

NOTE: There are four stories in this release: 1. A report on early 2002 primary turnout; 2. An analysis of Census data with respect to turnout changes; 3. A revision of 1990-2000 turnout figures in light of the 2000 Census; and 4. A preview of the factors likely to influence turnout in the 2002 general election.

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EARLY 9/11 POLITICAL RETURNS IN:

PRIMARY TURNOUT TRENDING

TOWARDS RECORD LOW

WASHINGTON, July 2 – If the results of the spring statewide primaries – for governor and U.S. Senator – are any guide, the patriotic fervor generated by the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is not translating into increased political participation:

–Average levels of turnout in statewide spring primaries in the 16 states which had primaries in both major parties are trending toward record low levels for mid-term election primaries.

–Average levels of turnout in the 18 Democratic spring statewide primaries and the 18 Republican spring statewide primaries, not always in the same states, are trending toward record mid-term election primary lows.

–Average levels of turnout in two-party statewide primaries and within each major party are now more than 50 percent lower than they were in the late 1960's and early 1970's.

These were among the principal findings of a four-part report issued today by the non-partisan Committee for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE) which studies issues surrounding electoral participation issues. The four parts of this report include an analysis of spring 2002 primary turnout; an analysis of Census 2000 election survey findings; a revision of

1990-2000 turnout figures, based on the 2000 Census; and a projection of factors which may influence turnout in the 2002 general election.

This part of the report – on spring statewide primary turnout – is based on final and official results from 15 states and final and unofficial results from five states – Iowa, Maine, New Jersey, Ohio and Pennsylvania – which held primaries and run-offs through June 25. It is also based on revised Voting Age Population statistics, which are used as the denominator for determining turnout percentages, in light of the 2000 Census (See Note 2).

I. Primary Turnout Analyzed:

Among the major findings of the study:

–Turnout in the 16 states which had statewide primaries in both major parties averaged 16.2 percent of the eligible vote, down from an average of 17.6 in 1998 and down fully 51.2 percent (17 percentage points) from the high water mark for turnout (33.2 percent of eligibles) in 1966. This continues a steady decline in which each succeeding mid-term primary turnout results since 1966 has been lower than the previous mid-term year.

–Turnout in the 18 states which had Democratic statewide primaries averaged 8.8 percent of eligibles, down from 10 percent of eligibles in 1998 and 52.9 percent (9.9 percentage points) from the 18.7 percent of eligibles who turned out in 1970.

–Turnout in the 18 states which had Republican statewide primaries averaged 7.4 percent of eligibles down from 8.5 in 1998 and down 48.6 percent (7 percentage points) from the GOP mid-term primary turnout apex of 14.4 percent of eligibles in 1966.

–All of these levels of turnout in the spring primaries, should similar results continue in the summer and fall statewide primaries, would constitute record lows for mid-term election primary turnout.

–Fully nine of the sixteen states which held statewide primaries in both major parties had new record lows for turnout, including Alabama, Arkansas, California, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio and West Virginia.

–In Democratic statewide primaries, ten of the 18 primaries resulted in record low turnouts – Arkansas, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, and West Virginia.

–In Republican statewide primaries, four of the 18 primaries resulted in record low turnouts – California, Nebraska, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

“In the real world, no one should have expected that the events of 9/11 would have increased political participation,” said Curtis Gans, CSAE’s director. “While there was an increase in patriotism, there was also an essential national unity that does not draw people into

electoral contest. And what the citizenry was asked to do was to return to normalcy, consume material goods and invest in the stock market, hardly clarion calls to civic involvement. The only exhortation was for an increase in volunteerism which tends to be a noblesse oblige apolitical act.

“On the other hand, these trends pose three discrete and serious dangers for democracy:

“-When you reach turnout levels as low as nine percent for the Democrats and seven percent for the GOP – and likely substantially lower for Congressional and lesser state and local office primaries – you are practically inviting organized factions with narrow and unrepresentative agendas to dominate the political process.

“-While primaries are for the active and interested of both parties, when the level of interest falls to those in these primaries, you are threatening the cohesion of American politics which the parties used to provide.

