

Election Night News and Voter Turnout: Solving the Projection Puzzle



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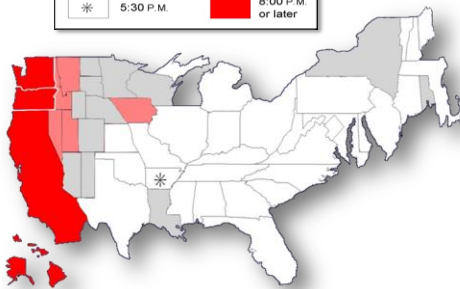
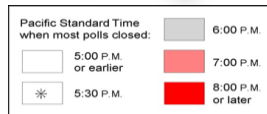
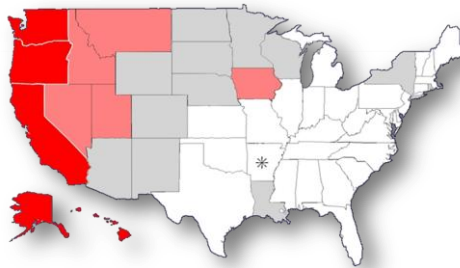
Projections PST: Past 9 Presidential Elections

Year	Presidential Race	First	Early
1984	Reagan–Mondale	5:00	3:00 hrs
1980	Reagan–Carter	5:15	2:45 hrs
1972	Nixon–McGovern	5:30	2:30 hrs
1996	Clinton–Dole–Perot	6:00	2:00 hrs
1988	Bush–Dukakis	6:17	1:43 hrs
1992	Clinton–Bush–Perot	7:48	12 min
Wednesday Morning (or later)			
1976	Carter–Ford	12:30	+ 4½ hr
2004	Bush–Kerry: Kerry conceded 8:05am		
2000	Bush–Gore: No unretracted final projection		

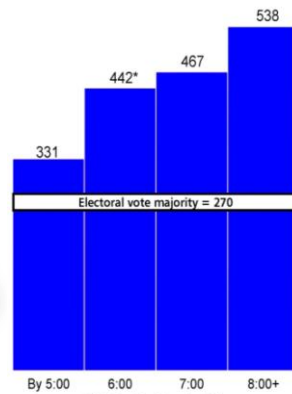
"Projections" Issued as Infallible Decrees

"Game, set, match. It's over. We'll have a new President of the United States [Clinton]. CBS News has never been wrong in making these calls in a Presidential race, underscore the word 'never.'"

Dan Rather, CBS, 1992

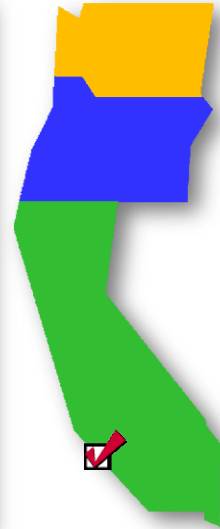
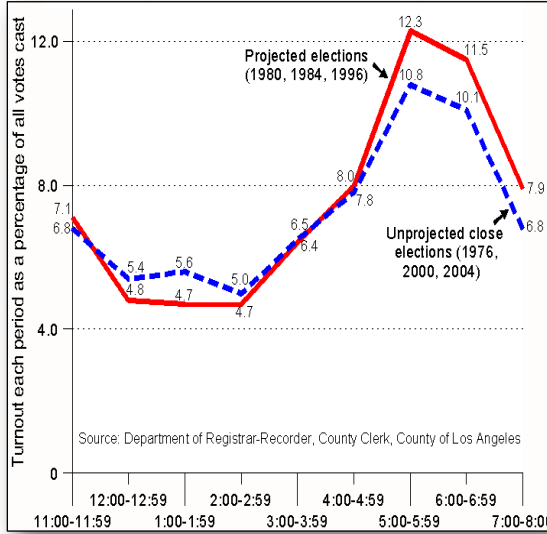


PST Poll Closings & Electoral Votes



P.M. Pacific Standard Time
 * includes 5:30 closing in Arkansas (6)
 Data above for 1984-1988 elections.
 For 1992-2000: 328, 436, 459, 539.

