

Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964–2012

Population Characteristics

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INTRODUCTION

Voting is arguably the most important civic opportunity given to citizens in the United States. In recent elections, much attention has been focused on the number of young people casting ballots.¹ Traditionally in American elections, young people have stood out for their consistently low levels of electoral participation, but a shift has appeared in some years, at least in part, in the direction of greater engagement. The main questions addressed in this analysis concern how important young-adult voting has been in the past, particularly recent presidential elections, and how important it may become in the future.

This research, which uses data from select November Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplements, comprises two main sections, each of which corresponds to a major criterion for determining voting eligibility.² The main difference in the two sections has to do with the population base used to calculate voting rates. The first section covers the period of 1964–2012 and focuses solely on the voting-age population, or the number of individuals who are old enough to vote legally in a given election, regardless of citizenship or other criteria. In most

instances, this population is the number of individuals 18 years of age and older, although there are some exceptions.³

In addition to the age requirement, voters in national elections must also be U.S. citizens. Although the U.S. Census Bureau has collected voting and registration data since 1964, the CPS has gathered consistent citizenship data in presidential elections only since 1996. Accounting for citizenship status provides a more accurate reflection of the population eligible to vote, therefore the second part of this analysis focuses on the age-eligible citizen population and is limited to the period of 1996–2012 for the reasons outlined above.⁴

Taken together, these two sections provide readers with a detailed historical portrait of voters in American presidential elections, with a specific focus on young adults. The first section provides broad historical context by focusing on age-eligible voters beginning in 1964, while the second section explores voting behavior in a more detailed fashion by accounting for citizenship status beginning in 1996.

¹ See <www.people-press.org/2012/11/26/young-voters-supported-obama-less-but-may-have-mattered-more/>.

² A third criterion not addressed in the CPS is felony disenfranchisement or the practice of not allowing convicted felons to vote. At least some of the nonvoters measured in this survey may have been felons, and as such, may have been unable to cast ballots legally.

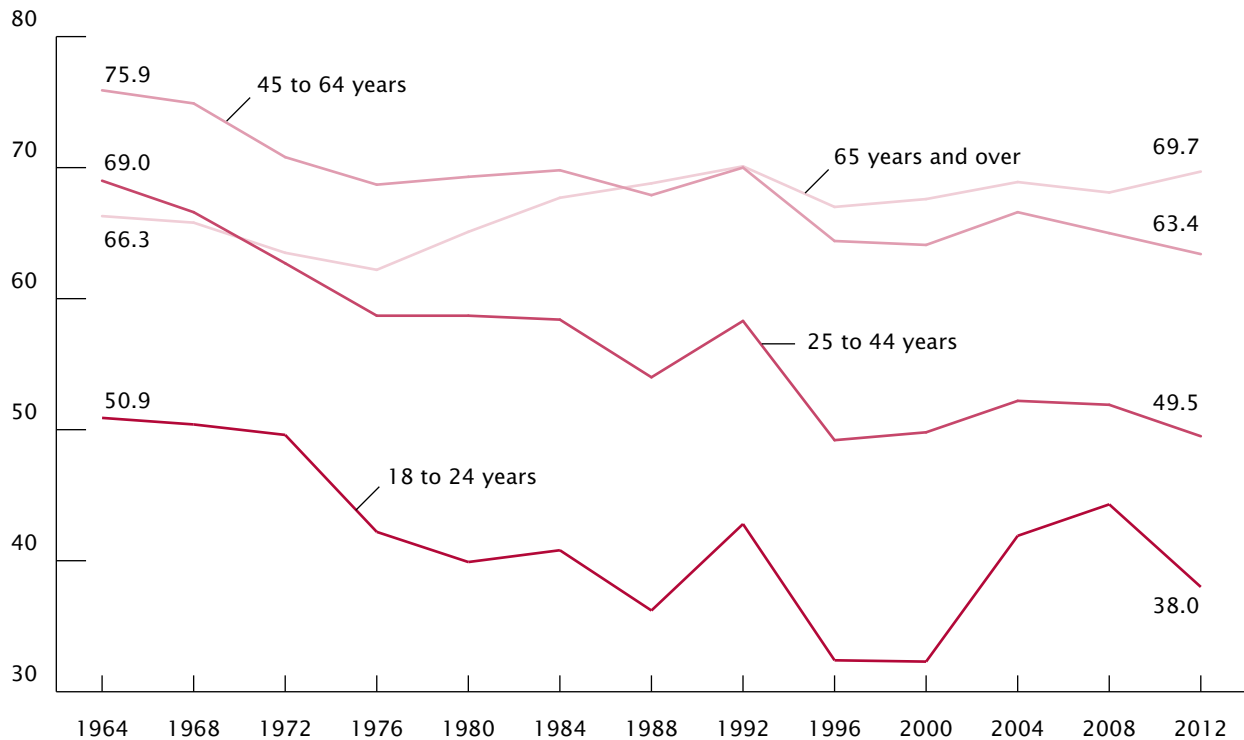
³ Prior to 1972, data are for people 21 and older with the exception of Georgia and Kentucky (18 and older), Alaska (19 and older), and Hawaii (20 and older). In 1972 and later years data are for the population 18 years of age and older for all states.

