

Abstract

The researcher conducted a secondary analysis of three major surveys of voters: the 2008 National Annenberg Election Survey, and the 2007 and 2008 Cooperative Congressional Election Surveys. All three of these surveys had media components, making it possible to create a profile of significant media differences between Election Day voters and those who vote early.

Early voters, contrasted to those on Election Day, are super citizens—the kind of extremely likely voters campaigns seek out and contact. Early voters (at $p < .0001$ level of significance) were more likely to be contacted by campaigns by both mail and e-mail, and at a $p < .05$ level of significance were more likely to be contacted by campaigns face-to-face and by phone.

Early voters, compared to election-day voters, are more likely to mention News and Documentary among their top-four favorite types of TV programs, and less likely to mention Science Fiction, Comedies, Reality Shows, and Music Videos. The only tested programs significantly favored by Election Day voters over their Early Voting counterparts were: *The Simpsons*, *Scrubs*, and *Family Guy*. A long list of news, documentary, news talk, and news satire programs, however, tend to be favored more by early voters than by those who vote on Election Day. Early voters were more likely than Election Day voters to listen to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* news program, and to listen to news gabbers such as Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Neal Boortz, Mike Gallagher, Clark Howard, Bill Bennett, and Dr. Laura Schlesinger.

The traditional practice of U. S. Election Day voting has been turned on its head by the rapidly increasing phenomenon of early voting, occurring both in person and by absentee ballot. This paper is being completed just one week from Election Day 2012. Projections are that by November 6, 2012, some 35 percent of the country will have voted early either in person or by mail. That's double the percentage of persons who voted early a decade ago. It's up from 20 percent of voters doing so just four years ago. George Mason University political scientist Michael P. McDonald testified to Congress that early voting is "tailoring democracy to fit the electorate." With each election, he notes, jurisdictions copy what worked in other states. Some evidence suggests early voting drives up turnout. Some 34 states now use some form of early voting. Ohio began early voting a full five weeks before the election. As many as 85 percent of Colorado voters may take advantage of that state's mail-in system (Voting Day Losing its Lustre, 2012).

Pollsters, politicians, political consultants, or journalists cannot assume early voters are demographically or attitudinally identical to voters who still walk into the voting booth on Election Day. This research is intended as a primer for politicians, pollsters, and news organizations alike to assure that their actions do not overlook, stereotype, understate, or fail to communicate with early voters. Some past work has identified certain demographic and attitudinal differences between early voters and election-day voters. This work will supplement those findings by concentrating on the different media habits of the two groups.

Literature Review

Roth and Harmon (2010) conducted a secondary analysis of 17 polls, reviewed 18 battleground state polls during the 2008 election, and re-examined data from two states, Georgia and North Carolina, that provided early voter demographic information.

Compared to Election Day voters, early voters were older, more likely to be women, white or Hispanic, and from urban or suburban areas, more likely to be from Western states, and less likely to be members of labor unions.

With such high levels of early voting – reaching more than 30 percent in 2008 – polling organizations have no choice but to rethink the way they are predicting voter behavior and election outcomes (McDonald, 2009).

Increasingly voters have been gravitating towards early voting in recent U.S. elections. In 2008, approximately 30 percent, or nearly 40 million people, voted early (McDonald, 2009; Gronke, 2012). Of these early voters, a larger percentage said they voted early in person rather than by mail (Kohut, 2008). In contrast, only about a quarter of the total number of ballots cast in the 2004 election were cast early (Quinn, 2008).

As of 2008, some 34 states are using early voting and all 50 states accept absentee ballots (Wolf, 2008). Since 2006 Colorado, Tennessee, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington have received more than half their ballots via alternative methods. Arizona, Florida, Georgia, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Texas joined them in 2008 (Gronke, 2012).

The top reason for the shift, according to the voters, is the convenience of early voting. In 2008, 48 percent of voters said they voted early because it was either more

accessible or convenient than voting on Election Day, while 31 percent said they did so to avoid lines at polling locations. Additionally, 32 percent said they voted early because they wouldn't have been able to vote or it would have been difficult to vote on Election Day (Kohut, 2008).

Methods

The researcher conducted a secondary analysis of the National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES), a 2008 rolling cross-section telephone survey and post-election telephone panel survey and a five-wave online panel. The NAES described its methods as follows:

Adults in the United States were interviewed by telephone and online about their beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior relevant to the 2008 presidential campaigns. Telephone interviews were conducted with 57,967 respondents during the 2008 election cycle; 3,737 were re-interviewed as part of a post-election telephone panel, also available on this site. The online panel was recruited by Knowledge Networks and consists of interviews with a nationally representative random sample of 28,985 respondents, covering a range of topics about the presidential campaign and politics generally, including candidates and political figures, current policy issues, media use, campaign discourse, political participation, and voting behavior. A section of questions about social

groups focused on perceptions of race and gender in U.S. society. All online participants in a wave were invited to be re-interviewed for all subsequent waves; among the 28,985 NAES08-Online respondents, 23,033 participated in at least two NAES waves, and 10,472 participated in all five NAES waves. Respondents also participated in up to two profile waves to provide demographic and other background information.

