

GETTING OUT THE VOTE

by H.F. Gosnell

Chapter I -- INTRODUCTION

It might be stated as a general rule in American politics that the proportion of eligible voters that come to the polls varies directly with the closeness of the elections in the particular jurisdiction analyzed.

It is not essential that the election actually be a close one. If the general impression is current that the election is going to be a close one, that is sufficient to stimulate greatly the interest of the electors in the voting process.

The facts gathered in the study of non-voting show that a large proportion of the non-voters in Chicago are ignorant regarding elections. The present study also shows that there is a relationship between habitual non-voting and a lack of schooling.

REASONS FOR NOT REGISTERING GIVEN BY SELECTED NON-VOTERS IN THE 1923 AND 1924 ELECTIONS: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION

Reasons for Not Registering	Adult Citizens Not Registered for the Mayor- alty Election of 1923	Adult Citizens Not Registered for the Presi- dential Election of 1924
All reasons:		
Number	3,369	649
Percentage	100.0	100.0
Illness	7.7	12.3
Absence	6.2	4.2
Detained by helpless member of family	1.6	1.1
Insufficient legal residence	7.6	6.6
Fear of loss of wages or business	2.9	3.3
Congestion at the polls	0.5	0.5
Poor location of polling booth	0.7	1.1
Fear of disclosure of age	0.3	0.0
Disbelief in woman's voting	11.3	13.4
Objections of husband	1.6	1.8
Belief that one vote counts for nothing	1.6	2.2
Disgust with politics	4.9	6.0
Disgust with own party	0.6	0.0
Belief that ballot box is corrupted	0.7	0.0
Disbelief in all political action	0.5	0.0
General indifference	33.4	33.8
Indifference to particular election	2.3	0.3
Neglect: intended to register but failed	5.0	2.9
Ignorance or timidity regarding elections	9.6	10.0
Failure of party workers	1.0	0.5

The per cent of the vote cast for the majority party and the per cent of the eligible voters not voting by states correlated .62 in 1920 and .58 in 1924.

It appears from this table that the conclusions reached in the study of non-voting regarding the quantitative importance of the various reasons given for electoral abstentions were fairly accurate. The attitudes of most of the non-voters interviewed in connection with the presidential election were obtained both before and after the election. In both the presidential and mayoralty elections, one-third of those who failed to register attributed their delinquency in electoral matters to general indifference, one-tenth were ignorant or timid regarding elections, and so on. Although this table shows what kind of rationalizations non-voters make for failing to exercise the franchise, it does not indicate the qualitative importance of the different reasons. How much pressure is needed to persuade a non-voter to overcome his indifference toward elections or his timidity regarding the process? It is this question which is given special consideration in the pages that follow. The results of the experiment in the stimulation of voting are based upon the actual response of six thousand citizens whose behavior was observed on November 4, 1924, and on February 14, 1925. It is assumed that the behavior of these citizens at these two elections is typical enough to be of general interest. 1

Chapter II -- EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUE

Aim: To determine the extent to which some of the factors causing non-voting could be controlled in a given election.

Reference to previous study of non-voting in re Chicago mayoralty election of 1923:

the factors shown to have some relation to non-voting were sex, the dramatic quality of the particular election, the convenience of the election system, mobility, foreign birth, and foreign-language training, and the nature of the local party organization, newness to the city and unfamiliarity with local surroundings.

Inasmuch as the previous study showed that the great bulk of the non-voters were not registered, emphasis was placed on increasing registration.

Factors kept constant: election machinery, party organizations, sex, mobility, foreign language habits, derivative citizenship.

Step 1 in sampling process: complete canvass of all adult citizens in 12 selected districts in Chicago during the summer months preceding the presidential election of 1924.

One Gold Coast precinct -- wealthy native whites
Two South Side precincts populated by native whites, one poor,
One good, neighborhood.
One South Side district solidly Negro
Two districts near the stockyards -- one Irish, one Polish
One South Chicago district predominately Polish

1. See Ben A. Arneson "Non-voting in a Typical Ohio Community", American Political Science Review, XIX, 816-25. His results are strikingly similar to those obtained in Non-Voting and in the present study.

