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Behind Biden's 2020 Victory

An examination of the 2020 electorate, based on validated voters

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How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this study to understand how Americans voted in 2020 and how their turnout and vote choices differed from 2016 and 2018. For this analysis, we surveyed U.S. adults online and verified their turnout in the three general elections using commercial voter files that aggregate official state turnout records. Panelists for whom a record of voting was located are considered validated voters; all others are presumed not to have voted.

We surveyed 11,818 U.S. adults online in November 2020, 10,640 adults in November 2018 and 4,183 adults in November and December 2016. The surveys were supplemented with measures taken from annual recruitment and profile surveys conducted in 2018 and 2020. Everyone who took part is a member of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP), an online survey panel recruited through national, random sampling of telephone numbers or, since 2018, residential addresses. This way nearly all U.S. adults have a chance of selection. The surveys are weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education, turnout and vote choice in the three elections, and many other characteristics. Read more about the ATP's methodology.

Here are the questions used for this report and its methodology.

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An examination of the 2020 electorate, based on validated voters

The 2020 presidential election was historic in many ways. Amid a global pandemic, with unprecedented changes in how Americans voted, voter turnout rose 7 percentage points over 2016, resulting in a total of 66% of U.S. adult citizens casting a ballot in the 2020 election. Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump 306-232 in the Electoral College and had a 4-point margin in the popular vote. While Biden's popular vote differential was an improvement over Hillary Clinton's 2016 2-point advantage, it was not as resounding as congressional Democrats' 9-point advantage over Republicans in votes cast in the 2018 elections for the U.S. House of Representatives.

A new analysis of validated 2020 voters from Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel examines change and continuity in the electorate, both of which contributed to Biden's victory. It looks at how new voters and voters who turned out in one or both previous elections voted in the 2020 presidential election and offers a detailed portrait of the demographic composition and vote choices of the 2020 electorate. It also provides a comparison with findings from our previous studies of the 2016 and 2018 electorates.

A number of factors determined the composition of the 2020 electorate and explain how it delivered Biden a victory. Among those who voted for Clinton and Trump in 2016, similar shares of each – about nine-in-ten – also turned out in 2020, and the vast majority remained loyal to the same party in the 2020 presidential contest. These voters formed substantial bases of support for both Biden and Trump. Overall, there were shifts in presidential candidate support among some key groups between 2016 and 2020, notably suburban voters and independents. On balance, these shifts helped Biden a little more than Trump.

> ### Validated voters, defined
>
> Members of Pew Research Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel were matched to public voting records from three national commercial voter files in an attempt to find a record for voting in the 2020 election. **Validated voters** are citizens who told us in a post-election survey that they voted in the 2020 general election *and* have a record for voting in a commercial voter file. Nonvoters are citizens who were not found to have a record of voting in any of the voter files or told us they did not vote.
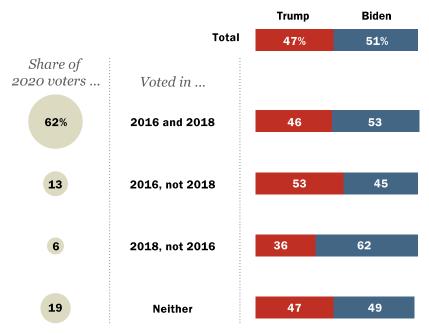
Overall, one-in-four 2020 voters (25%) had not voted in 2016. About a quarter of these (6% of all 2020 voters) showed up two years later – in 2018 – to cast ballots in the highest-turnout midterm election in decades. Those who voted in 2018 but not in 2016 backed Biden over Trump in the 2020 election by about two-to-one (62% to 36%).

Both Trump and Biden were able to bring new voters into the political process in 2020. The 19% of 2020 voters who did not vote in 2016 or 2018 split roughly evenly between the two candidates (49% Biden vs. 47% Trump). However, as with voters overall, there was a substantial age divide within this group. Among those under age 30 who voted in 2020 but not in either of the two previous elections, Biden led

Voters who voted in 2018 but not 2016 favored Biden in 2020

% of 2020 validated voters who voted for …

	Share of 2020 voters …	Voted in …	Trump	Biden
Total			**47%**	**51%**
	62%	**2016 and 2018**	46	53
	13	**2016, not 2018**	53	45
	6	**2018, not 2016**	36	62
	19	**Neither**	47	49

Notes: Based on 8,592 (2016), 8,405 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters who provided their 2020 vote choice in a post-election survey. Validated voters are those citizens who said they voted in a post-election survey *and* were found to have voted in commercial voter files. For panelists who did not participate in the post-election surveys in 2016 and 2018, measures of turnout were included from subsequent annual recruitment and profile surveys in 2018 and 2020. See Methodology for details.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Aug. 20-Oct. 28, 2018, Nov. 7-16, 2018, Aug. 3-16, 2020, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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59% to 33%, while Trump won among new or irregular voters ages 30 and older by 55% to 42%. Younger voters also made up an outsize share of these voters: Those under age 30 made up 38% of new or irregular 2020 voters, though they represented just 15% of *all* 2020 voters.

One somewhat unusual aspect of the 2016 election was the relatively high share of voters (nearly 6%) who voted for one of the third-party candidates (mostly the Libertarian and Green Party nominees), a fact many observers attributed to the relative unpopularity of both major party candidates. By comparison, just 2% of voters chose a third-party candidate in 2020. Overall, third-party 2016 voters who turned out in 2020 voted 53%-36% for Biden over Trump, with 10% opting for a third-party candidate. Among the 5% of Republicans who voted third-party in 2016 and voted in 2020, a majority (70%) supported Trump in 2020, but 18% backed Biden. Among the 5% of

Democrats who voted third-party in 2016 and voted in 2020, just 8% supported Trump in 2020 while 85% voted for Biden.

Here are some of the other key findings from the analysis:

- **Biden made gains with suburban voters.** In 2020, Biden improved upon Clinton's vote share with suburban voters: 45% supported Clinton in 2016 vs. 54% for Biden in 2020. This shift was also seen among White voters: Trump narrowly won White suburban voters by 4 points in 2020 (51%-47%); he carried this group by 16 points in 2016 (54%-38%). At the same time, Trump grew his vote share among rural voters. In 2016, Trump won 59% of rural voters, a number that rose to 65% in 2020.

- **Trump made gains among Hispanic voters.** Even as Biden held on to a majority of Hispanic voters in 2020, Trump made gains among this group overall. There was a wide educational divide among Hispanic voters: Trump did substantially better with those without a college degree than college-educated Hispanic voters (41% vs. 30%).

- **Apart from the small shift among Hispanic voters, Joe Biden's electoral coalition looked much like Hillary Clinton's, with Black, Hispanic and Asian voters and those of other races casting about four-in-ten of his votes.** Black voters remained overwhelmingly loyal to the Democratic Party, voting 92%-8% for Biden.

