



Understanding Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is a helpful statistic that indicates how engaged voters were in a particular election. Generally, this is understood as the percentage of voters who vote in a given election and is calculated by dividing the number of votes by the number of voters. However, calculating voter turnout is complex, and can vary based on how an eligible voter is defined and how they voted. Additionally, many factors impact voter turnout, including new election laws, the type of election (e.g., presidential or midterm), and the competitiveness of the race.

The Number of Voters

Voter turnout calculations can use up to four different ‘pools’ of voters, although Voting Eligible Population and Voting Age Population are more common. Each pool is a subset of the previous one.

Voting Age Population (VAP)

The number of voting-age voters (i.e., 18 years of age or older) in a jurisdiction. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Connecticut’s VAP was 2,869,227.

Voting Eligible Population (VEP)

The number of voters in a jurisdiction that are eligible to vote (i.e., not disqualified due to mental capacity, incarceration or immigration status, or another disqualifying reason), regardless of their registration status. The VEP of Connecticut is not officially calculated, but for the 2020 general election, the United States Election Project estimates Connecticut’s VEP was 2,603,327.

Registered Voters

The number of registered voters in a jurisdiction. According to the secretary of the state (SOTS), the number of registered voters in Connecticut on October 27, 2020, was 2,505,076.

Active Voters

Generally, this is the number of voters who are registered and have recently voted (different jurisdictions define this differently). Connecticut does define this differently as an *inactive* voter is one that must have his or her right to vote restored for one reason or another (voters are not removed for not voting recently). According to SOTS, the number of active voters in Connecticut on October 27, 2020, was 2,309,576.

The Number of Votes

There are three different pools that may be used to determine the number of votes. Again, each pool is a subset of the previous one.

Total Ballots Cast

This is the total number of ballots cast in the jurisdiction for all contests in that election. According to SOTS, in the 2020 general election, there were 1,861,086 ballots cast.

Highest Office Turnout

This is the number of ballots cast for the contest that obtained the most votes. For example, according to SOTS, in the 2020 general election, there were 1,823,857 ballots cast for the presidential contest, which was the most cast for any office that election.

Ballots Cast for Target Contest

This is the number of ballots cast for a specific contest (e.g., U.S. Senator). In an election where multiple contests are on the same ballot, turnout rates will vary as not all voters cast a vote for every contest.



Factors Affecting Voter Turnout

Regardless of how it is calculated, many factors can affect voter turnout, including:

Electoral Competitiveness – In jurisdictions or major contests where political parties are more competitive, voters are more likely to vote.

Candidate Influence – Certain candidates, especially presidential or gubernatorial candidates, can particularly rally voters or discourage turnout.

Election Type – Primary elections, off-year (non-presidential, non-midterm) elections, and local elections generally draw fewer voters than federal or statewide elections.

Changes in Voting Laws – When jurisdictions modify their voting laws (e.g., ranked-choice voting, voter identification, early voting), turnout rates are impacted.

Demographics/Issues – Generally, certain demographics are more likely to vote. For example, women are more likely to vote than men, or older Americans are more likely to vote than younger Americans. Turnout may increase if the election impacts policy issues relevant to these (or other) demographics.

2020 Presidential Election Voter Turnout Rates in CT

Using the data provided in this brief, the table below shows the wide range (63.57% - 80.58%) that might represent voter turnout based on which pools are used to calculate the rate.

	Total Ballots	Highest Turnout
VAP	64.86%	63.57%
VEP	71.49%	70.06%
Registered	74.29%	72.81%
Active	80.58%	78.97%

Learn
More

[Voter Turnout](#), FairVote.org
[MIT Election Data + Science Lab](#)
[QuickFacts](#), Connecticut, U.S. Census

[United States Election Project](#)
[Election Statistics and Data](#) & [Election Results](#), Connecticut Secretary of the State



OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

Analyst: Matthew H. Frame
Connecticut General Assembly
860-240-8400 | www.cga.ct.gov/olr