

Highlights

For months prior to Election Day it was clear that the 2000 elections were shaping up to be among the closest in history, and they certainly exceeded all expectations in that regard. The presidential contest remained undecided for 36 days after the ballots were cast. Voters across the country produced a Senate with 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans. While Republicans can claim control of the House, their hold on power in that chamber is so tenuous as to be nearly unworkable.

Yet, despite the readily apparent closeness of the election, nearly half of all eligible voters failed to exercise their most basic right in a democracy—the right to vote. For 48 percent of the adult population, voting was reduced to a spectator sport.

For the second time in the past five years, the Medill School of Journalism set out to explore this phenomenon. Working with the Campaign Study Group, 859 people who said they voted and 1,053 individuals who said they failed to vote on November 7 were interviewed at length in the weeks following the election about their reasons for voting or not voting, their political beliefs, their knowledge about issue positions taken by the candidates during the campaign, their news consumption habits, and their demographic backgrounds.

We discovered that while voters and nonvoters behave differently on Election Day they share many of the same attitudes concerning politics and social institutions. This research also largely confirmed the basic findings of our initial foray into the world of nonvoting prior to the 1996 elections, revealing five distinct groups of nonvoters who view government, the political parties, politicians and the news very differently.

Deconstructing Conventional Wisdom

Examined as a group, nonvoters conform in many ways to the conventional wisdom:

- Compared with voters, nonvoters are disproportionately young. While 17 percent of voters have not yet celebrated their thirtieth birthday, 27 percent of all nonvoters are between the ages of 18 and 29.
- Nonvoters are significantly less educated than voters. Just 3 percent of voters report having less than a high school education, while 16 percent of nonvoters do so. Conversely, only 20 percent of nonvoters say they have graduated from college, while the comparable figure for voters is 45 percent.
- Compared with voters, nonvoters have significantly lower annual household incomes. Twenty-three percent of all nonvoters report annual household incomes of \$50,000 or

more. Among voters, 40 percent report incomes that high. Thirty-five percent of nonvoters have household incomes below \$30,000, while the comparable figure among voters is just 25 percent.

- Nonvoters are less likely than voters to identify with either the Republican or Democratic parties. Forty percent of nonvoters identify themselves as political independents, while only 27 percent of voters do so.

However, these overall group attributes obscure nearly as much as they reveal about what motivates some people to vote and others to stay at home.

- Perhaps most important for those seeking to boost electoral participation, the survey strongly suggests that nonvoting is not necessarily a chronic disease. Among those who did not vote in this past presidential election, 34 percent say they frequently vote and only 25 percent admit to never voting. Among those who voted this time, 35 percent say they sometimes fail to vote, including 7 percent who describe themselves as voting only now and then or hardly ever. In short, the key to increasing voter turnout may lie more in motivating these occasional voters—roughly one-third of all eligible voters—to become regular voters rather than in motivating the chronic nonvoters.
- Neither voters nor nonvoters seem overly motivated by either the candidates or their stands on the issues. When asked to name their chief reason for turning out on Election Day, most voters give answers such as civic duty, a desire to exercise their rights, the general desire to have a voice in the outcome, and mere habit. Just 11 percent of all voters cite their like or dislike of the candidates as the prime motivation. Among nonvoters, the top reason given for failing to vote is not being registered. While 13 percent cite their dislike of the candidates, 8 percent blame their inability to get off work, 7 percent cite unplanned travel, and 5 percent say they have no interest in politics.
- Nonvoters are no more pessimistic than voters about the current direction of the country. When asked whether they feel that “things in the country are generally headed in the right direction” or that the country has “pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track,” 48 percent of nonvoters and 46 percent of voters express the more pessimistic view.
- When voters and nonvoters are asked to name the most important problems facing the country, their lists look virtually identical. Four of the five issues defined by voters as “the most important problem facing the country today” also make the top

five list of concerns among nonvoters—a lack of ethics and values in American society, infighting within the government, concerns about the health of the economy, and crime.

- Voters and nonvoters proved to be equally optimistic about their short-term economic futures—a driving force behind most political campaigns. Sixty-eight percent of nonvoters and 71 percent of voters feel that their family’s financial situation will improve during the next year.
- Nonvoters’ candidate preferences closely resemble those of voters. When nonvoters are asked whom they would have voted for, 37 percent picked George W. Bush, 37 percent opted for Al Gore, 5 percent said Ralph Nader and 2 percent indicated Patrick Buchanan.

If nonvoters look like voters in many ways, one might think they could be attracted to the polls by various procedural changes to lower real or perceived barriers to voting. Nonvoters certainly claim that is the case, although they recognize that some suggested solutions are better than others:

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of all nonvoters say that allowing people to register and vote on the same day would make them more likely to vote.
- Fifty-seven percent indicate that holding elections over two or three days instead of one day would increase the likelihood of their voting.
- Forty-two percent say that allowing everyone to vote by mail would make them more likely to vote.
- Just over four out of ten (41%) nonvoters say they would be more likely to vote if people were allowed to vote over the Internet.
- The idea that garnered the least support was weekend voting, which 37 percent say would make them more likely to vote.

However, since 58 percent of all non-voters say they chose not to vote while 40 percent say that something prevented them from voting, procedural changes may not have the impact suggested by these responses. That concern is amplified by the fact that when asked what they would do to help remedy their reason for not voting if they were in government, 31 percent responded that they did not know and another 12 percent said that nothing could be done. Only 21 percent cited procedural changes.

Moreover, nonvoters are not a monolithic group. Using cluster analysis, a statistical technique for classifying respondents into the most homogeneous, mutually exclusive groups possible, we have identified five types of nonvoters—precisely the same number of clusters we

found when we interviewed “likely non-voters” four months prior to the 1996 election. While the demographic make-up of the clusters is somewhat different than in 1996, the size of the clusters and the attitudinal and behavioral make-up of each cluster is nearly identical.