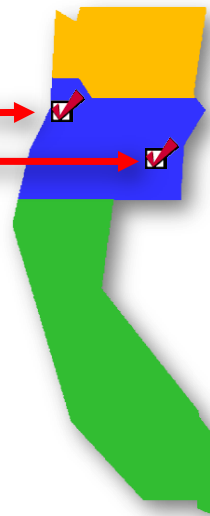
**Los Angeles County, 1974-2004:
 30 years of hourly turnout data from 30 sample precincts**



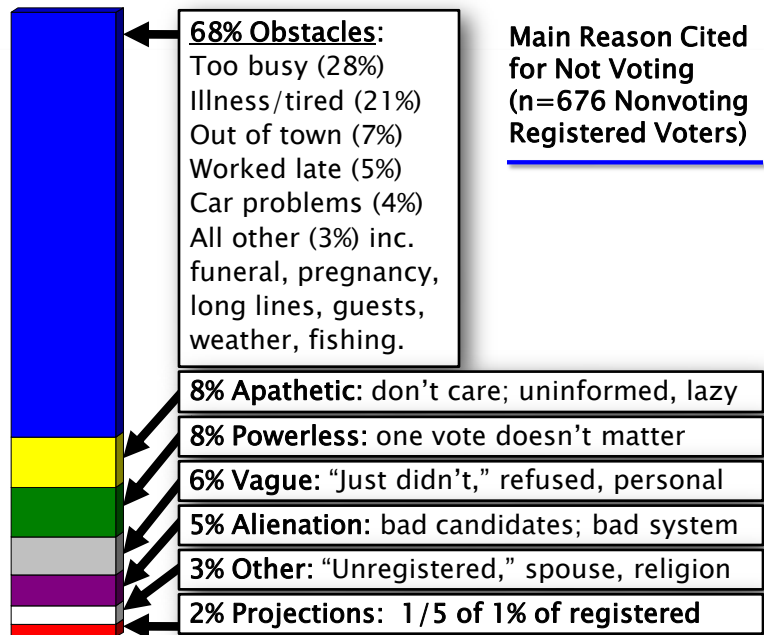
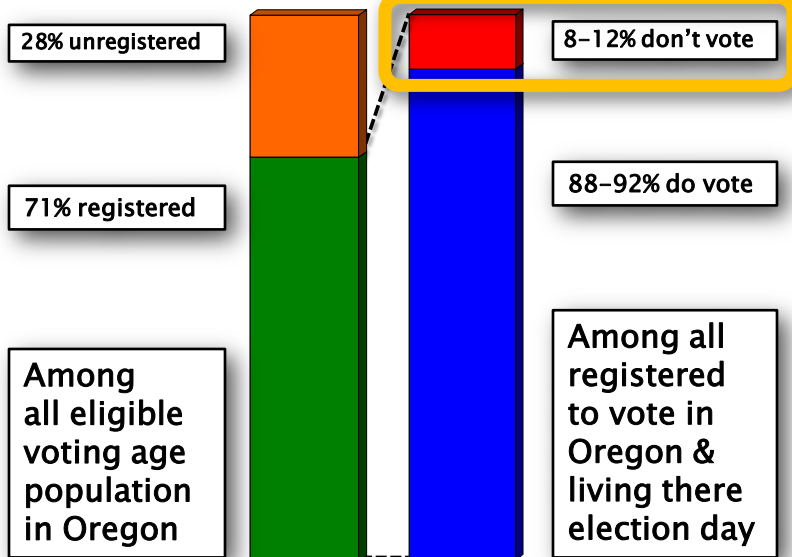
Oregon Studies

Survey research: Portland
 (largest election night poll of registered nonvoters)

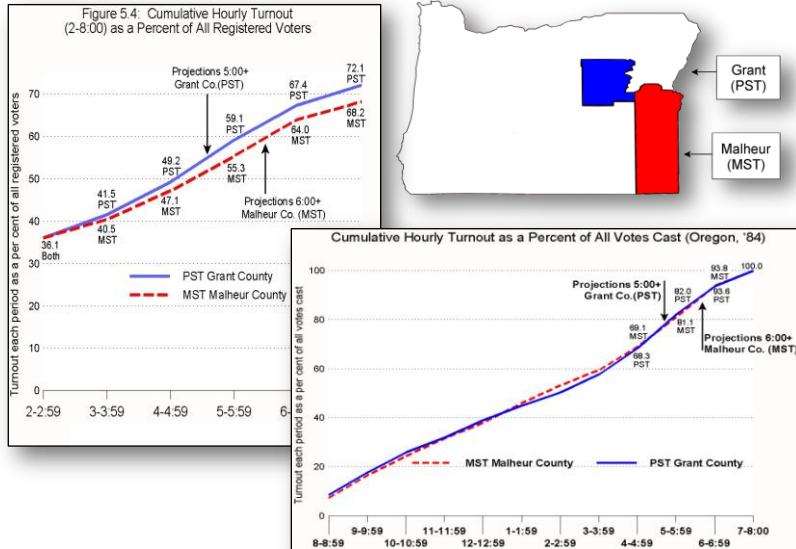
"Natural experiment": Eastern Oregon
 (hourly contrast of two closely matched counties)



