

SURVEY OF MILITARY PERSONNEL: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the Survey of Military Personnel. 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;
- 31 data tables, providing survey results cross-tabulated by Service Branch and other important characteristics; and
- a copy of the survey questionnaire used to administer the Post-Election Survey of Military Personnel.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

The instrument used for data collection was the “1996 Post-Election Voting Survey of Military Personnel,” which is attached at the conclusion of this chapter. The questionnaire contained 45 questions and an optional section allowing the respondent to make comments.

The first 8 questions ask about the characteristics of the respondent, such as age, paygrade, and branch of service. Questions 9 through 12 ask the respondent about his or her own voting behavior in the 1996 election. Questions 13 through 23 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 24 through 42 ask about voting information resources provided by the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP), plus electronic transmission of election materials. Finally, Questions 43 through 45 ask about other sources of voting information that are available to the respondent.

Sample

The sample was selected by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) from their administrative files. 19,842 individuals were sampled out of a total military population of 1,485,728. (Source: DMDC administrative files, October 1996.)

The sample was stratified to separate officers and enlisted personnel, both outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS) and within the continental U.S. (CONUS), for each of the 5 service branches (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard), thus creating 20 cells within the overall sample. Each cell contained 1,000 respondents (except the Coast Guard Officers OCONUS cell, which contained only 842 due to a lack of population), in order to create the total sample file of 19,842.

Prior to sample selection, the file was sorted by rank and location to ensure a distribution representative of the overall population. Every “nth” record was selected within each cell to produce a sample of 1,000. (In the case of Coast Guard Officers OCONUS, every record was selected.)

Distribution

Questionnaire packages were mailed directly to every sampled individual at his/her duty station address on October 25, 1996 (OCONUS) or November 1, 1996 (CONUS). The objective was to reach the respondent on or around Election Day, November 5.

Packages contained the questionnaire, a cover letter from the Secretary of Defense, and a postage-paid return envelope.

Approximately 8 weeks later, a duplicate mailing package was sent to a representative sampling of those who had not yet responded to the survey, in order to increase the overall survey response.

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 Military Personnel was 43%. [7,584 completed survey forms received ÷ (19,842 survey packages distributed, less 2,282 packages returned by the Postal Service as non-deliverable)].

Weighting

Final survey results have been weighted to bring the survey sample into proper balance relative to the actual population of military personnel. Without weighting, certain groups would be over-represented in the survey results, either because they were sampled disproportionately or they had a higher response rate. Most notably, military officers, who are found in smaller numbers than enlisted personnel in the overall population, but who tended to respond to the survey in disproportionate numbers, would be over-represented in the final survey sample without data weighting.

To compute the weights that were assigned to each survey response, a ratio was established of the number of responses received from each of the 20 cells described in the “Sampling” section above to

the actual population of military personnel in that cell. Survey responses were then re-computed based on these weights, reflecting the number of military personnel who would have theoretically given each response if the whole population had been surveyed.

Weighted survey results have been presented throughout this chapter.

While making the sample reflective of the overall population of military personnel, weighting cannot correct for the possibility of “non-response bias.” That bias is introduced if non-responders to the survey have substantially different opinions and experiences than those who did respond. No conclusion can be drawn about non-response bias in this case.

Conclusion

The following section presents the detailed findings of the Survey of Military Personnel.