

VOTER CONTACT NEWS

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New '84 registrants apathetic in '85

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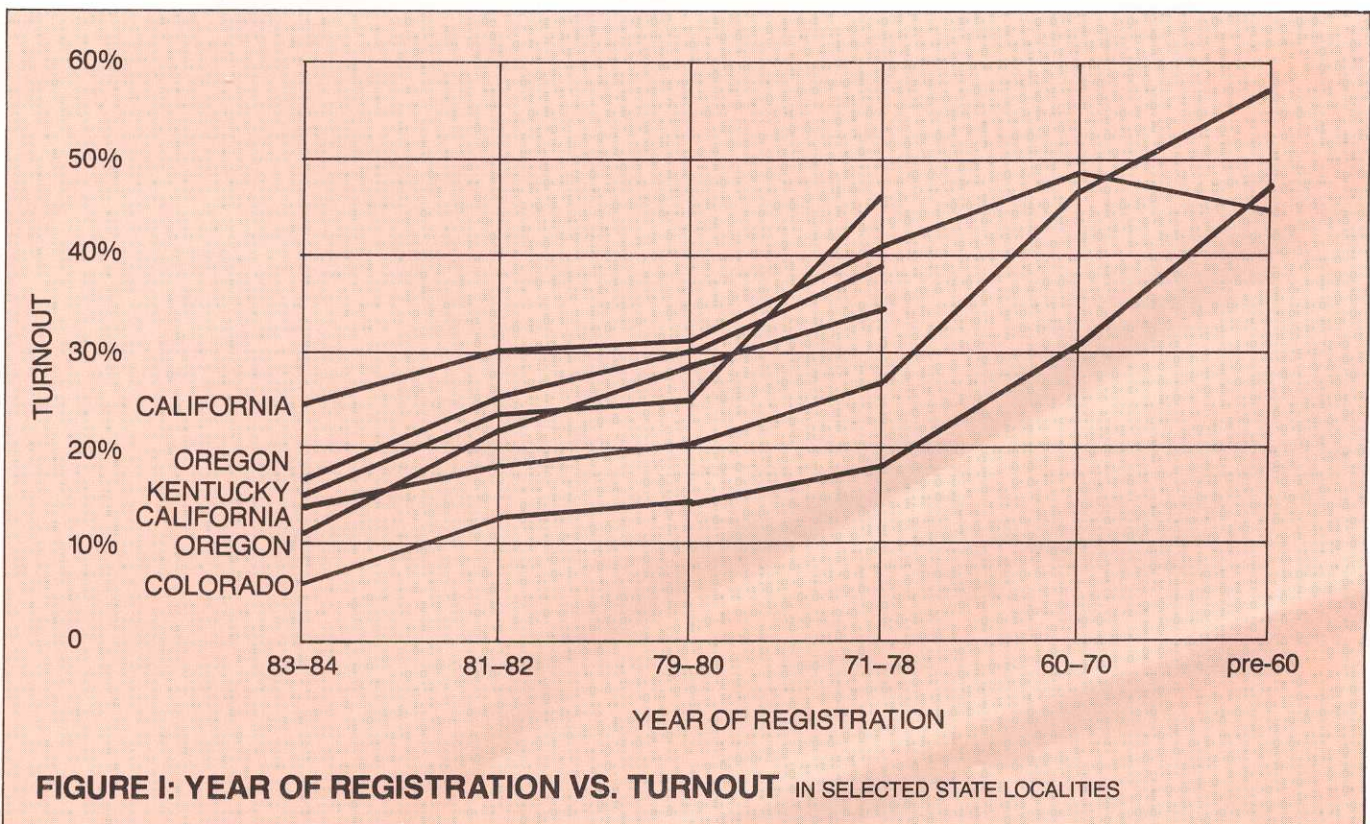
Since the massive new voter registration in 1984 much speculation has taken place about whether a "realignment" is taking place in American politics, and whether this massive influx of new participants will influence State and Local elections in the years to come.

The first opportunity for these new registrants to come back to the polls and take an interest in State and Local politics came in the many elections that took place in 1985. There were statewide elections for offices in Virginia, Kentucky, New Jersey, Louisiana and Mississippi, plus some kind of local election in nearly every state in 1985.

The overwhelming response to these elections by the new 1984 registrants has been to revert to apathy. In our study, covering over 1,000,000 voters in seven areas in five states all across the country, the turnout of these registrants was far below the turnout rate of previously registered voters. The average turnout rate for 1984 registrants in these elections was 14.2%, compared with an overall average turnout of 25.0% and an average turnout of those registered in 1978 or before of 42.6%. It is the long-time registrants who dominate these local elections.

