

**THE
FEDERAL
VOTING
ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM**

Fifteenth Report



December 1997

The Federal Voting Assistance Program

Fifteenth Report

This Report has been prepared by the staff of the
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) administers the federal responsibilities of the Presidential designee (Secretary of Defense), under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* of 1986. The *Act* covers all members of the Uniformed Services, Merchant Marine and their family members, and all U.S. civilian citizens residing outside the United States --- more than six million potential voters.

This report corresponds to the activity for the period 1992 through 1996. The survey of Uniformed Services personnel produced weighted statistics that will be used for comparative purposes with previous reports.

- The total voting participation rate among the Uniformed Services was 64% in 1996, as compared to the 49% rate of the general public. The 64% participation rate includes those voting absentee, voting in person, and attempting to vote.
- Among federal civilian employees overseas, the total voting participation rate was 68% in 1996. The participation rate includes 59% voting absentee and 9% either voting in person or attempting to vote.
- Voting participation among non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas increased six percentage points from 31% in 1992 to 37% in 1996. Participation includes 28% voting absentee, 1% voting in person and 8% attempting to vote.
- Voting participation in 1994, a non-Presidential election year, was 42% for the Uniformed Services (compared to 40% in 1990); 36% in 1994 for federal civilian employees overseas; and 11% in 1994 for non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas. The voting rate for the general public in 1994 was 38.78% (the 1990 general public voting rate was 36.4%).
- The citizens covered under *UOCAVA* comprised 3% of the total votes cast in 1996.
- The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) form continues to be the primary method used to register and request an absentee ballot. Of those who applied for a ballot in the 1996 general election, 71% of the Uniformed Services, 59% of the federal civilian employees overseas, and 61% of the non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas used the FPCA. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the local election officials reported receiving FPCA absentee ballot requests.
- A total of 70% of the local election officials counted Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots (FWABs) from Uniformed Services personnel; 37% counted FWABs from overseas civilians.

- The 1996 general election represents the second time that the FVAP's Electronic Transmission Service was in use for a Presidential election. There was a substantial increase in usage compared with 1992. In 1996, a total of 19,655 pages of documents (compared with 17,523 pages in 1992) were transmitted between 2,206 (699 in 1992) local election offices and citizens covered by *UOCAVA* located in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and 94 countries.
- The vast majority using the Electronic Transmission Service found it easy to do so. Eighty-four percent (84%) of the Uniformed Services, 77% of the federal civilian employees overseas, and 84% of the non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas found it easy to transmit election materials electronically. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the local election officials accepted electronically transmitted FPCA requests for absentee ballots in 1996. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the local election officials electronically transmitted (faxed) absentee ballots in 1996; 17% accepted faxed voted ballots.
- Operation Joint Endeavor: The Federal Voting Assistance Program worked with all state and local government officials to allow for electronic transmission of election materials to and from personnel supporting Operation Joint Endeavor (OJE). Twenty states authorized the complete faxing process that allowed for faxing of the FPCA, receiving the unvoted ballot and returning the voted ballot by fax. Four of these states (Alabama, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Rhode Island) and the District of Columbia normally do not allow faxing of the voted ballot. There were also 34 states that allowed some faxing of voting materials; nine of these states (Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Wyoming) and Puerto Rico, normally do not allow the faxing of official election materials. Only one state did not allow any faxing of voted material for troops deployed at locations in support of OJE.

Information Support

The Federal Voting Assistance Program's 1996 "Get-Out-The Vote" campaign received approximately \$51,000,000 worth of public service advertising involving local and national broadcast and print media outlets. The campaign was sponsored in conjunction with The Advertising Council in New York. The International Association of Clerks, Recorders, Election Officials and Treasurers (IACREOT) organization supported localization of the campaign in jurisdictions nationwide.

The public service announcements were distributed to over 1,400 television stations and networks including cable; 7,500 radio stations and networks; 8,000 newspapers; and 500 outdoor poster companies.

Problem Areas

Ballot Transit Time:

While electronic transmission offers an alternative to inadequate ballot transit time in emergency situations, the fact is that insufficient ballot transit time through the mail remains a significant obstacle to ensuring timely delivery of requested absentee ballots. Among those who did not vote, 26% of the Uniformed Services, 22% of the federal civilian employees overseas, and 12% of the non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas reported that they did not receive the requested absentee ballot in time to vote in the election.

Communications:

The main reasons given for not voting by 26% of the Uniformed Services personnel were that they had requested, but either did not receive an absentee ballot or the ballot arrived too late to be voted; and 14% reported that they had no candidate preference.

Eleven percent (11%) of the Uniformed Services personnel cited not knowing how to obtain an absentee ballot as one of the main reasons for not voting as compared with 16% of the federal civilian employees overseas and 22% of the non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas.

Also, 11% of the Uniformed Services and 15% of both the federal civilian employees overseas and non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas reflected that they were discouraged by the process of absentee voting.

Procedures:

Nineteen percent (19%) of the Uniformed Services Unit Voting Assistance Officers said the most frequent complaint from the citizens they served was not knowing if the FPCA was received by the election officials; 18% cited delayed response to the FPCA by election officials as a frequent complaint.

Forty-three states, the District of Columbia, and two territories have eliminated the requirement for separate FPCA submissions for primary and general elections. Forty-four states, the District of Columbia and one territory have eliminated the requirement for notarization of election materials. Complaints from citizens about the requirement of separate FPCA submissions for primary and general elections fell nine percentage points from 1992 (15%) to 1996 (6%). Only 1% of the Unit Voting Assistance Officers cited complaints about the difficulty in having an FPCA or ballot notarized. Two percent (2%) of the non-federally employed U.S. citizens overseas reported that the requirement for notarization of election materials was too difficult.

Incomplete Applications:

The local election officials cited the following most frequent problems encountered in processing the FPCA: no/inadequate home address (cited by 66%), this figure fell nine percentage points from the 1992 figure of 75%; inadequate or illegible mailing address (cited by 25%); citizens applying to the wrong jurisdiction (cited by 20%); and failure by the citizens to indicate party preference (cited by 19%).

INTRODUCTION

This is the fifteenth report since the enactment of the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955; it covers 1992 through 1996.

The current program is based on the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* of 1986. The *Act* authorizes the President to designate the head of a federal department or agency to administer the federal voting assistance responsibilities. The Secretary of Defense is the Presidential designee for administering this *Act*. The Director of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) carries out the federal functions for the Presidential designee.

The *Act* requires the states to allow certain citizens to register and vote in elections for federal offices using absentee procedures. The *Act* covers members of the Uniformed Services and the Merchant Marine, including the commissioned corps of the Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and their family members; federal civilian employees overseas; and other overseas U.S. citizens not affiliated with the federal government, a total numbering more than 6,000,000 eligible voters. In addition to the federal laws governing absentee registration and voting, most states permit these citizens to register for and vote absentee in state and local elections.

Executive Branch departments and agencies with employees overseas provide voting assistance under guidance from the Presidential designee. These departments and agencies utilize informational materials and services provided by FVAP. The Department of State, through its embassies and consulates, provides absentee voting information and assistance to U.S. citizens outside the United States. In addition, the Department of State, in selected areas, makes the diplomatic pouch available to citizens for sending election materials back to the U.S.

The U.S. Postal Service and the Military Postal Service facilitate the transmission of election materials between the voter and local election officials.

The General Services Administration prints the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) and distributes these forms upon request from federal departments and agencies.

The U.S. Attorney General is authorized to enforce the provisions of this *Act*.

FEDERAL VOTING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Federal Voting Assistance Program continually works with state and local government officials, assists states and other U.S. jurisdictions in adopting the mandatory and recommended provisions of the *UOCAVA*, and advises them on the applicability of federal laws and regulations to their individual electoral systems. An Ombudsman Service for all persons covered by the *Act* and for state and local government officials is also provided to assist in resolving absentee voting problems. The right of all U.S. citizens to register and vote is publicized to a worldwide audience on a continuous basis.

PROGRESS OF STATES IN IMPLEMENTING THE *UNIFORMED AND OVERSEAS CITIZENS ABSENTEE VOTING ACT OF 1986*

Significant changes have occurred in the absentee voting procedures implemented by the states in the last four years. These include notable improvements in facilitating absentee voting procedures, to include electronic voting, for persons covered by the *Act*. The Federal Voting Assistance Program's continual education efforts, in addition to its pursuit of state legislative initiatives, have helped communicate the challenges presented to the Uniformed Services and civilian citizens outside the U.S. in voting absentee. Although states have made progress in facilitating absentee voting by these citizens, obstacles remain.

