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Older people account for large shares of poll workers and voters in U.S. general elections

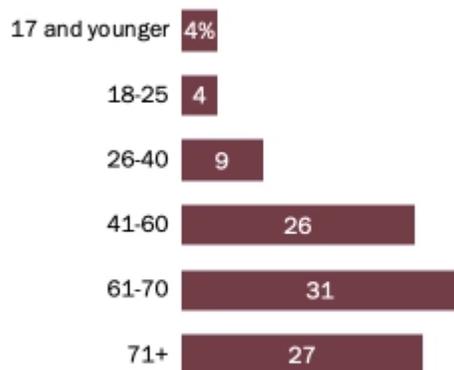
BY [MICHAEL BARTHEL](#) AND [GALEN STOCKING](#)



Adelia Hurtak wipes down a polling place during the Florida presidential primary in Miami in March. (Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

Majority of U.S. poll workers are over 60

% of U.S. poll workers in the 2018 general election who were ages ...



Note: Not all jurisdictions reported poll worker age; based on all poll workers whose age was known. See 2018 EAVS report for details.
Source: 2018 Elections Administration and Voting Survey.

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The coronavirus outbreak has prompted several states to [postpone their presidential primaries](#), citing restrictions on public gatherings. While the postponements will affect people of all ages, they may be particularly relevant for older adults, who tend to account for large shares of both poll workers and voters in general elections in the United States.

In the 2018 general election, around six-in-ten U.S. poll workers (58%) were ages 61 and older, including roughly a quarter (27%) who were over 70, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of government data from that year's [Election Administration and Voting Survey](#) (EAVS), a biennial study of states' administration of federal elections. (This data does not include all states; for more information about the methodology and limitations of this data, see "How we did this.")

The same pattern appeared in earlier elections. In [the 2016 general election](#), people ages 61 and older accounted for 56% of poll workers, according to that year's EAVS report.

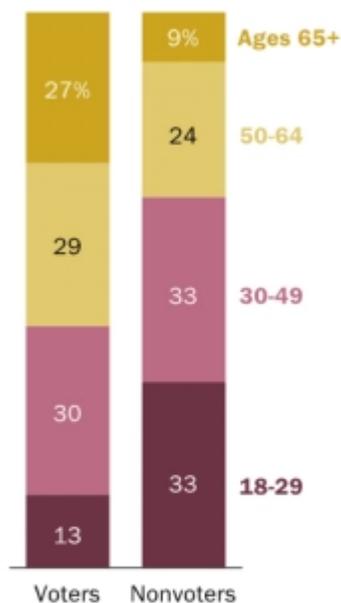
► How we did this

The coronavirus is especially dangerous for older adults. Eight-in-ten COVID-19-related deaths in the U.S. have involved adults 65 and older, [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). The CDC considers seniors to be [at higher risk for severe illness](#) from the virus and encourages them to take the same precautions as people with chronic health problems. Doctors have advised seniors with several underlying health conditions to [self-isolate during the outbreak](#).

If older Americans are unable to leave the house and serve as poll workers this year, it could exacerbate a common problem with the administration of elections. In the 2018 EAVS survey, roughly two-thirds of jurisdictions (68%) said it was very or somewhat difficult to find enough poll workers for that year's general election.

In 2016 general election, validated voters were older than nonvoters

% composition of validated voters and nonvoters



Note: Validated voters are those found to have voted in any of five commercial voter files and reported voting for Trump, Clinton, Johnson or Stein. Nonvoters are those who were not found to have voted in any of the files. Corrected for questionable matches. No answer responses not shown. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016.

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Of the 2,817 jurisdictions that answered the question, just 15% said it was very or somewhat easy to find enough poll workers. This challenge is already playing out amid the coronavirus outbreak: Wisconsin has struggled to recruit poll workers and even asked its National Guard to assist in primaries originally scheduled for April 7. Gov. Tony Evers issued an executive order to [delay the primaries until June](#) but it was later blocked by the state's Supreme Court.

Even if polling places can be staffed, the outbreak may also restrict Americans' willingness to come out to vote. In a Center survey conducted March 19-24, around two-thirds of all Americans (66%) – and 64% of those ages 65 and older – say they would [feel uncomfortable going to a polling place to vote](#), while wide majorities of Americans of all

ages say [postponing upcoming primaries](#) has been a necessary step to address the coronavirus outbreak.

Older Americans traditionally turn out to vote at higher rates than younger adults. In the 2016 presidential election, roughly a quarter of voters (27%) were ages 65 and older, according to a [Center analysis of validated voters](#). In contrast, only 9% of nonvoters were in this age group.

Topics [Voter Demographics](#), [Older Adults](#), [Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#), [Voter Participation](#), [Voting Issues](#)



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