- Nearly three out of ten (29%) nonvoters can be described as “Doers.” They are relatively avid news consumers who follow politics and public affairs regularly. They are extremely upbeat about the state of the Union and tend to be more positive than other nonvoters about a wide variety of governmental and social institutions. Doers tend to be more involved than members of the other nonvoter clusters in their communities. Five percent of the Doers say they volunteered on a political campaign last year and still failed to vote.
- One-quarter of all nonvoters can be described as the Unplugged. Compared with the other four clusters of nonvoters, the Unplugged are disproportionately young—59 percent are under the age of 30, including 41 percent who are between the ages of 18 and 24. These are among the most information deprived of all nonvoters. While 40 percent of the Doers say they read a newspaper six or seven days a week, only 7 percent of the Unplugged say they read a newspaper that often. The Unplugged also watch television news less than any other group of nonvoters. Not surprisingly, the Unplugged tend not to follow politics, rarely discuss public policy with family or friends and say they paid little attention to the 2000 campaign.
- Fourteen percent are what we call the “Irritables.” Compared with other groups of nonvoters, Irritables are disproportionately older. They tend to follow politics and public affairs fairly closely, with 42 percent saying that they follow developments in this arena most of the time. One-quarter of this group say they read a newspaper six or seven days a week—a significantly higher level of daily readership than either the Don’t Knows or the Unplugged. Sixty-four percent of the Irritables say they watch a television news broadcast at least six days a week. Half of the members of this cluster say they followed campaign stories at least fairly closely. Irritables see little difference between the political parties and they are much more likely than Doers to feel that it makes no difference who is elected.
- Twelve percent of the likely nonvoters can be classified as “Don’t Knows.” They have little or no interest in politics, have little interest in the news, and profess little knowledge about the candidates or the institutions that govern their lives. Don’t Knows are generally pessimistic about their elected officials and a wide variety of

social institutions. In general, they are also more likely than members of other nonvoter blocks to express no opinion about the various institutions.

- Twenty percent of nonvoters can be described as “Alienated.” As the cluster name would imply, 63 percent of the Alienated feel that the country has gotten off on the wrong track—29 percentage points higher than among the Doers. Alienated voters also take a dim view of politicians, political institutions, and a number of social institutions, as well. For instance, 39 percent of the Alienated have an unfavorable opinion about the Supreme Court, while the comparable figure among Doers is 11 percent. Among all nonvoters, the Alienated are the most likely to express unfavorable opinions about their local school boards, their local city councils and even religious institutions.

The fact that these five groups of nonvoters exist makes it highly unlikely that any single outreach program can significantly impact turnout.

Detailed Findings

Voting In the 2000 Elections

When asked about their behavior on Election Day, 52 percent of the American public say they voted, 19 percent claim that something prevented them from voting and slightly more than one-quarter (28%) proclaim that they chose not to vote. This level of voter participation is consistent with preliminary estimates of actual turnout.

As in past elections, turnout appears to have been lowest among those between the ages of 18 and 29, an age cohort in which 40 percent say they cast their ballots. Among the youngest eligible voters—those between the ages of 18 and 24—just 33 percent say they exercised their right to vote. Turnout appears to have been highest among those between the ages of 45 and 64, with 60 percent of the survey respondents in that age category saying they voted.

Women (55%) are more likely than men (48%) to say they voted, while men (32%) are more likely than women (25%) to say they chose not to vote. Both self-identified Republicans (61%) and self-identified Democrats (58%) are more likely than Independents (42%) to have cast their votes. The propensity to vote rises steadily with income, from a low of 33 percent among those with annual household incomes of less than \$15,000 to a high of 70 percent among those with incomes in excess of \$75,000. Those who have lived at their present address for more than two years (59%) are more than twice as likely as those who have lived at their current address for less than six months (24%) to have voted.

Participation in the voting process also rises with education, from a low of 19 percent among those with less than a high school education to a high of 71 percent among those who have completed college. Half (51%) of those with less than a high school education and more than one-third (38%) of those who have no more than a high school diploma say they chose not to vote (Table 1).

Put another way, those who exercised their right to vote in the 2000 elections are disproportionately female, partisan, educated, and older. While 51 percent of the adult population are women, 57 percent of voters are. While 61 percent of the eligible electorate identifies with one of the two major parties, 69 percent of voters do so. Forty-five percent of voters say they have graduated from college, but only 28 percent of the adult population can make that same claim. Although 22 percent of the eligible electorate is between the ages of 18 and 29, only 17 percent of voters fall within that age range. Conversely, 40 percent of all nonvoters say they are independents, just 20 percent of nonvoters have graduated from college, and 27 percent are between the ages of 18 and 29 (Table 2).

For those looking to increase participation in the electoral process, there are clear signs that the non-electorate is a moving target. Among those who say they cast votes last November, only 65 percent say they always vote when given the opportunity. Twenty-eight percent indicate that they vote most of the time, and 7 percent say they vote only now and then or hardly ever vote. Among nonvoters in this past election, roughly one-third (34%) say they either always vote or vote most of the time. Only 25 percent admit to never voting (Table 2).

Fifty-eight percent of all nonvoters indicate that they made a conscious decision not to vote, while 40 percent say that something prevented them from getting to the polls. Three-quarters of the Don't Knows say they chose not to vote compared with 50 percent of the Irritables and 55 percent of the Doers. Men (61%) are more likely than women (55%) to attribute their nonvoting behavior to choice.

The propensity to blame outside forces for the failure to vote rises with education, from a low of 35 percent among those with less than a high school education to a high of 50 percent among college graduates. Partisans who stayed away from the polls are also significantly more likely than independents to blame it on forces beyond their control. For example, among self-identified Democrats, 52 percent say that something prevented them from getting to the polls. Sixty-six percent of Independent nonvoters say they chose not to vote (Table 3).

If there is any good news for democracy in the fact that roughly half of the eligible electorate seems content to have remained on the sidelines it is that their decision to stay at home appears to have had no impact on the final outcome of the presidential contest. When asked whom they would have voted for had they exercised that right, 37 percent of the survey respondents picked Bush, 37 percent opted for Gore, 5 percent said Nader and 2 percent picked Buchanan. Twenty percent could not decide who would have gotten their vote. As with the voting public, black nonvoters would have sided overwhelmingly with Gore while whites would have gone much more narrowly for Bush. More than seven out of ten partisan nonvoters would have backed their party's nominee, although it appears that Nader would have siphoned off more votes from Gore than from Bush (Table 4).