There are interstate and intrastate differences in voting procedures that present difficulties for citizens covered by the *Act*, and are a source of confusion to Voting Assistance Officers and local election officials. Understanding the absentee voting procedures of one state does not necessarily translate into being able to assist a potential voter from another state, and may actually result in unintentionally misleading a voter. Furthermore, the lack of uniformity within a state only compounds the confusion by factoring in local election officials, who may not know that different procedures are in effect in different jurisdictions, and therefore may give conflicting advice or require more stringent procedures than are appropriate. In addition, voting and registration procedures may vary for people within the same family, i.e., Uniformed Services and their family members.

The FVAP has undertaken several state legislative initiatives in order to bring simplicity, uniformity and clarity to the absentee voting process to ensure enfranchisement.

The two significant problems that continue to threaten disenfranchisement are lack of adequate ballot transit time, and not knowing how to obtain an absentee ballot. As manifested by the results of the 1996 Post-Election Survey, FVAP education and information programs and on-site training workshops continue to raise the voting awareness of Voting Assistance Officers and citizens covered by *UOCAVA*. Further efforts to resolve these problems include initiating additional outreach programs by encouraging overseas organizations to carry out voting assistance activities for overseas citizens; expanding the utilization of the Electronic Transmission Service; integrating state-of-the-art technology in the FVAP's operations; and diligently pursuing legislative initiatives to facilitate absentee voting for *UOCAVA* citizens.

The specific initiatives and progress are as follows:

1. Provide Forty-Five Days Transit Time for Absentee Ballots to Uniformed Services and Overseas Citizens.

Thirty-six states, the District of Columbia and three territories now provide forty or more days transit time, either statutorily or through administrative practice:

Alabama	Iowa	Nebraska	Puerto Rico
Alaska	Kansas	Nevada	South Carolina
Connecticut	Kentucky	New Jersey	South Dakota
District of Columbia	Louisiana	New Mexico	Tennessee
Florida	Maryland	New York	Texas
Georgia	Massachusetts	North Carolina	Utah
Guam	Michigan	North Dakota	Virgin Islands
Idaho	Mississippi	Ohio	Virginia
Illinois	Missouri	Oregon	West Virginia
Indiana	Montana	Pennsylvania	Wyoming

2. Use of a Single FPCA to Serve as a Request for Registration and/or Ballot for All Elections Held During the Calendar Year.

This initiative is very important because many citizens mistakenly believe that a request for a primary ballot serves as a simultaneous request for a general election ballot. Forty-three states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the Virgin Islands have enacted such legislation:

Alaska	Illinois	Nebraska	Tennessee
Arizona	Indiana	New Hampshire	Texas
Arkansas	Iowa	Nevada	Utah
California	Kansas	New Jersey	Vermont
Colorado	Louisiana	New York	Virgin Islands
Delaware	Maine	North Carolina	Virginia
District of Columbia	Maryland	North Dakota	Washington
Florida	Massachusetts	Ohio	West Virginia
Georgia	Michigan	Oklahoma	Wisconsin
Guam	Minnesota	Oregon	Wyoming
Hawaii	Missouri	South Carolina	
Idaho	Montana	South Dakota	

3. Acceptance of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) as a Simultaneous Request for Registration and Absentee Ballots.

All the states accept the FPCA as a simultaneous request for registration and ballots. Forty-eight states, American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands send a ballot in response to a single FPCA for most citizens covered under the *Act*. Only five states still require some sort of state form in addition to the FPCA to register, and these only for a specific group of citizens covered under the *Act*.

The following five states still require certain citizens covered under the *Act* to submit a state form in addition to the FPCA in order to register:

Kentucky	Rhode Island
New Hampshire	Utah
Pennsylvania	

4. Remove the Notary Requirement on Any Election Materials; Replace with Self-Administered Oath, If Necessary.

Almost all states have enacted legislation to remove the notary requirement. Forty-four states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands now have eliminated notary requirements on all election materials for citizens covered by the *Act*:

Alaska	Illinois	Nevada	South Dakota
Arizona	Indiana	New Hampshire	Tennessee
Arkansas	Iowa	New Jersey	Texas
California	Kansas	New Mexico	Utah
Colorado	Kentucky	New York	Virgin Islands
Connecticut	Louisiana	North Carolina	Virginia
Delaware	Maine	North Dakota	Washington
District of Columbia	Maryland	Ohio	West Virginia
Florida	Massachusetts	Oklahoma	Wisconsin
Georgia	Minnesota	Oregon	Wyoming
Hawaii	Montana	Pennsylvania	
Idaho	Nebraska	South Carolina	

5. Eliminate Any “Not Earlier Than” Acceptance Dates for Registration or Absentee Ballot Requests.

Some states have specified dates to accept requests for registration and/or absentee ballots. This “not earlier than” limitation causes a problem for citizens covered by the *Act*. Motivational programs on voting are held at various times during an election year. At these sessions, personnel are encouraged to submit an application for registration and/or request for an absentee ballot. Unfortunately, persons such as

these who are motivated to act early in the election year could have their application rejected because local election officials received them too early.

The following 40 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have eliminated “not earlier than” restrictions for citizens covered by the *Act*:

Alabama	Illinois	Missouri	Pennsylvania
Alaska	Indiana	Montana	Puerto Rico
Arizona	Iowa	Nebraska	Rhode Island
California	Kansas	Nevada	South Carolina
Colorado	Kentucky	New Hampshire	South Dakota
Connecticut	Louisiana	New Jersey	Texas
Delaware	Maine	New Mexico	Utah
District of Columbia	Maryland	New York	Vermont
Florida	Massachusetts	North Dakota	Virgin Islands
Guam	Minnesota	Oklahoma	West Virginia
Idaho	Mississippi	Oregon	Wyoming

6. Establish Late Registration Procedures for Persons Recently Separated from the Uniformed Services and Civilian Overseas Employment Who, in Their Transition Period, May Not Know in Which Jurisdiction They Will Live.

Often the date of discharge, or return to the U.S. from overseas employment, and a state’s registration requirements combine to disenfranchise a *UOCAVA* citizen. Special procedures to allow these individuals to register and vote would solve this problem. Twenty states and the Virgin Islands currently allow such procedures:

California	Massachusetts	North Carolina	Virgin Islands
Connecticut	Missouri	North Dakota	Virginia
Illinois	Montana	Ohio	Wyoming
Iowa	Nebraska	Oklahoma	
Kansas	Missouri	Oregon	
Maryland	New Jersey	Utah	

7. Provide for State Special Write-In Absentee Ballot.

The state special write-in absentee ballot is used to provide a method for voting by Uniformed Services and other citizens overseas who, due to military contingencies or special circumstances such as those faced by submariners, Peace Corps volunteers, missionaries and others in remote areas, will be out of communication for extended periods of time and unable to receive regular absentee ballots sent in the normal time frame.

This state special write-in absentee ballot is provided by the states 90 days before an election, and allows the voter to write in the names of candidates or the party for whom he or she wishes to vote in the election. This ballot generally provides a full slate of offices to be voted upon, including federal, state and local offices.

This state special write-in ballot is not to be confused with the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) which is used as a back-up ballot primarily from overseas and only if the regularly requested absentee ballot is delayed or not received in a timely manner.

Twenty-five now have special write-in ballots:

Alaska	Indiana	North Dakota	Utah
Arizona	Iowa	Oklahoma	Virginia
California	Louisiana	Oregon	Washington
Colorado	Maine	Pennsylvania	Wisconsin
Connecticut	Missouri	South Carolina	
Delaware	Nebraska	Tennessee	
Georgia	New Hampshire	Texas	

8. Incorporate Reference to the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* into State Election Code.

In 1986, Congress updated and consolidated the provisions of the Federal Voting Assistance Act of 1955 and the Overseas Citizens Voting Rights Act of 1975 into the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*. Citation of this *Act* in state election codes helps state election officials and interested citizens find guidance to applicable federal law and increase their familiarity with the statute and its applications. Twenty-seven states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands have incorporated reference to the *UOCAVA* into their state election codes:

Arizona	Idaho	Nevada	Virgin Islands
California	Indiana	New Jersey	Virginia
Colorado	Iowa	New Mexico	West Virginia
Connecticut	Kansas	Ohio	Wisconsin
Delaware	Louisiana	Oklahoma	Wyoming
District of Columbia	Maryland	Oregon	
Georgia	Montana	South Carolina	
Hawaii	Nebraska	Utah	

9. Allow the Use of Electronic Transmission of Election Materials, Legislatively or Administratively.

The electronic transmission of election materials was first undertaken in 1990 during Operation Desert Shield as an emergency measure to ensure that U.S. Uniformed Services personnel in the Persian Gulf were not disenfranchised from participating in the general election. Since that time, the use of electronic transmission has expanded, and 1996 marked the second Presidential election year in which the Electronic Transmission Service was used. Forty-three states and territories allow some aspects of electronic transmission to include the citizen's faxing the FPCA for registration and absentee ballot request, the citizen's requesting that the ballot be faxed to him/her, and allowing the voted ballot to be faxed to the local election official.

