting and registration in the November 2008 presidential election, the characteristics of citizens who reported either registering or voting in the election, and the reasons why some registered individuals did not vote.

The data in this report are based on responses to the November 2008 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, which surveys the civilian noninstitutionalized population in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The estimates presented in this report may differ from those based on administrative data or exit polls. For more information, see the sections on *Measuring Voting and Registration in the Current Population Survey* and *Accuracy of the Estimates*.

### VOTING AND REGISTRATION OF THE VOTING-AGE CITIZEN POPULATION

#### Turnout for the November 2008 Election

In the 2008 presidential election, 64 percent of voting-age citizens voted, an estimate not statistically different from the percent that turned out in 2004, but higher than the presidential elections of 2000 and 1996 (Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>People in the military, U.S. citizens living abroad, and people in institutional housing, such as correctional institutions and nursing homes, were not included in the survey. For a discussion of the differences between the official counts of votes cast and the CPS data, see the section on *Measuring Voting and Registration in the Current Population Survey*.

<sup>2</sup>The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, and tables) are based on

#### ABOUT THIS REPORT

Voting and registration rates are historically higher in years with presidential elections than in congressional election years. For this report, we compare 2008 election data only with data from previous presidential election years (2004, 2000, 1996, etc.).

Overall, 131 million people voted in 2008, a turnout increase of about 5 million people since 2004. During this same 4-year period, the voting-age citizen population in the United States increased by roughly 9 million people.<sup>3</sup>

In 2008, 71 percent of voting-age citizens were registered to vote, a decrease compared to the 72 percent who were registered in 2004. The 2008 election had a higher registration rate than the presidential election of 2000, but was not statistically different from the 1996 rate. Overall, 146 million people were registered to vote in 2008, an increase of approximately 4 million people since 2004.

responses from a sample of the population and may differ from actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup>Additional historical voting and registration data, as well as detailed tables addressing each of the topics discussed in this report, are available at [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html).

### Current Population Reports

By Thom File  
and  
Sarah Crissey

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Table 1.

**Reported Rates of Voting and Registration: 1996 to 2008**

(Numbers in thousands)

Presidential election year	Citizens								Registered	
	Total	Registered				Voted			Percent reported voted	90 percent confidence interval
		Total	Number	Percent	90 percent confidence interval	Number	Percent	90 percent confidence interval		
2008 . . . . .	225,499	206,072	146,311	71.0	69.7–71.4	131,144	63.6	63.3–63.9	89.6	89.4–89.8
2004 . . . . .	215,694	197,005	142,070	72.1	71.8–72.4	125,736	63.8	63.5–64.1	88.5	88.3–88.7
2000 . . . . .	202,609	186,366	129,549	69.5	69.2–69.8	110,826	59.5	59.2–59.8	85.5	85.2–85.8
1996 . . . . .	193,651	179,935	127,661	70.9	70.6–71.2	105,017	58.4	58.1–58.7	82.3	82.0–82.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008.

Historically, the likelihood that an individual will actually vote once registered has been high, and 2008 was no exception. Of all registered individuals, 90 percent reported voting, up slightly from 89 percent in the 2004 presidential election.

**WHO VOTES?**

This section of the report highlights voting and registration rates by selected characteristics for the voting-age citizen population.

**Race and Hispanic Origin**

The likelihood of voting differed among race groups and Hispanics (Table 2). Non-Hispanic Whites (66 percent) and Blacks (65 percent) had the highest levels of voter turnout in the 2008 election.<sup>4</sup> Voting rates for Asians and Hispanics were not statistically different from one another at about 49 percent.

<sup>4</sup>Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported

Relative to the presidential election of 2004, the voting rates for Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics each increased by about 4 percentage points, while the voting rate for non-Hispanic Whites decreased by a single percentage point in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

Of the 5 million additional voters in 2008, about 2 million were Black, 2 million were Hispanic, and 600,000

another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this report (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were the single race White and non-Hispanic, people who reported the single race Black, and people who reported the single race Asian. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. Because Hispanics may be any race, data in this report for Hispanics overlap slightly with data for the Black population and the Asian population. Based on the November 2008 CPS, 3 percent of the Black voting-age population and 2 percent of the Asian voting-age population were Hispanic. Of the voting-age citizen population, 2 percent of Blacks and 2 percent of Asians were Hispanic. Data for the American Indian and Alaska Native and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander populations are not shown in this report because of their small sample size in the November 2008 CPS.

<sup>5</sup>For a full analysis of the 2004 election, see Kelly Holder, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004*, Current Population Reports P20-556: U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2006, <[www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf)>.

were Asian. Meanwhile, the number of non-Hispanic White voters did not change statistically from 2004.

Historically speaking, Black citizens voted at higher levels than in any presidential election since the U.S. Census Bureau began consistently measuring citizenship status in 1996 (Figure 2). The same was true for Hispanics, while in 2008 Asians voted at a higher rate than in 2004 or 2000.<sup>6</sup> Although the gap separating non-Hispanic Whites from other race and ethnic groups narrowed in 2008 compared to 2004, non-Hispanic Whites still voted at the highest level. In 2008, the voting rate for non-Hispanic Whites was lower than in 2004 but higher than 2000 or 1996.

The likelihood of registering also differed among race groups and Hispanics (Table 2). Non-Hispanic Whites (74 percent) and Blacks (70 percent) had the highest registration

<sup>6</sup>The voting rate for Asians in 2008 was not statistically different from 1996.

### Voting-Age Population

One of the primary criteria for being eligible to vote is age. Since 1972, every state has required that eligible voters be at least 18 years of age. Thus, the voting-age population, or the 18-and-older population, is a population base often used in presenting voting statistics. The Census Bureau has historically estimated voting and registration rates using this population but no longer focuses primarily on this method.

### Voting-Age Citizen Population

A second criterion for voting eligibility is citizenship. In the United States, only citizens can legally vote in elections. While the Census Bureau has collected voting and registration data since 1964, the CPS has gathered citizenship data for presidential elections in a consistent way only since 1994. Removing noncitizens decreases the voting-age population base, resulting in higher turnout rates for any given election. For example, in the November 2008 election, 58 percent of the voting-age population voted, while 64 percent of the voting-age citizen population

of the voting-age citizen population, as this is the preferred method for analyzing elections.

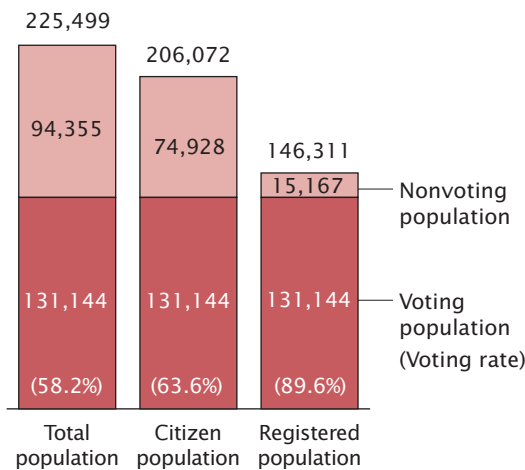
### Registered Population

A third criterion for voting eligibility is registration. With the exception of North Dakota, every state requires eligible voters to formally register before casting a ballot. In terms of methods and deadlines, registration procedures vary greatly from state to state.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1 illustrates the three measures of voting rates. In November 2008, of the 225 million people who were 18 and older, 206 million were citizens, and 146 million were registered. In the November election, 131 million people voted. Thus, the voting rate was 58 percent for the total population 18 and older, 64 percent for the voting-age citizen population, and 90 percent for the registered population.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1.  
**Voters Among the Total, Citizen, and Registered Voting-Age Populations: 2008**

(Population 18 and older, in thousands)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and Wyoming all have Election-Day registration. North Dakota has no statewide voter registration requirement.

<sup>8</sup> A fourth criterion for voting eligibility is felony disenfranchisement, or the practice of prohibiting persons from voting based on the fact that they have been convicted of a felony. Although the Census Bureau does not currently provide a measurement of felony disenfranchisement in the CPS, some of the people who reported not being eligible to vote in Table 6 of this report were ineligible due to a felony conviction.

Table 2.