Two North Side precincts, one German and one Swedish
Three West Side precincts populated by Russian Jews, Czechs,
and Italians

Following data obtained for each person:

sex
color
citizenship status
occupation
country of birth
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Step 2 in sampling process:

Division of citizens in each of the districts into two groups --
experimental and control groups

Chapter III -- METHODS USED TO STIMULATE VOTING

Many citizens had said that they had failed to vote either because they could not find the polling place, or because they were sick or absent on registration day and did not know about the provisions of the law for absent registration, or because no one had informed them of the necessity of registering upon such and such a day, or because they were new to the city and did not know whether they were qualified as voters or not, or because they had never voted before and were ignorant of the process and timid regarding making a start.

The character of the canvass was thorough and non partisan. Notices were sent to all the adult citizens in the districts studied regardless of their partisanship or previous voting record.

There were English, Polish, Czech, and Italian versions of the postcard notices.

Second notices were sent to those who received notices but failed to register on the first day. Second notices were of two types: one was factual, the other was of a hortatory character, containing a cartoon and several slogans.

Up to this point it has been shown that the proportion of the citizens that registered in the experimental group was appreciably higher than in the control group on both the first and second days of registration, that a slightly larger proportion of the women who received the hortatory appeal registered than those who received the factual notice, that a slightly larger proportion of the

registered voters who received sample ballots voted in the presidential election than of those registered voters who did not, and that an appreciable larger percentage of the registered voters who were sent the notice regarding the aldermanic election took part in that election than of those who were sent no notice. At each stage of the election process and at different elections, the non-partisan mail canvass to get out the vote had a stimulating effect upon the voting response of the citizens studied.

Chapter IV -- EFFECT OF PARTY ORGANIZATION ON VOTING

The kind of notices which we sent out were the most effective among the habitual non-voters. The habitual non-voters are those whom the party workers have not reached with their various and sundry methods. They are the new members of the electorate who have not yet taken the first step toward the exercise of the franchise, the women with inferiority complexes, the citizens who have become disgusted with politics, and those who disbelieve in all political action.

It has now been established that the non-partisan mail canvass brought out a larger vote both at the presidential and at the aldermanic elections than was brought out by the party workers alone. This result was obtained uniformly in precincts which contained widely different political views and which had widely varying types of party leaders.

The notices which we sent out in following up this canvass had the greatest influence upon those who had never voted before or who looked upon themselves as independent voters not belonging to one of the two major organizations. The quantitative effect of our notices varied with the strength of the local party organization and the previous voting record of the citizens who received them.

Chapter V -- RACIAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES UPON VOTING

It has now been shown that the voting response of the citizens studied was effected to some extent by their membership in different social and economic groups. Foreign birth and foreign-language training are to some extent associated with non-voting, but a mail canvass to get out the vote is just about as effective among the foreign-born as among the native-born, nor does there seem to be any great variation in the susceptibility of the different nationalistic groups to non-partisan civic appeals regarding voting. However, the colored women and the women born in Italy were slightly more responsive to our appeals than some of the other groups studied. The reason for this is undoubtedly that the political education of these two groups has been sorely neglected. Both lack any kind of civic organization such as the League of Women Voters which is so strong among the native white women. The other group factors studied, such as term of residence, economic status, were more closely related to the success of our mail canvass. The notices to register brought the highest returns among the new residents of the city and among the very rich who of their own accord showed great interest in presidential elections, but who were difficult to reach by ordinary canvassing methods.

Chapter VI -- EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES UPON VOTING

The principal factors studied in the experiment in the stimulation of voting have now been discussed. It has been shown that a non-partisan, get-out-the-vote canvass has the greatest influence among those least attached to one of the old-line party organizations, those who have never voted before, among women who are timid regarding elections either because of foreign language training or because of inferior status in the home, among the new residents of the city who feel unacquainted with the political affairs of the community, among the very rich who are hard to reach by the methods employed by the ordinary precinct workers, among the citizens who can not read and write English, among the citizens who have had no schooling, and among the citizens who have practically no knowledge of American political institutions.

Chapter VII -- CONCLUSION

Certain inferences and conclusions seem to be warranted by the examination of the results obtained in the study of non-voting and in the present study of a non-partisan mail canvass to get out the vote.

First, it is possible by the method of random sampling to measure the success of any device designed to interest people in elections.

Second, a complete personal notification of all the adult citizens regarding the time and place of registration will secure a more complete listing of all persons qualified and anxious to vote than is obtained at present.