⁴ Removing noncitizens from the voting-eligible population increases voting rates, as the population base for the rates becomes smaller, while the number of people who report voting does not change.

Figure 1.

Voting Rates Over Time for the Voting-Age Population: 1964–2012

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Select Years.

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 2012 election data only with data from other recent presidential election years.

Historical Trends in the Voting-Age Population

Voting rates, which represent the number of voters relative to a given population or subpopulation, have varied across recent election cycles with the general outcome being that voting rates increase with age. In every presidential election since 1964, young voters between the ages of 18 through 24 have consistently voted at lower rates than all other age groups, although young-adult voting rates have fluctuated from one election to another (Figure 1). Overall, America’s youngest voters have moved towards less engagement over time, as 18- through 24-year-olds’ voting rates dropped from 50.9

percent in 1964 to 38.0 percent in 2012. The decline in voting rates discussed in this first section is partially due to the increase in the noncitizen population, which by definition does not vote.⁵

In certain elections, young adults have shown significant levels of increased engagement, first in 1992, when 18- through 24-year-old voting rates increased to 42.8 percent, and then again in 2004, when young-adult voting rates increased to 41.9 percent.⁶ The main difference between these two

⁵ Michael P. McDonald. 2007. “The True Electorate: A Cross-Validation of Voter File and Election Poll Demographics.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71(4): 588–602.

⁶ Young-adult voting rates in 1992 and 2004 were not statistically different.

Table 1.
Reported Rates of Voting: 1996–2012
 (Numbers in thousands)

Presidential election year	Total, 18 years and older	Citizens				
		Total	Voted			
			Number	Percent	90 percent confidence interval	
2012.....	235,248	215,081	132,948	61.8	61.5	62.1
2008.....	225,499	206,072	131,144	63.6	63.3	63.9
2004.....	215,694	197,005	125,736	63.8	63.5	64.1
2000.....	202,609	186,366	110,826	59.5	59.2	59.8
1996.....	193,651	179,935	105,017	58.4	58.1	58.7

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

periods of increased young-adult voting is in their longevity. Following the 1992 election increase, young-adult voting rates dropped to 32.4 percent in the very next presidential election (1996). In contrast, following the 2004 election increase, young-adult voting rates increased once again in 2008 to 44.3 percent, before dropping off in the election of 2012.

In contrast to young voters, in recent presidential elections Americans 65 years of age and older have typically had voting rates higher than all other age groups. In 2012, for example, the voting rate for the 65 years and older group was 69.7 percent, about 6 percentage points above the next highest age breakdown.

The phenomenon of elderly Americans voting at higher rates than all other age groups is a fairly recent development in American elections. Between 1964 and 1992, voting rates for the 65 years and older group were either lower than or not statistically different from at least some other age breakdown. In 1964, for example, the oldest group of Americans actually voted at a lower rate (66.3 percent) than both 25- through 44-year-olds (69.0

percent) and 45- through 64-year-olds (75.9 percent). It was not until 1996 that the oldest voting rates surpassed those of all other age groups, a development that has remained consistent in every presidential election since.

Older Americans showed an overall voting rate increase between 1964 and 2012 (66.3 percent to 69.7 percent), surpassing the rates of all other age groups. Voting rates decreased for 25- through 44-year-olds (69.0 percent in 1964 to 49.5 percent in 2012), and for 18- through 24-year-olds and 45- through 64-year-olds as well.⁷

At least some of the voting rate decreases observed in this section for younger Americans are likely attributable to increasing numbers of noncitizens living in the United States. According to 2012 Census Bureau estimates, the noncitizen population in the United States has grown to over 22 million people.⁸ As the number of voting-age noncitizens increases, it is important to

⁷ The historical voting rate decreases for 18- through 24-year-olds and 45- through 64-year-olds were not statistically different. These estimates do not account for citizenship status.