“-And when the nation has seen a continuous and precipitous decline in political engagement as these primaries indicate but which also are a facet of every level of political involvement, we not only see in these results a politics dominated by the interested (those with interest in specific policy outcomes) and the zealous (those who are animated by a single-issue cause), but we also see a virtual end to the religious impulse to civic duty which had animated the nation's politics in previous generations and made possible some of its greatest civic accomplishments.” Gans said.

Other findings include:

-There were fully seven states of the 16 which held statewide primaries which have experienced a greater than 50 percent decline in primary turnout from their high points of participation, including Ohio (down 59.1 percent), California (down 58.9 percent), Texas (down 58.5 percent), Arkansas (down 56 percent), New Jersey (down 55.5 percent), Idaho (down 54.5 percent) and Nebraska (down 53 percent). (A full listing including this year's turnout rates, the rate and year of the apex of turnout and the percent and percentage point differences is in Table 3 of the summary charts.)

-While competitive races tended to boost turnout in some states, notably Illinois, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Texas, there were states where competition still produced record low turnouts, most notably California where the GOP race between William Simon (who won), former Mayor Richard Riordan and Secretary of State Bill Jones, produced the lowest GOP mid-term primary turnout in history.

-The greatest increases as compared to 1998 in overall turnout occurred in Pennsylvania (up 7.2 percentage points), Oregon (5.0), Illinois (5.0) and Texas (2.8). The greatest decreases occurred in Nebraska (down 10.0 percentage points), California (7.1) and Ohio (5.1). Montana was down 11.38 percentage points from its last previous two-party statewide race primary in

1994.

(The Oregon primary may be of particular interest since it was conducted under the relatively new system of all-mail balloting. There is nothing in the increase in Oregon's turnout that indicates that mail balloting had anything or much to do with that turnout increase. The increase was decidedly one-sided with 4 percentage points of the state's 5 percentage point increase occurring in the three-way very tight GOP gubernatorial primary, in which all three candidates were within 6 percentage points of one another. It was the second closest mid-term primary in the state in the last 40 years and the one which was closer, in 1974, had a turnout of 35.2 percent of eligibles, much higher than the 25.9 percent of eligibles who voted in this year's primary. And despite its increase in turnout – the highest since 1986 – Oregon's turnout this year was 38 percent (15.9 percentage points) lower than the 41.8 percent of eligibles who voted in the state's 1966 primary.

Since the special election in which Sen. Ron Wyden beat Sen. Gordon Smith, there have been four statewide elections under Oregon's all-mail ballot. The first, the general election of 1999, produced the lowest turnout of any statewide election in the state's history. The second, the Presidential primary of 2000, produced the lowest turnout of any statewide primary in Oregon history. The third was the 2000 general election which produced a turnout increase, but lesser than 18 other states which did not adopt mail voting and was also the third lowest Presidential general election turnout in the state's history.)

–The highest turnout in states which had two party primaries was in South Dakota, where 31.7 percent of the eligible electorate voted, followed by Oregon (25.9), Alabama (23.3), Illinois (23.3) Montana (21.4) and West Virginia (21.2). The lowest turnout was recorded in New Jersey where 6.1 percent of eligibles voted, followed by Texas (10.3), Ohio (11.9), Nebraska (17.0) and California (17.6).

–The greatest increase in Democratic turnout occurred in Pennsylvania (up 7.4 percentage points), followed by Texas (3.0), Illinois (2.9) and Alabama (2.0). The greatest decreases occurred in California (down 6.5 percentage points), Kentucky (4.2), New Mexico (2.7), Arkansas (2.6) and Ohio (2.1).

–The highest Democratic turnout occurred in West Virginia (15.7 percent of eligibles), followed by Kentucky (14.7), Arkansas (13.7), Illinois (13.4) and Oregon (13.5). The lowest Democratic turnout occurred in New Jersey (2.7 percent of eligibles), followed by Iowa (3.5), Idaho (3.9), Nebraska (4.8), Ohio (5.4) and Texas (6.4).