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Illness	7.7	12.3
Absence	6.2	4.2
Detained by helpless member of family	1.6	1.1
Insufficient legal residence	7.6	6.6
Fear of loss of wages or business	2.9	3.3
Congestion at the polls	0.5	0.5
Poor location of polling booth	0.7	1.1
Fear of disclosure of age	0.3	0.0
Disbelief in woman's voting	11.3	13.4
Objections of husband	1.6	1.8
Belief that one vote counts for nothing	1.6	2.2
Disgust with politics	4.9	6.0
Disgust with own party	0.6	0.0
Belief that ballot box is corrupted	0.7	0.0
Disbelief in all political action	0.5	0.0
General indifference	33.4	33.8
Indifference to particular election	2.3	0.3
Neglect: intended to register but failed	5.0	2.9
Ignorance or timidity regarding elections	9.6	10.0
Failure of party workers	1.0	0.5

The per cent of the vote cast for the majority party and the per cent of the eligible voters not voting by states correlated .62 in 1920 and .58 in 1924.

It appears from this table that the conclusions reached in the study of non-voting regarding the quantitative importance of the various reasons given for electoral abstentions were fairly accurate. The attitudes of most of the non-voters interviewed in connection with the presidential election were obtained both before and after the election. In both the presidential and mayoralty elections, one-third of those who failed to register attributed their delinquency in electoral matters to general indifference, one-tenth were ignorant or timid regarding elections, and so on. Although this table shows what kind of rationalizations non-voters make for failing to exercise the franchise, it does not indicate the qualitative importance of the different reasons. How much pressure is needed to persuade a non-voter to overcome his indifference toward elections or his timidity regarding the process? It is this question which is given special consideration in the pages that follow. The results of the experiment in the stimulation of voting are based upon the actual response of six thousand citizens whose behavior was observed on November 4, 1924, and on February 14, 1925. It is assumed that the behavior of these citizens at these two elections is typical enough to be of general interest. 1

Chapter II -- EXPERIMENTAL TECHNIQUE

Aim: To determine the extent to which some of the factors causing non-voting could be controlled in a given election.

Reference to previous study of non-voting in re Chicago mayoralty election of 1923:

the factors shown to have some relation to non-voting were sex, the dramatic quality of the particular election, the convenience of the election system, mobility, foreign birth, and foreign-language training, and the nature of the local party organization, newness to the city and unfamiliarity with local surroundings.

Inasmuch as the previous study showed that the great bulk of the non-voters were not registered, emphasis was placed on increasing registration.

Factors kept constant: election machinery, party organizations, sex, mobility, foreign language habits, derivative citizenship.

Step 1 in sampling process: complete canvass of all adult citizens in 12 selected districts in Chicago during the summer months preceding the presidential election of 1924.

One Gold Coast precinct -- wealthy native whites
Two South Side precincts populated by native whites, one poor,
One good, neighborhood.
One South Side district solidly Negro
Two districts near the stockyards -- one Irish, one Polish
One South Chicago district predominately Polish

1. See Ben A. Arneson "Non-voting in a Typical Ohio Community", American Political Science Review, XIX, 816-25. His results are strikingly similar to those obtained in Non-Voting and in the present study.

Two North Side precincts, one German and one Swedish
Three West Side precincts populated by Russian Jews, Czechs,
and Italians

Following data obtained for each person:

sex
color
citizenship status
occupation
country of birth
age
marital condition
mother tongue
length of residence at same address and in the city
political preferences
schooling
literacy
previous voting record
knowledge of government
economic status

Step 2 in sampling process:

Division of citizens in each of the districts into two groups --
experimental and control groups

Chapter III -- METHODS USED TO STIMULATE VOTING

Many citizens had said that they had failed to vote either because they could not find the polling place, or because they were sick or absent on registration day and did not know about the provisions of the law for absent registration, or because no one had informed them of the necessity of registering upon such and such a day, or because they were new to the city and did not know whether they were qualified as voters or not, or because they had never voted before and were ignorant of the process and timid regarding making a start.

The character of the canvass was thorough and non partisan. Notices were sent to all the adult citizens in the districts studied regardless of their partisanship or previous voting record.

There were English, Polish, Czech, and Italian versions of the postcard notices.

Second notices were sent to those who received notices but failed to register on the first day. Second notices were of two types: one was factual, the other was of a hortatory character, containing a cartoon and several slogans.