Alaska	Hawaii	Minnesota	Pennsylvania
American Samoa	Idaho	Mississippi	South Carolina
Arizona	Illinois	Missouri	Tennessee
Arkansas	Indiana	Montana	Texas
California	Iowa	Nebraska	Utah
Colorado	Kansas	Nevada	Vermont
Connecticut	Louisiana	New Jersey	Virgin Islands
Delaware	Maine	North Dakota	Virginia
District of Columbia	Maryland	Ohio	Washington
Georgia	Massachusetts	Oklahoma	Wisconsin
Guam	Michigan	Oregon	

10. Expand the Use of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB), to Include Special, Primary and Runoff Elections, and to Allow the FWAB to be Used as a Simultaneous Registration Application and Ballot.

The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) is a federal ballot designed for use by Uniformed Services personnel stationed overseas and other U.S citizens overseas who have already applied for a regular absentee ballot. If the regular absentee ballot does not arrive timely, these voters may obtain the FWAB, vote it by writing in names of candidates or political parties and return the FWAB to the local election official. It is often referred to as an emergency or back-up ballot.

The federal statute provides that the FWAB, which is prepositioned overseas, be used only in general elections. By expanding its use to include special, primary and runoff elections, citizens would not be disenfranchised because regular ballots are not received in a timely manner. Five states have expanded the FWAB's use to include elections other than the general election and offices other than federal offices, and its use in the U.S.:

Connecticut	Montana	West Virginia
Iowa	Virginia	

11. Provide the State's Chief Election Official with Emergency Authority During Periods of Declared Emergency.

Six states and the Virgin Islands have designated a chief election official to work with FVAP to establish expeditious methods for handling absentee ballots during declared emergencies:

Colorado
Hawaii

Indiana
Iowa

Missouri
Virgin Islands

Virginia

PROGRAM RESULTS

Analysis of the 1996 Post-Election Survey indicated that there was significantly high voting participation by citizens covered by the *Act* and improved satisfaction with assistance and services provided by the FVAP.

Post Election Surveys

The 1996 Post-Election Surveys were conducted to: determine participation in the electoral process by citizens covered by the *Act*; assess the impact of efforts designed to simplify and ease the process of voting absentee; evaluate other progress made to facilitate absentee participation; and identify any remaining obstacles to voting by these citizens.

In order to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the success of the Federal Voting Assistance Program and the remaining obstacles to absentee voting, five individual surveys were conducted to obtain information from: members of the Uniformed Services in the U.S. and overseas; federal civilian employees overseas; non-federally employed U.S. civilians overseas; Uniformed Services Unit Voting Assistance Officers; and local election officials entrusted with processing applications and forwarding registration materials and absentee ballots.

Members of the Uniformed Services in the U.S. and overseas, federal civilian employees overseas; and non-federally employed civilians overseas were queried regarding their voting activity and were asked to evaluate sources of assistance and information utilized. Respondents who reported that they did not vote were asked to provide reasons for not voting. Uniformed Services Unit Voting Assistance Officers are the primary source of voting assistance for members of the Uniformed Services and their family members. They were surveyed to determine the scope of their voting assistance efforts, the type of assistance provided, and difficulties experienced.

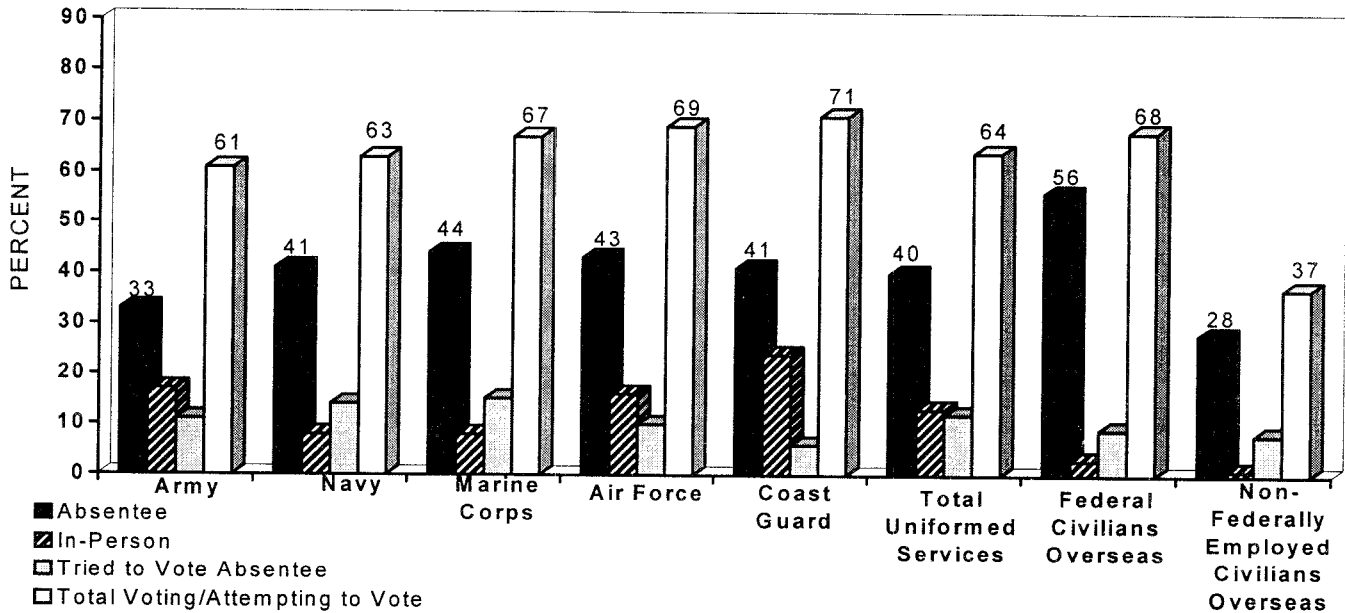
Local election officials were asked to provide information on voting in general, absentee voting in particular, and problems associated with handling requests and ballots from citizens covered by the *Act*.

Based on statistics from the Federal Election Commission, 49% of the U.S. civilian voting age population (general public) voted in the 1996 general election, representing a six percentage point decrease from the 1992 figure of 55%.

Charts 1 and 2 indicate voting behavior by the various groups surveyed. The overall Uniformed Services voting participation of 64% in 1996 is significantly higher (15%) than that of the general public. Voting participation among the Uniformed Services has consistently exceeded voting by the general public in Presidential elections since 1984. The major factors in maintaining this high percentage of voting participation for the Uniformed Services can be attributed directly to command support and the emphasis on

the voting program by each of the Services, and the states' progress in simplifying their absentee voting procedures. (See section on Progress of States on page 2). Charts 1 and 2 reflect a six-percentage point increase in voting participation in 1996 from 1992 among non-federally employed civilians overseas.