Four of the five issues defined by voters as "the most important problem facing the country today" also make the top 5 list of concerns among nonvoters—a lack of ethics and values in American society, infighting within the government, concerns about the health of the economy, and crime. Education, which made the top five list of problems named by voters, ranked sixth on the list of mentions by nonvoters. Given the fact that nonvoters and voters are in basic agreement over what constitute the country's most important problems, the presidential preference numbers are not all that surprising (Table 5).

The similarity between voter and nonvoter candidate preferences is also undoubtedly explained in part by the fact that both groups are equally optimistic about their short-term economic fortunes—a driving force behind most political campaigns. Among nonvoters, 68 percent think their family’s financial situation will improve during the next year, including 12 percent who believe it will improve a great deal. Seventy-one percent of those who voted in November see their financial situation improving during 2001, with 12 percent stating that their expectations are for significant improvement (Table 6).

The reasons cited for voting or not voting are well known to those who study turnout. Voters give what can only be described as civics-class answers, when asked to describe the main reason why they voted this past November. Roughly one-third (35%) say they voted because they have a civic duty to do so. Seventeen percent say they vote because they want to exercise their rights as citizens, and 14 percent cite their desire to have a voice in who is elected. Ten percent cite mere habit as the driving force behind their decision to go to the polls. Just 11 percent turned out on Election Day mainly because they either liked or disliked the candidates (Table 7).

When asked to name the primary reason for their inaction, 24 percent of nonvoters say they failed to vote because they were not registered. At 20 percent, the failure to register was the top reason given even by those who have lived at their current address for more than two years. Among the 13 percent of nonvoters who have lived at their current address for less than six months, 39 percent cited their non-registration as the reason. Other reasons cited by the collective of nonvoters included their dislike of the candidates (13%), the fact that they were working (8%), illness (8%), out of town travel (7%) and a lack of interest in politics (5%) (Table 7).

Whatever their stated reason for voting or not voting, it is clear that voters express a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy than do nonvoters. Put simply, voters exercise their right because they think they can personally make a difference; nonvoters do not exercise their right in part because they are much less likely to feel that their vote really matters.

When asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, “I’m only one person, so my vote doesn’t make a difference,” just 8 percent of voters indicate any agreement with that statement, including 4 percent who say they completely agree. Seventy-two percent of voters say they completely disagree with the idea, and another 20 percent indicate less strident disagreement. Among nonvoters, 28 say they agree on some level with the statement. Only 44 percent of nonvoters completely disagree (Table 8).

Another contributing factor to low voter turnout may be the fact that nonvoters have considerably more difficulty than voters in distinguishing any major differences between the Republican and Democratic parties. Only 25 percent of all nonvoters say there is a great deal of

difference between the parties, and while 40 percent see a fair amount of difference, 28 percent see hardly any difference. Among voters, 45 percent see a great deal of difference in what the parties stand for and just 16 percent say they see hardly any difference.

Nonvoting self-identified Democrats (34%) and Republicans (29%) are more likely than Independents (17%) to see a great deal of difference between the positions taken by the parties. Although 41 percent of nonvoting Independents think there is hardly any difference, just 22 percent of Republicans and 16 percent of Democrats feel that way. Among the various clusters of nonvoters, Doers and the Alienated are the most likely to see at least some difference between Republicans and Democrats, while the Don't Knows are the most likely to see hardly any difference (Table 9).

For roughly six out of ten nonvoters, contentment with the political system is not the primary explanation for their non-participation. When asked whether their failure to vote should be interpreted to mean that they are “basically satisfied with the way the country is going,” 62 percent say they disagree with that assessment of their behavior.

However, while they certainly do not entirely explain the nonvoting phenomenon, feelings of contentment with the status quo clearly contribute to reduced turnout. Thirty-four percent of all nonvoters say they agree to some extent with the notion, including 11 percent who say they strongly agree. Among Doers, 46 percent agree that contentment with the status quo contributes to their nonvoting behavior, compared with just 21 percent of the Alienated. Whites (32%) are significantly less likely than blacks (47%) to accept this characterization (Table 10).

In hopes of learning more about what would turn them into voters, nonvoters were asked to react to five proposals for changing the electoral process. “Allowing people to register and vote on the same day” garnered the largest positive response, with 64 percent saying that change would make them more likely to vote. Self-identified Democrats (76%) are more likely than either Republicans (61%) or Independents (63%) to say such a change would have a positive impact on their behavior, but the idea still ranked first among the five options for both these latter groups. Doers (71%) and the Unplugged (71%) are significantly more likely than the Don't Knows (51%) to think this procedural change would make them more likely to vote (Table 11).

The idea of “holding elections over two or three days instead of one day” attracted the second most positive response. Fifty-seven percent of all nonvoters say that such a change would make them more likely to vote. The idea proved particularly attractive to younger nonvoters, with 68 percent of those under 30 years of age saying it would make them more likely to vote. Democrats (66%) are far more likely than Republicans (51%) to think this change would move them to vote more often. Members of the Unplugged (67%) and the Doer (63%) clusters are more

likely than members of the Alienated (52%), Don't Know (51%), or the Irritable (46%) clusters to think this change would have a positive impact (Table 12).

Forty-two percent of all nonvoters say they would be more likely to vote if everyone could vote by mail. Those between the ages of 18 and 29 (50%) are twice as likely as those over the age of 65 (23%) to say this change would heighten their electoral participation. Once again, Democrats (49%) are more likely than Republicans (39%) to see this as a personally advantageous change. Once again, the Unplugged (50%) and the Doers (49%) are more likely than the Don't Knows (37%), the Alienated (35%) or the Irritables (32%) to think this change would help (Table 13).

Internet voting is viewed as having a positive impact on their own personal voting behavior by 41 percent of nonvoters. Among those with household incomes in excess of \$75,000—the group most likely to have a home computer—61 percent think Internet voting would make them more likely to participate. That figure drops steadily as income falls, reaching a low of 35 percent among those with household incomes below \$15,000. While 53 percent of college graduates think the ability to vote over the Internet would make them more likely to vote, just 30 percent of those with less than a high school education hold the same view. Fifty-seven percent of those under the age of 30 say that this one change would improve the odds that they would vote. The comparable figure among those over the age of 65 is 16 percent. The Unplugged are the most likely of all nonvoter groups to see this change as beneficial (Table 14).