The researcher also conducted secondary analysis of the 2007 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, a 10,000-person survey conducted during the last two weeks of November 2007. The 2007 study consisted of re-interviews of subjects from a 2006 study. Stephen Ansolabehere conducted a separate 2,000-person panel study. It consists of interviews of the same people in 2006, 2007, and 2008.

The 2008 survey also was the object of secondary analysis. The CCES describes its methods follows:

The 2008 CCES involved 30 teams, yielding a Common Content sample of 32,800 cases. The subjects for this study were recruited during the fall of 2008. Each research team purchased a 1,000 person national sample survey, conducted in October and November of 2008 by YouGov/Polimetrix of Palo Alto, CA. Each survey has approximately 120 questions. For each survey of 1,000 persons, half of the questionnaire was developed and controlled entirely by each the individual research team, and half of the questionnaire is devoted to Common Content. The

Common Content consists of the questions common to all team modules and has a sample size equal to the total sample size of all team modules combined. Most of the 30 teams purchased 1,000 person surveys, though the Harvard/MIT team purchased additional cases to increase their sample size and the size of the Common Content. All cases were selected through the Internet and YouGov/Polimetrix constructed matched random samples for this study.

Interviews for the 2008 survey were conducted in two waves. The Pre-Election wave was conducted during October, 2008, and gauged issue preferences, knowledge of the candidates, and some demographics, and vote intentions. The Post-Election wave was conducted the two weeks following Election Day (November 4, 2008).

The 2008 CCES is part of an on-going study. The Cooperative Congressional Election Study formed in 2006 to study congressional elections and representation using very large scale national surveys. Thirty-six separate teams joined the consortium for the 2006 study. The 2006 Common Content amounts to a 36,500 person survey that allows the collaborative to measure the distribution of political attitudes and preferences within states and congressional districts.

Findings

Early voters, compared to election-day voters, are more likely to mention News and Documentary among their top-four favorite types of TV programs, and less likely to mention Science Fiction, Comedies, Reality Shows, and Music Videos. The NAES numbers showed no significant differences between the two groups for Dramas, Soap Operas, Sports, and Game Shows (Table 1).

The long list of TV programs tested by NAES, a list heavily but not exclusively tilted toward news, showed some pattern. The only tested programs significantly favored by Election Day voters over their Early Voting counterparts were: *The Simpsons*, *Scrubs*, and *Family Guy*. A long list of news, documentary, news talk, and news satire programs, however, tend to be favored more by early voters than by those who vote on Election Day (Table 2).

Early voters were more likely than Election Day voters to listen to National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* news program. Early voters also were more likely than election-day voters to have listened to news gabbers such as Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Neal Boortz, Mike Gallagher, Clark Howard, Bill Bennett, and Dr. Laura Schlesinger.

The scope of NAES, covering both primaries and general election, makes it possible to note that early voters, contrasted to those on Election Day, look to be more like super citizens—the kind of extremely likely voters campaigns seek out and contact. Early voters (at $p < .0001$ level of significance) were more likely to be contacted by campaigns by both mail and e-mail, and were more likely to see the Mitt Romney primary ads. At a $p < .05$ level of significance, those early voters also more likely to see

McCain and other/minor candidate ads, and to be contacted by campaigns face-to-face and by phone.

The CCES 2007 (Ansolabehere, 2007) survey offered additional points in this media profile of early voters. Early/absentee voters were less likely than their election-day counterparts to subscribe to satellite TV, 28.6 to 31 percent (Chi-Square $p = .0292$). Overall, 28.1 percent of the voters in CCES 2007 were early/absentee. The percentages were noticeably higher, 34.9 and 31.1 percent respectively, for viewing PBS's News Hour with Jim Lehrer and MSNBC. Viewers of NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams were below the mean at 25.1 percent. Early voters exceeded election-day voters in self-reported watching of national evening news, Spanish TV, and PBS. CCES 2007 even had favorability scores for various television and movie personalities. Only one statistically significant difference emerged between early and election-day voters. Those who wait until Election Day to vote curiously are more favorably disposed to Mel Gibson.

The 2008 CCES (Ansolabehere, 2008) also gave information on media reliance. Some 71.3 percent of early voters, compared to 69.1 percent for Election Day voters, reported relying on newspapers for campaign information (Chi-Square 13.188, $p = .0003$). Early voters also claimed greater reliance on TV news for campaign information, 84.3 to 82.4 percent (Chi-square 15.071, $p < .0001$). The early voters also were more likely to report reading blogs for campaign information, 33.9 versus 31.7 percent (Chi-square 13.43, $p = .0002$). Election day voters, by 3.5 versus 2.8 percent were more likely than early/absentee voters to report not using any of the listed media—television news, newspapers, radio, and blogs—for campaign information.