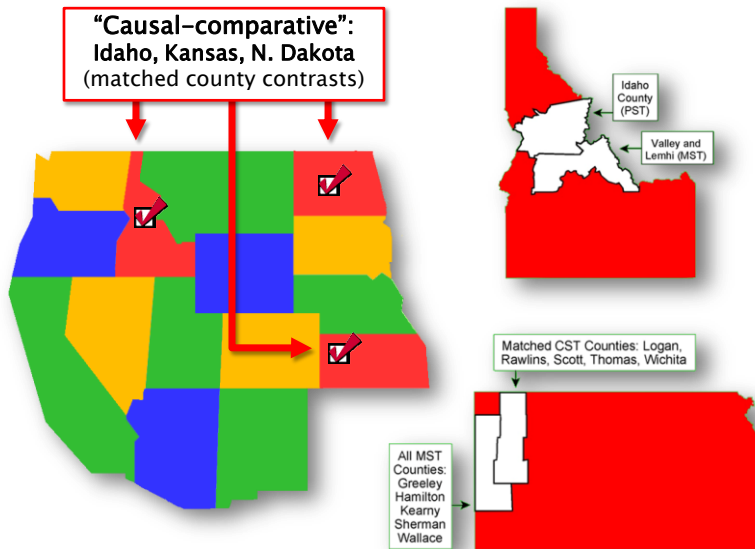
Finding Nonvoting Registered Portland–Area Citizens



Eastern Oregon "Natural Experiment"

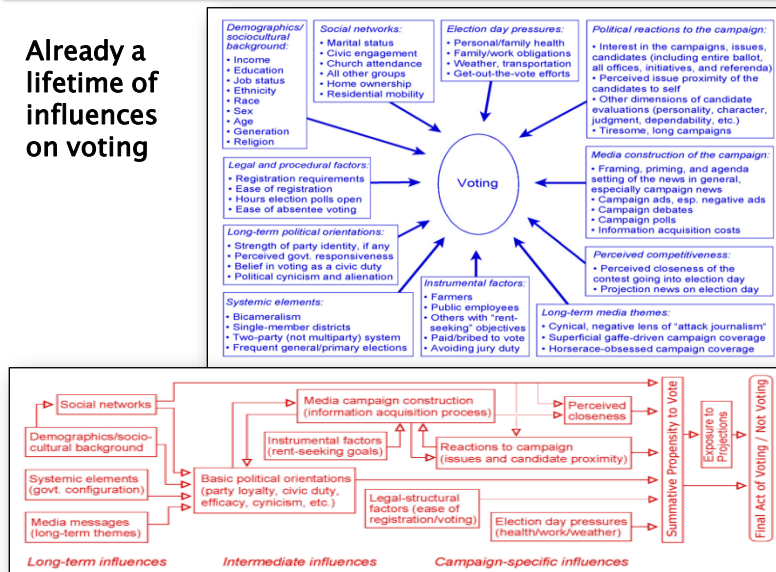


Matched Turnout Comparisons in States with Asynchronous Poll Closings in Two Time Zones



Why no marked decline in voter turnout?

Already a
lifetime of
influences
on voting



Why no marked decline in voter turnout?

- 1) A lifetime of influences already motivating voting.
- 2) Only half hear projection news before polls close.
- 3) Many do not necessarily accept polling/projections.
- 4) Do projections add urgency to recording their view and making a statement?

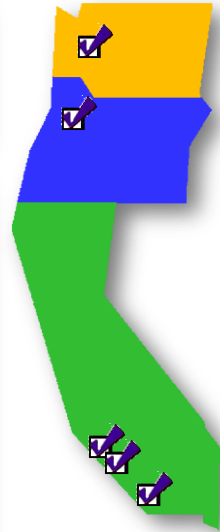
But Westerners still deplore projections!