It seems likely to conclude that this trend will continue. The graphs in Figure I dramatically illustrate

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VOTER CONTACT SERVICES COMPARISON PROFILE PREPARED FOR WALNUT CREEK STATE CA
 COUNTY 07 CONTRA COSTA
 NO 85 VOTE % T/O

	85 VOTE		ALL VOTERS		NO 85 VOTE		% T/O
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	
REPUBLICAN	9,677	58.78	25,304	52.49	15,627	49.22	38.24
DEMOCRAT	5,630	34.20	17,402	36.10	11,772	37.08	32.35
OTHER	1,156	7.02	5,505	11.42	4,349	13.70	21.00
AGE UNDER 25	771	4.68	6,512	13.51	5,741	18.08	11.84
25-34	1,517	9.21	7,802	16.18	6,285	19.80	19.44
35-44	2,069	12.57	6,554	13.59	4,485	14.13	31.57
45-54	1,347	8.18	3,752	7.78	2,405	7.58	35.90
55-64	1,373	8.34	3,123	6.48	1,750	5.51	43.96
OVER 65	2,412	14.65	5,368	11.13	2,956	9.31	44.93
AGE NOT CODED	6,974	42.36	15,100	31.32	8,126	25.60	46.19
REG 1983-84	3,419	20.77	14,071	29.19	10,652	33.55	24.30
1981-82	1,678	10.19	5,527	11.46	3,849	12.12	30.36
1979-80	2,008	12.20	6,824	14.15	4,816	15.17	29.43
1971-78	5,767	35.03	14,110	29.27	8,343	26.28	40.87
1960-70	3,028	18.39	6,226	12.91	3,198	10.07	48.63
PRE 1960	563	3.42	1,452	3.01	889	2.80	38.77
REG NOT CODED							
JAPANESE	97	.59	270	.56	173	.54	35.93
IRISH	812	4.93	2,340	4.85	1,528	4.81	34.70
SPANISH	338	2.05	1,381	2.86	1,043	3.29	24.48
ITALIAN	408	2.48	1,262	2.62	854	2.69	32.33
CHINESE/KOREAN	157	.95	466	.97	309	.97	33.69
IFWISH	1,031	6.26	2,811	5.83	1,780	5.61	36.68
	13,620	82.73	39,681	82.31	26,061	82.09	34.32
							33.93