–The greatest Republican increases occurred in South Dakota (up 10.3 percentage points), followed by South Carolina (4.8), Oregon (4.1) and Illinois (1.9). The greatest decreases occurred in Nebraska (down 6.1 percentage points), followed by Alabama (3.3), California (3.0) and Ohio (2.5).

–The highest GOP turnout occurred in South Dakota where 19.7 percent of eligibles

voted, followed by Idaho (14.8), Oregon (12.5), Montana (11.7) and Nebraska (11.6). The lowest GOP turnout occurred in New Jersey where 3.4 percent of eligibles voted, followed by Texas (4.0), Arkansas (4.5), Pennsylvania (5.3), West Virginia (5.6) and Ohio (6.4).

II. Census Sheds Light on 2000 Turnout, Long-Term Turnout Decline:

In late March, the U.S. Bureau of the Census released the results of its latest in a series of biennial surveys on registration and voting which is the largest single sampling of voting behavior in the United States and the best source of information on the level and trends in participation of demographic sub-groups.

This report and this series (adjusted for the consistent pattern of overreporting by survey respondents – see Note 4), help enlighten some unnoticed features of the 2000 election and of the four-decade long trend towards ever lower voter turnout. (See selected tables pages 7-9 of the summary charts.)

The 2000 election will be noted as the third closest election in 125 years in terms of the difference between the winner and loser in the Presidential election in terms of actual votes; the second closest election (behind the election of 1960) in the percentage of vote difference between the two leading candidates; and the closest election in 125 years in terms of electoral vote difference. Yet, a bare majority of the Voting Age Population (see note 2), 50.1 percent, cast ballots. Hardly an endorsement of the idea of electoral resurgence.

Still, almost all the major groupings in the electorate at least slightly increased their turnout rates, according to the Census survey.

But those which did not are instructive. The only groups to decline were white males, among the ethnic and racial groupings; 18-20 year-olds among the age groupings; those who had completed only one to eight years of schooling among the education groupings and the unemployed.

This pattern in the 2000 election reflects long-term trends that are continuing and expanding:

Age: There has been a continuing and progressive generational decline in voting. Those aged 18-20 have reduced their rate of participation by more than 40 percent since they were given the franchise in 1972 in both Presidential and mid-term elections. And as each succeeding generation moves up the age ladder, they are reducing the rates in the age cohorts above them. The rate of participation of those 18-24 has declined by 33.9 percent since 1972 in Presidential elections and by 32.4 percent since 1974. Those 25-34 have declined in their voting rate by 31.7 percent in Presidential elections since 1964 and by 40.1 percent in mid-term elections since 1966. Those 35-44 have reduced their participation rate by 23.1 percent in Presidential elections since 1964 and by 31.8 percent in mid-terms since 1966. The voting rate in Presidential elections

for those 45-54 has declined by 16.4 percent since 1964 and by 19.7 percent in mid-terms since 1966. The decline for those 55-64 is 9.2 percent in Presidential elections since 1964 and 7.9 percent in mid-terms since 1966. Only those over 65 have actually increased their rate of participation – those 65-74 by 1.4 percent in Presidential elections and by 8.3 percent in midterms, those over the age of 75 by 20.9 percent in Presidential elections and by 25.2 percent in mid-terms. (It is likely that the increase in the voting of those over 65 owes itself to three factors: 1. that they are the last generation imbued with the religion of civic duty; 2. because they vote heavily, they are targeted by campaigns; and 3. perhaps, most importantly and surely to the group over the age of 75, modern medicine which makes it possible for more seniors to vote.)

There are two likely conclusions which can be drawn from this data: that unless this progressive decline by generation is arrested, it is likely that the bracket creep will continue and as more and more of the uninvolved grow older, there will be no age cohort which will not experience decline; and that this generational decline will not be reversed until some new generation gets different stimuli in the home, their schools and in the macrocosm of American politics.