Discussion

The researcher ran additional statistical comparisons on other survey variables to add to existing lists of statistically significant demographic and attitudinal differences. In the 2007 CCES early voters compared to those on Election Day were more likely to own a pickup truck, and to have served in the military. On the other hand, early voters were less likely than their Election Day cohorts to shop at Wal-Mart, describe themselves as born again, have a second job, report personally knowing someone who is gay, have a job that provides health care coverage, and be satisfied with the way things are in the U.S.

For pollsters these data overall should make clear the imperative of adjusting methodologies so early voters and election day voters are represented in numbers close to their likely percentages of the election turnout. These electorates are different in enough fundamental ways to throw off projections if not properly proportioned. Reporters and news analysts would do well not to read too much into late-breaking election developments—not when a third to a half of the votes have been cast before Election Day.

For candidates this media profile suggests several tactics for a successful media strategy. One's media buys should begin early on news—ads on both TV news and news/talk radio. The ad buys should be coordinated with one's supported identification and get-out-the-vote efforts. "Super citizens," heavy news viewers with strong opinions, are prime candidates to be "banked" during early voting. In the closing days of the

campaign one can shift some advertising dollars to light entertainment fare as one tries to get less-motivated supporters to the polls.

The 2012 campaign soon will yield a cartload of additional polls that add to our understanding of early voting. The results should be of great interest to campaigners, candidates, journalists, pollsters, and even to those of us who are in none of those roles but who do vote—and increasingly do so early.

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Table 1. NAES Survey 2008, Favorite TV Program Types and Early/Day Voting

	Early Voters	Election Day Voters
Science Fiction / Top 4	1591 (26.5%)	2974 (28.7%)
Not in Top Four	4424	7381 Chi Square 4.636, p =.0019
Comedies / Top 4	2924 (48.6%)	5621 (54.3%)
Not in Top Four	3091	4734 Chi-Square 48.816, p<.0001
Reality Shows / Top 4	1774 (29.5%)	3272 (31.6%)
Not in Top Four	4241	7083 Chi Square 7.811, p = .0052
News / Top 4	4109 (68.3%)	6311 (60.9%)
Not in Top Four	1906	4044 Chi Square 88.916, p<.0001
Documentary / Top 4	3860 (64.2%)	6331 (61.1%)
Not in Top Four	2155	4024 Chi Square 14.770, p<.0001
Music Videos / Top 4	396 (6.6%)	771 (7.4%)
Not in Top Four	5619	9584 Chi Square 4.142, p = .0418

Table 2. NAES Percentages watching/listening to specific programs, Early v.

Election Day voters

TV Program (p < .0001)	Early	Day	TV Program (p < .05)	Early	Day
ABC World News	31.0	27.4	The Simpsons	10.4	12.3
Today Show	25.7	24.8	Nightline	20.3	18.1
NBC Nightly News	36.6	31.9	CBS Evening News	26.9	24.2
News Hour Jim Lehrer	14.9	10.4	Tonight Show	23.1	21.4
CNN Headline News	33.9	28.8	Bill O'Reilly	20	18.5
Daily Show	16.2	13.3	Hannity & Colmes	14.6	13.1
America's Election Hdq	7.9	5.8	Hannity's America	6.5	5.7
60 Minutes	44.1	37.8	Morning Joe	4.7	3.8
Face the Nation	16.8	12.4	Law and Order	36.9	35.3
Frontline	11.2	9.1	20/20	35.3	32.4
Hardball	15.7	11.4	Fox Report w/ S. Smith	12.6	11.2
Late Edition W. Blitzer	9.8	7.0	The View	15.7	13.9
Rachel Maddow Show	11.6	7.6	Scrubs	10.6	12.6
Meet the Press	24.4	19.9	Colbert Report	14.7	12.7

MSNBC Live	20.4	15.9		Geraldo at Large	6.1	5.0
Oprah	22.7	20.1		Dateline NBC	33.1	30.7
Situation Room	13.6	10.5		Studio B w S. Smith	7.8	6.4
Special Report B. Hume	10.4	8.5		Your World N. Cavuto	9.3	8.0
Larry King Live	16.9	10.5		McLaughlin Group	9.0	7.6
CBS Sunday Morning	16.5	13.7				
The Beltway Boys	5.9	4.3				
C. Brown Election Ctr	7.3	5.1				
This Week George S.	16.3	12.0				
Lou Dobbs	11	8.2				
Anderson Cooper 360	21.2	15.7				
Countdown w Keith O.	13	8.8				
Family Guy	11.3	14.1				
Reliable Sources CNN	1.8	1.0				
Radio (p<.0001)				Radio Program (p < .05)		
Dr. Laura Schlesinger	7.0	4.9		Sean Hannity	18.4	16.7

All Things Considered	31.6	26		O'Reilly radio	11.6	9.4
				Neal Boortz	5.5	3.9
				Mike Gallagher	2.3	1.6
				Clark Howard	5.8	3.8
				Bill Bennett	1.6	1.1