⁸ 2012 American Community Survey.

account for citizenship status when estimating voting rates.

Historical Trends in the Voting-Age Citizen Population

This section of the report presents voting statistics in presidential elections from 1996 to 2012. As mentioned earlier, although the Census Bureau has collected voting and registration data since 1964, the CPS has gathered consistent citizenship data in presidential elections only since 1996. By offering a more accurate reflection of the voting-eligible population, this section serves as a complement to the analysis already presented.

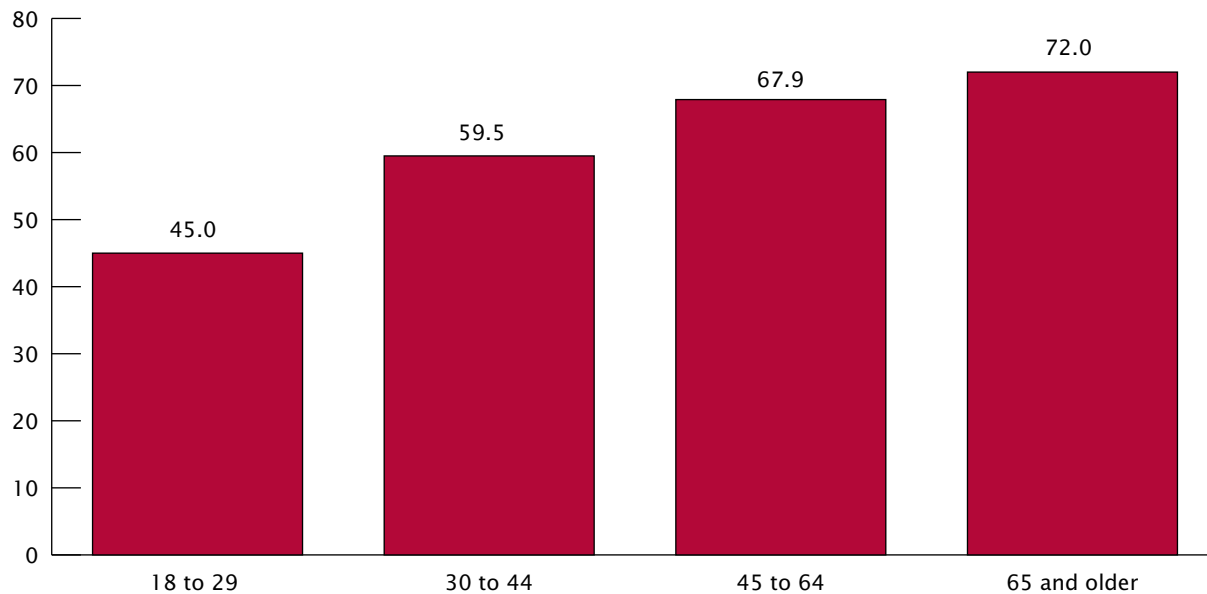
In an effort to expand the sample size and boost the reliability of the presented voting estimates, in the following section we have expanded the youngest age group from 18- through 24-year-olds to 18- through 29-year-olds.

Overall voting rates for the citizen voting-age population have fluctuated in recent presidential elections, from a low of 58.4 percent in 1996 to a high of about 64 percent in both 2004 and 2008 (Table 1).⁹ In 2012, the overall age-eligible citizen voting rate was 61.8 percent.

⁹ The overall voting rates in 2004 and 2008 were not statistically different.

Figure 2.
Voting Rates, by Age, for the Voting-Age Citizen Population: 2012

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012.

Since 1996, the number of citizens eligible to vote has increased in every presidential election, as has the number of citizens who have reported voting. Overall, 133 million people reported voting in 2012, a turnout increase of 1.8 million people since the election of 2008. Between 1996 and 2008, turnout increases were larger than in 2012, reaching a high of about 15 million additional voters in 2004. Table 2 displays the relative voting rate increases by age group over the five most recent presidential election cycles.

In 2012, the voting population 45 years of age and over increased, while the number of voters 18 through 44 years old decreased. Between 1996 and 2008, there was only a single example of an age group showing a decrease in net voting from one presidential election to the next, yet in 2012 significant decreases occurred for two age groups.¹⁰ Younger voters 18 through 29 years of age reported a net voting decrease of about 1.8 million, while voters between the

¹⁰ In 2008, 30- through 44-year-olds showed a net voter decrease of about 1.9 million from 2004.

ages of 30 through 44 reported a decrease of about 1.7 million.¹¹

In comparison with the election of 2008, about 4 million additional voters 65 years of age and older reported going to the polls in 2012, as did about 1.3 million additional voters between the ages of 45 through 64.