- **Biden made gains with men, while Trump improved among women, narrowing the gender gap.** The gender gap in the 2020 election was narrower than it had been in 2016, both because of gains that Biden made among men and because of gains Trump made among women. In 2020, men were almost evenly divided between Trump and Biden, unlike in 2016 when Trump won men by 11 points. Trump won a slightly larger share of women's votes in 2020 than in 2016 (44% vs. 39%), while Biden's share among women was nearly identical to Clinton's (55% vs. 54%).

- **Biden improved over Clinton among White non-college voters.** White voters without a college degree were critical to Trump's victory in 2016, when he won the group by 64% to 28%. In 2018, Democrats were able to gain some ground with these voters, earning 36% of the White, non-college vote to Republicans' 61%. In 2020, Biden roughly maintained Democrats' 2018 share among the group, improving upon Clinton's 2016 performance by receiving the votes of 33%. But Trump's share of the vote among this group – who represented 42% of the total electorate this year – was nearly identical to his vote share in 2016 (65%).

▪ **Biden grew his support with some religious groups while Trump held his ground.**
Both Trump and Biden held onto or gained with large groups within their respective religious
coalitions. Trump's strong support among White evangelical Protestants ticked up (77% in
2016, 84% in 2020) while Biden got more support among atheists and agnostics than did
Clinton in 2016.

▪ **After decades of constituting the majority of voters, Baby Boomers and members
of the Silent Generation made up less than half of the electorate in 2020 (44%),
falling below the 52% they constituted in both 2016 and 2018.** Gen Z and Millennial
voters favored Biden over Trump by margins of about 20 points, while Gen Xers and Boomers
were more evenly split in their preferences. Gen Z voters, those ages 23 and younger,
constituted 8% of the electorate, while Millennials and Gen Xers made up 47% of 2020 voters.[1]

▪ **A record number of voters reported casting ballots by mail in 2020 – including
many voters who said it was their first time doing so.** Nearly half of 2020 voters (46%)
said they had voted by mail or absentee, and among that group, about four-in-ten said it was
their first time casting a ballot this way. Hispanic and White voters were more likely than Black
voters to have cast absentee or mail ballots, while Black voters were more likely than White or
Hispanic voters to have voted early in person. Urban and suburban voters were also more
likely than rural voters to have voted absentee or by mail ballot.

This analysis is based on a survey of 11,818 members of Pew Research Center's American Trends
Panel conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020, shortly after the general election. It also draws on surveys
conducted among 10,640 panelists from Nov. 7-16, 2018, after the midterm election that year and
4,183 panelists from Nov. 29 to Dec. 12, 2016, after the general election. Researchers attempted to
match the panelists to three different commercial voter files that contain official records of voter
registration and turnout for 2016, 2018 and 2020. (For more details, see Methodology.)

This study marries official turnout records with a post-election survey among a large, ongoing
survey panel, with the goal of improving the accuracy of the results compared with relying on self-
reported turnout alone. The survey panel also makes it possible to examine change in turnout and
vote preference over time among many of the same individuals. This analysis joins a growing body
of research seeking to achieve a more accurate assessment of the 2020 election, each based on
somewhat different sources of data.[2] Different methods and data sources have unique strengths

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[1] Gen Z is defined here as voters born between 1997 and 2002, Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, Gen Xers were born
between 1965 and 1980, Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, and members of the Silent Generation were born between
1928 and 1945. See here for more on how Pew Research Center defines generations.

[2] The list is fairly long and growing: Voter surveys conducted for major news organizations, including the exit polls by Edison Research for the
National Election Pool and AP VoteCast by NORC at the University of Chicago for the Associated Press and Fox News; the Current Population

and weaknesses, meaning that specific estimates are likely to vary among the studies and no single resource can be considered definitive.

Voting patterns in the 2020 election

The 2020 election featured continuity in the voting patterns of major demographic and political groups in the population, but there were a few important shifts. The gender gap in the 2020 election was narrower than it had been in 2016 as Democrats made gains among men and Republicans made gains among women. In the 2016 election, Donald Trump won men by 11 percentage points (52% to 41%) while Hillary Clinton won women by 15 points (54% to 39%). In the 2018 election, Democrats substantially narrowed the gap with men (50% of men voted for Democratic candidates, 48% for Republican candidates) while maintaining an 18-point lead among women. In the 2020 election, men again divided nearly evenly (50% Trump, 48% Biden), while Biden's advantage narrowed to 11 points among women (55% to 44%).

Similarly, as Biden increased his level of support among White men in the 2020 election relative to Clinton's in 2016, Trump gained among White women, which had the effect of further narrowing

The gender gap narrowed among White voters

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016			2018			2020		
	Share voting for …		**Margin (Dem.-Rep.)**	Share voting …		**Margin (Dem.-Rep.)**	Share voting for …		**Margin (Dem.-Rep.)**
	Clinton	Trump		Dem.	Rep.		Biden	Trump	
Total	48%	46%	2	53%	44%	9	51%	47%	4
Men	41	52	11	50	48	2	48	50	2
Women	54	39	15	58	40	18	55	44	11
White, non-Hispanic	39	54	15	46	52	6	43	55	12
Black, non-Hispanic	91	6	85	92	6	86	92	8	84
Hispanic	66	28	38	72	25	47	59	38	21
Asian*				73	26	47	72	28	44
White men	32	62	30	43	55	12	40	57	17
White women	45	47	2	50	48	2	46	53	7
Black men				92	6	86	87	12	75
Black women				93	5	88	95	5	90
Hispanic men				69	27	42	57	40	17
Hispanic women				75	23	52	61	37	24

*Asian adults interviewed in English only.
Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. White, Black and Asian adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown. There were insufficient sample sizes in 2016 to separately show Black and Hispanic men and women. There were insufficient sample sizes in 2016 to show responses among Asians.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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the gender gap among White voters. In 2016, Trump won White men by 30 points (62% to 32%). That gap narrowed to a 17-point margin for Trump in 2020 (57% to 40%). White women, a group sometimes categorized as swing voters and who broke nearly evenly in 2016 (47% for Trump to 45% for Clinton), favored him in 2020 (53% to 46%).

Biden received the support of 92% of Black voters, nearly the same as Clinton received in 2016 and Democratic candidates for the U.S. House received in 2018.

While Biden took a 59% majority of the Hispanic vote, Trump (with 38%) gained significantly over the level of support Republican candidates for the House received in 2018 (25%). To be sure, Hispanic voters are not a monolith; there is substantial diversity within the Hispanic electorate.

