

VOTER CONTACT NEWS

A JOURNAL OF COMPUTERS IN POLITICS

VOL. 2, NO. 2, FREE

Low turnout expected for '84 registrants in '86

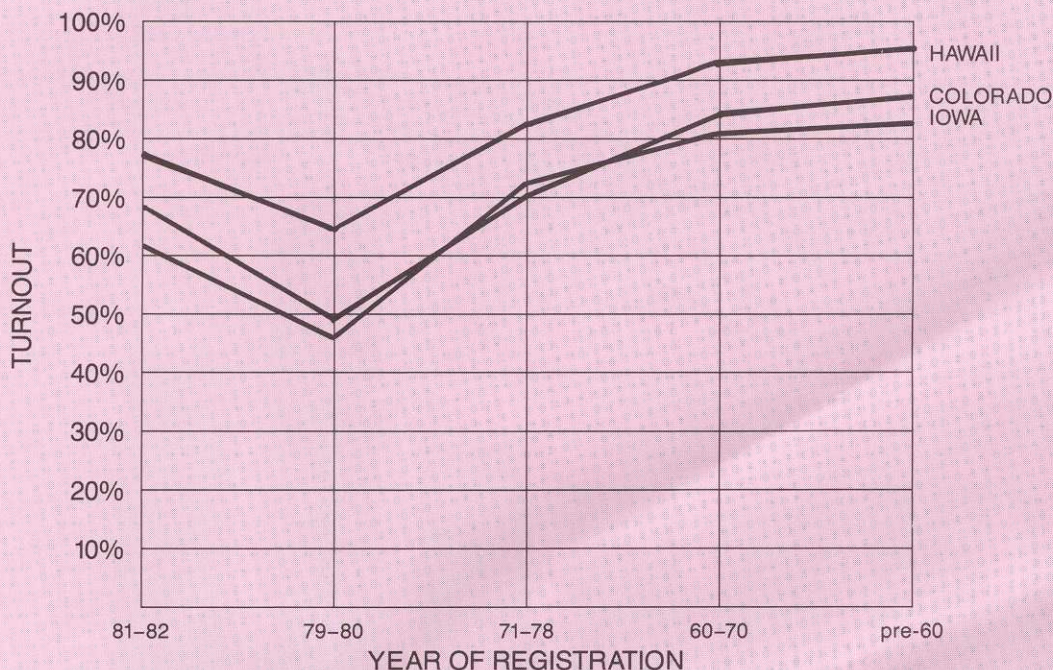
By Bill Daly

In the last issue of *Voter Contact News* we presented some data covering actual incremental turnout rates for a number of special elections in 1985. This data was broken down by age and year of registration. Campaigns are now in full swing for the 1986 elections, and there is increasing interest in predicting and understanding who will be the likely voters in the 1986 elections, and particularly whether the large block of voters who registered in 1984 will prove a decisive factor in the '86 elections.

We first turned to some of our historical files to study the last general election following a Presidential

election, 1982. Presumably people who registered in 1984 will behave in 1986 much like the people who registered in 1980 behaved in 1982. Using our files for Hawaii, Colorado and Iowa we were able to plot in Figure I the statewide turnout figures for those three states in the general election of 1982 versus year of original registration. As in the previous study, we see that the graphs for each of the states have a remarkably similar shape, despite the quite different nature of the 3 electorates. In all three states there was a governor's race in 1982, so there was some substantial draw for overall turnout.

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**FIGURE 1: TURNOUT VS. YEAR OF REGISTRATION
1982 General Election**

Low turnout

Cont'd from page 1

The average turnout in these three states in the General Election of 1982 was 71.5%. It is interesting to note that even those who registered in 1982, the year of the election, still had a lower than average turnout of only 67.6%. Unfortunately getting people registered doesn't bring them to the polls. Those who had registered two years earlier, in 1980, had the lowest turnout of all, 49%. Less than half of the 1980 registrants returned to vote in a 1982 Governor's Race after registering for the Presidential Race in 1980. For all others registered for more than two years, however, the turnout rate was a remarkably high 83%. As in our previous study, it is clear the long term registrants are dominating the 'off year' general elections, although not to the degree they are dominating special elections.