**Reported Rates of Voting and Registration by Selected Characteristics: 2008**

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total	Citizens							Registered	
		Total	Registered			Voted			Percent report- ed voted	90 percent confi- dence interval
			Number	Per- cent	90 percent confi- dence interval	Number	Per- cent	90 percent confi- dence interval		
<b>Total, 18 years and older.....</b>	<b>225,499</b>	<b>206,072</b>	<b>146,311</b>	<b>71.0</b>	<b>69.7–71.4</b>	<b>131,144</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>63.3–63.9</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>89.4–89.8</b>
<b>Sex</b>										
Male.....	108,974	98,818	68,242	69.1	68.7–69.5	60,729	61.5	61.1–61.9	89.0	88.7–89.3
Female.....	116,525	107,255	78,069	72.8	72.4–73.2	70,415	65.7	65.3–66.1	90.2	89.9–90.5
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>										
White alone.....	183,169	169,438	122,020	72.0	71.7–72.3	109,100	64.4	64.1–64.7	89.4	89.2–89.7
White alone, non-Hispanic.....	154,472	151,321	111,215	73.5	73.2–73.8	100,042	66.1	65.8–66.4	90.0	89.7–90.2
Black alone.....	26,528	24,930	17,375	69.7	68.7–70.7	16,133	64.7	63.7–65.7	92.9	92.3–93.4
Asian alone.....	10,455	7,059	3,901	55.3	53.2–57.4	3,357	47.6	45.5–49.7	86.1	84.5–87.6
Hispanic (any race).....	30,852	19,537	11,608	59.4	57.8–61.0	9,745	49.9	48.3–51.5	84.0	83.0–84.9
<b>Nativity Status</b>										
Total citizens.....	206,072	206,072	146,311	71.0	70.7–71.3	131,144	63.6	63.3–63.9	89.6	89.4–89.9
Native.....	190,683	190,683	137,001	71.8	71.5–72.1	122,839	64.4	64.1–64.7	89.7	89.4–89.9
Naturalized.....	15,390	15,390	9,310	60.5	59.4–61.6	8,305	54.0	52.9–55.1	89.2	88.3–90.1
<b>Age</b>										
18 to 24 years.....	28,263	25,791	15,082	58.5	57.6–59.4	12,515	48.5	47.6–49.4	83.0	82.1–83.8
25 to 34 years.....	40,240	34,218	22,736	66.4	65.7–67.1	19,501	57.0	56.2–57.8	85.8	85.1–86.4
35 to 44 years.....	41,460	36,397	25,449	69.9	69.2–70.6	22,865	62.8	62.1–63.5	89.8	89.3–90.4
45 to 54 years.....	44,181	41,085	30,210	73.5	72.9–74.1	27,673	67.4	66.7–68.1	91.6	91.0–92.2
55 to 64 years.....	33,896	32,288	24,734	76.6	75.9–77.3	23,071	71.5	70.8–72.2	93.3	92.7–93.8
65 to 74 years.....	20,227	19,571	15,290	78.1	77.3–78.9	14,176	72.4	71.5–73.3	92.7	92.0–93.5
75 and older.....	17,231	16,724	12,810	76.6	75.7–77.5	11,344	67.8	66.8–68.8	88.6	87.6–89.6
<b>Marital Status</b>										
Married.....	125,645	113,527	86,234	76.0	75.6–76.4	79,329	69.9	69.4–70.4	92.0	91.7–92.3
Widowed.....	14,189	13,621	9,768	71.7	70.3–73.1	8,386	61.6	60.1–63.1	85.9	84.8–86.9
Divorced.....	22,935	22,012	14,905	67.7	66.6–68.8	12,977	59.0	57.8–60.2	87.1	86.3–87.9
Separated.....	4,833	4,209	2,707	64.3	61.7–66.9	2,252	53.5	50.8–56.2	83.2	81.1–85.3
Never married.....	57,896	52,703	32,698	62.0	61.2–62.8	28,200	53.5	52.7–54.3	86.2	85.7–86.8
<b>Educational Attainment</b>										
Less than high school graduate.....	30,204	22,981	11,602	50.5	49.6–51.4	9,046	39.4	38.5–40.3	78.0	76.9–79.1
High school graduate or GED.....	70,427	65,378	41,880	64.1	63.6–64.6	35,866	54.9	54.4–55.4	85.6	85.1–86.1
Some college or associate's degree.....	63,780	60,974	45,904	75.3	74.8–75.8	41,477	68.0	67.5–68.5	90.4	90.0–90.8
Bachelor's degree.....	40,850	38,091	30,928	81.2	80.6–81.8	29,330	77.0	76.4–77.6	94.8	94.4–95.2
Advanced degree.....	20,238	18,648	15,996	85.8	85.1–86.5	15,425	82.7	81.9–83.5	96.4	96.0–96.8
<b>Annual Family Income<sup>1</sup></b>										
Total family members....	168,032	153,160	110,920	72.4	72.1–72.7	100,255	65.5	65.2–65.8	90.4	90.1–90.6
Less than \$20,000.....	15,784	12,837	8,173	63.7	62.5–64.9	6,665	51.9	50.7–53.2	81.5	80.3–82.8
\$20,000 to \$29,999.....	13,749	11,725	7,869	67.1	65.9–68.3	6,606	56.3	55.0–57.6	83.9	82.8–85.1
\$30,000 to \$39,999.....	16,150	14,144	10,051	71.1	70.0–72.2	8,793	62.2	61.0–63.4	87.5	86.6–88.4
\$40,000 to \$49,999.....	12,547	11,295	8,202	72.6	71.4–73.8	7,307	64.7	63.4–66.0	89.1	88.1–90.1
\$50,000 to \$74,999.....	29,959	27,850	21,765	78.2	77.5–78.9	19,743	70.9	70.1–71.7	90.7	90.2–91.3
\$75,000 to \$99,999.....	19,075	18,114	14,844	81.9	81.1–82.7	13,846	76.4	75.5–77.3	93.3	92.7–93.9
\$100,000 and over.....	49,034	45,964	36,609	79.6	79.1–80.2	33,589	91.8	91.4–92.1	91.8	91.3–92.2
Income not reported.....	29,272	27,094	14,482	53.4	52.5–54.3	13,286	49.0	48.1–49.9	91.7	91.1–92.4

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2.

**Reported Rates of Voting and Registration by Selected Characteristics: 2008—Con.**

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Total	Citizens							Registered	
		Total	Registered			Voted			Percent reported voted	90 percent confidence interval
			Number	Per cent	90 percent confidence interval	Number	Per cent	90 percent confidence interval		
<b>Employment Status</b>										
In the civilian labor force . . .	152,707	139,058	100,544	72.3	72.0–72.6	90,715	65.2	64.8–65.6	90.2	90.0–90.5
Employed . . . . .	143,186	130,569	95,103	72.8	72.5–73.2	86,073	65.9	65.6–66.3	90.5	90.2–90.8
Unemployed . . . . .	9,521	8,489	5,441	64.1	62.6–65.6	4,642	54.7	53.2–56.2	85.3	84.0–86.7
Not in the labor force . . . . .	72,792	67,014	45,767	68.3	67.8–68.8	40,429	60.3	59.8–60.8	88.3	87.9–88.8
<b>Duration of Residence<sup>2</sup></b>										
Less than 1 year . . . . .	24,812	23,804	16,497	69.3	68.2–70.4	13,580	57.0	55.9–58.2	82.3	82.0–82.7
1 to 2 years . . . . .	25,796	24,623	18,418	74.8	73.8–75.8	16,066	65.3	64.2–66.4	87.2	86.4–88.1
3 to 4 years . . . . .	25,524	24,367	19,588	80.4	79.5–81.3	17,695	72.6	71.6–73.6	90.3	89.6–91.1
5 years or longer . . . . .	107,826	105,339	89,805	85.3	84.9–85.7	81,979	77.8	77.3–78.3	91.3	91.0–91.6
Not reported . . . . .	41,541	27,940	2,003	7.2	6.6–7.8	1,824	6.5	6.0–7.0	91.1	88.8–93.3
<b>Region</b>										
Northeast . . . . .	41,543	37,886	26,455	69.8	69.1–70.5	23,837	62.9	62.2–63.6	90.1	89.6–90.6
Midwest . . . . .	49,396	47,209	34,897	73.9	73.3–74.5	31,306	66.3	65.7–66.9	89.7	89.2–90.2
South . . . . .	82,402	75,984	53,988	71.1	70.6–71.6	47,536	62.6	62.1–63.1	88.0	87.6–88.5
West . . . . .	52,158	44,994	30,971	68.8	68.2–69.4	28,465	63.3	62.7–63.9	91.9	91.5–92.4
<b>Veteran Status<sup>3</sup></b>										
Total population . . . . .	225,460	206,160	146,393	71.0	70.7–71.3	131,212	63.6	63.3–63.9	89.6	89.4–89.9
Veteran . . . . .	22,420	22,278	17,185	77.1	76.3–77.9	15,805	70.9	70.0–71.8	92.0	91.4–92.6
Nonveteran . . . . .	203,040	183,882	129,208	70.3	70.0–70.6	115,407	62.8	62.5–63.1	89.3	89.1–89.6
<b>Tenure</b>										
Owner . . . . .	160,889	152,730	113,717	74.5	74.1–74.9	103,560	67.8	67.4–68.2	91.1	90.8–91.4
Renter . . . . .	61,842	50,812	30,955	60.9	60.1–61.7	26,239	51.6	50.8–52.4	84.8	84.0–85.5