As in 2016 and 2018, wide educational differences among 2020 voters

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016			2018			2020		
	Share voting for ...		**Margin**	Share voting ...		**Margin**	Share voting for ...		**Margin**
	Clinton	Trump	**(Dem.-Rep.)**	Dem.	Rep.	**(Dem.-Rep.)**	Biden	Trump	**(Dem.-Rep.)**
Postgraduate	66%	29%	37	68%	30%	38	67%	32%	35
College graduate	52	41	11	58	41	17	56	42	14
Some college	42	49	7	48	49	1	49	50	1
High school or less	44	51	7	47	51	4	41	56	15
College grad+	57	36	21	62	36	26	61	37	24
Some college or less	43	50	7	47	50	3	45	53	8
White, college grad+	55	38	17	58	40	18	57	42	15
White, some college or less	28	64	36	36	61	25	33	65	32
Black, college grad+				90	7	83	92	8	84
Black, some college or less				93	5	88	92	8	84
Hispanic, college grad+				74	21	53	69	30	39
Hispanic, some college or less				71	27	44	55	41	14

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. White and Black adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown. Insufficient sample sizes in 2016 to separately show Black and Hispanic voters by education. There are too few respondents who identify as Asian American, Native American or other racial or ethnic groups to draw conclusions about differences by education.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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One noteworthy feature of the 2020 election was the wide education gap among Hispanic voters. In 2020, Biden won college-educated Hispanic voters 69% to 30%. At the same time, Biden's advantage over Trump among Hispanic voters who did not have a college degree was far narrower (55% to 41%).

One of the most pivotal groups in the 2016 election was White voters without a four-year college degree, who were critical to Trump's electoral college victory that year (nationally, he won them by a wide 36-point margin in 2016, 64% to 28%). Prior to 2016, differences in candidate preferences by education were typically much smaller than they were that year. In 2020, Trump won 65% of White non-college voters – nearly identical to his 2016 share – even as Biden outperformed Clinton among this group (33% of White non-college voters backed Biden, up from the 28% of this group Clinton won in 2016). At the same time, White voters with a college degree or higher supported Biden by roughly the same margin they had backed Clinton in 2016.

Trump's stronghold among White men without a four-year college degree loosened somewhat in 2020. While he still won this group by a little more than two-to one (66% to Biden's 31%), that 35 percentage point gap is notably smaller than the 50-point gap in the 2016 election, when 73% of White men without a college degree supported Trump, compared with 23% who supported Clinton. Meanwhile, White men with a four-year college degree have become increasingly supportive of Democratic candidates, breaking close to evenly in 2016 (47% for Clinton, 44% for Trump) but supporting Biden by a 10-point margin in 2020.

At the same time, Trump's vote share among White women without a college degree grew slightly between the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. In 2016, White, non-college women supported Trump by a margin of 56% to 33%. By 2020, Trump's vote share rose to 64% among this group compared with 35% supporting Biden. Among white women with a college degree, support for Biden was on par with support for Clinton in 2016 (59%-40% in 2020).

Party and ideology

Biden and Trump benefited from similar levels of party loyalty in 2020, with Trump receiving 92% support among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents and Biden getting 94% among Democrats and Democratic leaners. Comparable levels of support for each candidate were seen among Democrats (95% for Biden) and Republicans (94% for Trump), not including leaners. Among independents and those who affiliated with other parties, Biden led Trump by 52%-43%.

Biden substantially increased Democratic support among independents from 2016

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016			2018			2020		
	Clinton	Trump	Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	Dem.	Rep.	Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	Biden	Trump	Margin (Dem.-Rep.)
Republican/lean Rep.	4%	89%	85	6%	91%	85	6%	92%	86
Democrat/lean Dem.	89	5	84	95	3	92	94	4	90
Republican	4	92	88	4	95	91	5	94	89
Democrat	94	5	89	97	2	95	95	4	91
Independent/other	42	43	1	55	40	15	52	43	9
Party/lean and ideology									
Conserv. Rep./lean Rep.	3	94	91	2	96	94	2	97	95
Moderate/liberal Rep.	8	79	71	15	80	65	16	79	63
Moderate/conserv. Dem.	85	8	77	91	7	84	91	7	84
Liberal Dem./lean Dem.	94	2	92	98	1	97	98	2	96

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Ideological divisions within the parties were also apparent in the vote, with both Trump and Biden doing better among the ideological core of their parties. Trump received the votes of 97% of conservative Republicans and leaners but a smaller majority (79%) of Republicans who describe themselves as moderate or liberal. Biden took 98% of the vote among liberal Democrats and leaners and 91% among those who are moderate or conservative.

Age and generation

A yawning age gap in voter support – a pattern that emerged in the 2004 presidential election for the first time since 1972 – continues to be evident, with voters under 30 favoring Joe Biden by 24 percentage points (Biden 59%, Trump 35%).

Perhaps reflecting the enduring impact of this long-term age gap, voters ages 30 to 49 were also solidly in the Democratic candidate's camp in 2020, favoring Biden by 12 points (55%-43%), similar to Clinton's share among this age group. By contrast, older age groups divided fairly evenly between Biden and Trump, a result not too different from 2016.

Young voters were a strong group for the Democrats, but less so than in 2018

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016			2018			2020		
	Share voting for …		**Margin**	Share voting …		**Margin**	Share voting for …		**Margin**
Age	Clinton	Trump	**(Dem.-Rep.)**	Dem.	Rep.	**(Dem.-Rep.)**	Biden	Trump	**(Dem.-Rep.)**
18-29	58%	28%	**30**	72%	23%	**49**	59	35	**24**
30-49	51	40	**11**	59	38	**21**	55	43	**12**
50-64	45	51	**6**	50	48	**2**	47	53	**6**
65+	44	53	**9**	46	52	**6**	48	52	**4**
Generation (born)									
Millennial/Gen Z (1981-'02)							58	38	**20**
Millennial (1981-'96)	56	31	**25**	67	28	**39**	58	39	**19**
Gen X (1965-'80)	49	43	**6**	55	44	**11**	51	48	**3**
Baby Boomer (1946-'64)	46	50	**4**	49	49	**0**	48	51	**3**
Silent (1928-'45)	39	58	**19**	42	58	**16**	42	58	**16**

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. Don't know responses not shown. There were insufficient sample sizes in 2020 to separately show Gen Z adults.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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These patterns also are apparent when the lens is shifted to birth cohorts, or generations – groups of voters who share birth years and perhaps formative political experiences in common, such as the popularity of the president at the time they were first eligible to vote. Voters in the youngest adult generations today – Generation Z (those ages 18 to 23 in 2020) and the Millennial generation (ages 24 to 39 in 2020) – favored Biden over Trump by a margin of 20 percentage points, though Trump gained 8 points among Millennials compared with his 2016 performance.