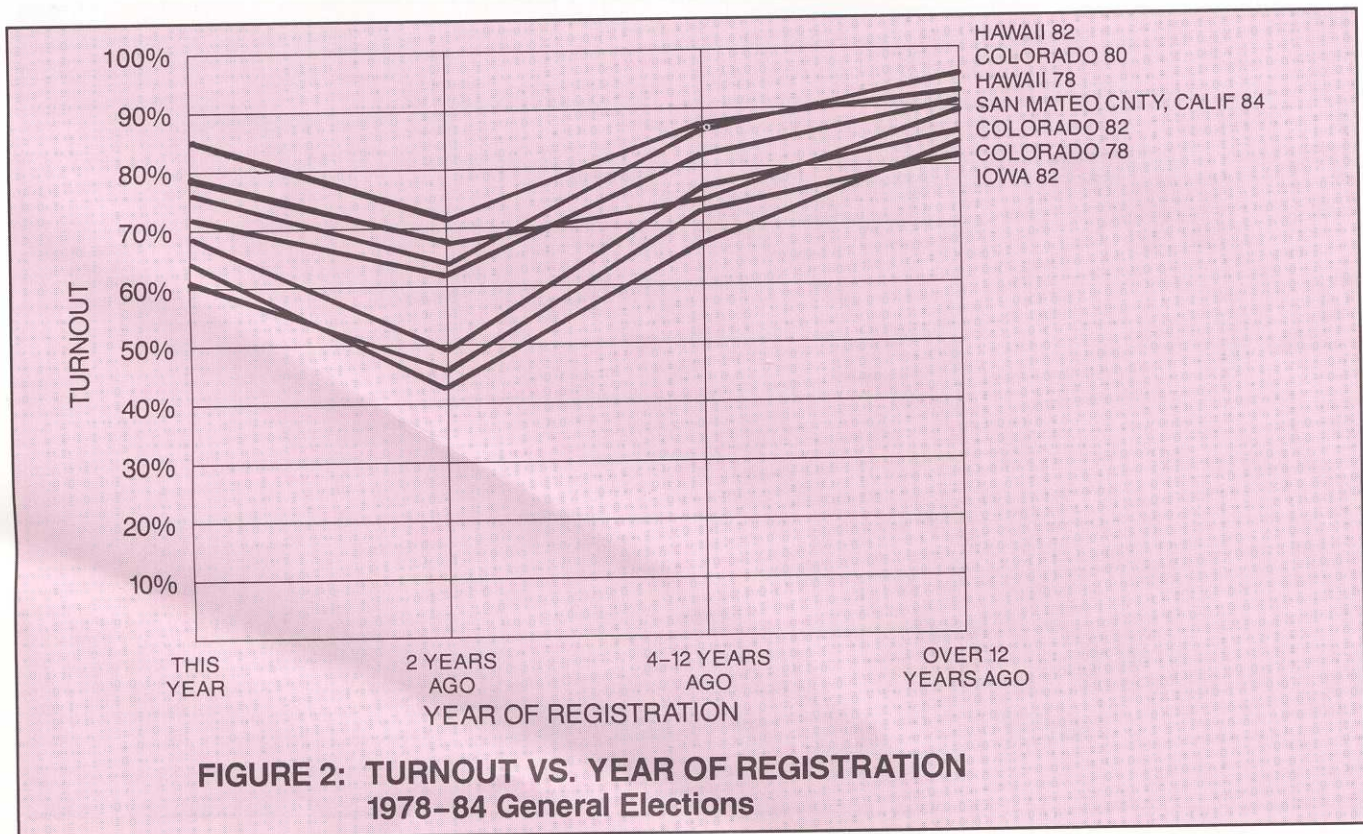
In Figure II we took the data from Figure I and added some additional historical data from California 1984, Hawaii 1978, and Colorado 1978 and 1982. The shape of the graphs is still remarkably the same. Generally the turnout rate two years after registration is somewhat lower for people who registered in Presidential years than for those who register in 'off years,' but regardless of the year the group with the lowest turnout will be those who registered two years earlier. Registrants in the current year will turnout a little below the average turnout in the current year, and the people who have been registered for a long time will have the highest turnout.

