

# The Election Center

an international service association of election and voter registration officials

12543 Westella, Suite 100 Houston, TX 77077 281-293-0101 FAX: 281-293-0453 or 293-8739

Please call us at the main number if you encounter difficulty with either line or E-Mail: [electioncent@pdq.net](mailto:electioncent@pdq.net)

WEBSITE: [www.electioncenter.org](http://www.electioncenter.org)

12-07-2005 Member Alert By Heidi Freier

As we explore the statistics from the, "EAC 2004 Election Day Survey" the first topics discussed give us a big picture view of the 2004 election. When it comes to any election the main information needed is who got the most votes, what share of the eligible population turned out to the polls and what voting method did the majority of voters use. There were four main chapters in the EAC report that concentrated on the big picture of the 2004 election, population estimates, ballots counted, voting methods and absentee ballots. **[Election Center NOTE:** Some caution should be used by all when referring to the analysis of the data: this is a first attempt by the EAC and the data may not be complete, may have been reported differently among states and jurisdictions depending on their understanding of what was meant, and/or there may be other factors affecting the data that have not been properly analyzed on a first pass. So use caution in touting the data and its analysis until there has been more time to digest this monumental effort.]

The EAC survey examined the population estimates throughout the report in terms of voting age population (VAP) as well as citizen age voting population (CVAP.) Due to the uneven distribution of non-citizens across jurisdictions it is important to use CVAP in addition to VAP when drawing conclusions of survey results across jurisdictions, (if VAP were the only factor used, rates would be underestimated in jurisdictions with high proportions of non-citizens, which tend to be Western states, particularly CA and in urban and small cities.)

With help from the U.S. Census Bureau, the EAC was able to estimate:

- CVAP in 2004 was 197,438,494 people
- VAP was 221,279,989
- Of the voting age population, 92.9 percent are citizens.

The tendencies that were found in the EAC survey responses were that the larger jurisdictions (more than one million people) have a much lower proportion of the voting age population that are citizens (83.2 percent.) This would coincide with the statistic that urban jurisdictions have the lowest percentage of citizens. It was shown in the statistics that small and medium sized jurisdictions had 96.3 percent of their voting age population were citizens in 2004.

Of the 6,568 jurisdictions that received this survey, 6,488 reported data on the number of ballots counted. According to reporting jurisdictions, 121.9 million ballots were counted in the 2004 election. The EAC's consultant took the number of ballots counted and calculated that number as a percentage of the reported total number or registered voters as well as a percentage of the VAP and CVAP. The resulting calculations reveal:

- The number of ballots cast constituted 70.4 percent of all registered voters and 60.7 percent of the VAP. Because different states and even jurisdictions within the same state often use different definitions, (i.e. whether total number of registered voters includes inactive voters or not,) when reporting total number of ballots counted, different numbers were reported.

Even with the reporting differences, some interesting tendencies surfaced when the resulting calculations were examined further. According to the data, the number of ballots cast as a percentage of CVAP was higher:

- in jurisdictions with higher income, higher education levels, in predominantly white jurisdictions and
- in states with highly contested races
- as well as states with Election Day Registration. States that allow EDR reported significantly higher turnout rate for all methods of calculating turnout rates.

- Jurisdictions that allow early voting reported lower turnout rates than non-early voting jurisdictions for all methods of calculating turnout. This result was opposite of the expected effect of early voting.

In each section of the EAC report, the data is also reviewed at the state level, allowing a big picture view of the states and regions voter activity. As far as voter turnout is concerned:

- Minnesota had the highest voter turnout rate with 76.1 percent of the CVAP
- followed by Wisconsin, Maine, Oregon, New Hampshire, and South Dakota.
- Hawaii had the lowest turnout rate with 47.9 percent of the CVAP. Texas followed with 52 percent.
- Midwest had highest turnout 96.8 percent of the CVAP followed by the
- Northeast with 94.3 percent,
- the South with 93.8 percent of the CVAP.
- The West had the highest share of non-citizens 86.6 of CVAP.

During Election 2004, there were four possible modes a voter could cast a ballot, by the traditional polling place, absentee ballot, early voting, and provisional ballot. Of the over 121.8 million ballots tallied for the EAC survey:

- at least 55.3 percent were cast in precincts or polling places,
- nearly 12.0 percent were cast via absentee ballots,
- 8.4 percent came from early voting ballots in jurisdictions that allow that process, and
- provisional ballots contributed 1.0 percent.