Bringing up the rear among the five options discussed was “holding elections on the weekend.” Thirty-seven percent of all nonvoters view this potential change as one that would make them more likely to vote. Non-whites (52%) and those under the age of 30 (44%) are significantly more bullish on this notion than are whites (33%) and those over the age of 65 (18%). Democrats (47%) are also more likely than Republicans (33%) to view this as a positive change. Among the five nonvoter clusters, Doers (47%) are more than twice as likely as the Don't Knows (21%) to believe this procedural change would increase their participation rate (Table 15).

While these responses are encouraging on their face, it is unlikely that these procedural changes would have the impact suggested. Since 58 percent of all non-voters say they chose not to vote, it is difficult to see a clear link between procedural changes and increased turnout. That concern is amplified by the fact that when asked what they would do to help remedy their reason for not voting if they were in government, only 21 percent cited procedural changes such as same day registration and voting or Internet voting. Thirty-one percent responded that they did not know and another 12 percent said that nothing could be done.

Even if the mechanics of voting should change, those in the current nonvoter pool will have to be self-motivated to change their behavior. Given their nonvoter status, it remains highly unlikely that the political establishment will reach out to them with information or encouragements to vote.

During the 2000 campaign, nonvoters were far less likely than voters to have been contacted by a political candidate or someone working on a candidate's behalf. While 56 percent of all voters report having had such contact, just 26 percent of nonvoters do so. Among the nonvoter pool, whites (28%) are twice as likely as blacks (14%) to report such political outreach, and college graduates (40%) are more than twice as likely as those with less than a high school education (18%) to do so (Table 16).

Political Alienation and Social Cynicism

Conventional wisdom would suggest that because they have opted out of the system nonvoters are likely to be much more alienated than voters from their government. As it turns out, the attitudes towards politicians and institutions are much less divergent than one might expect.

Many nonvoters are clearly angry about much of what they see in the political arena. When asked whether they feel that "things in this country are generally going in the right direction" or that the country has "pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track," 48 percent of all nonvoters express the more pessimistic view and 44 percent opt for the more optimistic view. Women (54%) are more likely than men (41%) to think the country has gotten off on the wrong track. Self-identified Democrats (55%) are significantly more likely than either Republicans (41%) or Independents (40%) to think the country is headed in the right direction. Those with less than a high school education (56%) and those with incomes under \$15,000 (61%) are the most likely to hold the more pessimistic view. Doers (62%) are significantly more likely than the Unplugged (42%), the Alienated (32%), or the Don't Knows (26%) to hold an optimistic view about the direction in which the country is headed (Table 17).

Having said that, nonvoters do not turn out to be any more pessimistic than voters about the overall state of the nation. Among voters, sentiment is split right down the middle, with 47 percent saying the country is headed in the right direction and 46 percent stating that the country is off on the wrong track. As with nonvoters, women (50%) are more likely than men (40%) to feel that the country is heading in the wrong direction. Also paralleling the nonvoters, Democratic voters (59%) are much more likely than their Republican counterparts (36%) to feel things are heading in the right direction. However, Independent voters (51%) are much more likely than nonvoting independents (40%) to be bullish on the direction the country has taken (Table 17).

Nonvoters are also somewhat more likely than voters to express alienation from their elected officials, but again the difference is not that great. When asked the degree to which they agree or disagree with the notion that most elected officials do not care what they think, 64 percent of nonvoters say they agree to some extent, including 28 percent who completely agree. Among voters, 53 percent think their elected officials don't care what they think, including 10 percent who completely agree. One-third of all nonvoters disagree with that idea; the comparable figure among voters is 46 percent.

Among nonvoters, the idea that elected officials care little about what they think is most acutely felt by blacks and those with the lowest incomes. While 61 percent of whites agree to some extent with this notion, 83 percent of blacks do so, including 46 percent who say they completely agree. Fifty-three percent of those with annual household incomes over \$75,000 hold this view to some degree, but 72 percent of those with incomes below \$15,000 do so.

Low income and black voters are also more likely than their wealthier and white counterparts to think their elected officials couldn't care less about their views, but the disparities are not nearly so great as they are among the nonvoting population. Sixty-three percent of black voters say they agree to some extent with this idea, and 51 percent of white voters do so. Perhaps more importantly, just 11 percent of black voters say they completely agree with the concept. Among voters who make less than \$30,000 a year, 64 percent hold this view to some degree; the comparable figure among those with incomes in excess of \$75,000 is 50 percent (Table 18).

Nevertheless, nonvoters are significantly more likely than voters to subscribe to the view that "it makes no real difference who is elected—things go on just as they did before." Forty-nine percent of nonvoters say they agree to some extent with that statement, including 20 percent who express complete agreement. Among voters, 28 percent indicated some level of agreement with the idea, but just 7 percent say they completely agree.

Further dissecting the nonvoting population, Doers are the least likely to think that elections do not matter. While 60 percent of Doers disagree to some extent with the idea that it makes real difference who is elected, just 22 percent of the Don't Knows and 39 percent of the Alienated feel that way.

Among both nonvoters and voters alike, self-identified Independents are more likely than partisans to feel that elections make no difference. Among nonvoters, 57 percent of Independents hold this view compared with 45 percent of self-identified Republicans and 41 percent of Democrats. Among voters, 40 percent of the Independents express skepticism over the real value of elections, but only 24 percent of both Republicans and Democrats do so (Table 19).

Directly linking election outcomes to public policy decisions produced identical results. When asked how closely they subscribed to the notion that, “voting in elections has little to do with the way that real decisions are made in our country,” nonvoters are considerably more pessimistic than voters. Among those who did not vote in the 2000 presidential and congressional elections, 49 percent say they agree to some extent with 25 percent stating complete agreement. Among their voting counterparts, 28 percent express some agreement, including 8 percent who say they completely agree. Once again, partisans were the most likely to think that voting matters, whether they actually vote or not. (Table 20).

Slim majorities of both voters and nonvoters feel that there is a need for a third major political party in this country. Among voters, 51 percent take this position, with men (59%) significantly more likely than women (45%) to say they see such a need. Among nonvoters, 53 percent advocate the formation of a third party, and again, men (59%) are much more likely than women (46%) to profess this opinion (Table 21).