¹¹ The net voting decreases of 1.7 million and 1.8 million were not statistically different.

Table 2.

Voter Turnout, by Age: 1996–2012

(Numbers in thousands)

Year and age	Total votes cast	Change from previous presidential election
2012		
Total	132,948	1,804
18 to 29	20,539	-1,846
30 to 44	30,756	-1,740
45 to 64	52,013	1,270
65 and older	29,641	4,122
2008		
Total	131,144	5,408
18 to 29	22,385	2,260
30 to 44	32,496	-1,864
45 to 64	50,743	3,416
65 and older	25,519	1,594
2004		
Total	125,736	14,910
18 to 29	20,125	4,261
30 to 44	34,360	851
45 to 64	47,327	8,026
65 and older	23,925	1,772
2000		
Total	110,826	5,809
18 to 29	15,864	*215
30 to 44	33,509	*111
45 to 64	39,301	4,686
65 and older	22,153	797
1996		
Total	105,017	X
18 to 29	15,649	X
30 to 44	33,398	X
45 to 64	34,615	X
65 and older	21,356	X

* Not statistically different from zero.

X Not applicable.

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

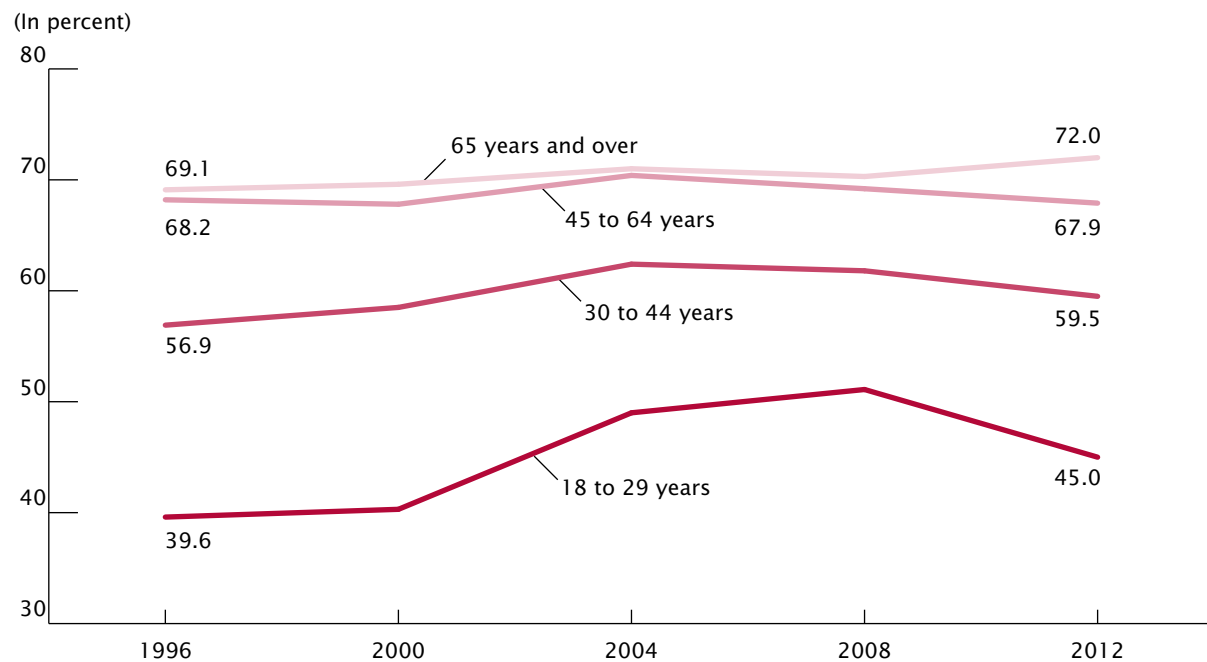
The following section of this report discusses two additional populations: the eligible population and the voting population.

The eligible population refers specifically to citizens 18 years of age and older—or the citizen voting-age population.

The voting population refers to the number of voting-age citizens who actually reported casting ballots.

This section also introduces measurements of voting relative to eligibility. It is important to note these concepts refer only to two voting-related measures for a specific group, and they do not compare one group with either another group or with national/overall measures.

Figure 3.
Voting Rates in Presidential Elections, by Age, for the Voting-Age Citizen Population: 1996-2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Select Years.

