

SURVEY OF OVERSEAS CIVILIANS: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the Survey of Overseas Civilians. What follows is a brief description of the survey methodology, including questionnaire design, the survey sample, distribution, response rate, and data weighting.

In succeeding sections of this chapter, the reader will find:

- detailed findings for the survey, including a question-by-question analysis of the survey data;
- 27 data tables, providing survey results cross-tabulated by important respondent characteristics; and
- a copy of the survey questionnaire used to administer the Post-Election Survey of Overseas Civilians.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

The instrument used for data collection was the “1996 Post-Election Voting Survey,” which is attached at the conclusion of this chapter. The questionnaire contained 46 questions and an optional section allowing the respondent to make comments.

The first 9 questions ask about the characteristics of the respondent, such as age, years away from the U.S., and occupation. Questions 10 through 13 ask the respondent about his or her own voting behavior in the 1996 election. Questions 14 through 24 ask about the process of obtaining an absentee ballot, including use of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB). Questions 25 through 43 ask about voting information resources provided by the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), plus electronic transmission of election materials. Finally, Questions 44 through 46 ask about other sources of voting information that are available to the respondent.

Sample

40 U.S. embassies and consulates throughout the world were selected to administer the post-election survey. Each diplomatic post selected to participate was given a batch of survey packets for distribution; batches consisted of 100, 200, or 300 survey packets, depending on population of U.S. citizens served by the post.

Embassy/Consulate Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) at the 40 posts were asked to select survey participants at random from the list of U.S. citizens who were registered with that post as of the survey date. They were given detailed instructions describing the proper sampling technique.

Distribution

The batched questionnaire packages were shipped by diplomatic pouch to each post on October 7, 1996. VAOs were asked to address and mail the survey packages in time to reach the respondents on or about Election Day, November 5.

The survey packages contained the questionnaire, a cover letter from the Department of State, and a return envelope. VAOs were asked to affix local postage and their post's return address to the return envelope for collection of the completed survey forms.

VAOs were also provided with an identical number of reminder letters and envelopes, with instructions to mail them to the survey respondents approximately two weeks following the initial distribution date. This follow-up mailing was designed to increase response rates.

Completed surveys were collected and shipped back to Voting Officer, Department of State, via diplomatic pouch 30 and 90 days after distribution. Responses were accepted until April 4, 1997.

Response Rate

The response rate is the ratio of completed and returned surveys to the number receiving a questionnaire, less postal non-deliverables. The response rate for the 1996 Survey of Overseas Civilians was 26%. [2,272 completed survey forms received ÷ (10,000 survey packages distributed, less 1,160 packages returned as non-deliverable)].

A list of the participating diplomatic posts and the response rate for each post can be found on Table B1, Page 37, in the "Summary Tables" section of this chapter. Response rates for each post ranged from a high of 57% for Rabat, to 7 posts who returned no completed post-election surveys.

Weighting

Consistent with past post-election survey practice, survey results have not been weighted.

Conclusion

The following section presents the detailed findings of the Survey of Overseas Civilians.