Income: There has been a similar pattern among various income groupings with the lowest income groups experiencing the greatest decline in participation, but with one difference – all income groups have declined in their rate of participation. The voting rates of those with incomes under \$11,100 have declined by 32.6 percent in presidential elections since 1964 and by 47.8 percent since 1966 in mid-term elections. Those with incomes of \$11,101 to \$16,649 have declined in their rate of participation by 29.7 percent in Presidential elections and by 29 percent in mid-term elections. Those with incomes of \$16,650 to \$27,749 have reduced their rate of participation by 26.1 in Presidential elections and by 25.8 in mid-terms. The participation rates of those with incomes of \$27,750-\$41,649 have dropped by 25 percent in Presidential elections and by 24.9 percent in mid-terms. The voting rates of those whose incomes are between \$41,650 and \$55,499 have been reduced by 22 percent in Presidential elections and by 28.5 percent in mid-terms. Those with incomes over \$55,000 have reduced their rate of participation by 16.9 percent in presidential elections and by 21.5 percent in mid-terms.

Education: The picture with respect to education is also similar – the participation rates of those with the least education have declined the greatest. The voting rates of those who have only completed from one to eight years of schooling have fallen 52.3 percent in Presidential elections since 1964 and by 48.7 percent in mid-terms since 1966. Voting has declined among those who have completed 9-11 years of education by 49.5 percent in Presidential elections and by 53.6 percent in mid-terms. The voting rates of high school graduates has decreased by 34.7 percent in Presidential elections and by 39 percent in mid-term elections. Those who have completed 1-3 years of college vote at a 25.5 lesser rate in Presidential elections and 28.3 percent in mid-terms. Those who have graduated a 4-year college vote at a 18.2 lesser rate now than in 1964 in Presidential elections and a 22.4 percent lower rate in mid-terms. The voting rates of those with more than 4 years of college has declined by 9.9 percent in Presidential elections and by 8 percent in mid-terms.

What is clear from the age, income and education data is that the national 25 percent decline in voting (and 30 percent outside the south) is not due to voter satisfaction, but rather due to people whose needs are greatest and whose hope is least.

The levels of participation of these groups in the most recent Presidential and mid-term elections (2000 and 1998) are perhaps instructive. The lowest age group, those 18-20, voted at a 24.8 percent rate in 2000 and at an 8.9 percent rate in 1998. This compared with a voting rate of 66.3 percent in 2000 and 58.7 in 1998 for those 65-74 (the highest voting cohort). Those with incomes under \$11,100 voted at a 29.4 percent rate in 2000 and a 19 percent rate in 1998, compared to a 2000 voting rate of 65.6 and a 1998 voting rate of 49.2 for those with incomes over \$55,000. Those with only one to eight years of schooling voted at a 23.2 percent rate in the 2000 election and a 19.4 rate in the 1998 mid-term, compared to a 71.9 percent rate for those who had more than a college education in 2000 and 59 percent in 1998.

If one is going to reverse some of these trends, the left outs – those at or close to the bottom of the age, education and income scales – must be reintegrated into American society through education; through the attention of the integrating institutions of American society – the schools, the churches, the unions, the political parties and government; and through a reversal of policies which has seen wealth flow upward and the gap between the rich and nearly rich and the middle-class and poor widen.

Gender and Race: The decline in turnout over the last four decades is largely the product of whites in general and white males in particular. Turnout for whites has declined by 18.4 percent since 1964 in Presidential elections and by 22.9 percent in mid-terms since 1966. Turnout for African-Americans, thanks largely to the Voting Rights Act, has declined by only 5 percent in Presidential elections and has actually increased by 0.3 percent in mid-terms.

Turnout for all males has declined by 24.9 percent in Presidential elections and by 28.4 percent in mid-terms. The largest part of that figure is propelled by the decline in participation of white males whose voting rate has declined by 23.9 percent in Presidential elections and by 27.7 percent in mid-terms. Turnout for black males has declined by 13.6 percent in Presidential elections and a modest 8.4 percent in mid-terms.

Turnout for all females has declined by 13.8 percent in Presidential elections and by 18.2 percent in mid-terms. (Which means, in passing, that the increasing share of the voting electorate occupied by females is not a product of their increased vote, but that their participation has declined less.) White female participation has declined by 13 percent in Presidential elections and by 18 percent in mid-terms. But African-American participation has actually increased by 2.3 percent in Presidential elections and by 7 percent in mid-terms, making them the only major grouping, other than those over 65 to increase their rate of participation.