Voters and nonvoters are united in their desire for more local autonomy and less federal involvement. Seventy percent of voters and 67 percent of nonvoters say they agree at least to some extent with the statement, “the federal government should run only those things that cannot be run at the local level.” Among both voters and nonvoters alike, 34 percent express complete agreement with that sentiment. Both self-identified Republican (48%) and Independent (34%) voters are significantly more likely than Democratic (21%) voters to completely endorse the concept. Young voters are also far less likely than older voters to completely agree that local control is preferred whenever possible. Among voters 65 years old and older, 53 percent say they completely agree. Among those under 30, the comparable figure is 29 percent.

Among nonvoters, both the Don’t Knows (56%) and the Unplugged (61%) are significantly less likely than Doers (76%) to see value in the primacy of local control. For the Don’t Knows this is largely due to the fact that 19 percent expressed no opinion on the subject (Table 22).

Even so, nonvoters are only slightly more likely than voters to disparage the overall performance of the federal government. Sixty-two percent of all voters say they can agree to some extent with the idea that “the federal government often does a better job than people give it credit for.” Among nonvoters, 55 percent take that same view. Thirty-six percent of voters disagree with the idea, and 37 percent of nonvoters do so. Among nonvoters there are virtually no statistically significant differences in the responses to this question across the various demographic groups.

However, black voters (82%) are more likely than either white (60%) or other non-white (46%) voters to feel that the federal government does a better job than it gets credit for. Not

surprisingly, Democratic voters (73%) are significantly more likely than either Republican (51%) or Independent (64%) voters to hold that view (Table 23).

Both nonvoters and voters think there is a clear role for the federal government. Majorities of both groups express the belief that what goes on in Washington impacts them personally, and strong majorities of both believe that on issues such as healthcare the federal government must play an active role.

When asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with the idea that most issues discussed in Washington don't affect them personally, 77 percent of all voters disagree, including 35 percent who disagree completely. Among nonvoters, a less impressive but still solid majority of 59 percent say they disagree to some extent, with 26 percent expressing total disagreement.

While there are no significant demographic differences among voters, less educated and poorer nonvoters are somewhat more likely than their better-educated and wealthier counterparts to feel disconnected from events in Washington. Among nonvoters who have not completed high school, 39 percent agree to some extent that discussions in Washington have little impact on their lives. The comparable figure among college graduates is 29 percent. Sixty-six percent of the nonvoters with incomes in excess of \$75,000 disagree with that concept, while only 45 percent of those with incomes under \$15,000 do so. Ironically, the Unplugged (69%) and the Alienated (68%) are the most likely of the nonvoter groups to disagree with the notion that what goes on in Washington does not affect them (Table 24).

Seventy-seven percent of nonvoters and 76 percent of voters agree that government should play an active role in improving healthcare, housing and education for middle income families. Regardless of whether one focuses on voters or nonvoters, women, Democrats and Independents are more likely than men and Republicans to completely agree with this idea. Fifty percent of female voters say they completely agree with the idea compared with 41 percent of male voters. While 49 percent of male nonvoters express complete agreement with this notion, 56 percent of female nonvoters do so. Among voters, 60 percent of Democrats and 48 percent of Independents say they completely agree compared with just 32 percent of Republicans. Similarly, 67 percent of Democratic nonvoters and 56 percent of self-identified Independents cite complete agreement compared with just 34 percent of Republicans.

Among nonvoters, Doers and the Unplugged are the most likely to see a strong role for the federal government in healthcare, housing and education. Sixty-two percent of Doers and 59 percent of the Unplugged say they completely agree that Washington has an active role to play in these areas. The comparable figure for among the Alienated is 43 percent (Table 25).

When it comes to their views on a host of political and social institutions nonvoters are no more pessimistic or alienated than voters, and in many cases the opinions expressed by nonvoters are actually more upbeat than those offered by their voting compatriots.

Respondents were asked to think about ten political and social institutions and for each one to provide a favorable or unfavorable opinion about it. To establish a ceiling for the approval rates, one of the items was “the religion or religious institution [they] are most familiar with,” and as expected this item garnered the highest ratings among both nonvoters and voters alike.

Seventy-three percent of all nonvoters say they have a favorable opinion about their religion, half of whom give it a very favorable rating. That overwhelming approval rate remains relatively constant across virtually all demographic categories. Nonvoting Independents (31%) are less likely than either Republicans (39%) or Democrats (45%) to give their religious institutions a very favorable rating and are more likely to voice no opinion. Doers (50%) are the most likely of the five nonvoter clusters to give their religion a “very favorable” rating, while the Don’t Knows (41%) are the most likely to lack an opinion.

Among voters, 79 percent give religious institutions at least a generally favorable rating, with 41 percent saying their opinion is very favorable. Republican voters (50%) are more likely than either Democrats (37%) or Independents (36%) to state a very favorable opinion (Table 26).

Daily newspapers were accorded a generally favorable rating by 68 percent of nonvoters, including 21 percent who profess a very favorable outlook toward them. Again, opinions remain essentially constant across most demographic groups, although self-identified Democrats (28%) are somewhat more likely than either Republicans (21%) or Independents (19%) to express very favorable opinions. Given their high levels of readership it is not all that surprising that Doers (42%) are more than twice as likely as any other group and ten times more likely than the Don’t Knows (4%) to say they feel very favorably disposed towards their local newspaper. Those who think the country is headed in the right direction are also more likely than those who feel it has gotten off on the wrong track to feel positively disposed towards newspapers.

Among voters, 69 percent give their daily newspapers generally positive marks, with 19 percent expressing very favorable opinions. Black voters (33%) are twice as likely as whites (17%) to have a very favorable opinion. Those who think the country is headed in the right direction are once again more likely than those who feel it has gotten off on the wrong track to feel positively disposed (Table 27).

Two-thirds of all nonvoters have a positive opinion about the United States Supreme Court, including 20 percent who say their opinion is very favorable. Nonvoters between the ages of 18 and 29 are somewhat more likely than their older counterparts to hold a very favorable opinion of

this institution. White nonvoters (67%) are also more likely than their black counterparts (54%) to view the Court favorably.

Doers are the most likely of the nonvoter clusters to view the Court in a favorable light. While 89 percent of those in the Doer cluster give it generally positive marks, including 33 percent who rate it very favorably, just 43 percent of the Alienated express generally positive views of the Court. Only 7 percent of the Alienated say they have a very favorable opinion. Among the Don't Knows, 61 percent say they have no opinion of the Court.