VOTING PARTICIPATION 1996
CHART 1



VOTING PARTICIPATION 1992
CHART 2

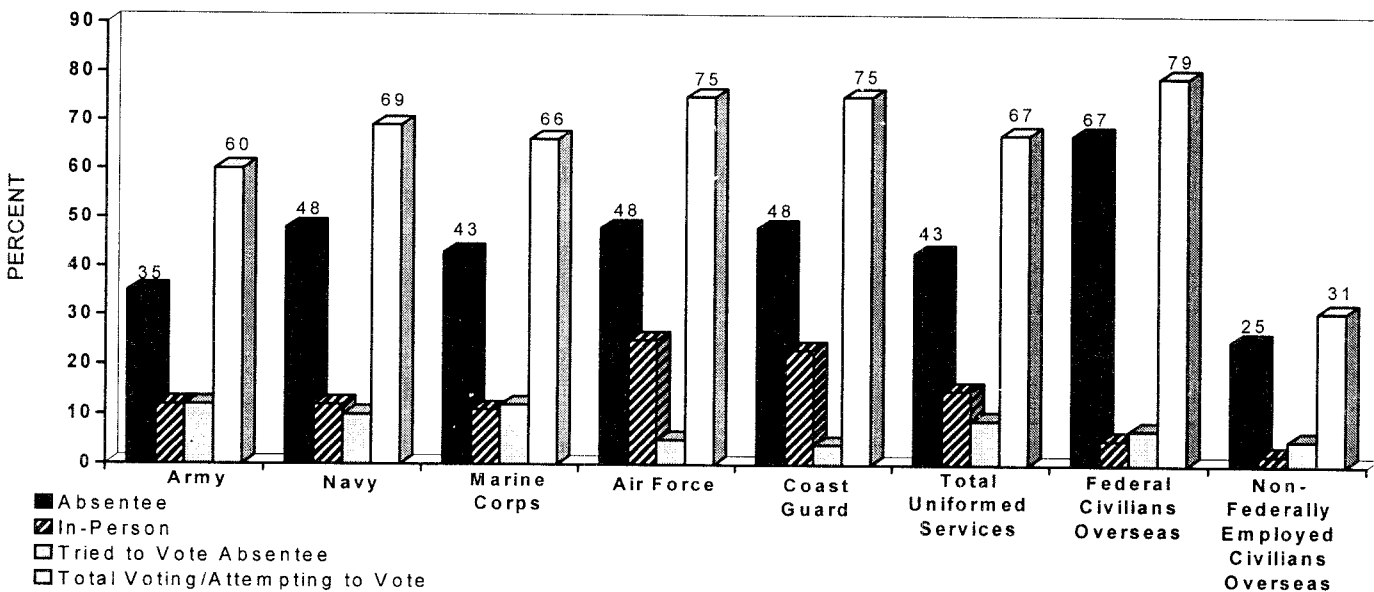


Chart 3 indicates a strong correlation between age and voting in the Uniformed Services. At each age range, the proportion of those voting increases progressively from 36% for the 18-20 year olds to 84% for those 45 years old and above.

Generally, officers in the Uniformed Services are older than junior grade enlisted personnel. Thus, rank becomes a significant indicator in accounting for differences in voting participation. Voting participation increases progressively from 42% for those in the lowest ranking enlisted paygrades of E1-E3 compared to 80% for those in the lowest officer rank with the highest participation of 87% for those O-4 and above.

There is also a tendency for those with a longer duration at a duty station to vote in an election than those who have been assigned to their current duty station for a shorter period. In 1996, Uniformed Services personnel assigned to their duty stations for more than three years had a higher voter participation rate (71%) than those who resided at their duty station for less than three years. Significantly, those assigned to a duty station for six months or less were 11% less apt to vote than those residing at a duty station three years or more.

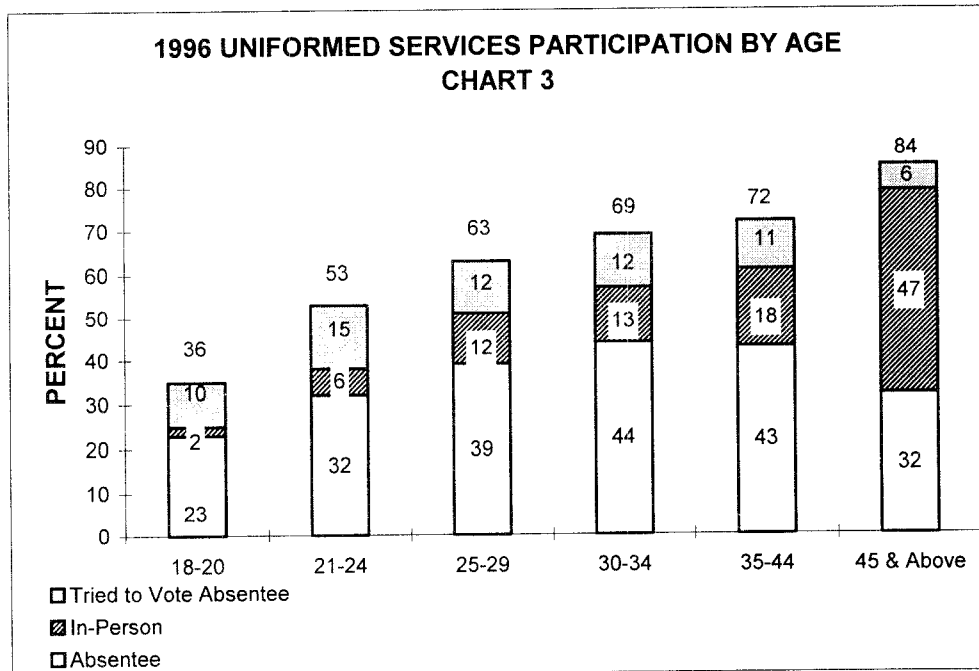


Chart 4 indicates that voting participation in 1996 by federal civilian employees overseas was the highest at 77% in the age group 25 to 29. This is similar to 1992 where the highest participation was 82% for those 25 to 29 years old.

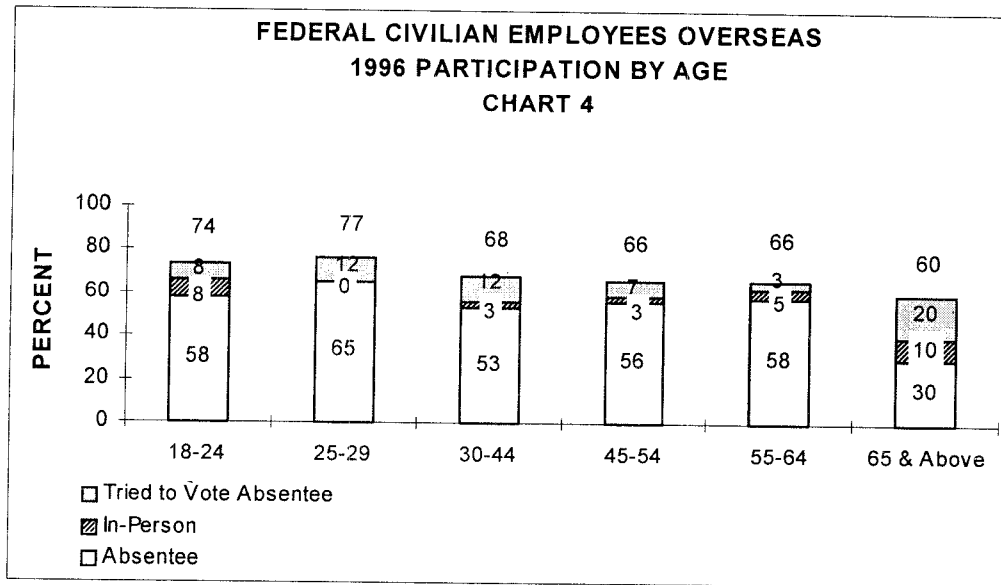
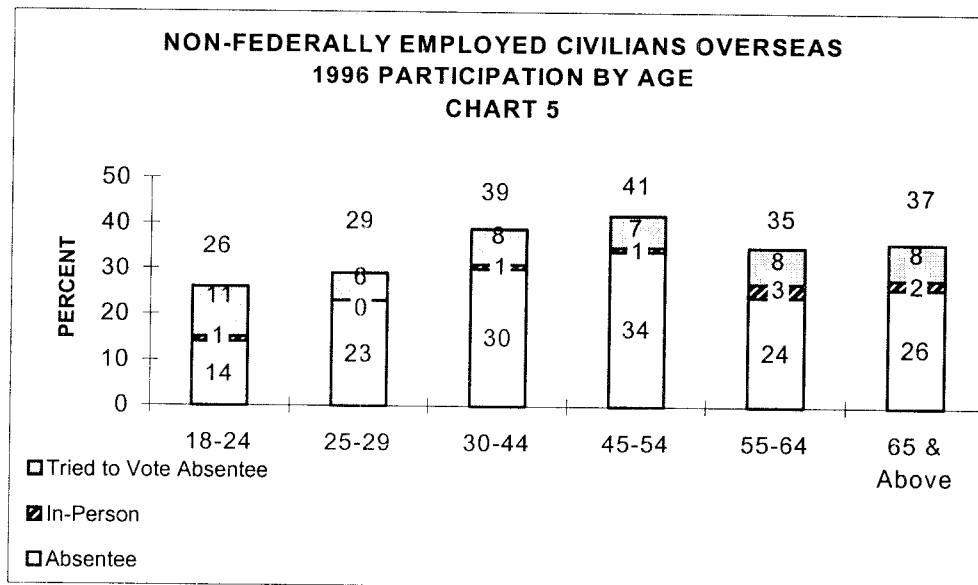


Chart 5 shows that voting participation in 1996 among non-federally employed civilians overseas was the highest at 41% in the 45 to 54 age range.



At the time of the election and this survey, 68% of the Uniformed Services sample was stationed in the U.S.; the remainder was stationed overseas. All of the federal civilian sample and the sample of non-federally employed civilians overseas were outside the U.S. and its territories at the time of the election and survey.