The Eligible Population and the Voting Population

Just as with the voting-age population, voting rates for the voting-age citizen population have varied across recent election cycles and have tended to increase with age (Figure 3). In 2012, Americans 65 years of age and older voted at a higher rate (72.0 percent) than any other age group.

One useful strategy for assessing electoral behavior is to compare a subpopulation's share of the eligible population with their share of the population that actually voted. If a group accounts for 50 percent of the eligible population (i.e., citizens 18 years of age and older) and 75 percent of the voting population (i.e., citizens who actually reported casting ballots), then we can say

this group is over voting relative to their share of the eligible population. However, if the same subgroup accounts for only 25 percent of the voting population, this group may be said to have under-voted at the polls, relative to their group's eligibility rate.

Table 3.
Composition of the Eligible Population and Voting Population, by Age: 1996–2012

(Numbers in thousands)

Year and age	Percentage of eligible population ¹	Percentage of voting population ²
2012		
18 to 29	21.2	15.4
30 to 44	24.0	23.1
45 to 64	35.6	39.1
65 and older	19.1	22.3
2008		
18 to 29	21.3	17.1
30 to 44	25.5	24.8
45 to 64	35.6	38.7
65 and older	17.6	19.5
2004		
18 to 29	20.9	16.0
30 to 44	27.9	27.3
45 to 64	34.1	37.6
65 and older	17.1	19.0
2000		
18 to 29	21.1	14.3
30 to 44	30.7	30.2
45 to 64	31.1	35.5
65 and older	17.1	20.0
1996		
18 to 29	22.0	14.9
30 to 44	32.6	31.8
45 to 64	28.2	33.0
65 and older	17.2	20.3

¹The eligible electorate refers specifically to citizens 18 years and older.

²The voting population refers to the percentage of those who actually reported casting ballots.

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

Table 3 shows groups by both their percentage share of the eligible population and their percentage share of the voting population.¹²

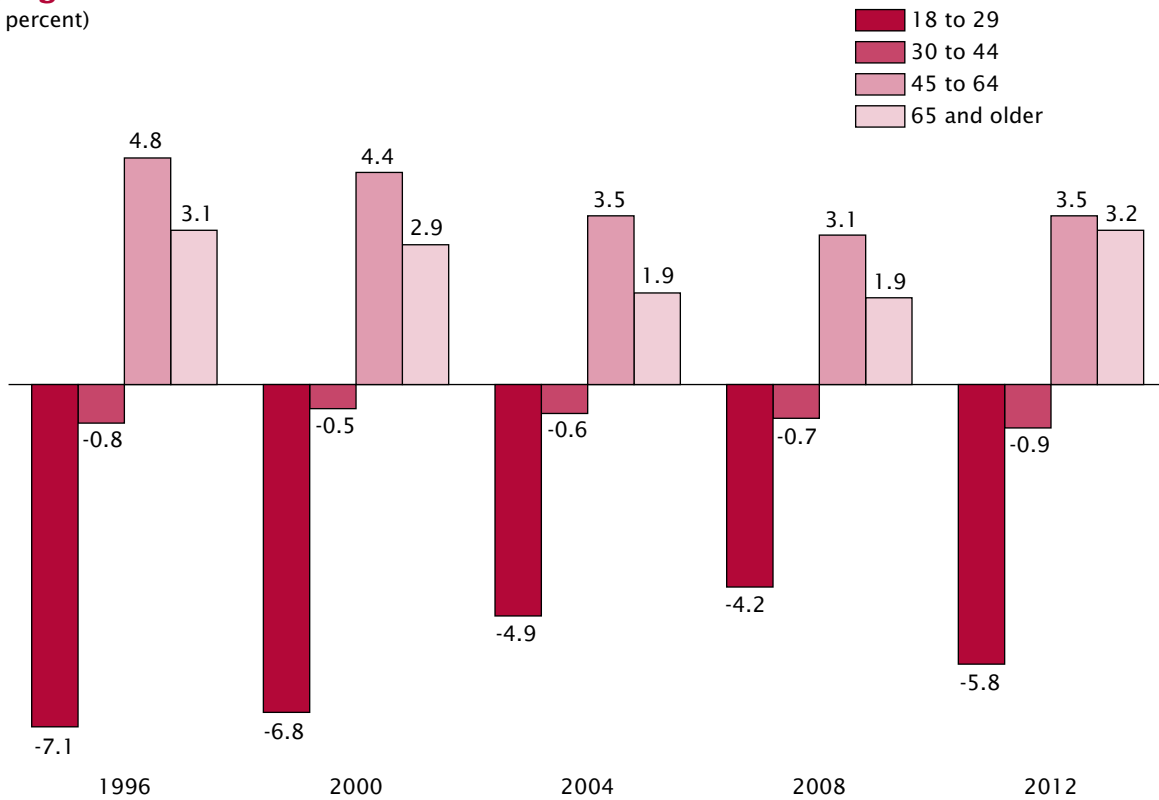
Overall, younger Americans have consistently under-voted at the polls relative to their eligibility. The magnitude of these differences has fluctuated over time. As Figure 4 illustrates, the voting rate of young people aged 18 through 29 was 7.1 points below the group’s eligibility rate in 1996. In 2000, the young-adult under-voting rate was not statistically different from 1996, but in 2004, 2008, and 2012, the young-adult under-voting rate was smaller than in 1996.

