



behavior research center's

Rocky Mountain Poll

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Contact: Earl de Berge
info@brc-research.com

4 IN 10 WOULD VOTE VIA THE INTERNET IF THEY COULD

EXPANDING VOTING OPTIONS PORTENDS BROAD PARTICIPATION IN FUTURE ELECTIONS

PHOENIX, Ariz. (November 24, 2000) – Levels of participation in elections across America may trace more to the intensity of campaigns and the changing lifestyles of Americans and their militant penchant for convenience than, as some pundits have complained, to a profound loss of interest in politics or liberty or to burgeoning cynicism about our democracy. The heavy turnout in the 2000 election appears to be an illuminating demonstration that real differences between candidates and philosophies, coupled with the perception of a close contest, results in heightened voter interest and turnout.

Additionally, the growing popularity of voting by mail (which may hit 40 percent or more of all ballots cast in Maricopa County) points to the desire of voters to be able to cast ballots in more convenient ways than trooping to the polls in poor weather or standing in lines to exercise their voting privileges.

In our post-election poll in Maricopa County, voters were given four options for casting ballots:

- Voting via the internet
- Going to a polling place
- Voting by mail, or
- Not voting at all.

(– more –)

Fewer than ten percent say they would probably not vote, a considerably lower figure than the approximately 25 percent of Maricopa voters who passed on this year's presidential election, and far lower than the proportions that have stayed at home or at their desks during other recent, and less energized, elections.

The potential for the Internet to lift participation in voting is seen perhaps most tellingly in the finding that among people currently registered to vote, but who admit they did not participate this November, we find six of ten saying they would vote by Internet, were this option available.

But it is not just the availability of an added option that could result in greater turnout. More likely, it is the expanded mix of options that appeals to voters. Indeed, Internet voting is not for everyone. For example, while interest in voting by Internet is strong among younger and working age people, vote by mail remains very popular with retirees. Among minority voters, we find a preference for the social experience of going to a polling place. Thus it is unlikely that the Internet will be a godsend to all voters, but rather that a variety of options will expand participation.

What is more, if vote by mail or Internet voting would result in less crowded polling places, the appeal of going to a polling place with the expectation of not having to wait in long lines might attract voters who in the past have seen long lines as a barrier to their participation.

Voters who prefer the Internet are heavily concentrated within the ranks of younger adults, employed persons, Independents and registered voters who did not vote in this year's election and among adults who admit they are not registered to vote. Such a voter profile will doubtless result in political party officials of various colors either dragging their feet on the implementation of Internet voting or pushing hard for it, depending upon whether they see an advantage to themselves. In reality, however, broad spectrums within all political parties look forward to the day when the electoral process will catch up to technology and offer voters more options about how to exercise their franchise. Thus 39 percent of Republicans, 43 percent of Democrats, and 52 percent of Independents indicate a preference for voting via the Internet. Just over a third (36%) of citizens who admit they are not currently registered to vote say they would vote by Internet were it available.

(– more –)

The results of this poll may also reveal that current voting methods discriminate against the lifestyle preferences of some Americans while favoring those of others. For example, both now and in the future, older voters show a strong preference for voting by mail, an option that is of little interest to large blocks of voters who tend to turn out in disproportionately lower numbers on election day: younger voters, minorities and the poor. These same voters, on the other hand, and especially the young, are very interested in Internet voting and voting in person at polling places.

When Internet voting becomes an option for voters it is very likely that political parties, candidates, initiative proponents and governments who have long benefitted from low turnout and block voting from small but determined constituencies, may find themselves confronted with having to run campaigns aimed at broader constituencies than they have faced in the past. On the other hand, broader participation and modern communications systems could also yield more pluralistic voting patterns and an environment which might be conducive to stronger emergence of third party options.

It should be very interesting, and perhaps amusing, to watch the dominant political parties of today wrestle with what we predict will be growing public demand for our voting system to be modernized and made more convenient for the public.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona (2000-IV-08), is based on 600 interviews with adults throughout metro Phoenix between November 10 and 20, 2000. Where necessary, figures for age, sex, race and political party were weighted to bring them into line with their actual proportion in the population. In a sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 4.8 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire voter population been surveyed.

The Rocky Mountain Poll is conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and is an independent and non-partisan research program sponsored by the Center.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

ENCLOSED: Statistical tables.

STATISTICAL DATA

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Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona
RMP 2000-IV-08

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“Voters can now vote by going to a polling place or with a mail-in ballot. In the future, Americans will have the added choice of voting through the Internet from whatever location is convenient for them. If all three methods were available in the next election, would you most likely vote in person at a polling place, vote through the mail or vote through the Internet or might you prefer not to vote at all?”

| | Via Internet | Polling Place | Via Mail | Might Not Vote |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------|----------------|
| Total | 41% | 31% | 21% | 7% |
| Age: Under 35 | 50 | 30 | 10 | 10 |
| 35 to 54 | 47 | 31 | 16 | 6 |
| 55 + | 21 | 33 | 40 | 6 |
| Retired | 17 | 32 | 44 | 7 |
| Men | 39 | 38 | 15 | 8 |
| Women | 43 | 24 | 27 | 6 |
| Caucasians | 42 | 29 | 23 | 6 |
| Hispanics | 31 | 35 | 14 | 20 |
| Other | 40 | 36 | 16 | 8 |
| Democrat | 43 | 33 | 24 | 0 |
| Republican | 39 | 34 | 26 | 1 |
| Independent/Non-Partisan | 52 | 30 | 14 | 4 |
| Not Registered | 39 | 26 | 15 | 20 |

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“In the presidential election last week, did you vote at a polling place, through the mail or did you not have time to vote in that election?”

|                       | Polling Place | Via Mail | (% Claiming They Voted) |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Maricopa County Total | 60%           | 40%      | (79%)                   |
| Republican            | 55            | 45       | (87)                    |
| Democrat              | 66            | 34       | (76)                    |
| Non-Partisan          | 64            | 36       | (73)                    |

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| (Maricopa County) | <u>Profile of Registered Voters Who Admit Not Voting in 2000 Election</u> |
|--------------------------|---|
| Republican | 33% |
| Democrat | 42 |
| Independent/Non-Partisan | 25 |
| Men | 47 |
| Women | 53 |
| Age: Under 35 | 52 |
| 35 to 54 | 30 |
| 55 and over | 18 |
| Education: High School | 45 |
| Some College | 25 |
| College | |
| Graduate | 30 |
| Income: Under \$25,000 | 19 |
| \$25,000 to \$44,999 | 35 |
| \$45,000 to \$64,999 | 24 |
| \$65,000 and over | 22 |
| Retirees | 18 |
| Employed | 70 |
| Students/Homemakers | 12 |

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