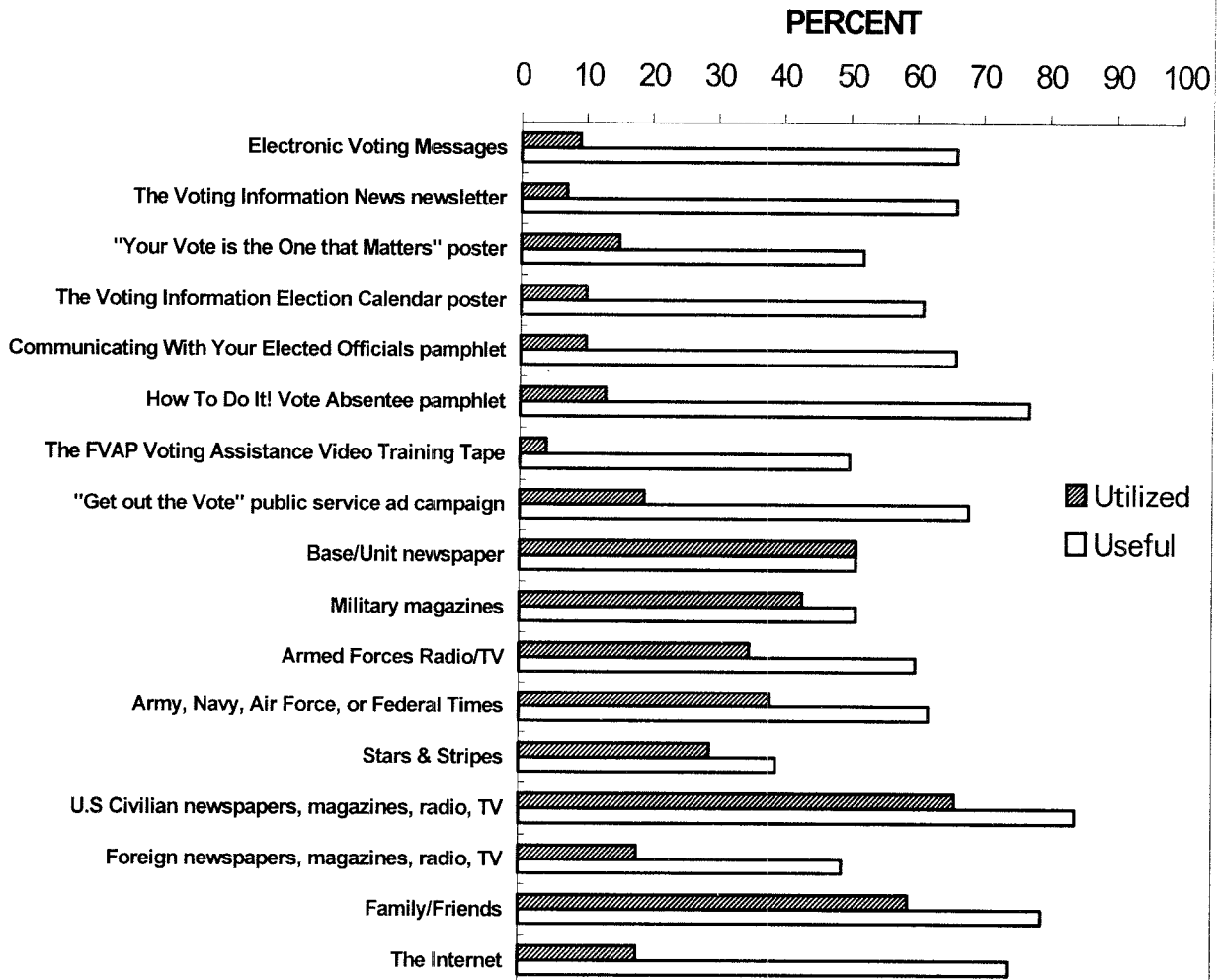
Survey findings indicate relationships between voting and other demographic indicators such as age, rank, time at duty station and location of duty station during the 1996 general election. The surveys also prove that an effective voter information and education program with proper command and agency support can motivate *UOCAVA* citizens to participate consistently at higher rates than those of the general public.

The Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) continued to be the primary tool used by the Uniformed Services members to request registration and an absentee ballot. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the Uniformed Services personnel acquired the FPCA through military channels; 19% obtained it through the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP). The FPCA was used to request a ballot by 59% of the federally employed civilians overseas, representing a two-percentage point increase over 1992. Of these, 49% obtained the FPCA through Uniformed Services channels; 31% through a U.S. embassy or consulate; and 15% through the FVAP. Sixty-one percent (61%) of the non-federally employed civilians overseas requested a ballot using the FPCA. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of these obtained the FPCA from a U.S. embassy or consulate; 3% obtained it through the FVAP; and 2% obtained it through U.S. Uniformed Services channels.

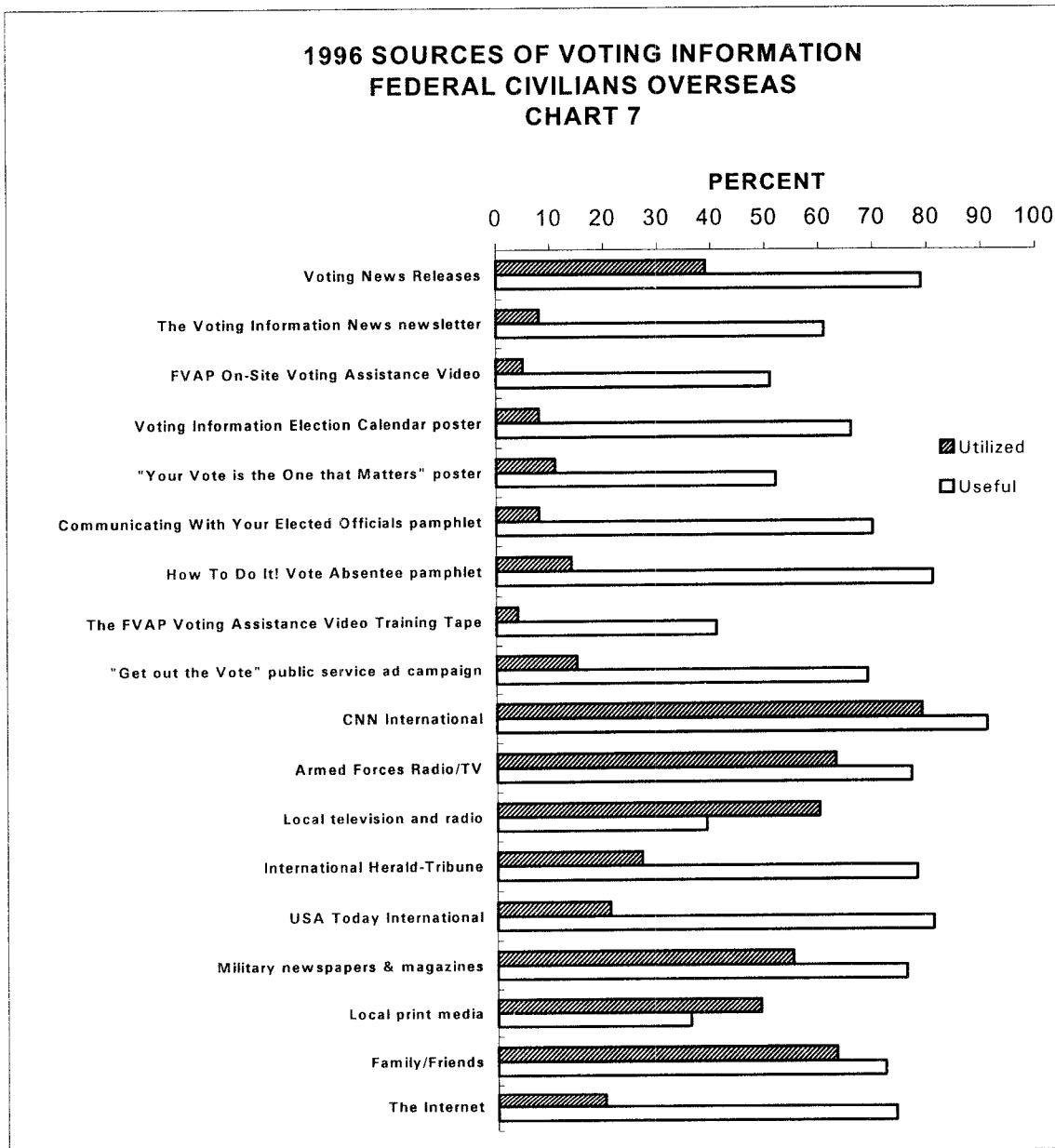
Sources of Voting Assistance

Citizens covered by the *Act* were asked about the sources of information they consulted to assist them in participating in the electoral process and their overall satisfaction with the assistance received. Forty-two percent (42%) of the Uniformed Services personnel reported that the Unit Voting Assistance Officer was their primary source of information, and as in 1992, (across the Services) 93% were satisfied with the quality of assistance given by the Unit Voting Assistance Officer. Of those Uniformed Services personnel who used the *Voting Assistance Guide* in 1996, 90% rated it as a good source of assistance. Of those that did not use the *Guide*, 37% indicated that they had all the information they needed from the Unit Voting Assistance Officer and other sources, and did not need to consult the *Guide*. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the Uniformed Services indicated that they used U.S. civilian newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV as their most common source of voting information. Other sources of voting information are provided in Chart 6.