In 2012, the voting rate of young people aged 18 through 29 was 5.8 points below the group’s eligibility rate. This estimate of the relative young-adult under-vote is larger than it was in either 2004 or 2008, an indication that the under-voting decreases observed in those elections were temporary.

Older Americans, meanwhile, have been more inclined to vote at higher rates than their share of the eligible population. Overall, the voting rate gap between younger and older voters narrowed in the elections of 2004 and 2008, but opened up again in 2012. When viewed alongside the analysis of the voting-age population in the “Historical Trends in the Voting-Age Population” section, it seems likely that the observed young-adult voting surge of 2004–2008 was temporary and not representative of

¹² U.S. citizens living abroad, and people in institutionalized housing, such as correctional facilities or nursing homes, were not included in the November Voting Supplement. 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 non-demographic information is included for Armed Forces members.

Figure 4.
Differences Between Shares of the Eligible Population and Voting Population, by Age: 1996–2012
 (In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Select Years.

a permanent shift towards greater young-adult engagement in presidential elections.

Age and Gender Voting Gaps

Voting rates have also historically varied according to gender. In every presidential election since 1996, women have voted at higher rates than men (Figure 5). Most recently in 2012, the spread was about 4 percentage points.

Since 1996, a gender voting rate gap has been consistently present for most age groups, particularly young voters. In every election in this section, young women between the ages of 18 through 29

voted at higher rates than young men of the same ages, reaching a differential of about 8 percentage points in 2008.¹³ In each election since 1996, women have voted at higher rates than men for all age groups except in the oldest age group.

For elderly Americans, a gender voting gap has operated in reverse, with men 65-years-of-age and older voting at higher rates than women in every election since 1996. At about 6.5 percentage points, this differential was larger in 1996 than in the two most recent elections,

¹³ The 2008 differential was not statistically different from 1996, 2004, and 2012.

with elderly men voting at a higher rate than elderly women by about 3.7 percentage points in 2012, an indication that as a new cohort ages into the 65-years-of-age and older category, the gender divide of elderly men voting at higher rates than elderly women may soon be a thing of the past.^{14,15}

Young-Adult Voting Patterns by State

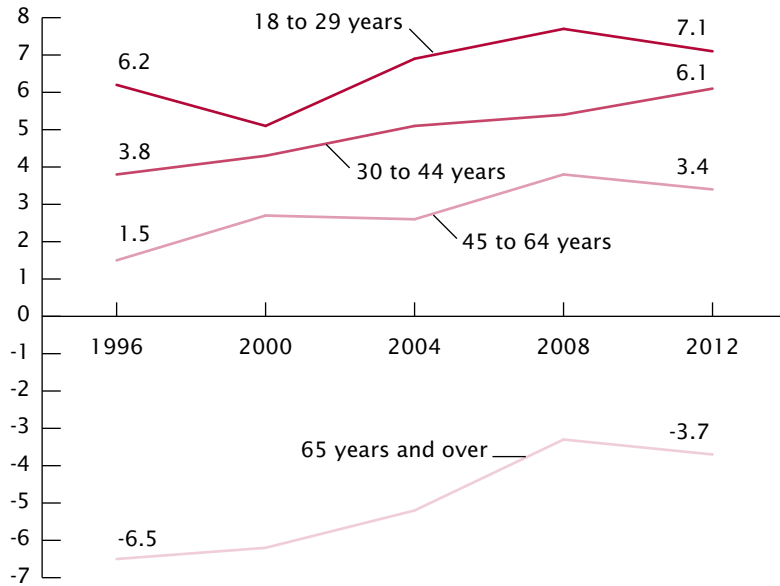
Although the CPS is representative at the state level, the sample sizes for state voting statistics, when

¹⁴ The 1996 differential was not statistically different from 2000 or 2004.