<sup>1</sup> Limited to people in families.<sup>2</sup> Data on duration of residence were obtained from responses to the question, "How long has (this person) lived at this address?"<sup>3</sup> These estimates were derived using the veteran weight, which uses different procedures for construction than the person weight used to produce estimates elsewhere in this table; therefore, population totals differ while proportions are not affected.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

rates in the 2008 election, while registration rates for Hispanics (59 percent) and Asians (55 percent) were significantly lower.

**Age**

Citizens between the ages of 18 to 24 were the only age group to show a statistically significant increase in turnout in the most recent election, reaching 49 percent in 2008, compared with 47 percent in 2004. Citizens between the ages of 45 to 64 saw their voting rates

decrease to 69 percent in 2008, down slightly from 70 percent in 2004. Voting rates for citizens aged 25 to 44 and 65 years or older were statistically unchanged between 2004 and 2008.

This represents the second straight presidential election where young citizens significantly increased their voting rates. Over the last two presidential elections, young citizens have increased their voting rate by a total of 12 percent, compared to 4 percent for 25- to

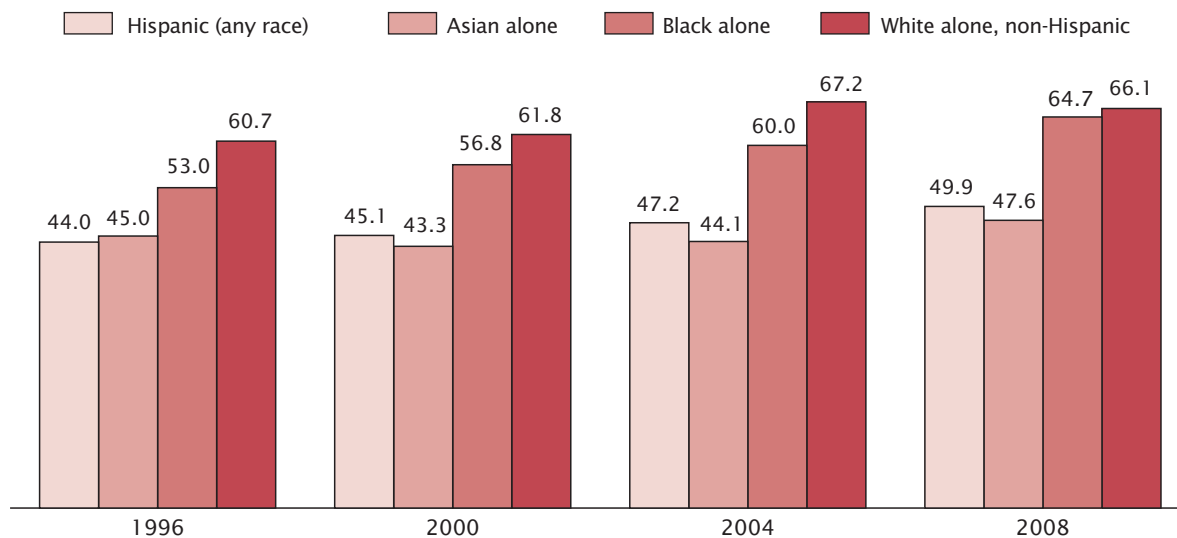
44-year-olds and 1 percent for 45- to 64-year-olds.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this increase among young voters, voting rates did tend to increase with age. In 2008, younger citizens (18–24) had the lowest voting rate (49 percent), while citizens who fell into older age groups (25–44, 45–64, and 65 and older) had progressively higher voting

<sup>9</sup>The 2008 voting rate for individuals 65 and older was not statistically different from 2000.

Figure 2.  
**Voting Rates by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2008**

(Citizens 18 and older, in percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008.

rates (60 percent, 69 percent, and 70 percent, respectively).

As discussed in the previous section, about 5 million additional voters went to the polls in 2008. Young people between the ages of 18 and 24 made up about 1 million of these additional voters. Meanwhile, approximately 3 million of these voters were between the ages of 45 and 64, while approximately 1.5 million were 65 years or older.<sup>10</sup> The number of citizens between the ages of 25 and 44 who turned out in 2008 was not statistically different from 2004.

In 2008, registration also increased with age. Younger citizens (18–24) had the lowest registration rate (59 percent), while citizens who fell into older age groups (25–44, 45–64, and 65 and older) had progressively higher registration rates

<sup>10</sup> The number of additional voters aged 18 to 24 was not significantly different from the number of additional voters aged 65 or older.

(68 percent, 75 percent, and 77 percent, respectively).

### Educational Attainment

Compared to 2004, voting rates decreased in 2008 for individuals with some college or at least a bachelor's degree (Table 2). The voting rate of citizens with at least a bachelor's degree (79 percent) was higher than that of citizens who had not received a high school diploma (39 percent), those who were high school graduates (55 percent), and individuals who had only some college or an associate's degree (68 percent).

Overall, younger adults had lower voting rates in 2008; however, for highly educated young people, the impact of being young on voter turnout was overcome by the impact of advanced education (Figure 3). Young adults with a bachelor's degree or more had a higher voting rate (70 percent) than young adults with lower levels of educational attainment (27 percent

to 57 percent, respectively). Young adults with at least a bachelor's degree also had a higher voting rate than 25- to 44-year-olds with some college (64 percent), as well as most age groups with a high school diploma or less.<sup>11</sup>

Registration rates also increased with education in 2008. Citizens with at least a bachelor's degree registered at a higher rate (83 percent) than those who had not received a high school diploma (51 percent), those who were high school graduates (64 percent), and individuals who had some college or an associate's degree (75 percent).

### Regions

Citizens residing in the Midwest were more likely to vote than those in other regions (Table 2). In 2008, 66 percent of voting-age citizens in

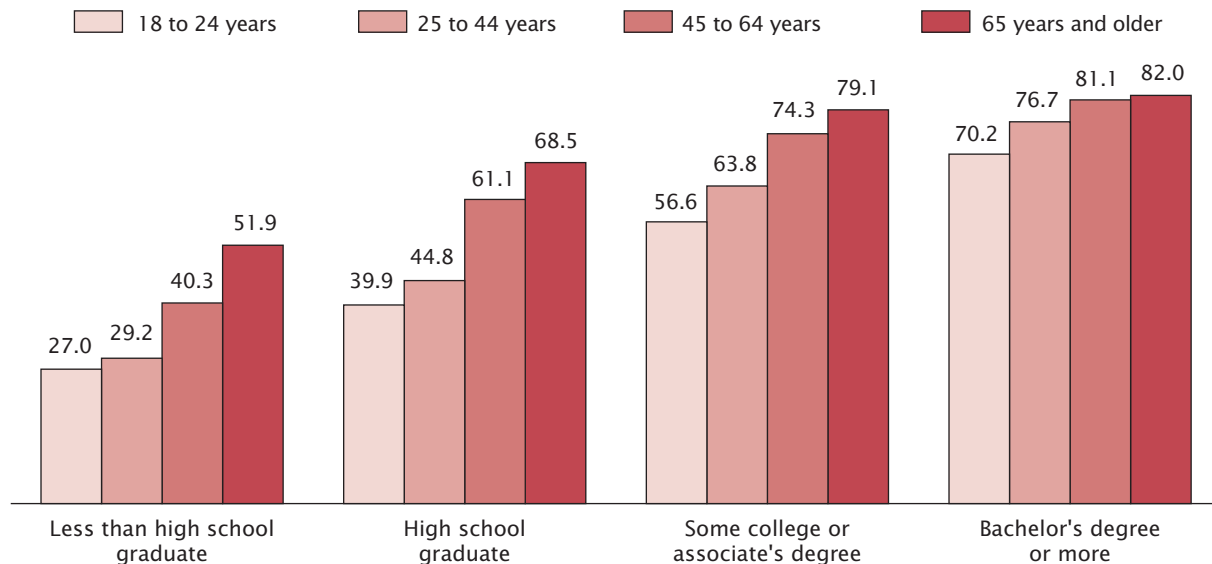
<sup>11</sup> The voting rate for young adults with at least a bachelor's degree was not statistically different from individuals 65 and older with a high school diploma.