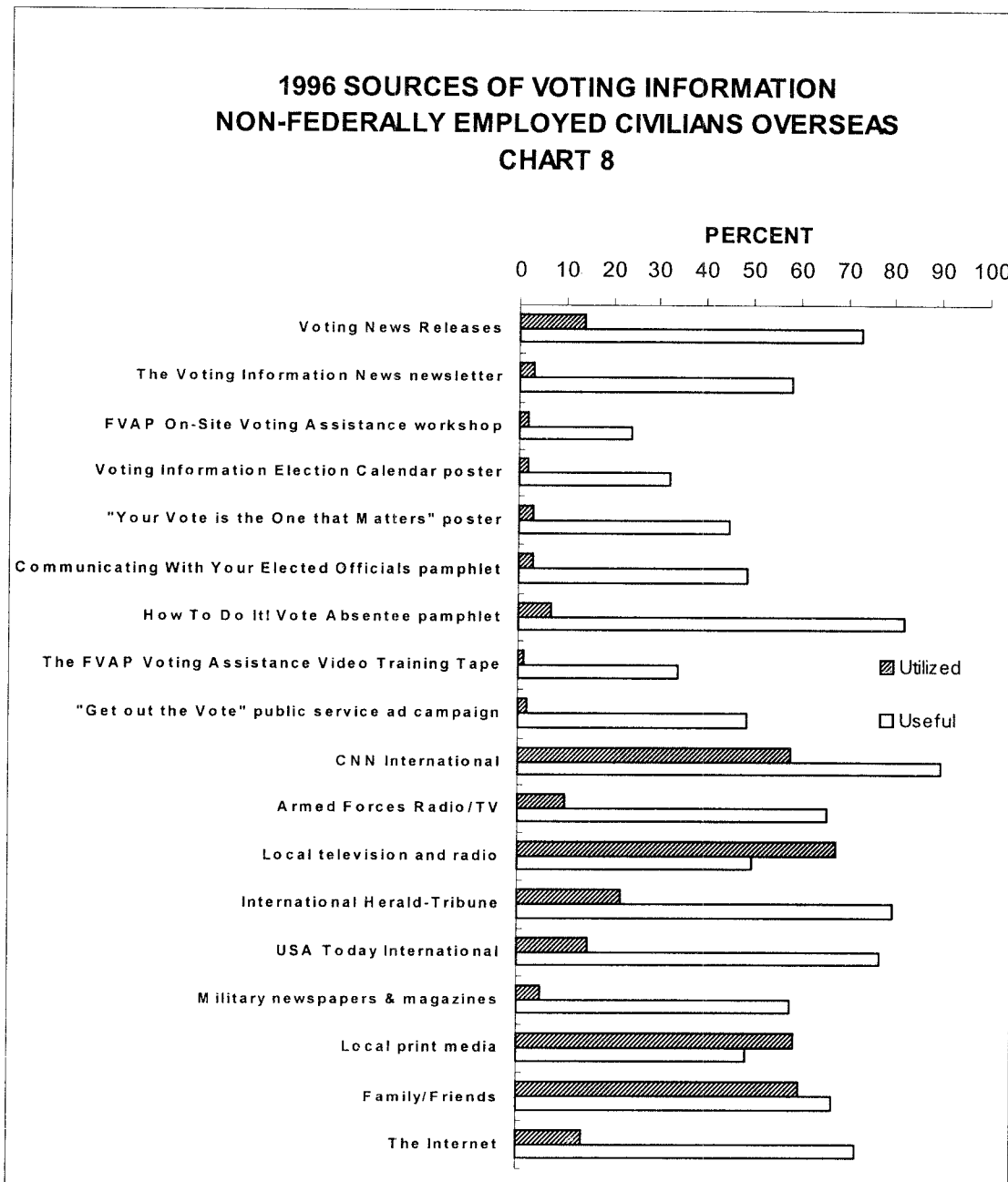
**1996 SOURCES OF VOTING INFORMATION
UNIFORMED SERVICES PERSONNEL
CHART 6**



For federal civilian employees overseas, 49% cited military channels as a major source of assistance and information about absentee voting; 31% cited a U.S. embassy or consulate; and 15% used the FVAP. Ninety-three percent (93%) of those who contacted a Unit Voting Assistance Officer were satisfied with the assistance provided, as compared with 85% in 1992. Of the federal civilian employees overseas using the *Voting Assistance Guide* in 1996, 89% rated it as a good source of assistance, an increase of two percentage points over 1992 (87%). Of those that did not use the *Guide*, 38% indicated that they had all the information they needed from other sources. Seventy-nine (79%) of the federal civilian employees overseas, indicated that they used CNN International as their most common voting information source. Additional sources of voting information are provided in Chart 7.



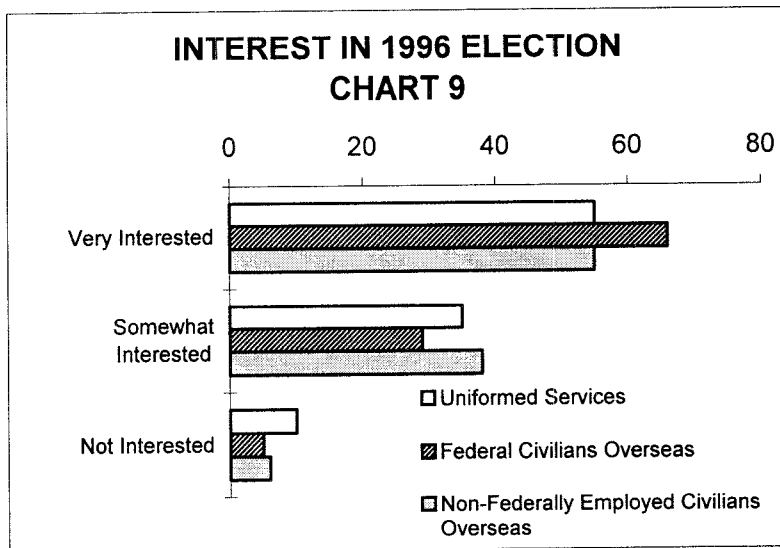
For non-federally employed civilians overseas, U.S. embassy and consulate Voting Assistance Officers are a major source of assistance and information about absentee voting. In 1996, 88% of those using a U.S. embassy and consulate Voting Assistance Officer were satisfied with the information/assistance they received. This satisfaction level is unchanged from 1992. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of those who used the *Voting Assistance Guide* rated it as a good source of information. Of those who did not use the *Guide*, 13% said they received all the information they needed from other sources. Sixty-eight percent (68%) relied on local television and radio as their most common source for information on voting in the 1996 general election. Additional sources of voting information are provided in Chart 8.



The *Voting Information News (VIN)* newsletter, introduced after the 1988 general election, was rated for its usefulness by the five surveyed communities. In 1996, of those who received the *VIN*, the highest degree of usefulness was by those providing voting assistance or processing absentee voting requests. For example, 86% of the Uniformed Services Unit Voting Assistance Officers rated it as useful (compared to 60% in 1992) and 88% of the local election officials found it useful. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the Uniformed Services personnel, 61% of the federal civilians overseas, and 58% of the non-federally employed civilians overseas found it useful.

Interest in Election

There was a slight decline in interest for the 1996 general election compared to 1992. In 1996, 10% of the Uniformed Services (compared to 5% in 1992); 5% of the federal civilians overseas (compared to 1% in 1992); and 6% of the non-federally employed civilians overseas (compared to 3% in 1992) reported that they were not interested in the election.



Transit Time

Insufficient ballot transit time is a primary cause of disenfranchisement for citizens covered by the *UOCAVA*. As described in the “Progress of the States” portion of this report, a minimum transit time of 45 days is desired in order for an absentee voter to request the ballot, vote it and return it in time to be counted. Accordingly, state and local government officials are encouraged to mail out absentee ballots as early as possible to citizens who have requested them, and citizens are encouraged to submit applications for an absentee ballot as soon as possible in order to allow sufficient time for ballot transit, meet state deadlines, and utilize international mail systems.

For Uniformed Services personnel, approximately 83% submitted their absentee ballot requests before October; 87% of the federal civilian employees overseas, and 80% of the non-federally employed civilians overseas submitted their requests for ballots before October.