Because data was not provided by all states least 23.3 percent of the votes could not be determined as to what method of voting was used. Possible confusion on survey questions and differences in how states and local officials tallied information differently could have affected this count.

At the state level Washington State leads the pack with over two-thirds (68.7 percent) of its votes reported as cast absentee. Oregon was unique, in that the state allows vote by mail for all persons. Alaska reported the highest percent of its total votes coming from accepted provisional ballots. California had the second highest amount of provisional ballots cast at 7.2 percent.

The early voting totals were interesting for Texas and Tennessee because they have kept historical data. In 2004, Texas had the highest percentage of early votes cast with 47.7 percent; Tennessee was close behind with 44.9 percent. According to the historical data, the percentage of voters casting an early vote has almost tripled since 1994. In 1994 Texas reported that 1.3 million people or 14.7 percent of total ballots counted were cast in early voting, in 2000 that amount increased to 2.5 million ballots or 20.1 percent. The early voting counts also increased in Tennessee from 6 percent of total ballots counted in 1994 to 35.7 percent in 2000.

The data collected for absentee ballots in the EAC survey constituted a separate section in the report. According to the data in the 2004 the reporting jurisdictions recorded, 16.8 million absentee ballots requested an increase from 12.5 million in 2002. Of those ballots requested 14.8 million were returned to the election office (88.7 percent) and 14.7 million of those returned were counted actually counted as a valid vote (96.9 percent.)

Along with collecting specific number of absentee ballots requested, returned and counted, the EAC survey asked for the top five reasons for rejecting absentee ballots. The most common reasons were:

- no voter signature,
- ballot not timely received,
- non-matching signature,
- elector voted early or at the polls,
- ballot returned as undeliverable, ineligible to vote,
- no ballot application on record,

- no witness signature,
- spoiled ballot,
- ballot missing from envelope,
- ballot returned in unofficial envelope,
- multiple ballots returned in one envelope and
- elector deceased.

One of the trends uncovered in the collected data showed that of those jurisdictions reporting a lower rate of absentee ballots requested have higher rates of absentee ballots returned. Jurisdictions with “no excuse” absentee balloting report much higher request rates, but lower return rates, by about six percentage points, than other jurisdictions. This pattern was similar to those jurisdictions permitting early voting, which is opposite of what we might assume the trend would be. On the opposite side of that trend where absentee ballots are more difficult to obtain, the request rates may be lower, but the return rates are higher. The report makes the assumption that when the process is more difficult those voters who truly desire to cast an absentee ballot will make the extra effort to return the ballot.

Other trends show that centralized management of voter registration databases increased return rates and counting of absentee ballots. States with a statewide voter registration database reported slightly lower request rates, but reported a return rate of almost six percent higher and a counting rate over three percent points higher than jurisdictions without a statewide database. Lower income and education jurisdictions tended to report lower rates of requesting absentee ballots than high income and education jurisdictions, however, lower socioeconomic status jurisdictions reported higher rates of return.

Small-sized and rural jurisdictions tended to report the lowest rates of absentee requests while large-sized and urban areas reported the highest rates of absentee ballot requests, but large population and urban areas tended to also report the lowest rates of absentee ballots returned. The data broken down by state shows that Washington had the most votes cast absentee with 64.5 percent of their total ballots cast, California was closest behind with 32.4 percent. Washington DC reported the lowest percent of returned absentee ballots with 72.6 percent of the total ballots requested, DC also reported the lowest rate of counting absentee ballots at 87.5 percent of the absentee ballots counting as a valid vote. Maryland reported highest rate of counting. Colorado had highest return rate at 98 percent. Because Oregon already does most of its voting by mail, they had the lowest amount of absentee ballots requested.

The vast amount of data the EAC collected and the large scale of the report make it difficult to scale the information down to a few pages. However, the statistics and information included above gives an overview of the points the EAC report makes and helps us see the big-picture of the 2004 election, the population that voted and they way they voted. It becomes evident that the collection of data and keeping a historical context on some of the voting trends of this nation is even more important as technology and voter needs change. Please keep watch as we continue to explore further into the EAC survey data and into the more specific areas, the survey researched, such as voter registration and provisional ballot trends.