Figure 3.

**Voting Rates by Educational Attainment and Age Groups: 2008**

(Citizens 18 and older, in percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

the Midwest voted, while the voting rates in the West, Northeast, and South were all about 63 percent.

Compared to 2004, the South was the only region to display a statistically significant increase (about 2 percentage points) in voter turnout in 2008. The Midwest and Northeast both showed significant decreases, while the voting rate in the West was not statistically different from the 2004 election.

About 4 million more voters came to the polls in the South in 2008 compared to 2004. There was also an increase of about 2 million voters in the West. The number of aggregate voters in the Northeast and Midwest did not change statistically between 2004 and 2008.

Citizens residing in the Midwest were also more likely to be registered to vote than those in other regions. In 2008, 74 percent of eligible individuals in the Midwest

reported being registered, compared to the South (71 percent), Northeast (70 percent), and West (69 percent).

**States**

In 2008, 20 states showed statistically different voting rates in comparison to the election of 2004 (Table 3). As displayed in Figure 4, 8 of these states displayed an increase in voting rates, while 12 displayed a decrease. Six of the states with higher voting rates were located in the South (Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, and the District of Columbia) while the remaining two were in the Northeast region (Connecticut and Rhode Island).

States with lower voting rates in 2008 than in 2004 were spread across the entire country and included Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Minnesota and the District of Columbia had some of the highest voting rates in the country (about 75 percent). Utah and Hawaii were among the states with the lowest voting rates in the country at approximately 52 percent each. Overall, 16 states had voting rates that were not statistically different from the national average of 64 percent (Figure 5).

Excluding North Dakota, which has no formal voter registration process, Maine, Minnesota, Louisiana, and the District of Columbia had among the highest levels of voter registration in the country (approximately 79 percent). Hawaii and Utah shared the lowest registration rates at about 59 percent. Overall, 19 states had registration rates that were not statistically different from the national average of 71 percent.

Table 3.  
**Voting Rates by State: 2004–2008**  
 (Numbers in thousands)

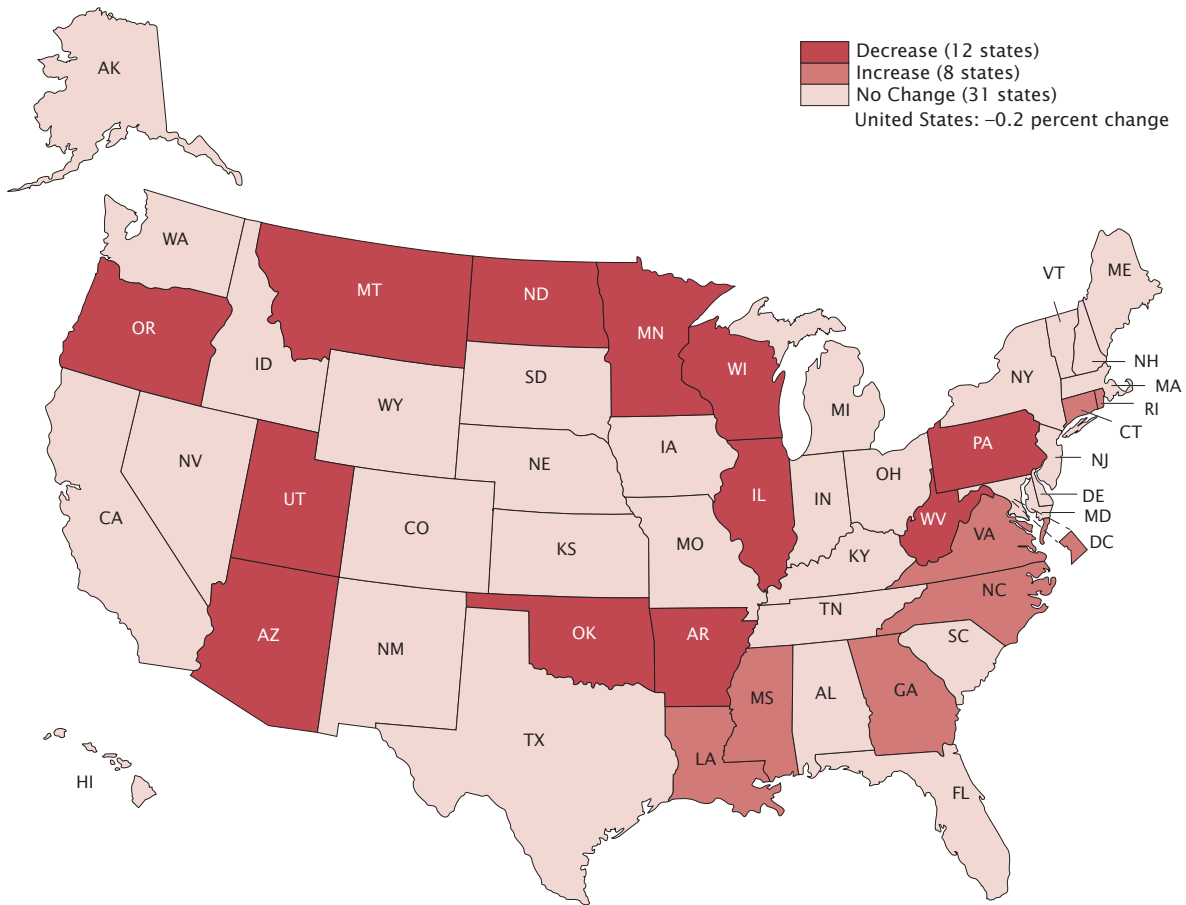
State	Citizens						Percentage change between 2004 and 2008
	2004			2008			
	Total voted	Percent voted (citizen)	Margin of error	Total voted	Percent voted (citizen)	Margin of error	
<b>United States</b> .....	<b>125,736</b>	<b>63.8</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>131,144</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>-0.2</b>
Mississippi .....	1,263	61.7	2.6	1,439	69.7	2.4	8.0 *
Georgia .....	3,332	56.8	2.4	4,183	64.2	1.8	7.4 *
North Carolina .....	3,639	61.4	1.9	4,370	67.5	1.7	6.1 *
Louisiana .....	2,067	64.2	2.4	2,149	70.3	2.4	6.1 *
Virginia .....	3,134	63.1	2.2	3,650	68.7	1.9	5.6 *
District of Columbia .....	270	69.2	2.5	306	74.1	2.6	4.9 *
Connecticut .....	1,524	63.2	2.1	1,610	67.2	2.6	4.0 *
Rhode Island .....	467	63.7	2.0	507	67.4	2.6	3.7 *
Maryland .....	2,413	65.6	2.1	2,611	68.3	2.3	2.7
South Carolina .....	1,899	63.2	2.3	2,100	65.6	2.5	2.4
Nebraska .....	793	65.3	2.2	844	67.3	2.6	2.0
Indiana .....	2,598	58.6	2.0	2,758	60.5	2.2	1.9
California .....	12,807	61.9	1.2	13,828	63.4	1.0	1.5
Hawaii .....	433	50.8	2.5	457	51.8	2.6	1.0
Nevada .....	871	58.9	2.1	1,027	59.9	2.7	1.0
Colorado .....	2,097	67.5	1.9	2,308	68.4	2.4	0.9
Tennessee .....	2,319	54.6	2.5	2,516	55.5	2.2	0.9
Delaware .....	385	66.4	2.4	408	67.3	2.6	0.9
Michigan .....	4,818	67.1	1.6	4,865	67.8	1.7	0.7
Idaho .....	585	61.6	2.4	644	61.4	2.5	-0.2
New Hampshire .....	677	71.5	1.9	708	71.2	2.5	-0.3
Florida .....	7,372	64.3	1.3	7,951	63.8	1.3	-0.5
South Dakota .....	378	68.3	2.0	390	67.8	2.3	-0.5
Ohio .....	5,485	66.1	1.6	5,483	65.5	1.6	-0.6
Washington .....	2,851	67.6	2.1	3,073	66.8	2.1	-0.8
Alabama .....	2,060	63.2	2.3	2,126	62.4	2.4	-0.8
Kansas .....	1,188	64.2	2.2	1,219	63.3	2.7	-0.9
Texas .....	7,950	57.1	1.4	8,435	56.1	1.2	-1.0
Iowa .....	1,522	71.3	2.0	1,501	70.2	2.5	-1.1
New York .....	7,698	60.2	1.2	7,559	58.8	1.3	-1.4
Massachusetts .....	3,085	68.6	1.9	3,044	67.1	2.1	-1.5
New Mexico .....	837	64.4	2.5	846	62.6	2.6	-1.8
Maine .....	736	73.1	1.8	716	71.2	2.6	-1.9
Kentucky .....	1,930	65.0	2.3	1,952	63.1	2.6	-1.9
New Jersey .....	3,693	66.0	1.7	3,637	64.1	1.9	-1.9
Pennsylvania .....	5,845	64.5	1.4	5,747	62.4	1.5	-2.1 *
Alaska .....	293	67.6	2.2	304	65.0	2.6	-2.6
Vermont .....	316	67.3	2.0	308	64.7	2.7	-2.6
Wyoming .....	247	66.9	2.2	250	64.3	2.6	-2.6
Missouri .....	2,815	68.5	2.0	2,846	65.8	2.2	-2.7
Illinois .....	5,672	65.6	1.5	5,436	62.6	1.6	-3.0 *
Oklahoma .....	1,541	62.3	2.3	1,507	58.7	2.7	-3.6 *
West Virginia .....	798	57.2	2.2	741	53.4	2.4	-3.8 *
Arizona .....	2,239	63.8	2.5	2,497	59.9	2.3	-3.9 *
North Dakota .....	330	71.5	2.1	321	67.5	2.5	-4.0 *
Minnesota .....	2,887	79.2	1.7	2,759	75.0	2.1	-4.2 *
Montana .....	482	70.2	2.4	473	65.4	2.5	-4.8 *
Arkansas .....	1,140	58.7	2.5	1,092	53.8	2.6	-4.9 *
Wisconsin .....	3,010	76.6	1.7	2,887	71.2	2.1	-5.4 *
Oregon .....	1,924	74.0	2.0	1,818	67.6	2.6	-6.4 *
Utah .....	1,022	67.8	2.3	939	53.1	2.5	-14.7 *