Generation Xers, those ages 40 to 55 in 2020, divided relatively evenly (51% to 48%), as did Baby Boomers. Only among members of the Silent Generation, ages 75 to 92 in 2020, was Trump clearly favored (by 58%-42%). Notably, Boomers and Silents (and the very small number of voters from the Greatest Generation) made up less than half of the electorate in 2020 (44%), compared with just over half in both 2016 and 2018.

Geography

The political split between America's rural areas and its suburban and urban locales remained substantial in 2020. Biden did considerably better among suburban voters in 2020 than Clinton did in 2016 (54% for Biden, 45% for Clinton). By contrast, Trump garnered the support of 65% of rural voters, including 71% of White rural voters; the latter represented an increase over the 62% he received among this group in 2016. Biden received a solid majority of votes among urban residents (66% overall), but Trump gained among urbanites relative to his performance in 2016 (33% in 2020, 24% in 2016).

Democrats gained among suburban voters in 2018 and 2020

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016			2018			2020		
	Share voting for ...		Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	Share voting ...		Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	Share voting for ...		Margin (Dem.-Rep.)
	Clinton	Trump		Dem.	Rep.		Biden	Trump	
Urban	70%	24%	46	73%	25%	48	66%	33%	33
Suburban	45	47	2	52	45	7	54	43	11
Rural	34	59	25	38	59	21	33	65	32

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. Location in an urban, suburban or rural area is self-reported. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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Religion

Voters in 2020 sorted along religious lines in ways consistent with recent elections. Protestants constituted nearly half of all voters (46%), as they did in 2016. Within the Protestant tradition, White evangelicals accounted for 19% of all voters, but a much higher share of Trump's voters (34%). Without such broad support for Trump among White evangelicals, Biden would have beaten him by more than 20 points.

White non-evangelical Protestants voted for Trump over Biden by a 14-point margin (57%-43%), while Black Protestants were an overwhelmingly Democratic group (91% voted for Biden).

Stable voting patterns among most religious groups

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016 Share voting for ...Clinton	2016 Trump	2016 Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	2018 Share voting ...Dem.	2018 Rep.	2018 Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	2020 Share voting for ...Biden	2020 Trump	2020 Margin (Dem.-Rep.)
Protestant	39%	56%	17	40%	58%	18	40%	59%	19
Catholic	44	52	8	46	52	6	49	50	1
Unaffiliated	65	24	41	75	22	53	71	26	45
Other	61	33	28	66	33	33	64	32	32
White evang. Prot.	16	77	61	17	81	64	15	84	69
White non-evang. Prot.	37	57	20	42	55	13	43	57	14
Black Protestant				94	5	89	91	9	82
Other race Protestant				47	50	3	42	56	14
White Catholic	31	64	33	39	59	20	42	57	15
Hispanic Catholic				71	27	44			
Other	61	33	28	66	33	33	64	32	32
NET Unaffiliated	65	24	41	75	22	53	71	26	45
Atheist				88	9	79	87	11	76
Agnostic				79	18	61	84	14	70
Nothing in particular	61	27	34	68	29	39	61	35	26
Attend religious services									
Monthly or more often	37	58	21	40	58	18	40	59	19
Yearly or less often	54	38	16	61	37	24	58	40	18

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. White and Black adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Biden, by contrast, drew strong support from religiously unaffiliated voters – atheists, agnostics, and those who say their religion is "nothing in particular." Together, these voters made up 25% of voters, which is a slightly larger share of the total electorate than White evangelicals (19%). But support for Biden among the unaffiliated was not quite as lopsided as Trump's support among White evangelicals (a 45-point margin for Biden among the unaffiliated vs. a 69-point margin for Trump among White evangelicals). Without the religiously unaffiliated, Trump would have had a 9-point popular vote margin over Biden.

White non-Hispanic Catholics were more supportive of Biden (at 42%) than they had been of Clinton in 2016 (31%), but Trump still captured a solid majority of their votes (57%). White Catholics made up 14% of all voters.

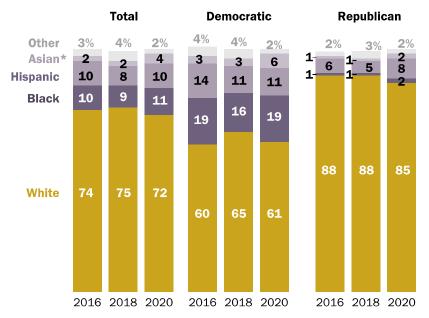# Demographic profiles of Trump and Biden voters

As was the case in the 2016 and 2018 elections, the Democratic voting coalition in 2020 looked quite different from the Republican coalition in several respects. Overall, Biden voters were younger, more racially and ethnically diverse, and less likely to live in rural areas than Trump voters.

In 2020, 85% of voters who cast a ballot for Trump were White non-Hispanic; this compares with just 61% of Biden voters. These differences are roughly consistent with the share of White voters in each party's coalition in 2016.

Nearly two-in-ten voters who cast a ballot for Biden in the 2020 election (19%) were Black, identical to the share of Clinton voters in 2016 who were Black. That is significantly higher than the share of Trump voters who were Black (2%).

Biden's voters more racially and ethnically diverse than Trump's, but GOP voters slightly less likely to be White in 2020 than in 2016

Composition of validated voters who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates (%)

*Asian adults interviewed in English only.
Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. White and Black adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
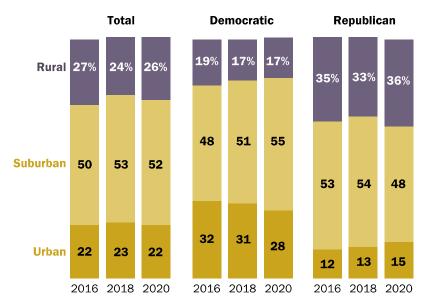"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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The community profiles of Trump and Biden voters are similar in some fundamental ways to the previous two elections – but more voters who cast ballots for Biden in 2020 say they live in a suburban area compared with Clinton's 2016 voters.

Overall, urban voters continue to constitute a larger share of the Democratic coalition compared with the Republican coalition. And rural voters remain a significantly larger portion of the Republican electorate.

However, when comparing Clinton's voters with Biden's, there are some significant shifts. In 2016, about half of Clinton's voters described their communities as suburban (48%), while 32% said they were from an urban area and 19% were from a rural area.

In 2020, suburban voters made up a majority of Biden's coalition (55%); 28% of his voters said they lived in urban areas and 17% were from rural areas.