FIGURE II: COMPARISON PROFILE

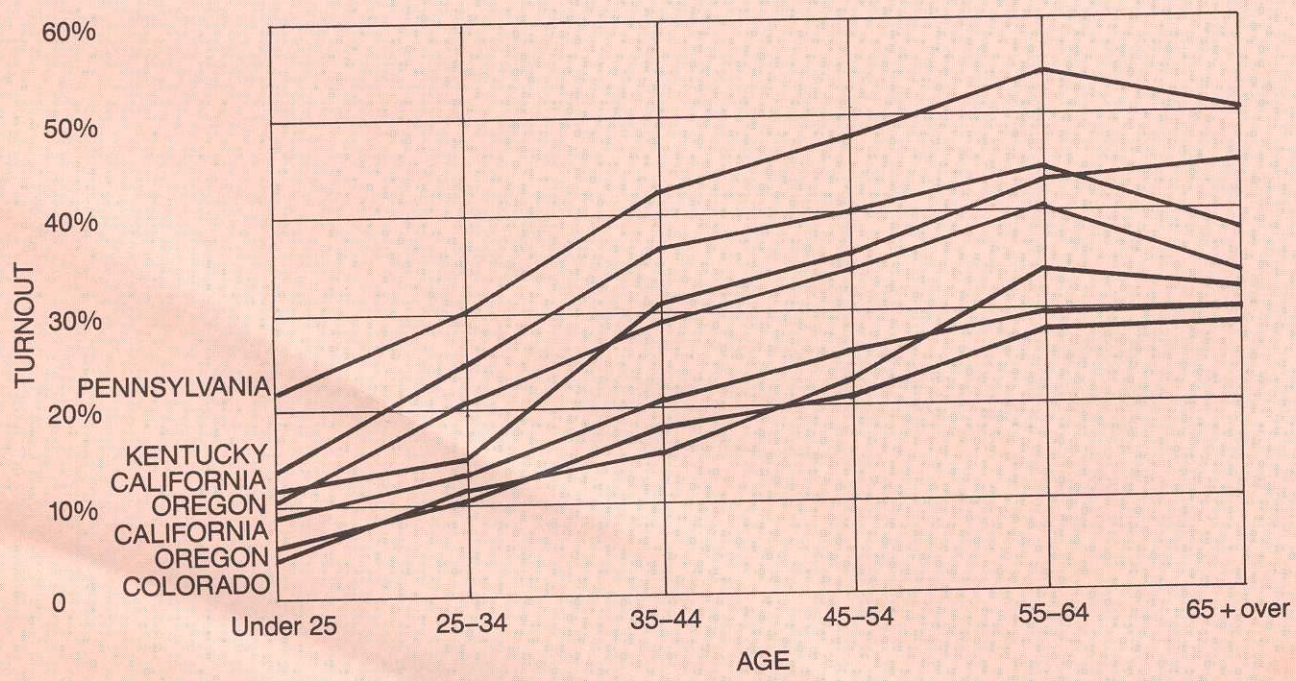


FIGURE III: AGE VERSUS TURNOUT IN SELECTED STATE LOCALITIES

'84 registrants

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that the longer a person has been registered the more likely they are to vote in a current election. It is important to note that all areas covered by the graph use some sort of voter "purge," where voters are purged from the list if they do not meet some minimum voting pattern. This pattern can vary a good bit from place to place, but the major thing that people have in common who registered before 1979 and are still on the voter rolls is a habit of voting.

This pattern of a habit of voting is an important input for planning Voter Contact programs. The following are some significant implications for campaigns in 1986 and beyond based on these findings:

- a) If you want to target your persuasive voter contact program at people who are likely to vote you will do well to use length of registration and specific past voting history as key criteria.
- b) If you are trying to decide what voters to concentrate on with your Get-Out-The-Vote efforts, you should include members of your high support groups who have registered in the two preceeding years, especially those with no subsequent habit of voting.
- c) Effects of voter registration drives are not long lasting unless a habit of voting can be established. Much registration effort has been focused on increasing the numbers, without considering who actually ends up going to the polls. Possibly more effort should be spent on trying to change the habits of voting in high support groups.
- d) These guidelines are particularly important for normally low turnout elections, such as primaries and special local elections.

BUILDING VOTER HISTORY CODED FILES

It is becoming increasingly common for political campaigns to look at past individual voting history in assessing campaign strategy for Voter Contact. If we know what voters have a habit of voting in low-turnout special elections we can assume they will also participate in high-turnout general elections, and have the best chance at participating in other low-turnout elections such as primaries, bond measures, etc. Because of this many computerized files of registered voters now have individual past voting history coded on each voter record. In many cases it is possible to obtain such files directly from the registrar, for instance in all or part of Kentucky, Iowa, Maryland, Washington, Alaska, North Carolina and Oregon, as well as many other areas.

Where past voting history is not available from the

registrar directly it is frequently worth gathering such information manually and keying it into an existing file of registered voters. There are a variety of methods for gathering and updating this information, and the process will be more accurate if the voter files have an unchanging Voter Identification Number issued by the registrar. Regardless of the specific circumstances, however, it is generally a straightforward matter to work out some sort of methodology for gathering and updating.

Voter Contact Services has a variety of programs and procedures available for performing these tasks. We normally maintain many such files of voters, and in particular we have files on several million voters that already include individual coding of 1985 participation. We choose about a million of these voters for this study. We wanted to insure a cross-section of the electorate and used voters from Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Colorado, Oregon and California. Some areas were large urban, others suburban, some rural and some smaller regional centers.

Using these files and the Voter Contact Comparison Report it is possible to assess incremental turnout rates by groups of voters, particularly by period of registration and by age. The computer passes over the complete files of registered voters, counting up all those who registered in 1983-84, and at the same time making a separate count of how many of those voted in the elections under study. Similarly voters in other registration periods are counted, as well as in each political party, age group, ethnic group, etc. When the entire file has been passed it is possible to produce a demographic analysis of those who voted, those who didn't vote, and the entire universe of voters, as well as incremental turnout by demographic group. A sample of a Comparison Report used in the study is shown on Figure II.

This process is very exact, eliminating any sampling error and the tendency of people to want to say they voted in past elections whether they did or not. By preparing these Comparison Reports for each area included in the study we were able to graph the values shown in the % Turnout column to produce the graph shown in Figure I.

THE OLDER VOTER'S STRONGER HABIT OF VOTING

It is common knowledge in political campaigns that older voters are more likely to vote than younger voters. With the data from various Comparison Reports we have dramatically illustrated the remarkable truth of this fact in the graph in Figure III. In the elections included in this study where we had voter's age on the file the average turnout rate was 27.2%. For voters under 25 the rate was less than half of that, only 10.8%, while the highest turnout group, voters 55-64, had a turnout rate nearly 50% higher than average, 38.6%.

The habit of voting gets increasingly strong with