Seventy-four percent of voters rate the Supreme Court favorably, placing it in a statistical dead heat with religion as the institution voters respect most. That level remains relatively constant across all demographic groups (Table 28).

Television news received generally favorable ratings from 59 percent of the nonvoters, including 18 percent who rate it very favorably. Women (21%) are somewhat more likely than men (15%) to say they view such news very favorably. Democrats (26%) are more likely than either Republicans (14%) or Independents (15%) to have a very favorable opinion. The propensity to rate television news very favorably falls as the level of education rises, from a high of 26 percent among those with less than a high school education to a low of 10 percent among college graduates. Those who feel the country is headed in the right direction (67%) are also more likely than those who feel the country has gotten off on the wrong track (52%) to view television news in a generally positive light.

Once again, Doers are the most likely of the five nonvoter clusters to have a favorable opinion of television news, with 78 percent giving such programming a generally positive rating. By comparison, 52 percent of the Irritables, 50 percent of the Alienated, and 35 percent of the Don't Knows say they have a generally favorable opinion of television news. The Unplugged, who generally do not watch television news, rate it more highly than any of these latter three groups.

Significantly fewer voters (48%) than nonvoters (59%) view television news favorably. Women (56%) are more likely than men (38%) to give generally favorable ratings to such news, although women are no more likely than men to rate it very favorably. Democrats (66%) are significantly more likely than either Republicans (37%) or Independents (36%) to look favorably on such news (Table 29).

While they did not vote in the most recent congressional elections, nonvoters (55%) are only slightly less likely than voters (61%) to say they have a generally favorable opinion of Congress. Among nonvoters, the percentage citing a favorable opinion rises with both education and income. Nonvoters who think the country is headed in the right direction (64%) are far more

likely than those who think it has gotten off on the wrong track (47%) to feel upbeat towards Congress. Those between the ages of 18 and 29 are more likely than their older counterparts to view Congress favorably.

Eighty-nine percent of Doers express generally favorable views of Congress, including 28 percent who say their opinion is very favorable. Both these approval levels are not only far higher than for any other group of nonvoters, they are also higher than those expressed by any group of voters (Table 30).

Fifty-four percent of nonvoters and 53 percent of voters express generally favorable views about the Democratic Party. Black nonvoters (73%) are far more likely than white nonvoters (50%) to think favorably of the Democrats. Nonvoting women (58%) are significantly more likely than their male counterparts (49%) to rate the party favorably. Doers (78%) rate the Democratic Party far more favorably than do members of any other nonvoter cluster, and more highly than any group of voters other than self-identified Democrats and blacks. Among voters, 60 percent of women and 79 percent of blacks rate the party favorably. Only 44 percent of male voters and 48 percent of white voters express similarly positive views. (Table 31).

Nonvoters (52%) are less likely than voters (63%) to rate their city or county council positively, with the difference explained almost entirely by a larger percentage of nonvoters saying they have not formed an opinion. There are virtually no differences evident in either group based upon demographic characteristics. However, attitudinal differences do emerge from the cluster analysis, where 81 percent of Doers express generally favorable ratings compared with 60 percent of the Unplugged, 56 percent of the Alienated, 25 percent of the Don't Knows, and just 4 percent of the Irritables. A staggering 82 percent of those Irritables have no opinion one way or the other (Table 32).

This higher non-response rate among nonvoters may be largely explained by the fact that nonvoters are far less likely than voters to express any interest in local politics. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "I'm pretty interested in local politics," 51 percent of nonvoters express some sense of agreement, including only 18 percent who say they completely agree. Across the various clusters, very favorable ratings range from a high of 32 percent among Doers to a low of 9 percent among the Don't Knows.

Among voters, 83 percent say they are at least somewhat interested in local politics, including 37 percent who say they agree completely. Interest in local politics is higher among elderly voters than among the young. Male voters (88%) are somewhat more likely than their female counterparts (79%) to express such interest, although the level of interest expressed by

both men and women is extremely high. Among nonvoters, partisans exhibit a greater degree of interest than do Independents (Table 33).

Nonvoters and voters hold very similar views concerning labor unions. Among nonvoters, 52 percent say they feel generally favorably toward organized labor, including 18 percent who say their opinion is very favorable. Once again, Doers (72%) express far more positive feelings towards organized labor than do members of other nonvoter clusters. Among voters, 51 percent say they feel generally positive, including 15 percent who feel very favorably. Self-identified Democratic voters and nonvoters are much more likely than Republicans to think well of labor unions. Black voters and nonvoters are considerably more likely than whites to take a positive position (Table 34).

Nonvoters have a slightly lower opinion of their local school boards than do voters, but again, the difference is made up entirely by the larger percentage of nonvoters who feel they have no opinion on the subject. Among nonvoters, 51 percent have a generally favorable opinion, 21 percent feel unfavorably toward their school boards, and 27 percent express no opinion. Among voters, 59 percent say their opinion is generally favorable, 25 percent say it is unfavorable, and 17 percent have no opinion. For both voters and nonvoters, there are virtually no measurable differences based upon demographics.

Among nonvoters, Doers express extremely positive opinions of their local school boards. Seventy-nine percent of all Doers say they have a favorable opinion of these local officials, including 35 percent who say they have a very favorable opinion. Sixty percent of the Alienated and 58 percent of the Unplugged cite generally favorable views of their school boards, with 14 percent of each group describing their views as very favorable. Ninety percent of the Irritables and 47 percent of the Don't Knows express no opinion (Table 35).

Fifty percent of nonvoters and 55 percent of voters express generally favorable views about the Republican Party. Not surprisingly, whites are significantly more upbeat than blacks about the GOP regardless of their voting status. Among voters, men (62%) are more likely than women (50%) to express positive feelings about the Republican Party, but no such gender difference is evident among nonvoters (Table 36).

Political Information Gathering and Knowledge Of Candidate Positions

Overall, voters are twice as likely as nonvoters to say they follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, and that two-to-one ratio remains fairly constant across a range of demographic groups.