\* Significant at .10 level

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004 and 2008.



Figure 4.  
**Voting Rate Changes by States: 2004–2008**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

### **RACE AND ETHNICITY, REGION, AND AGE**

This section of the report offers a more in depth profile of voters based specifically on race and ethnicity, age, and region of residence.

#### **Region and Race**

In the Northeast and West, non-Hispanic Whites voted at higher rates than Blacks, Asians, or Hispanics in 2008. In the South, Blacks had the highest voting rate, while in the West voting rates for

Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites were not statistically different from one another (Table 4).

As noted earlier in this report, the South was the only region to show a statistically significant increase in voting rates between 2004 and 2008. When race and ethnicity are considered alongside region of residence, voting rates for Blacks are shown to have increased in the South. All other regions showed no statistical change for Black voters between 2004 and 2008 (Table 4).

Voting rates for non-Hispanic Whites, meanwhile, are shown to have decreased in the Midwest, Northeast, and West during this same period, while the percentage of non-Hispanic Whites who voted in the South did not change significantly between the two elections.

Although both Asians and Hispanics displayed increased voting rates in the West, neither group showed any significant changes in other regions.

Table 4.

**Voting Rates, by Regions, Age, and Race and Ethnicity: 2004–2008**

(Numbers in thousands)

Age and race and ethnicity	Percent of citizens voting									
	2008					2004				
	Region					Region				
	Total	South	West	Northeast	Midwest	Total	South	West	Northeast	Midwest
<b>Total . . . . .</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>62.6 *</b>	<b>63.3</b>	<b>62.9</b>	<b>66.3</b>	<b>63.8</b>	<b>61.0</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>67.8</b>
18–24 . . . . .	48.5 *	46.1 *	47.8	49.0 *	52.8	46.7	43.6	46.3	46.0	52.2
25–44 . . . . .	60.0	58.7 *	59.1	59.2 *	63.6	60.1	57.1	59.0	61.3	65.0
45–64 . . . . .	69.2	68.0	69.5 *	68.7 *	71.0 *	70.4	67.4	71.5	70.8	73.9
65 and older . . . . .	70.3	70.6	71.0 *	67.5	71.6 *	71.0	69.0	73.6	69.1	73.6
<b>White alone, Non-Hispanic . . . . .</b>	<b>66.1 *</b>	<b>64.4</b>	<b>67.9 *</b>	<b>65.6 *</b>	<b>67.3 *</b>	<b>67.2</b>	<b>63.9</b>	<b>70.7</b>	<b>67.1</b>	<b>69.0</b>
18–24 . . . . .	49.4	45.0	50.4	51.4	52.8	49.8	45.8	53.7	48.9	52.4
25–44 . . . . .	62.1 *	60.2	63.0	61.1 *	64.5	63.5	59.8	65.5	64.2	66.4
45–64 . . . . .	71.2 *	69.2	73.6 *	71.3	72.0 *	73.2	69.7	77.3	73.0	74.9
65 and older . . . . .	72.6	72.6	75.8	70.1	72.1	73.1	70.5	77.6	72.1	74.3
<b>Black alone . . . . .</b>	<b>64.7 *</b>	<b>66.0 *</b>	<b>63.0</b>	<b>58.6</b>	<b>67.3</b>	<b>60.0</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>61.6</b>	<b>56.2</b>	<b>66.0</b>
18–24 . . . . .	55.4 *	55.1 *	57.9	47.2	63.5	47.1	46.4	46.9	41.3	56.2
25–44 . . . . .	64.0 *	65.6 *	62.0	59.1	64.3	59.3	58.3	62.1	54.7	64.0
45–64 . . . . .	68.7 *	70.7 *	65.1	62.3	70.0	65.3	64.7	63.9	62.5	70.4
65 and older . . . . .	68.0	68.2	67.6	61.7	73.5	65.9	63.5	69.0	63.7	73.4
<b>Asian alone . . . . .</b>	<b>47.6 *</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>52.5 *</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>44.1</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>45.7</b>
18–24 . . . . .	40.6	35.0	45.8	30.5	46.3	34.2	28.5	36.4	30.6	36.8
25–44 . . . . .	47.3 *	39.5	52.3 *	40.9	52.8	40.2	37.4	39.7	43.7	41.8
45–64 . . . . .	51.0	45.2	56.8	43.8	45.8	51.1	44.3	52.1	51.9	57.3
65 and older . . . . .	45.1	56.5	47.6	34.3	36.2	47.7	52.7	52.3	27.9	46.7
<b>Hispanic (any race) . . . . .</b>	<b>49.9 *</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>53.1 *</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>47.0</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>48.8</b>	<b>51.3</b>
18–24 . . . . .	38.8 *	36.7	41.8	40.3	31.3	33.0	29.5	33.0	35.7	42.2
25–44 . . . . .	47.7	41.4	52.4	51.0	49.3	45.2	41.4	46.1	49.6	49.4
45–64 . . . . .	58.1	56.7	59.2	59.0	56.2	56.2	55.6	54.1	60.8	60.3
65 and older . . . . .	56.0	54.3	60.0	53.0	48.5	57.0	59.4	63.7	36.5	53.4

\* Indicates that 2008 estimate is different from 2004 estimate at the .10 level.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2004 and 2008.

**Region and Age**

As discussed earlier, young people were the only age group to show a statistical increase in voting rates between 2004 and 2008, while voters between the ages of 45 and 64 were the only group to show a statistical decrease (Table 4).

When age is considered alongside region of residence, voting rate increases were primarily focused among young people in the South and Northeast. Voting rates in the South increased for young people

in the 18 to 24 and 25 to 44 age groups. In the Northeast, voting rates increased for young people between the ages of 18 and 24, but decreased for citizens in the 25 to 44 age group.

Every region outside of the South experienced a drop in voting among older citizens. In the Northeast, voting rates decreased for citizens in the 45 to 64 age group. In both the Midwest and West, voting rates decreased for citizens between the ages of 45 and 64 and for those 65 years and older.