Responding to these applications for an absentee ballot, local election officials mail an absentee ballot to those who have properly registered to vote. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the Uniformed Services personnel received their absentee ballots by the end of September, while most (65%) of the Uniformed Services absentee ballots were received during October. For federal civilian employees overseas, 20% received their absentee ballots by the end of September, while 73% received them during October; comparably the 1992 figures are 21% and 75%, respectively. Among non-federally employed civilians overseas, 15% received their absentee ballots by the end of September and 75% received their ballots during October, compared to 1992 where the figures indicate 14% and 73%, respectively.

Nine percent (9%) of the non-federally employed civilians overseas and 7% of the federal civilian employees overseas received their ballots during November. This continues to validate the need for the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) in order to provide these voters with a back-up ballot allowing them to participate in the general election.

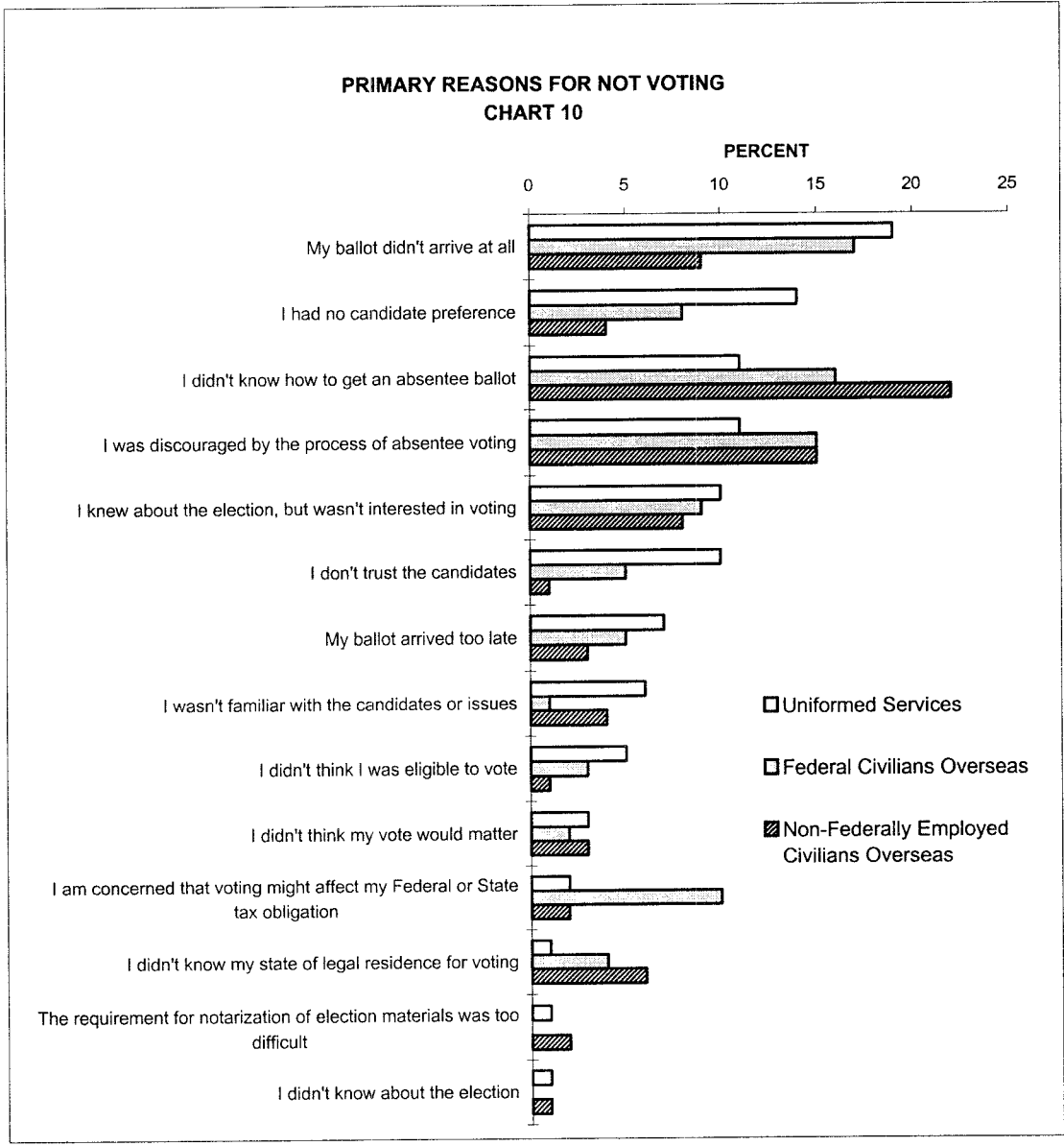
A variety of survey data have been evaluated to ascertain the reasons why citizens covered by the *Act* did not participate in the 1996 election. The indicators help determine whether non-participation is intended by the citizen, or if citizen desires and attempts to vote are thwarted by procedural obstacles or lack of information.

Chart 10 indicates that the main reasons for not voting in 1996 by Uniformed Services personnel were that the absentee ballot did not arrive at all (19%) and the requested absentee ballot arrived too late to be voted (7%) for a total of 26% who did not receive an absentee ballot in time for the election; 14% reported that they did not have a candidate preference.

Among federal civilian employees overseas, the main reasons for not voting were that the ballot did not arrive at all (17%) or it arrived too late (5%) equaling 22% who did not receive a ballot in time to vote it; 16% did not know how to obtain an absentee ballot.

Non-federally employed civilians overseas cited the main reasons for not voting as not knowing how to obtain an absentee ballot (22%) and thinking they were not eligible to vote (16%).

Not knowing how to obtain an absentee ballot was one of the top reasons cited for not voting in 1996 among federal civilian employees overseas and non-federally employed overseas civilians. This obstacle has been somewhat overcome by an increased emphasis on educational and training efforts with a dramatic reduction (12 percentage points) seen in the community of non-federally employed civilians overseas where, in 1992, not knowing how to obtain an absentee ballot was indicated by 34% of these citizens.



Local election officials were queried about the most frequent problems encountered in processing FPCAs submitted by citizens covered by the *Act*. As in 1992, the leading problem is the applicant's lack of, or inadequate indication of, a home address within the local jurisdiction (66%); cited by 75% in 1992. The second most cited problem was the applicant's failure to provide an adequate or legible return mailing address (25%); cited by 33% in 1992. The third most cited problem was the applicant's applying to the wrong jurisdiction (20%); cited by 19% of the local election officials in 1992.