¹⁵ The 2012 differential was not statistically different from 2004 and 2008.

Figure 5.
**Female Voting Rates Relative to Male Voting Rates,
 By Age, for the Voting-Age Citizen Population:
 1996-2012**

(In percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Select Years.

combined with subestimates of the population such as age, result in margins of error for voting rates in many states that are so large as to make comparisons across states difficult. In this section, we discuss state-level voting outcomes for 18- through 29-year-olds that have been statistically tested against the national average. Certain states may have young-adult voting outcomes that appear quite different from the national average, but after statistical testing is completed, these voting rates are shown not to be statistically different from the national rate. Users should interpret state-level results with caution.

Although 18- through 29-year-olds voted at lower levels than other

age groups nationally in 2012, this result was not geographically uniform. Table 4 displays each state's young-adult voting rate alongside the voting rate for each state's population 30 years of age and older. Table 4 also shows whether or not these voting rates were statistically different from the respective national averages.

In the majority of states (27), the young-adult voting rate did not differ statistically from the national average, but in 14 states, young-adult voting rates were statistically higher than the national standard. These states where young people had comparatively high levels of voting were not geographically clustered but were typically states

with high voting rates among the rest of the population, as all but three of these with high young-adult voting rates had high voting rates among the 30-years-of-age and older population as well. The only exceptions were North Dakota, Ohio, and South Carolina.

In ten states, young-adult voting rates were statistically lower than the national young-adult average of 45.0 percent. All geographies where young people had low levels of young-adult voting relative to the national level were located in either the southern or western parts of the country, and in all but four of these low young-adult voting rate states, voting rates for the 30-years-of-age and older population were also lower than the national average. Exceptions included Alaska, Kansas, South Dakota, and Wyoming. Kansas was the only state with a significantly low young adult voting rate alongside a significantly high 30-years-of-age and older voting rate.

Discussion

These state level findings suggest that in many parts of the country in 2012, voting rates for young adults aged 18 through 29 were consistent with voting rates for the rest of a state's population. Throughout this report, we have documented the many instances where young people, either those aged 18 through 24 or aged 18 through 29, have been less inclined than other age groups to turnout at the polls. Although these deficits exist, young-adult voters have tended to be more engaged, relative to one another, in states with older populations that are highly engaged as well. At the very least, this suggests that low voting rates among

Table 4.
Voting Rates by Age and State: 2012
 (Numbers in thousands)

State	Citizens			
	Young adults 18–29		Adults 30 years and older	
	Voting rate	Margin of error (±)	Voting rate	Margin of error (±)
District of Columbia	*69.9	4.8	*78.3	2.7
Mississippi	*68.1	5.1	*76.4	2.5
Wisconsin	*58.0	5.0	*77.5	2.1
Minnesota	*57.7	5.1	*77.2	2.2
Iowa	*57.1	5.8	*72.3	2.7
North Carolina	*56.5	3.9	*71.9	1.8
South Carolina	*55.9	5.6	66.9	2.7
Colorado	*55.7	5.2	*74.6	2.5
New Hampshire	*55.6	6.0	*72.8	2.7
Massachusetts	*53.5	4.5	*75.4	2.1
Louisiana	*52.8	5.6	*69.9	2.7
Virginia	*52.1	4.1	*70.7	2.0
North Dakota	*51.9	5.3	67.4	2.8
Oregon	51.0	5.7	*71.7	2.7
Ohio	*50.2	3.5	66.6	1.7
Maryland	50.1	4.8	*69.4	2.5
Michigan	48.5	3.9	*71.4	1.8
Missouri	48.5	4.9	67.9	2.4
Rhode Island	47.5	6.0	66.0	3.0
Georgia	46.8	3.8	65.8	1.9
Maine	46.6	6.7	*73.5	2.8
Washington	46.5	4.6	*70.4	2.2
New Jersey	46.1	4.0	65.7	2.1
Pennsylvania	46.1	3.3	65.5	1.6
Delaware	46.0	5.9	*71.9	2.6
Florida	45.8	2.7	#64.3	1.4
New Mexico	45.6	5.4	65.8	2.8
Nebraska	45.1	5.7	65.7	2.9
United States	45.0	0.6	66.3	0.3
Montana	44.6	5.6	*71.2	2.6
Illinois	43.8	3.2	66.2	1.7
Kentucky	43.8	5.5	#63.4	2.8
California	43.7	1.8	#61.9	1.1
Connecticut	43.0	5.7	67.4	2.8
Idaho	42.7	5.4	*69.0	2.6
Nevada	42.5	5.0	#62.9	3.0
New York	42.4	2.5	#63.4	1.5
Tennessee	42.1	4.6	#59.2	2.4
Indiana	41.1	4.6	#63.8	2.3
Vermont	40.6	6.2	68.6	2.9
Utah	40.5	4.5	#62.8	2.7
Alabama	40.3	5.4	67.2	2.6
Kansas	#38.3	5.2	*70.3	2.8
Arizona	#38.1	4.4	#61.0	2.5
Alaska	#37.9	5.3	64.4	2.9
Wyoming	#37.5	5.5	64.6	2.9
South Dakota	#36.4	4.8	68.6	2.6
Hawaii	#30.5	4.9	#56.4	2.8
Arkansas	#30.4	4.8	#59.8	2.9
Texas	#29.6	2.0	#61.4	1.3
Oklahoma	#27.1	4.8	#59.9	2.9
West Virginia	#23.6	4.7	#53.1	2.6