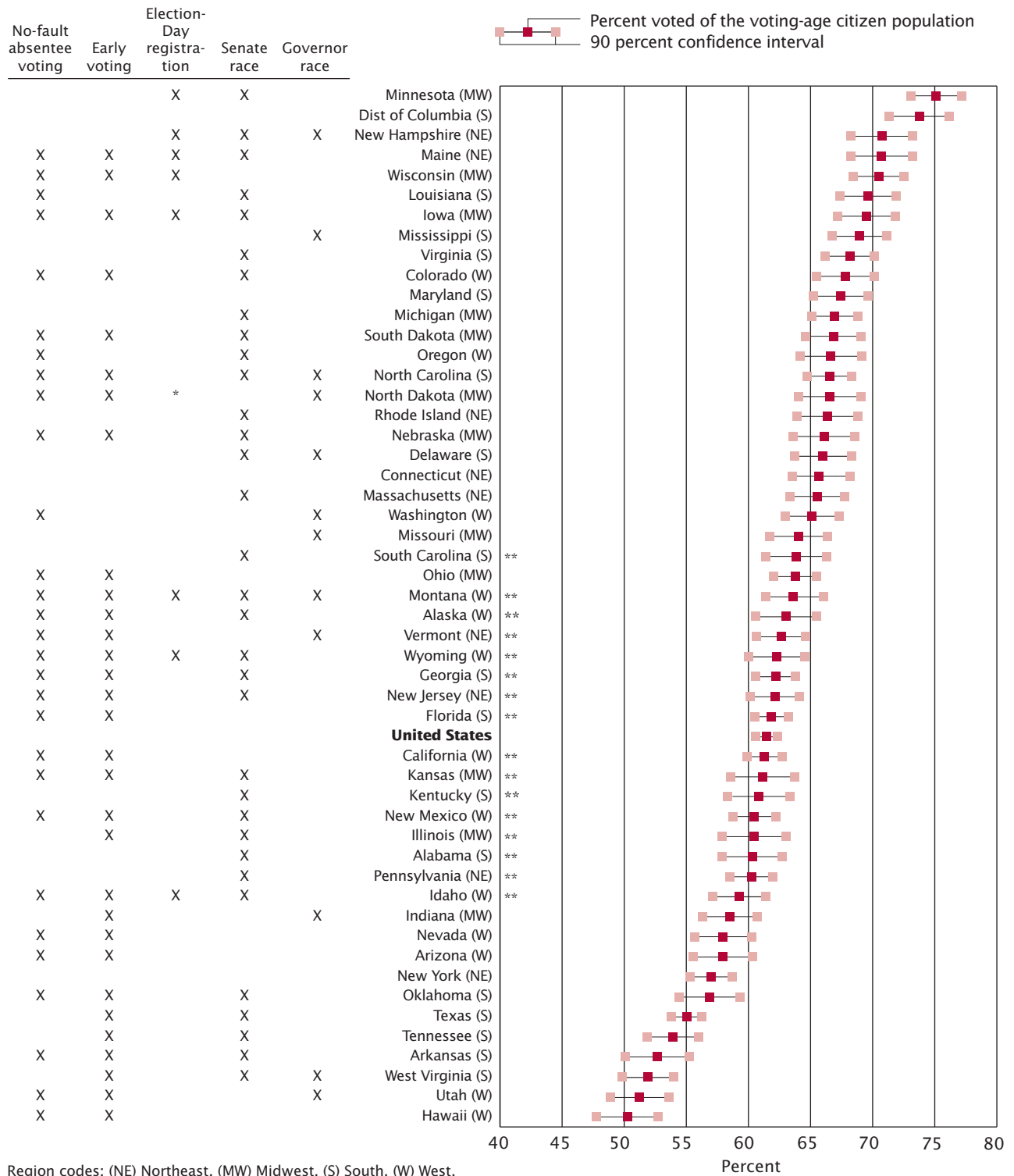
**Race and Ethnicity and Age**

As noted earlier, the overall voting rate for non-Hispanic Whites dropped in 2008. This drop was focused primarily on the middle aged as voting rates for individuals in the middle two age groups (25–44 and 45–64) showed statistically significant decreases (Table 4).

The overall increase in Black voting rates discussed earlier was focused primarily on younger and middle-aged individuals. Statistically significant increases were seen for Black

Figure 5.  
**Voting by State: 2008**

(Citizens 18 and older)



Region codes: (NE) Northeast, (MW) Midwest, (S) South, (W) West.

\* North Dakota does not have a formal registration process.

\*\* Not statistically different from the national average.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008; National Conference of State Legislatures <[www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)>; Project Vote Smart <[www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org)>.

Table 5.

**Odds Ratios of Registering and Voting From Multivariate Regression Models: 2008**

Characteristic	Among voting-age citizens	
	Registration odds ratio	Voting odds ratio
<b>Sex</b>		
Male.....	(R)	(R)
Female.....	1.3 ***	1.3 ***
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>		
White alone, non-Hispanic and other non-Hispanic .....	(R)	(R)
Black alone, non-Hispanic.....	1.9 ***	2.3 ***
Hispanic (any race).....	0.9 **	0.9 ***
<b>Age</b>		
18 to 24 years.....	(R)	(R)
25 to 44 years.....	1.4 ***	1.4 ***
45 to 64 years.....	2.1 ***	2.2 ***
65 years and older.....	3.3 ***	3.1 ***
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
Less than a high school diploma.....	(R)	(R)
High school graduate or GED.....	2.2 ***	2.2 ***
Some college or associate's degree.....	4.4 ***	4.4 ***
Bachelor's degree or higher.....	8.5 ***	8.8 ***
<b>Family Income <sup>1</sup></b>		
Less than \$25,000.....	(R)	(R)
Between \$25,000 and \$75,000.....	1.4 ***	1.5 ***
More than \$75,000.....	2.0 ***	2.1 ***
<b>Duration of Residence</b>		
Less than 1 year.....	(R)	(R)
1–4 years.....	1.3 ***	1.4 ***
5 years or longer.....	2.0 ***	2.1 ***
<b>Region</b>		
South.....	(R)	(R)
Northeast.....	0.9	1.0
West.....	0.8 ***	1.1 *
Midwest.....	1.2 ***	1.2 ***
Unweighted N.....	92,360	92,360

\*\*\* Significant at .001 level. \*\* Significant at .01 level. \*Significant at .10 level.

(R) Reference group.

<sup>1</sup>People with missing data on Family Income or Duration of Residence were included in the multivariate model, with dummy variables to account for their influence (although the odds ratios for these variables are not included in this table).

Note: Due to the complex sampling design of the Current Population Survey, analyses were weighted using a normalized person weight and a design effect of 1.38 was used to adjust standard errors.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

voters in all age groups except 65 years and older. Meanwhile, the overall increase in Asian voting rates was focused primarily on voters between the ages of 25 and 44, while the overall increase in Hispanic voting rates was focused primarily on young voters between the ages of 18 and 24.

### **Race and Ethnicity, Region, and Age**

When race and ethnicity, region, and age are analyzed together,

most of the 2008 voting rates did not statistically change in comparison to 2004. However, at least some significant changes did occur. In the South, non-Hispanic Whites 65 years and older displayed higher voting rates in 2008 relative to 2004. An increase was also seen for every age group of Blacks in the South, except those 65 years and older. In the West, Asians and Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 44 showed an increase, as did Hispanics aged 18 to 24. Voting

rates decreased for non-Hispanic Whites in the West (aged 25 to 44 and 45 to 64 years), the Northeast (aged 25 to 44 years) and the Midwest (all age groups except 18 to 24 years).

### **MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS**

A multivariate analysis was performed to ascertain the independent effects of certain characteristics on the likelihood of voting and registering. Factors in the models included duration of residence,

region of residence, sex, age, race and Hispanic origin, educational attainment, and family income.<sup>12</sup> The overall results were similar for both models and correspond with the descriptive statistics presented earlier in this report.

## Voting

Table 5 displays results from logistic regression analyses predicting voting by these characteristics. Results are displayed as odds ratios, which are related to the probability of voting after allowing for the influence of other variables in the model. Values above 1 indicate that, compared with the reference group, people have higher odds of voting. Values below 1 indicate that they have lower odds of voting than people in the reference group.