Among voters, slightly more than two-thirds (68%) say they follow public affairs most of the time. That figure rises steady with age from a low of 52 percent among those between the ages of 18 and 29 to a high of 84 percent among those 65 years old and older. The propensity to follow public affairs closely also rises with education and income. Among those with a high school education or less, 59 percent report following developments in the public arena most of the time. The comparable figure among those with a college diploma is 77 percent. While 56 percent of those with annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 say they regularly follow public affairs, 82 percent of the voters with incomes in excess of \$75,000 do so. Male voters (74%) are more likely than female voters (63%) to say they follow politics closely. Whites (71%) are also significantly more likely than blacks (51%) to make that claim.

These same patterns are evident among nonvoters, albeit at a much lower level. While roughly one-third (34%) of all nonvoters say they follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, that interest in government rises steadily with age, education and income. As the figures below also show, both male and white nonvoters are more likely than their female and black counterparts to say they follow politics closely:

- Only 23 percent of nonvoters between the ages of 18 and 29 say they follow government and public affairs most of the time, but 59 percent of those 65 years old and older do so.
- Among college graduates, 50 percent claim to follow public affairs most of the time, while the comparable figure among those with less than a high school education is just 26 percent. Those who have graduated from high school (32%) or have attended some college (29%) also lag far behind their college-educated counterparts when it comes to following public affairs.
- Whites (36%) are nearly twice as likely as blacks (19%) to say they follow public affairs and government closely;
- Men (38%) are somewhat more likely than women (30%) to express that level of intense interest in politics (Table 37).

Those who voted in last year's presidential and congressional elections are also far more likely than nonvoters to have followed stories about the various campaigns. Eighty-five percent of all voters say they followed such stories at least fairly closely, including 40 percent who indicate that they followed them very closely. Voters who identify with either major party are significantly more likely than those who call themselves independents to say they followed such stories very closely. Men (47%) and whites (43%) were also significantly more likely than either women (35%) or blacks (29%) to report the highest level of interest in campaign coverage.

Among nonvoters, the disinterest in voting translates directly into a disinterest in political news. While slightly more than half (52%) of all nonvoters report having followed campaign news at least fairly closely during the months leading up to the election, just 17 percent say they followed such stories very closely. Even among college-educated nonvoters, only 29 percent say they followed campaign news very closely.

However, among nonvoters there is a wide variation in reported interest in political stories based upon one's cluster assignment. Sixty-six percent of Doers say they followed presidential and congressional campaign stories at least fairly closely during the 2000 elections, including 22 percent who followed them very closely. Among the Alienated, 65 percent say they followed such stories at least fairly closely, including 24 percent who followed them very closely. At the other end of the political news-interest spectrum are the Don't Knows, only 22 percent of whom report following campaign stories at least fairly closely (Table 38).

A majority of nonvoters is so far removed from the political process that they do not even exchange ideas about politics with family or friends on anything close to a regular basis—even during the most hotly contested presidential election in history. When asked how frequently they discuss politics and public affairs with family members only 37 percent of nonvoters claim to do so several times a week, and just 13 percent say they do so every day. That underwhelming pattern of non-discourse is consistent across all age and racial groups. Men and women prove to be equally unplugged from their families when it comes to political discussion. Only among college graduates, which comprise 20 percent of the nonvoting population, do at least half the respondents report discussing public affairs with family members at least several times a week.

In relatively sharp contrast, 63 percent of voters say they discuss politics with family members at least several times a week. One-quarter of all voters do so every day. The frequency of political discourse increases with education, but for other demographic groups the rate is fairly stable (Table 39).

Nonvoters are also much less likely than voters to discuss politics and public affairs with friends. Thirty-six percent of nonvoters report having such discussions at least several times a week, with just 11 percent saying that they take place on a daily basis. Among voters, the comparable figures are 53 percent and 16 percent, respectively (Table 40).

Echoing these self-reports on political interest are the responses to questions on newspaper readership and television news viewing. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of all voters say they read a newspaper at least four days each week, including 49 percent who say they read a newspaper at least six days each week. Male voters (55%) are more likely than female voters (45%) to report reading a newspaper six or seven days each week. Such “everyday” readership rises significantly

with age, from a low of 30 percent among those under the age of 30 to a high of 72 percent among those over the age of 65. Among voters, there was no measurable difference in readership across the various levels of education.

Many fewer nonvoters (44%) say they read a newspaper at least four days each week, and just 28 percent say they read one six or seven days a week. As with voters, everyday readership rises steadily with age, from a low of 17 percent among those younger than 30 to a high of 51 percent among those 65 years old or older. Reported everyday readership is somewhat higher among college graduates than it is among those with less education.

Several exceptions to this general rule of lower newspaper readership among nonvoters emerge from the cluster analysis. Among the Alienated, 69 percent report reading a newspaper at least four days during a typical week, including 52 percent who say they read one six or seven days a week. Two-thirds (66%) of all Doers say they read a newspaper at least four days a week, including 40 percent who read a newspaper daily. These readership levels are on par with most voter subgroups (Table 41).

When it comes to watching television news programs, there is far less difference between voters and nonvoters. Seventy-eight percent of all voters watch a television news program at least four nights each week, including 57 percent who watch at least six nights a week. “Every night” viewership rises from a low of 40 percent among the youngest voters to a high of 77 percent among senior citizens.

Among nonvoters, nearly two-thirds (64%) say they watch television news at least four nights each week, including 46 percent who say they do so six or seven nights a week. This every-night viewership rises 42 percentage points across the age spectrum, from 33 percent among those under 30 years of age to 75 percent among those 65 years old and older. Six-night viewership is highest among the Alienated (66%), the Irritables (63%) and the Doers (58%), but far lower among the Don’t Knows (27%) and the Unplugged (17%) (Table 42).

Given these differential information-gathering patterns, it will surprise no one that nonvoters are far less informed than voters about where candidates Bush and Gore stood on a number of issues discussed during the presidential campaign.

For instance, when asked which of the two men “supported a ban on the procedure that some people call partial-birth abortion,” just 37 percent of all nonvoters can correctly identify that as Bush’s position. Twenty-percent of nonvoters attribute that position to Gore, and 43 percent do not even hazard a guess. Among college-educated nonvoters, 58 percent can correctly name Bush as supporting this type of abortion ban. That figure drops to 28 percent among those who have not completed high school.