* Indicates that the estimate is statistically higher from the national average for that age group.

Indicates that the estimate is statistically lower from the national average for that age group.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2012.

young adults can vary according to geography and other factors.

On the national level, whether looking at the voting-age population or the voting-age citizen population, in every year of this analysis, young adults had voting rates below all other age groups. The first section of this report documented how Americans 65 years of age and older voted at higher rates than all other age groups in 2012, a result consistent with the last five presidential elections. However, historical age-based voting patterns are not set in stone. As recently as 1992, the voting population's oldest group did not vote at a level higher than all other age groups.

In 1992, and then again in 2004, voting rates for young-adults aged 18 through 24 increased significantly. The 1992 increase was short-lived, as young-adult voting rates dropped off in the very next presidential election, but the 2004 increase was actually compounded by another increase in 2008, all of which happened in advance of another young-adult voting decline in 2012.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY OF THE DATA

The data in this report come from the November 2012 Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement, which surveys the civilian noninstitutionalized population in the United States.

The population represented (the population universe) in the Voting and Registration Supplement to the November 2012 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.

The November CPS supplement, which asks questions on voting and registration participation, provides the basis for estimates in this report. The first question in the 2012 supplement asked if respondents voted in the election held on Tuesday, November 6, 2012. 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 the election.

As in all surveys, the Current Population Survey estimates are subject to sampling and non-sampling error. Data users should observe the size of standard errors when interpreting the data presented in this report—the larger the margin of error, the less reliable the estimate. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

Nonsampling error in surveys is attributable to a variety of sources, such as survey design, the respondent’s interpretation of a question, the respondent’s 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, 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/apspd/techdoc/cps/> or by contacting the Demographic Statistical Methods Division via e-mail at <dsmd.source.and.accuracy@census.gov>.

Measuring Voting and Registration in the Current Population Survey

The Current Population Survey (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 these official results. These tallies show the number of votes counted for specific offices. In the presidential elections discussed in this report, the official count of comparison is the total number of votes cast for the office of the President, or the aggregate of the individual state reports as reported by the Clerk of the House.

Discrepancies occur in each election between the CPS estimates and

the official counts.¹⁶ In previous years, the disparity in the estimates in presidential elections has varied, with official tallies typically showing lower turnout.¹⁷ 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.

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, even though they may report voting during their CPS interview.

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

¹⁶ Information about state regulations for registration and voting can be found at the National Conference of State Legislatures Web site, <www.ncsl.org>, or from the individual state election offices.

¹⁷ 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/member_info/electionInfo>.

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.¹⁸

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, and therefore does not capture voting

¹⁸ See Holbrook, Allyson L. and Krosnick, John A. “Social Desirability Bias In Voter Turnout Reports: Tests Using the Item Count Technique.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 74, Issue 1. Oxford University Press.

for citizens residing in the United States who were in the military or living in institutions. The CPS also does not capture voting for citizens residing outside the United States, both civilian and military, who cast absentee ballots.

MORE INFORMATION

Detailed tabulations are available that provide demographic characteristics of the population by voting and registration. The Census Bureau also provides a series of historical tables and graphics, in addition to an interactive “Voting Hot Report.” Electronic versions of these products and this report are available at <www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting>.

CONTACT

Contact the U.S. Census Bureau Customer Services Center toll free at 1-800-923-8282 or <<https://ask.census.gov/>>.

SUGGESTED CITATION

File, Thom. 2013. “Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964–2012.” *Current Population Survey Reports*, P20-572. U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

USER COMMENTS

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of our data and reports. Please send comments and suggestions to:

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