The graphs in Figure III show some additional data on turnout rates by age for even year elections. The top two lines are for Presidential years in Colorado (1980) and San Mateo County, California (1984). Note these are the overall highest turnout elections, and the relative turnout rate for younger voters has increased. The three lower lines represent 'off year' elections, and the tailoff on the left indicates younger voters have relatively worse turnout performance in non-presidential years.

Taken together with the 1985 data these three results form an interesting pattern that shows increasingly strong relative performance by younger voters as turnout increases. Of course it is logical that turnout by low-turnout groups might increase more than turnout by high-turnout groups as overall turnout increases. The data presented here makes a strong case that it is true for younger voters and for recent registrants, despite the fact that they are always in the lowest turnout groups.

Campaigns in 1986 that plan GOTV efforts would do well to focus such activities on their supporters who are young and recent registrants. Campaigns that are planning registration drives would do well to include some GOTV effort in their budget for those they register. Working to establish a habit of voting amongst your support groups in EVERY election is a valuable goal for political action. The place to focus the effort is on those who haven't yet established the habit.

Bill Daly is President of Voter Contact Services.



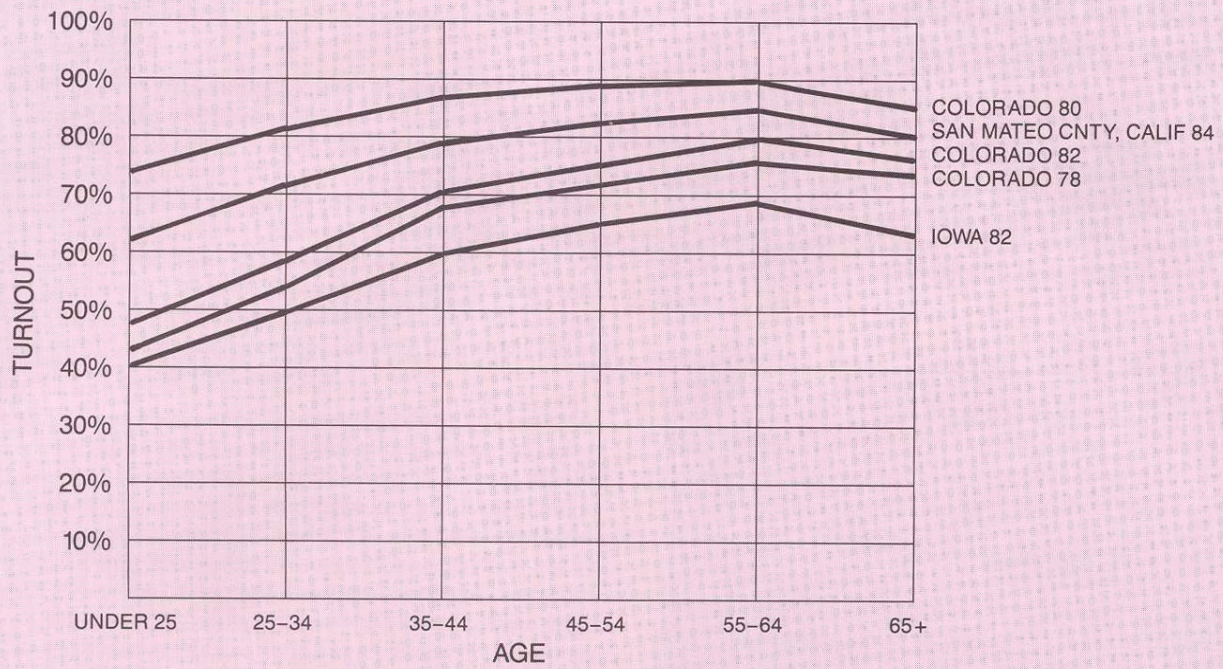


FIGURE 3: TURNOUT VS. AGE
1978-84 General Elections