Higher share of Biden's voters were from suburban areas compared with Clinton

Composition of validated voters who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates (%)

	Total			Democratic			Republican		
	2016	2018	2020	2016	2018	2020	2016	2018	2020
Rural	27%	24%	26%	19%	17%	17%	35%	33%	36%
Suburban	50	53	52	48	51	55	53	54	48
Urban	22	23	22	32	31	28	12	13	15

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
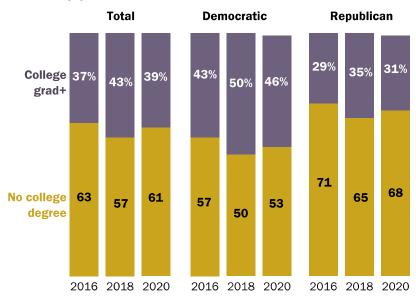"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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In 2020, 31% of Trump voters had at least a four-year college degree – similar to the share of Trump voters who had a college degree in 2016. Far more Trump voters (roughly 70% in each presidential election) did not have a four-year college degree.
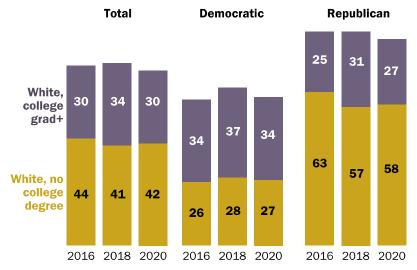
The Democratic electorate is more evenly divided when it comes to education. In 2020, 46% of Biden voters had at least a college degree; 53% did not have a degree.

As was the case in 2016, White voters without a four-year college degree made up a considerably larger share of GOP voters (58%) than Democratic voters (27%). At the same time, White voters with a college degree made up a larger share of Biden voters (34%) than Trump voters (27%).

Differences in educational attainment of Trump, Biden coalitions

Composition of validated voters who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates (%)

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In 2020, the age profiles of Democratic and Republican voters looked largely similar to 2016. Younger adults continue to make up a larger share of Democratic voters compared with Republican voters. For example, in 2020, nearly half of Biden voters (49%) were younger than 50; that compares with 39% of Trump voters in 2020.

Nearly half of Biden's voters were younger than 50

Composition of validated voters who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates (%)

	Total			Democratic			Republican		
	2016	2018	2020	2016	2018	2020	2016	2018	2020
65+	27%	31%	27%	25%	26%	25%	32%	37%	30%
50-64	29	29	28	27	27	25	33	32	31
30-49	30	30	30	32	33	32	27	26	27
18-29	13	11	15	16	15	17	8	6	11

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details.
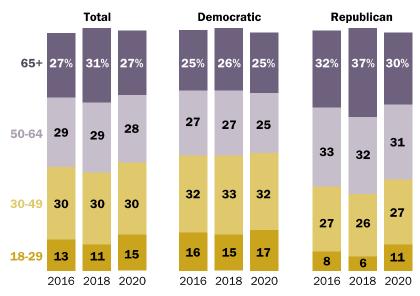Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
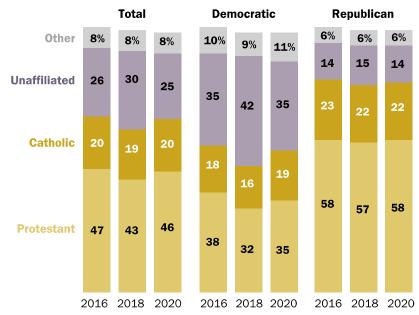"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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Protestants made up a majority of those voting Republican in 2020, just as they did in 2016. Overall, 58% of Trump voters were Protestant, compared with just 35% of Biden voters. White evangelical Protestants, in particular, remained a critical part of the Republican voting coalition, making up 34% of Trump's voters but just 6% of Biden's.

Catholics made up similar shares of Biden and Trump voters (19% and 22%, respectively); in 2016, Catholics made up a slightly higher share of Trump voters compared with Clinton voters (23% vs. 18%). Voters who were unaffiliated with any religious tradition (atheists, agnostics and those who describe themselves as "nothing in particular") made up 35% of Biden voters but just 14% of Trump voters in 2020.

Catholics were about one-fifth of both candidates' voters in 2020

Composition of validated voters who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates (%)

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
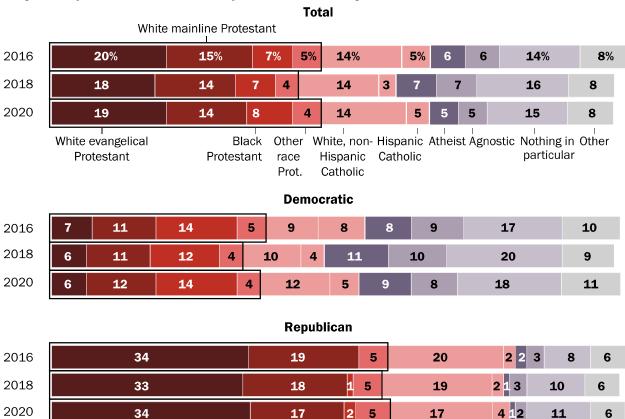"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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White evangelical Protestants constituted roughly a third of voters for Republican candidates in the past three elections

Composition of validated voters who voted for Democratic and Republican candidates (%)

Total

White mainline Protestant

Year	White evangelical Protestant		Black Protestant	Other race Prot.	White, non-Hispanic Catholic	Hispanic Catholic	Atheist	Agnostic	Nothing in particular	Other
2016	20%	15%	7%	5%	14%	5%	6	6	14%	8%
2018	18	14	7	4	14	3	7	7	16	8
2020	19	14	8	4	14	5	5	5	15	8

Democratic

Year										
2016	7	11	14	5	9	8	8	9	17	10
2018	6	11	12	4	10	4	11	10	20	9
2020	6	12	14	4	12	5	9	8	18	11

Republican

Year										
2016	34	19		5	20	2	2	3	8	6
2018	33	18	1	5	19	2	1	3	10	6
2020	34	17	2	5	17	4	1	2	11	6

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. White and Black adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
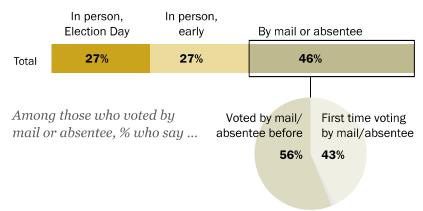"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

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Voting methods in the 2020 presidential election

The 2020 election brought a huge change in how Americans cast their ballots. As some states looked to adapt to challenges in administering elections amid the COVID-19 pandemic, large numbers of voters were offered expanded access to absentee and vote-by-mail options in the 2020 election. As a result, a record number of voters said they cast their ballots this way (46%). And smaller shares of voters said they either voted in person on Election Day (27%) or in person *before* Election Day (27%).