Focus Groups of Registered Voters

- 8 Focus Groups:**
- 2 Los Angeles
 - 2 Seattle
 - 2 Portland
 - 1 Orange Co.
 - 1 San Diego

Consistent Findings:

- No first-hand experience of anyone not voting due to projections.
- But accepted convention wisdom.
- Regardless of turnout effects still hostile to projections because:
 - Inequality with fellow citizens
 - Devaluation of their votes



Previous Policy Proposals

Speech Limitations:

- Prohibit states from releasing results early.
- Prohibit/limit exit polls.
- Require a “Miranda warning” for exit polls.
- FCC projection ban.
- Law against projections.

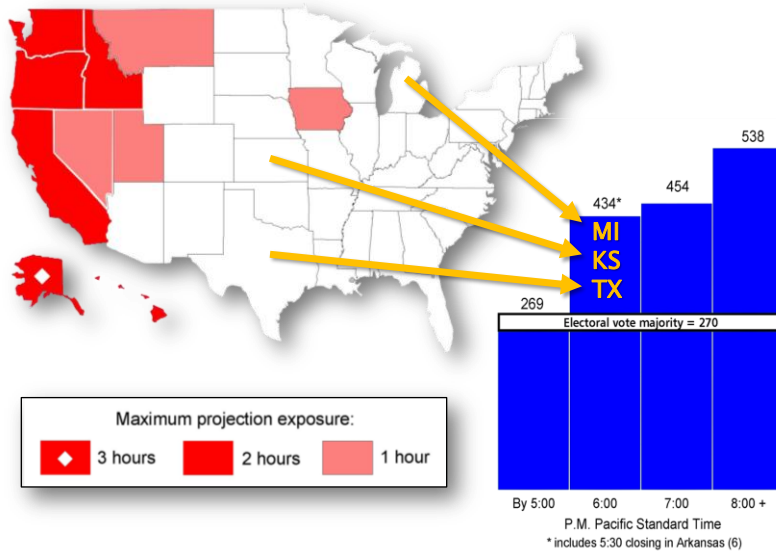
Simultaneous Closings:

- Nationwide: 11E/8P
- Nationwide: 9E/ 6P
- Nationwide: Sunday
- Tuesday natl. holiday
- 24 hour voting day.

Modest Policy Adjustments

- Two-week (election year) delay using Daylight Saving Time in Pacific Time Zone. So, 8:00 EST would be 6:00 PDT, reducing the projection window by one hour. (DST now ends first Sunday in Nov., not the last Sunday in Oct.)
- Networks continue the new practice of waiting until **all** polls (not most polls) close in a state before calling that state. This reduces the projection window one hr.
- Switch by Western states to shift polling earlier and closing at 7pm to close the projection window completely.

2004–2008: "All State Polls" Practice

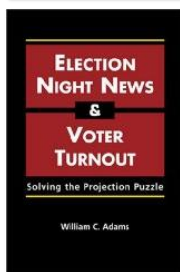


Projection Issues on Election Day 2008

Some potential controversies:

- Will exit poll results again be leaked (with misleading, partial data) in the afternoon as they were in 2004?
- Will anchors/analysts who know exit poll results resist signaling outcomes early with "characterizations"?
- Will equally close Obama and McCain states be called equally fast?
- Will TV continue the new practice of waiting until all polls close (not just "most polls") in a state?
- Inaccurate/premature projections (cf. Bush-Gore).
- Will House/Senate losers blame narrow losses on TV projections of the President?

Book Reviews



www.gwu.edu/~pad/projections

"Adams has put together a remarkable and persuasive collection of studies on an important issue, using a unique, multi-method approach that sets a great example for scholarship." — Trevor Thompson, *Public Opinion Quarterly*

"Adams' fine book won't end the argument over projections. But as the 2008 campaign commences, it will become the place where the argument begins." — Jack Shafer, *Slate.com*

"This clear and smartly designed analysis of the media projection/electoral choice problem is the new baseline study, and thus is essential reading for students and professionals involved in elections and election analysis. Highly recommended." — *Choice*

"*Election Night News and Voter Turnout* [is] a useful corrective to the hyperbolic histrionics that often accompany the debate about the impact of early projections. It is likely to remain the most realistic and best summary of this issue for a long time." — Kathleen Frankovic, *Political Communication*

"[Adams] bring[s] together all of the aspects of election night projections – from political behavior to media behavior – into a single package. ... There is no doubt that election projection controversies will continue into the future, which will make this volume a valuable resource for some time." — Thad Hall, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*

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