Up to this point it has been shown that the proportion of the citizens that registered in the experimental group was appreciably higher than in the control group on both the first and second days of registration, that a slightly larger proportion of the women who received the hortatory appeal registered than those who received the factual notice, that a slightly larger proportion of the

registered voters who received sample ballots voted in the presidential election than of those registered voters who did not, and that an appreciable larger percentage of the registered voters who were sent the notice regarding the aldermanic election took part in that election than of those who were sent no notice. At each stage of the election process and at different elections, the non-partisan mail canvass to get out the vote had a stimulating effect upon the voting response of the citizens studied.

Chapter IV -- EFFECT OF PARTY ORGANIZATION ON VOTING

The kind of notices which we sent out were the most effective among the habitual non-voters. The habitual non-voters are those whom the party workers have not reached with their various and sundry methods. They are the new members of the electorate who have not yet taken the first step toward the exercise of the franchise, the women with inferiority complexes, the citizens who have become disgusted with politics, and those who disbelieve in all political action.

It has now been established that the non-partisan mail canvass brought out a larger vote both at the presidential and at the aldermanic elections than was brought out by the party workers alone. This result was obtained uniformly in precincts which contained widely different political views and which had widely varying types of party leaders.

The notices which we sent out in following up this canvass had the greatest influence upon those who had never voted before or who looked upon themselves as independent voters not belonging to one of the two major organizations. The quantitative effect of our notices varied with the strength of the local party organization and the previous voting record of the citizens who received them.

Chapter V -- RACIAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCES UPON VOTING

It has now been shown that the voting response of the citizens studied was effected to some extent by their membership in different social and economic groups. Foreign birth and foreign-language training are to some extent associated with non-voting, but a mail canvass to get out the vote is just about as effective among the foreign-born as among the native-born, nor does there seem to be any great variation in the susceptibility of the different nationalistic groups to non-partisan civic appeals regarding voting. However, the colored women and the women born in Italy were slightly more responsive to our appeals than some of the other groups studied. The reason for this is undoubtedly that the political education of these two groups has been sorely neglected. Both lack any kind of civic organization such as the League of Women Voters which is so strong among the native white women. The other group factors studied, such as term of residence, economic status, were more closely related to the success of our mail canvass. The notices to register brought the highest returns among the new residents of the city and among the very rich who of their own accord showed great interest in presidential elections, but who were difficult to reach by ordinary canvassing methods.

Chapter VI -- EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES UPON VOTING

The principal factors studied in the experiment in the stimulation of voting have now been discussed. It has been shown that a non-partisan, get-out-the-vote canvass has the greatest influence among those least attached to one of the old-line party organizations, those who have never voted before, among women who are timid regarding elections either because of foreign language training or because of inferior status in the home, among the new residents of the city who feel unacquainted with the political affairs of the community, among the very rich who are hard to reach by the methods employed by the ordinary precinct workers, among the citizens who can not read and write English, among the citizens who have had no schooling, and among the citizens who have practically no knowledge of American political institutions.

Chapter VII -- CONCLUSION

Certain inferences and conclusions seem to be warranted by the examination of the results obtained in the study of non-voting and in the present study of a non-partisan mail canvass to get out the vote.

First, it is possible by the method of random sampling to measure the success of any device designed to interest people in elections.

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Third, a complete notification of all the registered voters regarding the candidates and issues to be voted upon would increase the proportion of registrants who voted in all elections.

Fourth, a civic educational program for adults as well as for children would undoubtedly have an immediate and continuous effect upon the interest shown in elections.

GETTING OUT THE VOTE

by H.F. Gosnell

Chapter I -- INTRODUCTION

It might be stated as a general rule in American politics that the proportion of eligible voters that come to the polls varies directly with the closeness of the elections in the particular jurisdiction analyzed.

It is not essential that the election actually be a close one. If the general impression is current that the election is going to be a close one, that is sufficient to stimulate greatly the interest of the electors in the voting process.

The facts gathered in the study of non-voting show that a large proportion of the non-voters in Chicago are ignorant regarding elections. The present study also shows that there is a relationship between habitual non-voting and a lack of schooling.

REASONS FOR NOT REGISTERING GIVEN BY SELECTED NON-VOTERS IN THE 1923 AND 1924 ELECTIONS: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION

Reasons for Not Registering	Adult Citizens Not Registered for the Mayor- alty Election of 1923	Adult Citizens Not Registered for the Presi- dential Election of 1924
All reasons:		
Number	3,369	649
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