Large share of voters cast a ballot by absentee or mail in the 2020 election

% of validated voters who said they voted …

	In person, Election Day	In person, early	By mail or absentee
Total	27%	27%	46%

Among those who voted by mail or absentee, % who say …

Voted by mail/ absentee before
56%

First time voting by mail/absentee
43%

Notes: Based on 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Method of voting based on self-reports from a post-election survey. See Methodology for details.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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A majority of absentee voters said they had previously voted this way before the 2020 election (56%). Still, a sizable share (43%) said the November election was the first time they had cast an absentee or mail ballot.

Sizable shares of voters across racial and ethnic subgroups cast absentee or mail-in ballots in the 2020 election – though there are some differences in voting methods when comparing across groups. White voters were most likely to say they voted in person on Election Day (30%). Comparably smaller shares of Black (20%) and Hispanic voters (18%) said the same.
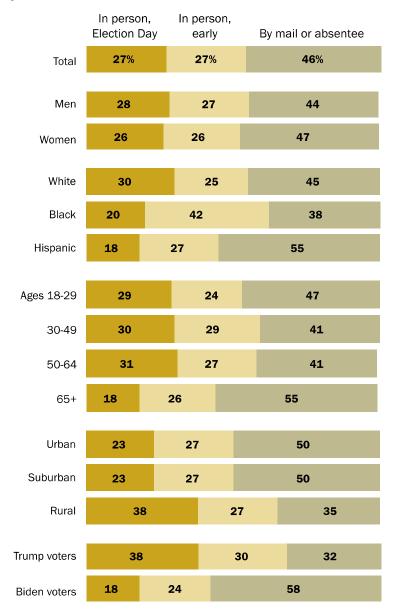
Black voters were more likely than White or Hispanic voters to say they cast their ballot in person *before* Election Day (42% of Black voters, vs. 27% of Hispanic voters and 25% of White voters).

Voters ages 65 and older stand out in their voting behavior: 55% say they voted absentee or by mail in the 2020 election – 13 percentage points higher than the share of adults under 65 who cast a ballot by mail.

Urban and suburban voters were considerably more likely than rural voters to say they cast their ballot by mail (50% of urban and suburban vs. 35% of rural voters). In contrast, rural voters were more likely to

Black voters were more likely than others to cast ballots in person before Election Day in 2020

% of validated voters who cast their ballot …

	In person, Election Day	In person, early	By mail or absentee
Total	27%	27%	46%
Men	28	27	44
Women	26	26	47
White	30	25	45
Black	20	42	38
Hispanic	18	27	55
Ages 18-29	29	24	47
30-49	30	29	41
50-64	31	27	41
65+	18	26	55
Urban	23	27	50
Suburban	23	27	50
Rural	38	27	35
Trump voters	38	30	32
Biden voters	18	24	58

Notes: Based on 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice and method of voting are based on self-reports from a post-election survey. See Methodology for details. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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report voting in person on Election Day.

A majority of Biden voters said they voted absentee or by mail in the 2020 election (58%). By contrast, about a third of Trump voters (32%) voted by mail. Roughly two-thirds of Trump voters (68%) said they voted in person, either on (38%) or before (30%) Election Day. Reflecting these differences, Trump performed much better among voters who cast their ballots in person on Election Day (65% for Trump vs. 33% for Biden). These shares were reversed among absentee and mail-in voters: 65% of absentee voters said they voted for Biden, compared with 33% who voted for Trump.

Sizable divides in candidate support by vote method

% of validated voters who say they cast a ballot for ...

	Trump	Biden
Total	47%	51%

Among those who cast ballots ...

	Trump	Biden
In person, Election Day (27%)	65	33
In person, early (27%)	52	47
By mail or absentee (46%)	33	65

Notes: Based on 9,668 validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice and method of voting are based on self-reports from a post-election survey. See Methodology for details.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Preferences were more evenly divided among those who cast their ballots in person ahead of Election Day: 52% voted for Trump while 47% voted for Biden.

Voters and nonvoters

The 2020 general election featured the highest rate of voter turnout in more than a century, with 66% of eligible adults casting a ballot for president.

All members of the American Trends Panel who took the 2020 post-election survey – whether they voted or not – were asked which candidate they preferred in the race for president. Nonvoters – citizens for whom no record of turnout could be located or who told us they did not vote – preferred Joe Biden over Donald Trump by 15 percentage points, 50% to 35%, compared with Biden's 4-point overall advantage among voters.

Voters were nearly evenly divided on party affiliation, with 50% identifying or leaning Democratic and 48% identifying or leaning Republican, similar to the 51%-48% split in 2016. Nonvoters in 2020 were more closely divided on partisanship than they were in 2016. Among nonvoters in 2020, 46% were Democrats or leaned Democratic, while 41% were Republicans or leaned Republican. A majority of nonvoters in 2016 (55%) were Democrats or Democratic leaners, compared with about four-in-ten (41%) who were Republicans or leaned toward the Republican Party.

Despite notable changes in the demographics of the two candidates' coalitions, the demographic composition of the electorate as a whole in 2020 did not differ much from that of 2016.

Although turnout was strong, stark demographic differences between voters and nonvoters similar to those seen in past U.S. elections were present in 2020, a pattern familiar to political observers.
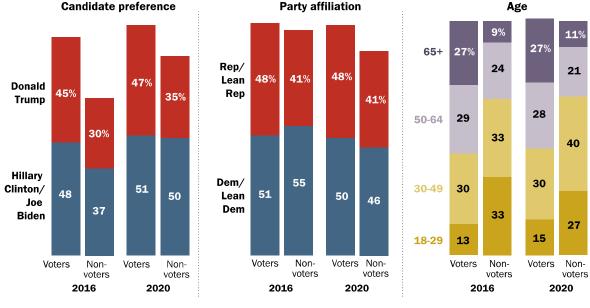
Voters as a group were considerably older than nonvoters. Adults younger than 50 made up 45% of all voters but 68% of nonvoters – nearly identical to the pattern seen in 2016.
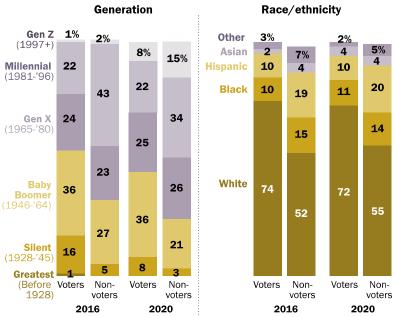
But generational change in the electorate was quite apparent. Very few members of Gen Z (born 1997 and later) were eligible to vote in the 2016 electorate, and they made up just 1% of all voters that year. In 2020, they were 8% of the total, though their lower rate of turnout compared with older age cohorts is reflected in the fact that they were 15% of eligible nonvoters. At the other end of the generational spectrum, members of the Silent and Greatest generations (born 1945 and earlier) fell from 16% of all voters in 2016 to just 8% in 2020, but their turnout rates remained among the highest of all generations.