Earlier in this report, Table 2 showed that 65 percent of Blacks and 66 percent of non-Hispanic Whites voted in 2008. While this was an interesting outcome, the results of our multivariate analysis in Table 5 are every bit as remarkable. When all other factors are held equal (e.g., once the impact of age, duration of residence, region of residence, sex, educational attainment, and family income are all held constant), the odds of voting in 2008 were about twice as high for Blacks as they were for the non-Hispanic Whites reference group (2.3:1).

Age was also an important predictor of voting. In Table 5, 18- to 24-year-old citizens are the reference category for age. The odds ratio for 25- to 44-year-old citizens is 1.4, indicating that people in the older group had about 40

<sup>12</sup> Data on duration of residence were obtained from responses to the question, "How long has (this person) lived at this address?"

percent greater odds of voting than younger people. Meanwhile, 45- to 64-year-old citizens had more than twice the odds of voting as young people (2.1:1), while the odds of voting for citizens 65 and older were about 3 times as high (3.3:1).

Another important influence on voting was education. Respondents with a high school diploma had more than twice the odds of voting as those without a high school diploma (2.2:1). Respondents with at least some college were more than 4 times as likely (4.4:1), while people with at least a bachelor's degree were more than 8 times as likely (8.5:1) to vote compared to those with less than a high school education.

## Registration

Table 5 also displays results from logistic regression analyses predicting registration. These results closely mirror our model predicting voting and show that when other factors in the model are held constant, race, age, and education each had a strong influence on whether people were registered to vote.

## METHODS AND MOTIVATIONS

In 2008, the Voting and Registration Supplement included questions about how individuals registered and voted, as well as items asking why some Americans chose not to register or to vote.

The following section is based on answers to these questions.

## Methods of Voting and Registering

In the 2008 election, 70 percent of voters reported that they voted on Election Day, and 30 percent voted before Election Day—either in person or by mail. Of the 39 million Americans who voted before

Election Day, 52 percent reported doing so by mail.<sup>13</sup>

In 2008, when asked how or where they registered to vote, 22 percent of the registered population reported that they registered at either a county or government registration office or while obtaining a driver's license or identification card at a department of motor vehicles. Nationwide, 14 percent mailed a registration form to a local election office, while 6 percent of registered voters reported registering in each of the following ways: either at the polls on Election Day; at a school, hospital, or campus; or at a registration booth (Figure 6).<sup>14</sup>

## Reasons for not voting and not registering<sup>15</sup>

Of the 146 million people who reported that they were registered to vote, 15 million (10 percent) did not vote in the 2008 presidential election (Table 6). Of these registered nonvoters, 18 percent reported that they did not vote because they were too busy or had conflicting work or school schedules. Another 15 percent reported that they did not vote because they were ill, disabled, or had a family emergency. Additionally, 13 percent did not vote because they were not interested or felt their vote would not make a difference, while another 13 percent reported not voting because they did not like the candidates or the campaign issues.

<sup>13</sup> Data about how and when people voted do not include refusals or individuals who reported not knowing.

<sup>14</sup> The percentage of voters who reported registering at a school, hospital, or campus was statistically different from the percentage who registered at a registration booth. Additional historical voting and registration data, as well as detailed tables addressing each of the topics discussed in this report, are available at <[www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html)>.

<sup>15</sup> Only individuals who reported being registered and also reported not voting were asked the question about reason for not voting.

Table 6.

**Reasons for Not Registering and Voting, by Selected Characteristics: 2008**

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Percent distribution of reasons for not voting and registering													
	Total	Race and Hispanic origin					Age				Educational attainment			
		White alone	White alone, non-Hispanic	Black alone	Asian alone	Hispanic (any race)	18–24 years	25–44 years	45–64 years	65 years and older	Less than high school graduate	High school graduate or GED	Some college <sup>3</sup>	Bachelor's degree or more
<b>Total nonvoters . . . .</b>	<b>15,167</b>	<b>12,920</b>	<b>11,172</b>	<b>1,242</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>1,862</b>	<b>2,567</b>	<b>5,819</b>	<b>4,201</b>	<b>2,581</b>	<b>2,556</b>	<b>6,015</b>	<b>4,427</b>	<b>2,169</b>
<b>Reasons for not voting<sup>1</sup></b>														
Too busy, conflicting schedule . . . . .	17.5	17.3	16.2	16.9	26.9	24.8	21.0	24.3	14.9	3.0	12.2	18.0	20.2	16.9
Illness or disability . . . . .	14.9	15.0	15.6	20.3	6.8	10.8	3.2	6.8	14.8	45.3	25.6	14.3	10.9	12.5
Not interested . . . . .	13.4	14.1	14.1	8.5	9.4	14.0	12.1	14.2	15.2	9.9	13.8	15.6	11.4	10.8
Did not like candidates or campaign issues . . . . .	12.9	14.2	15.2	4.3	4.5	7.6	8.0	12.7	16.5	12.5	13.6	14.0	11.9	11.4
Other reason . . . . .	11.3	11.0	10.9	12.7	11.8	11.7	11.6	11.7	12.5	8.0	10.8	10.9	11.6	12.4
Out of town . . . . .	8.8	8.9	9.1	6.4	12.0	7.8	14.2	8.4	8.3	5.1	4.0	6.8	11.1	15.3
Don't know or refused . . . . .	7.0	6.3	6.1	13.0	11.0	7.3	11.2	7.2	5.8	4.6	5.3	6.6	8.7	6.8
Registration problems . . . . .	6.0	5.7	5.6	5.6	7.9	7.0	9.0	7.3	4.3	2.6	3.2	5.8	7.2	7.4
Inconvenient polling place . . . . .	2.7	2.5	2.3	3.3	5.5	4.1	2.6	3.0	2.6	2.3	3.1	2.6	2.5	3.0
Transportation problems . . . . .	2.6	2.4	2.4	4.8	1.7	2.5	2.4	1.4	3.4	4.5	4.7	2.8	1.9	1.4
Forgot to vote . . . . .	2.6	2.4	2.4	3.1	2.6	2.4	4.5	2.8	1.8	1.3	3.0	2.5	2.7	1.9
Bad weather conditions . . . . .	0.2	0.2	0.2	1.2	–	–	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.8	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.3
<b>Total not registered . . . . .</b>	<b>30,402</b>	<b>24,848</b>	<b>20,524</b>	<b>2,961</b>	<b>1,646</b>	<b>4,663</b>	<b>6,294</b>	<b>11,882</b>	<b>8,464</b>	<b>3,763</b>	<b>7,614</b>	<b>12,799</b>	<b>7,043</b>	<b>2,947</b>
<b>Reasons for not registering<sup>2</sup></b>														
Not interested in the election/not involved in politics . . . . .	46.0	48.1	50.5	33.7	35.5	36.2	42.2	45.4	50.1	44.9	43.9	48.9	45.6	39.9
Did not meet registration deadlines . . . . .	14.7	14.6	14.4	17.7	12.2	15.8	21.3	16.0	11.2	7.0	10.3	13.8	18.3	20.7
Not eligible to vote . . . . .	8.6	7.6	5.6	14.0	12.2	17.2	7.6	10.1	8.5	5.6	11.4	8.2	6.6	7.9
Other . . . . .	6.1	5.9	6.3	7.4	6.1	4.3	6.1	6.0	6.0	8.2	5.1	5.9	6.9	7.2
Permanent illness or disability . . . . .	6.0	5.8	6.0	8.6	3.2	4.7	2.8	3.3	6.8	17.7	10.4	5.7	2.7	3.5
Don't know or refused . . . . .	5.7	5.4	5.5	7.0	6.3	5.3	8.3	5.6	4.8	3.6	4.9	6.1	6.4	4.1
Did not know where or how to register . . . . .	4.2	3.9	3.7	4.6	6.8	5.3	6.2	4.2	2.9	3.5	4.7	4.0	4.4	3.2
My vote would not make a difference . . . . .	4.0	4.2	4.6	3.4	2.7	2.1	3.6	3.7	4.8	4.1	4.0	3.8	4.4	4.2
Did not meet residency requirements . . . . .	3.5	3.5	2.9	2.7	5.6	5.8	3.0	4.5	3.0	2.0	2.9	2.8	3.7	7.8
Difficulty with English . . . . .	1.4	0.9	0.5	0.7	9.3	3.0	0.4	1.1	1.5	3.6	2.5	0.8	1.1	1.5

– Represents zero or rounds to zero.

