

Characteristics of the Electorate by Generational Status: Analysis of the Current Population Survey, 1996-2008

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ABSTRACT

The Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplement collects data on the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the nation's electorate. The CPS is effective in its capacity to characterize the population on the basis of the fundamental question: "Did you vote?"

The U.S. Census Bureau uses questions on parental place of birth to divide the population into generational statuses: the "first generation" (the foreign born), "second generation" (natives with at least one foreign-born parent), and "third-or-higher generation" (natives with no foreign-born parents).

While other studies have documented relationships between voting and factors such as age, sex, race, educational attainment, income, and occupation, few have examined these relationships by generational status. This poster examines levels of voting and registration, by generational status, in the four most recent (2008, 2004, 2000, 1996) presidential elections and the demographic and economic characteristics of the electorate during the 2008 elections.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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In 2008, according to the Current Population Survey, of the 300.2 million people in the United States, 37.7 million were first generation, 32.5 million were second generation, and 230 million were third-or-higher generation.¹ While about one-fourth (23.4 percent) were foreign stock (the

¹ The CPS Voting and Registration Supplement collects information from the civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 18 years and older.

first plus the second generation), the majority (76.6 percent) were native born with native-born parents.

The national electorate includes U.S. citizens aged 18 years and older. In 2008, there were 206.1 million U.S. citizens aged 18 years and older, including 15.4 million first generation, 18.0 million second generation, and 172.6 million third-or-higher generation. Furthermore, a person must be registered to vote in order to be eligible to vote. In 2008, 146.3 million people were registered to vote, including 9.3 million first generation, 12.3 million second generation, and 124.7 million third-or-higher generation.

Also in 2008, there were 131.2 million voters, including 8.3 million first generation, 10.9 million second generation, and 112.0 million third-or-higher generation voters. While the first generation represented a relatively small proportion (6.3 percent) of the electorate, they were the fastest growing group of voters, increasing by about 4 million – or 90 percent – between 1996 and 2008. By comparison, the second generation voters declined by about 300 thousand (3 percent) while third-or-higher generation voters increased by 22.5 million (25 percent) during this same period.

Regardless of the recent growth in the foreign born, the first generation is the least likely of all generation groups to vote. In 2008, the third-or-higher generation had the highest voter turnout (about 64 percent) compared with 60 percent for the second generation and 54 percent for the first generation.

This poster will analyze voter participation in the 1996 through 2008 presidential elections, by world region of birth and generational status. It will examine generational differences in the demographic and economic characteristics of the electorate during the November 2008 presidential election. The goal of this poster is to describe socioeconomic characteristics of the electorate in an effort to assess how these characteristics, along with generation, may influence voter participation. The analysis will be primarily descriptive and will be displayed as figures.

FIGURES

Introduction

Introductory paragraph

Text box: Define foreign born, native born, first generation, second generation, and third-or-higher generation

The National Electorate

Figure 1. The National Electorate by World Region of Birth: 1996 – 2008

Figure 2. The National Electorate by Generational Status: 1996 – 2008

Reported Rates of Voting

Figure 3. Reported Rates of Voting and Registration by World Region of Birth: 1996 – 2008

Figure 4. Reported Rates of Voting and Registration by Generational Status: 1996 – 2008

Social and Economic Characteristics of Voters by Generation

Figure 5. Voter Participation by Age Group and Generation: 2008

Figure 6. Voter Participation by Educational Attainment and Generation: 2008

Figure 7. Voter Participation by Employment Status and Generation: 2008

Figure 8. Voter Participation by Occupation and Generation: 2008

Figure 9. Voter Participation by Tenure and Generation: 2008

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