Turnout differences by race and ethnicity persisted as well. White non-Hispanic adults were 72% of voters in 2020 but just 55% of nonvoting citizens. Black Americans made up 11% of voters, but a

Despite higher turnout, wide disparities by age and race in voting persist

Composition of validated voters and nonvoters (%)

Candidate preference

	Donald Trump	Hillary Clinton/ Joe Biden
2016 Voters	45%	48
2016 Non-voters	30%	37
2020 Voters	47%	51
2020 Non-voters	35%	50

Party affiliation

	Rep/Lean Rep	Dem/Lean Dem
2016 Voters	48%	51
2016 Non-voters	41%	55
2020 Voters	48%	50
2020 Non-voters	41%	46

Age

	65+	50-64	30-49	18-29
2016 Voters	27%	29	30	13
2016 Non-voters	9%	24	33	33
2020 Voters	27%	28	30	15
2020 Non-voters	11%	21	40	27

Generation

	Gen Z (1997+)	Millennial (1981-'96)	Gen X (1965-'80)	Baby Boomer (1946-'64)	Silent (1928-'45)	Greatest (Before 1928)
2016 Voters	1%	22	24	36	16	1
2016 Non-voters	2%	43	23	27	5	
2020 Voters	8%	22	25	36	8	
2020 Non-voters	15%	34	26	21	3	

Race/ethnicity

	Other	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White
2016 Voters	3%	2	10	10	74
2016 Non-voters	7%	4	19	15	52
2020 Voters	2%	4	10	11	72
2020 Non-voters	5%	4	20	14	55

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters and 756 (2016) and 1,477 (2020) validated nonvoters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Nonvoters were citizens who were not found to have a record of voting in any of the voter files. Vote choice for both years are from post-election surveys. See Methodology for details. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Asian adults interviewed in English only. Don't know responses not shown.
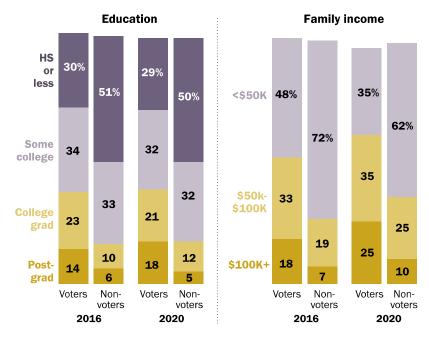Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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slightly larger share (14%) of nonvoting citizens, and Hispanic adults were 10% of voters but 20% of nonvoting citizens. Asian Americans (a relatively small but fast-growing group in the U.S.) made up 4% of voters and an identical share of nonvoting citizens (*note: nonvoters in this analysis do not include noncitizens*).

Some of the largest differences between voters and nonvoters are seen on education and income. College graduates made up 39% of all voters in 2020 (about the same as in 2016) but only 17% of nonvoters. Adults with a high school education or less were 29% of all voters but half of nonvoters.

As in 2016, voters in 2020 had higher incomes and more formal education than nonvoters

Composition of validated voters and nonvoters (%)

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters and 756 (2016) and 1,477 (2020) validated nonvoters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Nonvoters were citizens who were not found to have a record of voting in any of the voter files. Vote choice for both years are from post-election surveys. See Methodology for details. Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016 and Nov. 12-17, 2020.
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Acknowledgments

Methodology

Pew Research Center conducted this study to understand how Americans voted in 2020 and how their turnout and vote choices differed from 2016 and 2018. For this analysis, we surveyed U.S. adults online and verified their turnout in the three elections using commercial voter files that aggregate publicly available official state turnout records. With a small number of exceptions as noted below, panelists for whom a record of voting was located are considered validated voters; all others are presumed not to have voted.

The analysis in this report relies on two slightly different sets of data drawn from the same pool of panelists. The bulk of the report provides comparisons of the 2020 vote by various groups in the population, taken from the 2020 post-election survey (described below), with similar reporting from post-election surveys conducted after the 2016 presidential and 2018 congressional elections. Estimates for 2016 and 2018 in this part of the report are identical to those published in Pew Research Center's earlier reports and rely solely on the relevant post-election surveys at the time. The 2020 report does not include a small number of estimates from the 2016 report (principally, for subgroups among Hispanic voters) because of a change in the Center's standards for the minimum acceptable sample size for reporting.

The other part of this report (primarily in the introduction and first few pages) examines change and continuity in turnout and vote choice among individual panelists. For this analysis we attempted to measure voter turnout and vote choice for all three elections for all panelists who took the 2020 post-election survey, including the large number of 2020 respondents who were not members of the panel in 2016 or 2018. To account for this, we obtained measures of turnout and vote choice for these panelists in subsequent annual recruitment and profile surveys from 2018 and 2020, as described below.

The post-election surveys used in this report included interviews with 11,818 U.S. adults in November 2020, 10,640 adults in November 2018 and 4,183 adults in November and December 2016. Everyone who took part is a member of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP). The surveys are weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education, and many other characteristics, as described below.

American Trends Panel Methodology

The American Trends Panel (ATP), created by Pew Research Center, is a nationally representative panel of randomly selected U.S. adults. This report is based on interviews from three separate waves of the panel, one conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, one conducted Nov. 7-16, 2018, and the final one conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020. Panelists participate via self-administered web surveys.

American Trends Panel recruitment surveys

Recruitment dates	Mode	Invited	Joined	Active panelists remaining
Jan. 23 to March 16, 2014	Landline/ cell RDD	9,809	5,338	2,187
Aug. 27 to Oct. 4, 2015	Landline/ cell RDD	6,004	2,976	1,245
April 25 to June 4, 2017	Landline/ cell RDD	3,905	1,628	622
Aug. 8 to Oct. 31, 2018	ABS/web	9,396	8,778	5,906
Aug. 19 to Nov. 30, 2019	ABS/web	5,900	4,720	2,334
June 1 to July 19, 2020	ABS/web	1,865	1,636	1,274
Total		**36,879**	**25,076**	**13,568**

Note: Approximately once per year, panelists who have not participated in multiple consecutive waves or who did not complete an annual profiling survey are removed from the panel. Panelists also become inactive if they ask to be removed from the panel.

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Panelists who do not have internet access are provided with a tablet and wireless internet connection. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish. At the time of the Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016 survey, the panel was managed by Abt, and it is currently being managed by Ipsos, which oversaw data collection for the 2018 and 2020 surveys.

The ATP was created in 2014, with the first cohort of panelists invited to join the panel at the end of a large, national, landline and cellphone random-digit-dial survey that was conducted in both English and Spanish. Two additional recruitments were conducted in 2015 and 2017 using the same method. Across these three surveys, a total of 19,718 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 9,942 (50%) agreed to participate.