<sup>1</sup> Only individuals who reported being registered and also reported not voting were asked the question about reason for not voting.<sup>2</sup> Includes only those respondents who answered “no” to the question, “Were you registered in the election of November 2008?”<sup>3</sup> Includes individuals reporting an associate's degree.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.



Of the 30 million citizens who were not registered to vote in 2008, 46 percent reported that they were not interested in the election or were not involved in politics. Another 15 percent reported that they did not meet the registration deadlines.<sup>16</sup>

## MEASURING VOTING AND REGISTRATION IN THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

The CPS Voting and Registration Supplement is a nationally representative sample survey that collects information on voting shortly after an election in November. The CPS supplement estimates the number of people who registered to vote and who voted based on direct interviews with household respondents. The CPS estimates are an important analytic tool in election studies because they identify the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of people who report that they do, or do not, vote.

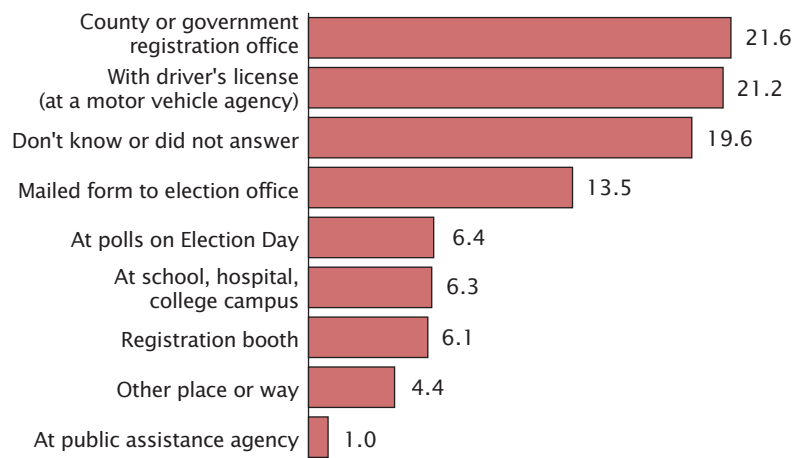
Each state's board of elections tabulates the vote counts, while the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives reports the official results. These tallies show the number of votes counted for specific offices. In a presidential election, the official count of comparison is the national total number of votes cast for the office of the President.

Discrepancies occur in each election between the CPS estimates and the official counts. In the November 2008 CPS, an estimated 131.1 million citizens of voting age in the civilian noninstitutionalized population reported that they voted in the November presidential election. Official counts from the Clerk of the U.S. House of

<sup>16</sup> Only individuals who reported that they had not registered were asked the question about the reason for not registering. This population does not include those who responded "do not know" or who refused to answer the question.

Figure 6.  
**Method of Registration to Vote: 2008**

(Percent distribution of registered voters)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008.

Representatives showed 131.4 million votes cast, a difference of about 263,000 votes (less than 1 percent) between the two sources.<sup>17</sup> In previous years, the disparity in the estimates in presidential elections has varied between 3 percent and 12 percent of the total number of votes shown as cast in the official tallies, with official tallies typically showing lower turnout.<sup>18</sup>

Differences between the official counts and the CPS may be a combination of an understatement of the official numbers and an overstatement in the CPS estimates as described below.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Information about state regulations for registration and voting can be found at the National Conference of State Legislatures Web site, <[www.ncsl.org](http://www.ncsl.org)>, or from the individual state election offices.

<sup>18</sup> The official count of votes cast can be found on the Web page of the Clerk of the House of Representatives at <<http://clerk.house.gov>>.

<sup>19</sup> For more detailed explanations of the differences between official counts and survey counts, see U.S. Census Bureau, *Studies in the Measurement of Voter Turnout*, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 168, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1990.

## Understatement of Total Votes Cast

Ballots are sometimes invalidated and thrown out during the counting process and therefore do not appear in the official counts. Official vote counts also frequently do not include mismarked, unreadable, and blank ballots. Additionally, when the total number of votes cast for U.S. President represents the official count, voters who do not vote for this office are not included in the reported tally.

## Reports of Voting in the CPS

Some of the error in estimating turnout in the CPS is the result of population controls and survey coverage. Respondent misreporting is also a source of error in the CPS estimates. Previous analyses based on reinterviews showed that respondents and proxy respondents are consistent in their reported answers and thus misunderstanding the questions does not fully account for the difference between the official counts and the CPS. However, other studies that

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 over reporting for the purpose of appearing to behave in a socially desirable way.

As stated above, the definition of “official count” can provide another source of disparity. The CPS gathers information on whether respondents voted in the November election, not whether they voted for a specific office. The CPS estimates include respondents who voted in only state or local elections, but these individuals would not be included in official vote tallies based on ballots cast for a U.S. presidential candidate.

### **Voting Not Captured in the CPS**

The CPS covers only the civilian noninstitutionalized population residing in the United States, while the official counts list all votes cast by this universe plus citizens residing in the United States who were in the military or living in institutions and citizens residing outside the United States, both civilian and military, who cast absentee ballots.<sup>20</sup>

### **Reports of Registration in the CPS**

Apart from the voting discussion above, there are additional reasons why discrepancies may occur between administrative records and survey estimates of voter registration. Because voter registration does not occur in the same limited

time frame as voting, reports of registration may be subject to greater recall bias.

Administrative counts of registration also may be biased, particularly through inaccurate purging practices.<sup>21</sup> People who have died or moved and duplicate entries may not be properly deleted from voter rolls, while others may be inappropriately removed.

The differences between administrative records and the CPS lead to different counts of the registered population and, consequently, to different voter turnout rates. The official registration counts tend to be higher than the estimates from the CPS, which leads to a lower voter turnout rate from official sources compared to the CPS.<sup>22</sup>

### **SOURCE OF THE DATA**

The population represented (the population universe) in the Voting and Registration Supplement to the November 2008 CPS is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. The excluded institutionalized population is composed primarily of individuals in correctional institutions and nursing homes (91 percent of the 4.1 million institutionalized people in Census 2000).

Most estimates in this report come from data obtained in November 2008 from the CPS, although

earlier CPS reports provide some of the estimates discussed. The Census Bureau conducts the CPS every month, although this report uses only November data for its estimates.

The November CPS supplement, which asks questions on voting and registration participation, provides the basis for the estimates in this report. The first question in the 2008 supplement asked if respondents voted in the election held on Tuesday, November 4, 2008. If respondents did not respond to the question or answered “no” or “do not know,” they were then asked if they were registered to vote in this election. Nonresponses and responses of “no” or “do not know” to either question were included in the respective categories of “not registered” or “did not vote.”

### **ACCURACY OF THE ESTIMATES**

Statistics from sample surveys are subject to sampling error and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level. This means the 90 percent confidence interval for the difference between comparative estimates does not include zero. Nonsampling error in surveys is attributable to a variety of sources, such as survey design, respondent question interpretation, respondent 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.

<sup>20</sup> Demographic information for Armed Forces members (enumerated in off-base housing or on-base with their families) is included on the CPS data files. 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.

<sup>21</sup> For an overview of voter registration counts, see Committee on State Voter Registration Databases, National Research Council, *State Voter Registration Databases: Immediate Actions and Future Improvements, Interim Report*, National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> For more information, see Michael P. McDonald, “The True Electorate: A Cross-Validation of Voter Registration Files and Election Survey Demographics,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 4, Winter 2007, pp. 588–602.

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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, but biases may still be present when people are missed by the survey who differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. 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, can be found at [www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsnov08.pdf](http://www.census.gov/apsd/techdoc/cps/cpsnov08.pdf) or by

contacting Rebecca A. Hoop of the Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at [dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov](mailto:dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov).

### **MORE INFORMATION**

Detailed tabulations are available that provide demographic characteristics of the population on voting and registration. The electronic versions of these tables and this report are available on the Internet at the Census Bureau's Voting and Registration Web site at [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html). Once on the site, in the "Subjects A-Z" area, click on "V," and then on "Voting and Registration Data."

### **CONTACT**

Contact the Demographic Call Center Staff at 301-763-2422 or 866-758-1060 (toll-free) or visit <http://ask.census.gov> for further information on voting and registration.

### **USER COMMENTS**

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of data and report users. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

Chief, Housing and Household  
Economic Statistics Division  
U.S. Census Bureau  
Washington, DC 20233-8500

or send e-mail to:  
[hhes-info@census.gov](mailto:hhes-info@census.gov).





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