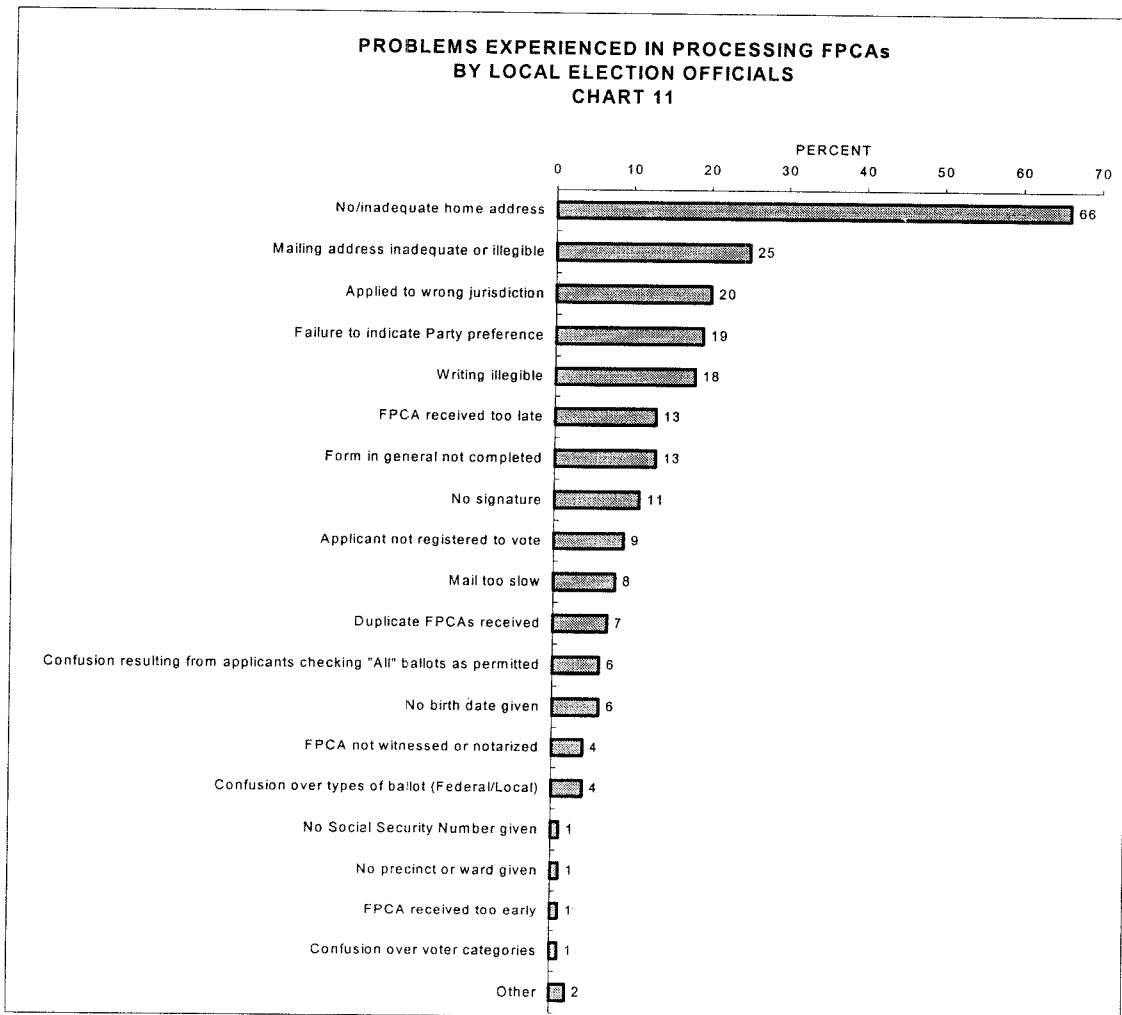


Chart 11 shows the most common problems that continue to be encountered by local election officials in processing FPCAs for citizens covered by the *Act*. Redesign of the FPCA in 1995, and educational and training efforts, however, have reduced substantially the incidence of such problems encountered in 1992 (from 1 to as much as 9 percentage points in all but four problem areas). The only exceptions are a one-percentage point increase in the three problem areas identified as: applications sent to the wrong jurisdiction, mail too slow, and confusion over types of ballots for which eligible, and a three-percentage point increase in the number of the local election officials citing the absence of a birth date on the FPCA as a problem.

Electronic Transmission

The Federal Voting Assistance Program's Electronic Transmission Service has continued in operation since Operation Desert Shield in 1990. It was used in Operation Restore Democracy, Operation Restore Hope, and expansively in Operation Joint Endeavor in 1996. Many states have legislatively or administratively made changes to their election laws to provide for this method of transmitting election materials for Uniformed Services and U.S. citizens overseas. This method is often the last resort a citizen has when faced with circumstances that would otherwise lead to his or her disenfranchisement.

During the 1996 Presidential election, the Federal Voting Assistance Program's Electronic Transmission Service was used by the five queried communities. Of those Uniformed Services personnel using the Service, 44% received or transmitted the FPCA, 23% received or transmitted the ballot, and 7% received or transmitted the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). Eighty-four (84%) reported that the Service was easy to use.

Federally employed civilians overseas also used the Service. Thirty-eight percent (38%) received or transmitted FPCAs, 23% received or transmitted FWABs, and 15% received or transmitted ballots. Of those using the Service, 77% found it easy to do so.

Of the non-federally employed civilians overseas who used the Service, 47% received or transmitted the FPCA, 14% received or transmitted the ballot, and 3% received or transmitted the FWAB. As with the Uniformed Services, 84% of these overseas civilians reported that the Service was easy to use.

Unit Voting Assistance Officers were queried regarding the type of assistance provided using the Electronic Transmission Service. In 1996, 18% transmitted or received the FPCA electronically; 7% transmitted or received the unvoted absentee ballot electronically; and 5% transmitted or received the voted absentee ballot electronically.

Of those Unit Voting Assistance Officers using the Service, approximately 90% found it easy to receive legible copies and 82% reported that it was easy to transmit legible copies.

Of the local election officials queried, 78% accepted electronically transmitted FPCA requests for absentee ballots for the 1996 general election. Of those, 91% accepted FPCAs from Uniformed Services personnel; 60% accepted FPCAs from overseas civilians. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the local election officials reported that they electronically transmitted absentee ballots for the 1996 general election; 81% of the absentee ballots were transmitted to Uniformed Services personnel and 58% were electronically transmitted to overseas civilians. The average round-trip transit time for electronically transmitted absentee ballots was excellent with 72% of the local election officials reporting a transmission time of 3 days or less, and 21% reporting same day transmission.

VOTING ASSISTANCE OFFICERS

A Voting Assistance Officer is appointed at every level of command within the Uniformed Services, and one is appointed at every U.S. embassy or consulate. The Voting Assistance Officer's responsibilities include providing accurate procedural information and assistance to citizens who wish to register and vote. The Voting Assistance Officers have a pivotal role in assisting those citizens covered by the *Act* to exercise fully their right to vote.

Uniformed Services

Approximately 40% of the Voting Assistance Officers in the Uniformed Services are junior officers. Overall, enlisted personnel account for approximately 47% of the Voting Assistance Officers. The majority (64%) was age 30 or older. Frequent change of duty station remains a contributing factor in the lack of continuity in voting assistance efforts. In 1996, almost one-third of the Voting Assistance Officers reported that they had served as a VAO for their unit for 12 months or less; 22% of Unit Voting Assistance Officers had served previously in this capacity.

The most common forms of training received by Voting Assistance Officers were an informal briefing, on-site voting training workshops, and voting training video. Of those who received this training, informal briefings were rated by 44% as useful.

The most fundamental resource available to Voting Assistance Officers is the *Voting Assistance Guide*. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the Unit Voting Assistance Officers received the *Guide*. Most *Guides* were received during the months of February and March, with an equal number receiving the *Guide* in April and May. This indicates that a significant proportion of Unit Voting Assistance Officers could not utilize the *Guide* in all phases of their assistance programs, most specifically in preparation for the state and presidential primary elections, which began in February.

Compared with 1992, noticeable improvements were made in the earlier receipt of the *Guide* by Unit Voting Assistance Officers. Twenty-four percent (24%) of the Voting Assistance Officers received the *Guide* prior to March, an improvement of eight percentage points over 1992. An overwhelming 73% received the *Guide* in the first six months of the year and were able to utilize it during the phase of the heaviest election activity in anticipation for the general election in November.

This improvement is attributed to earlier availability of the *Guide* by the FVAP and through the Services' distribution channels. Of those receiving the *Guide*, 99% rated it as useful.

In 1996, Unit Voting Assistance Officers reported that they were most often asked to provide the FPCA to applicants; 50% cited this as one of the three most common types of voting information or assistance. Help filling out the FPCA was cited by 44%; and providing the address of local election officials was mentioned by 12%.

When asked the most frequent complaints received from absentee voters they assisted, 27% of Unit Voting Assistance Officers reported that they did not receive any complaints; 19% received complaints because citizens did not know if the FPCA was received by local election officials; 18% cited complaints from citizens about delays in receiving a response to the FPCA; and 17% mentioned complaints about a lack of information on candidates and issues.

LOCAL ELECTION OFFICIALS

The local election officials are the individuals who administer an election at the local level in counties, cities, townships and other jurisdictions within the U.S. These officials were queried in 1996 regarding their perspective on the absentee voting process, its level of success and recommendations for further improvements.

Among the sampled jurisdictions, 24% of the local election officials reported that 500 or more votes were cast in the 1996 general election by Uniformed Services absentee voters and 4% reported that 500 or more votes were cast by overseas civilians.

As discussed, lack of adequate ballot transit time is a cause of disenfranchisement among absentee voters (See Transit Time, page 17). As stated, a transit time of 45 days is desired in order for an absentee voter to request the ballot, vote it and return it in time to be counted. In 1996, 31% of the local election officials began mailing absentee ballots on or before September 21 (the 45th day before the election), while the majority (77%) mailed absentee ballots by October 5 for the November 5, 1996 general election.

Ninety-nine percent (99%) of the local election officials reported receiving absentee ballots from Uniformed Services personnel; 92% reported receiving absentee ballots from overseas civilians in 1996. Ten percent (10%) reported that no absentee ballots arrived from the Uniformed Services too late to be counted; 38% reported that no absentee ballots arrived from overseas civilians too late to be counted. Seventy percent (70%) of the local election officials counted one or more Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots (FWABs) from Uniformed Services personnel; 37% counted one or more FWABs from overseas civilians.

Eighty-five percent (85%) of the local election officials who utilized the FVAP Ombudsman Service were satisfied with the assistance it provided them in administering elections for citizens covered by the *Act*. This represents a three-percentage point increase in the satisfaction rate over 1992.

Local election officials were queried regarding their use of electronic transmission. The majority of officials utilizing the system were satisfied with its ease of use. (See section on Electronic Transmission, page 21).