(Note: these figures do not include Latinos, Asians and Native Americans, among others, which would make possible for these numbers to add together for a balanced total.)

III. Turnout Went Down Between 1990-2000 Without A Vote Changing:

Because the 2000 Census revealed a growth in the U.S. population much greater than had been anticipated by projections drawn from the 1990 Census and those previous, all the estimates for Voting Age Population, the denominator for determining turnout, beginning with the 1990 election had to be recalculated upward progressively through 2000. And, that, in turn has reduced the turnout percentages for each election year and in each state from 1990-2000.

CSAE, under formulas provided by the Census Bureau (and outlined pages 5-6 of the notes in this report), has made those changes. (A full list of these changes are on pages 4-6 in the summary section of this report.)

Accordingly the following changes have occurred:

The 2000 Presidential election turnout was 50.1 percent of eligibles (Voting Age Population) rather than 51.2 as previously reported. It grew by 1.9 percentage points (rather than 2.2) from a revised 1996 turnout of 48.2 percent (rather than 49 percent). The 1992 turnout was 54.8 percent of eligibles rather than 55.2 and thus was lower than the 1972 turnout, which it had previously purportedly equalled.

Mid-term turnout in 1996 was 35.3 percent of eligibles rather than 36.1. Mid-term turnout in 1994 was 38.5, rather than 38.8. And mid-term turnout in 1990 was at about the same level 36.5 as it was prior to the revisions.

Partisan turnout figures both nationally and on the state level also have been adjusted downward. A full listing is in the Presidential vote charts toward the end of this report.

IV. PROSPECTS FOR 2002 GENERAL ELECTION TURNOUT:

Anyone writing at this remove from the November election who would predict likely turnout levels should be committed to an institution for the mentally unbalanced. There is too much unknown about what may happen between now and then to even hazard a guess.

What is known is that everything in this report, from a larger electorate, to the continued decline in primary voting, to the four-decade decline among almost all voter groupings without anything being done about the root causes of this decline argues for a low voter turnout. But how low and whether turnout, in comparison to 1996, will go up or down is an open question.

There are a number of factors which could propel turnout upward. Almost every populous state – California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and Texas – will be having highly competitive and contentious contests for at least one statewide office.

Almost every state has a major budget shortfall which could reduce public services and enhance voter anger. College freshmen, polled after 9/11, indicated a greater liberality, interest in politics and public service – a reversal of a three decade trend downwards in all those categories (but also maybe a temporary reaction to the attacks). And it is not at all clear that the nation is not headed for a double-dip recession which could ignite voter reprisals, propel turnout upward and hurt the party in power, in this case the Republicans.

There are a number of unknowns whose impact on turnout cannot be anticipated: Will there be another major terrorist assault on American soil and what will be the political reaction to it? How much further will the United States and American troops be involved in active combat overseas and what will be the public's reaction to that involvement? Will the various business scandals enrage potential voters or further alienate them from the political system? How successful will the Administration be in its various foreign interventions and non-interventions and what will the public think of leadership at voting time?

But barring some dramatic event – recession, terrorism, war – it is likely that the disinterest of the non-college educated young, the hopelessness of the poor, the mistrust of leadership of the majority, the ugliness of the modern television campaign and the cynicism about and lack of coverage of politics in the media in general and television in particular will be among the factors that will hold turnout down.

Some day it would be nice to report something other than gloom and lament – that somebody was doing something commensurate with the scope needed to reclaim the vitality of American democracy.

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Appended to this report are six sections:

1. A set of graphs which illustrate the major findings in this report.
2. A set of notes on methodology and the limitations of the figures which are used for calculating turnout.
3. A series of summary charts which detail the major findings of this report.
4. Charts of the actual votes for the spring primaries.
5. Charts of the revised votes for President in 2000 and previous years by state and nation because of the 2000 Census.
6. Both unadjusted and adjusted charts showing turnout changes over time for several demographic groupings and derived from the Census Bureau's P-20 series of the Current Population Survey.