

## DISCUSSION

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These papers illustrate two approaches to the study and measurement of voting behavior. On the one hand, Professor Stokes has described the series of sample surveys on voting conducted by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan beginning with the 1948 election.

Meyer Zitter and Donald Starsinic, on the other hand, have a different purpose in view - that is, to provide state by state estimates of that portion of the nonvoting population who are unable to vote for legal and administrative reasons.

The Survey Research Center has emphasized in its nationwide surveys the psychological variables which explain political behavior, rather than such descriptive characteristics as age, income, and education. Although some would argue that there has been an undue emphasis on the psychological components in the Center's studies of political behavior, the insights offered, for example, on party identification, have enriched our understanding of American politics.

As Professor Stokes concedes however, students of politics also depend on the accurate and complete collection of basic election statistics by states and local governments. It is especially for persons who utilize these figures that the Zitter-Starsinic paper will be of interest.

The phenomenon of nonvoting has become a commonplace of American political commentary. The voting turnout in the United States is usually compared with the higher rates of other democratic nations. However, the would-be voter in this country must overcome many more administrative hurdles than do voters abroad. Principally, he must register, usually in person, before he can vote for the first time in his election district. He must also meet residence requirements which disfranchise many in a highly mobile society. Absentee voting laws in many states are unnecessarily restrictive. In spite of these and other obstacles, voting turnout in most non-southern states in Presidential years compares favorably with the performance of West European nations. It must be conceded, however, that this figure sags appreciably for mid-term elections.

Zitter and Starsinic have devised a way of estimating the approximately one-third of the resident population who have "legitimate" reasons for nonvoting. Subtracting these two groups from the voting age population, they arrive at a more realistic estimate of voting turnout. In general, I would agree with these approximations with a few reservations.

Census population estimates are based on place of residence. For members of the Armed Forces, this means where they are stationed rather than their state of voting residence. Although no reliable figures exist on the latter, it seems probable that subtracting these presumed nonvoters from the total of persons eligible by age may result in misleading figures if the majority of Armed Forces personnel register and vote in their home states.

Persons temporarily confined to their homes by illness are involuntary nonvoters by definition. This is another gray area where a good estimate is hard to come by, although Rossiter estimated that five million persons were unable to vote in the 1956 election because of illness.<sup>1/</sup>

The authors make a valid point concerning the availability of registration statistics. Although a few states and parts of states do not require formal registration, much would be gained by encouraging states to establish procedures for uniform collection and publication of these data. Sample surveys offer another means, seldom exploited, of gaining further enlightenment on the characteristics of the registered and the nonregistered.

I should like to conclude by describing briefly another study on the measurement of voting behavior in which the chairman and I participated. The Bureau of the Census became involved in this subject during the election of 1964 under a provision of Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to "conduct a survey to compile registration and voting statistics in such geographic areas as may be recommended by the Commission on Civil Rights." In order to gain experience in this field, a single question was added to the November Current Population Survey to ascertain the number of age eligible persons who voted for President. The results, weighted by the usual CPS weighting procedures and adjusted to independent estimates of the civilian noninstitutional population, produced approximately six million more voters than the official figures, or a difference of seven percentage points.

We ascribed this discrepancy to four general factors without attempting to allocate the proportional share of each factor.<sup>2/</sup> First, there is a tendency for respondents to overreport their voting, possibly increased by Census use of a household respondent to report for other family members.

<sup>1/</sup> Clinton Rossiter, Parties and Politics in America, Ithaca, N. Y. 1960, p.31.

<sup>2/</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 143, "Voter Participation in the National Election: November 1964," U. S. Government Printing Office, Wash. D.C. 1965, pp 4-5.

Second, the attribution of the characteristics of persons in interviewed households to households where no interview was obtained rests on the unlikely assumption that difficult to locate persons vote as frequently as the rest of the population.

Third, the Current Population Survey sample is known to be unsatisfactory in its coverage of certain groups such as nonwhite males age 21-24 who have a high level of nonvoting. In addition, the independent estimates of the voting age population are based on the 1960 Census and reflect undercounts known to exist in certain age groups.

Finally, there are two aspects of the election itself that have a bearing on the estimates - the invalidation of ballots and the fact that more people vote in an election than vote for any specific office, including that of President.

The data collected by the Bureau of the Census support previous findings in that nonvoters tend to be female, nonwhite, rural, of low income and education, the young and the elderly. The size of the Current Population Survey Sample (approximately 32,000 interviewed households) permitted an extensive cross-classification of variables, while the fact that the sample was based on households made possible an analysis of family voting. It has been proposed that the Census Bureau undertake another voting survey this fall (1966). Additional questions have been suggested on registration and reasons for nonregistration.<sup>2/</sup>

<sup>2/</sup> Since the August meeting, Budget Bureau approval has been received for voting surveys in conjunction with the 1966 election. In addition to questions on voting and registration on the Current Population Survey, there will be two methodological tests - one obtaining information directly from the voter, rather than a household respondent, while the other will experiment with collecting voting and registration information by mail using two versions of question wording.