Among voters on the other hand, two-thirds can correctly link Bush with his opposition to this specific abortion procedure. Only 17 percent incorrectly link Gore with this position and an equal number are unable to connect either candidate with this stance. Republican voters (71%) are more likely than Democrats (60%) to answer correctly, but even the Democratic voters score well above nonvoters. As with nonvoters, the ability to correctly link Bush to this anti-abortion position rises with education, from a low of 56 percent among those with a high school education or less to a high of 73 percent among college graduates. White voters (71%) are far more likely than black voters (40%) to answer correctly (Table 43).

Similarly, only 37 percent of nonvoters can correctly identify Gore as the candidate who proposed giving parents a \$10,000 tax credit for college tuition. Roughly half (51%) of nonvoting college graduates make the proper identification, a figure significantly higher than for those who have attended but not completed college (33%), high school graduates (36%) or those with less than a high school diploma (30%). Self-identified Democrats (48%) are also more in tune with their party's nominee than are Republicans (35%) or Independents (34%).

Fifty-four percent of voters know that Gore, not Bush, proposed the \$10,000 college tuition tax credit. Democratic voters (67%) are considerably more likely than Republicans (47%) or Independents (50%) to answer this question correctly. Those between the ages 45 and 64—the target audience for Gore's message—are considerably more likely than those over the age of 65 to correctly link Gore to his tuition proposal (Table 44).

While 44 percent of all nonvoters know that Gore supported a three-day waiting period to allow for background checks of prospective gun buyers at gun shows, 61 percent of voters realize he took that position. Forty percent of nonvoters cannot answer the question at all, while 16 percent get it wrong. Among voters, the comparable figures are 24 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

Among those who voted, knowledge of Gore's support of the three-day waiting period seems to have permeated all demographic groups to roughly the same extent. However, among nonvoters, knowledge of Gore's position rises with education, from a low of 27 percent among those with less than a high school education to a high of 59 percent among college graduates. Male nonvoters (50%) are much more likely than female nonvoters (38%) to correctly label this as Gore's position. Gore's core Democratic supporters (52%) are also more likely than either Republicans (42%) or Independents (43%) to know the correct answer (Table 45).

Forty-five percent of nonvoters know that Bush supported allowing oil companies to drill in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but 46 percent can not venture a guess. Nine percent of the nonvoters think Gore held this view. Among voters, 68 percent correctly identify Bush with

this issue, 10 percent incorrectly name Gore, and 23 percent say they do not know which candidate supported such energy exploration.

Among nonvoters, men (56%) are more likely than women (33%) to identify Bush as favoring oil exploration in the wildlife refuge. Knowledge rises with education, from a low of 33 percent among those with less than a high school education to a high of 68 percent among college graduates. While just 23 percent of those with annual household incomes of less than \$15,000 can correctly name Bush, 69 percent of those with incomes in excess of \$75,000 can do so.

That same pattern is evident among voters, with 75 percent of men and 62 percent of women correctly linking Bush to his energy position. While 58 percent of voters with a high school education or less can name Bush, 76 percent of college graduates can do so. Fifty-five percent of those with incomes of less than \$30,000 correctly answer the question, but 82 percent of those with incomes above \$75,000 do so. Whites (72%) are also far more likely than blacks (47%) to know Bush's position on the issue (Table 46).

Community Involvement

While voting is clearly not among their top priorities, nonvoters find time for other community and quasi-political activities. Forty percent of all nonvoters say they have done volunteer work for a charity, religious organization or other non-profit group within the past year. The rate of volunteerism increases steadily with education, from a low of 27 percent among those with less than a high school education to a high of 58 percent among college graduates. Rates of volunteerism also jump in direct proportion to household income, from a low of 24 percent among those with annual incomes of less than \$15,000 to a high of 52 percent among those with incomes in excess of \$75,000. The youngest nonvoters are also more likely than those over 45 years of age to say they have volunteered. Both the Doers (48%) and the Unplugged (46%) are more likely than members of the other nonvoter clusters to report having volunteered.

Even so, nonvoters are also much less likely than voters to have volunteered their time. Among voters, 63 percent say they have also volunteered their time to a charity, religious organization or other non-profit within the past twelve months. Their participation rates also rise with income and education, although the differences across the various income and education levels are not as dramatic as is the case with nonvoters (Table 47).

Voters are four times as likely as nonvoters to say they volunteered on a political campaign during the past year, but the difference is of little practical consequence. While 2 percent of nonvoters volunteered in this way, just 8 percent of voters did so. In some respects the fact that 2

percent of nonvoters, including 5 percent of the Doers, took the time to volunteer in a campaign is more remarkable than the fact that 8 percent of voters did so (Table 48).

Similarly, 8 percent of nonvoters say they participated in a club or organization that deals with government and politics within the past twelve months. That percentage is statistically indistinguishable from the 11 percent of voters who did so. For both nonvoters and voters, participation rates climb as education increases, but highly educated voters do not participate in this many at higher rates than do highly educated nonvoters (Table 49).

Voters (42%) are twice as likely as nonvoters (22%) to say they have been active in some other type of community group or club within the past year. For both groups participation rates climb with education and income, but the levels exhibited by nonvoters consistently fall well below those exhibited by voters in any given income or education category (Table 50).

Not only do voters report a higher incidence of volunteerism than do nonvoters, but voters also are more likely to be regular volunteers—at least when it comes to their charitable and religious activities. Among those voters who say they volunteered time to a charity or religious group during the past year, 51 percent say that they do so on a regular basis. The comparable figure among nonvoter volunteers is 37 percent. However, when it comes to other forms of community participation, voting volunteers are no more likely than nonvoting volunteers to do so regularly (Table 51).

As one might expect, nonvoters are less motivated than voters to express their views through a letter, telegram, fax, or e-mail to a media outlet or government official. Among nonvoters, 13 percent say they have communicated their views in one of these ways over the course of the past year. The comparable figure among voters is 30 percent. Among both nonvoters and voters, the propensity to communicate with politicians and the media rises with education. Among voters, levels of communication also rise steadily with age, from a low of 19 percent among those under the age of 30 to a high of 40 percent among those over 65 (Table 52).

Finally, nonvoters are no less likely than voters to have participated in a march or demonstration during the past twelve months. Five percent of all nonvoters claim to have made their views known in this manner, while 7 percent of voters say they have done so (Table 53).