

Commission Seeking Answers To Apathy In 1960 Election

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Was it apathy, economics, out-dated voting laws or just plain laziness that kept 37.5 million Americans away from the polls in the 1960 presidential elections?

A report being drafted by the President's Commission on Registration and Voting Participation hopes to answer this question next month.

The commission has been studying the phenomenon of the non-voting citizen for the past several months. It will present its findings to President Kennedy Nov. 30. It has discovered, among other things, that the greatest percentage of non-voters is in the 21-to-30 year age bracket and that Sundays or holidays, when the average voter is free, might be the best days to hold elections.

Kennedy, former President Dwight D. Eisenhower and many national leaders were deeply concerned by the fact that only 65 per cent of the electorate voted in 1960 and only 48 per cent went to the polls in the congressional tests last year.

Although slightly better than the 1956 presidential election turnout, political experts said the voting percentages seemed to indicate that indifference has permeated the electorate over the past few decades.

Between 1940 and 1960, eleven states recorded decreases in the number of eligible voters who actually went to the polls.

In contrast to the U.S. voting record, there was a 99 per cent voting turn out in the Italian national elections this year and better than 80 per cent averages in Great Britain, Austria and West Germany. And even the one-party Soviet Union reported a record 99.95 per cent turnout in its 1962 election for deputies to the Supreme Soviet (parliament).

"Naturally, no free nation could ever hope to compete with the record of a totalitarian country," Donald G. Herzberg, staff director of Mr. Kennedy's commission, told UPI. "But in a nation, such as the United States, where the principles of democracy can only be sustained by an active and interested electorate, we should be able to do better."

The commission has received countless letters, suggestions and complaints from citizens who have found voting impediments in their states. Unsolicited suggestions have ranged from giving away "green stamps" to distributing "I-Have-Voted" buttons in an attempt to woo the American voter from his shell of indifference.

In a review of state laws, the commission has found that one-third of the states require voters to register more than a month before a national election. Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas still have poll taxes which must be paid anywhere from six months to two years before an election. Alabama, South Carolina and Mississippi require two years of residency before a person can vote.

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