In August 2018, the ATP switched from telephone to address-based recruitment. Invitations were sent to a random, address-based sample of households selected from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Two additional recruitments were conducted in 2019 and 2020 using the same method. Across these three address-based recruitments, a total of 17,161 adults were invited to join the ATP, of whom 15,134 (88%) agreed to join the panel and completed an initial profile survey. In each household, the adult with the next birthday was asked to go online to complete a survey, at the end of which they were invited to join the panel. Of the 25,076 individuals who have ever joined the ATP, 13,568 remained active panelists and continued to receive survey invitations at the time this survey was conducted.

The 2020 survey

The 2020 survey was conducted Nov. 12-17, 2020, with 11,818 panelists. Noncitizens and those who refused the citizenship question (N=450), voters who refused to answer the vote choice question (N=84) and panelists who declined to provide their names and thus could not be matched to a voter record (N=139) were removed, leaving 11,145 panelists for analysis.

An effort was made to match the panelists to three commercial voter files: one that serves conservative and Republican organizations and campaigns, one that serves progressive and Democratic organizations and campaigns, and one that is nonpartisan. People for whom a registration record could not be found are included in the files but likely underrepresent nonvoters. Because of a law passed in 2018, Utah residents can opt to keep their voter registration and vote history data private. Consequently, Utah residents in the American Trends Panel are considered to be voters if they reported having voted when asked in the post-election survey.

Overall, 97% of voting eligible panelists were matched to at least one of these files and a turnout record for 2020 (or self-report for Utah) was located for 9,668 panelists. Panelists who could not be matched or for whom no 2020 turnout record could be located were considered to be validated nonvoters (1,477 panelists).

Additional details about the administration of this survey can be found here.

The 2016 survey

The 2016 survey was conducted between Nov. 29 and Dec. 12, 2016, with 4,183 respondents. Noncitizens and panelists who declined to provide their names and thus for whom a match to a voter record could not be attempted were removed from the analysis, leaving 3,770 panelists for analysis. An effort was made to match the panelists to five commercially available databases that contain information about voter registration and turnout for nearly every U.S. adult. In total, 91% of panelists were located in at least one of the files. Panelists who were verified as having voted in at least one of the commercial voter databases were considered to be validated voters (3,014 individuals) and are included in the tabulations. Panelists for whom no turnout record was located were considered to be nonvoters (756 individuals).

The validation process is discussed in detail in a more general report about commercial voter files published in February 2018, "Commercial Voter Files and the Study of U.S. Politics."

The 2016 vote choices reported here are based on panelists who said that they voted and were verified as having done so. Those who refused to state their vote choice or who reported voting for

a candidate other than Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, Gary Johnson or Jill Stein were excluded from the analysis.

The resulting sample of verified voters mirrored the election results very closely. After the validation was done and the sample was limited to those for whom a turnout record could be located, 48% reported voting for Clinton and 45% for Trump. By comparison, the official national vote tally was 48% for Clinton and 46% for Trump.

The 2018 survey

The 2018 post-election survey was conducted Nov. 7-16, 2018, with 10,640 panelists. Noncitizens, those who refused to answer the vote choice question and panelists who declined to provide their names and thus could not be matched to a voter record were removed, leaving 10,144 panelists for analysis. An effort was made to match the panelists to two commercial voter files. Overall, 94% of panelists were matched to at least one file and a turnout record for 2018 was located for 7,585 panelists. Panelists who could not be matched or for whom no 2018 turnout record could be located were considered to be validated nonvoters (2,559 panelists).

Vote choice measures for panelists who did not participate in the 2016 or 2018 surveys

In addition to the comparisons of how different groups in the population voted over time, the current report focuses on how individual panelists' turnout and vote choice changed over time. A large number of people who participated in the 2020 post-election survey had not been on the panel at the time or did not respond to the 2016 and 2018 post-election surveys at the time they were conducted. For these panelists, their vote choices for 2016 and 2018 were measured after the fact.

For panelists who did not take the 2016 post-election survey, 2016 vote choice was measured on either of two annual profile surveys, depending on when the joined the panel. These were conducted Aug. 20-Oct. 28, 2018, and Aug. 3-16, 2020. In both cases, the vote choice question asked whether panelists voted for Clinton, Trump or someone else.

For panelists who did not take the 2018 post-election survey, 2018 vote choice was measured in the 2020 annual profile survey, conducted Aug. 3-16, 2020. The vote choice question for the U.S. House of Representatives asked whether panelists voted for the Democratic Party's candidate, for the Republican Party's candidate, or another candidate. As with the 2016 findings, these were used to supplement the 2018 post-election survey for the analysis of individual-level change.

Weighting for the 2020 post-election survey

The data was weighted in a multistep process that accounts for multiple stages of sampling and nonresponse that occur at different points in the survey process.

First, each panelist begins with a base weight that reflects their probability of selection for their initial recruitment survey (and the probability of being invited to participate in the panel in cases where only a subsample of respondents were invited). The base weights for panelists recruited in different years are scaled to be proportionate to the effective sample size for all active panelists in their cohort. To correct for nonresponse to the initial recruitment surveys and gradual panel attrition, the base weights for all active panelists are calibrated to align with the population benchmarks identified in the accompanying table (except for vote choice and voter turnout) to create a full-panel weight. For waves in which all active panelists are invited to participate, the wave-specific base weight is identical to the full-panel weight.

The wave-specific base weights for panelists who completed the survey are again calibrated to match the population benchmarks specified above. These weights are trimmed (typically at about the 1st and 99th percentiles) to reduce the loss in precision stemming from variance in the

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Age x Gender Education x Gender Education x Age Race/Ethnicity x Education Born inside vs. outside the U.S. among Hispanics and Asian Americans Years lived in the U.S.	2019 American Community Survey
Census region x Metro/Non-metro	2020 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2019 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys
Frequency of internet use Religious affiliation	2020 National Public Opinion Reference Survey
2016 and 2020 presidential vote choice and 2018 generic congressional ballot choice	Official vote tabulations by the Federal Election Commission
2016, 2018 and 2020 voter turnout estimates	Voter eligible population turnout based on ballots counted for highest office, compiled by the United States Elections Project. Share of adults who were eligible voters in each election based on 2019 American Community Survey.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total U.S. adult population. The 2020 National Public Opinion Reference Survey featured 1,862 online completions and 2,246 mail survey completions.

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weights. Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting.

A final adjustment was applied to the trimmed weights to ensure that turnout and the popular vote margin for 2016, 2018 and 2020 exactly matched the weighting benchmark.

Variables used to align the 2020 sample to the population are shown in the table. The procedure for weighting the 2018 and 2016 post-election surveys differed slightly from the 2020 survey, principally in the sources of the weighting parameters. Details about these are available in the methodology statements for the 2018 and 2016 surveys.

Sampling errors and tests of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.