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The John C. Bollens Lecture Series

"Some Promising and Dismal California Political Participation Trends"

Mervin Field
President, Field Institute
Director, California Poll

THE JOHN C. BOLLENS LECTURE SERIES

The aim of the John C. Bollens Lecture Series is to bring together the worlds of academic exploration and practical politics so that the work of those who serve the public will be illuminated by discussion of the broader principles and ideas of representative government. Such a synthesis is true to the spirit of the lecture's namesake, the distinguished Professor of Political Science at UCLA, John C. Bollens. Born in 1920 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, John Bollens earned his bachelor's degree at the College of Wooster, his master's degree at Duke University and his doctorate at the University of Minnesota. He began his association with UCLA in 1950 and became a full professor in 1960. He established himself as a most productive and influential thinker on local government. Not only did he write 26 books, including profiles of Mayor Sam Yorty and Governor Jerry Brown, and inspire hundreds of students, but he also held important positions with Los Angeles County, Los Angeles City and the cities of Seattle and Chicago. These positions included Civil Service Commissioner of Los Angeles County, member, Los Angeles Citizens Committee on Zoning Practices, and director, Town Hall Study of the City of Los Angeles' Charter and Governmental organization, which led to many changes in the City's charter.

We who know and worked with Professor Bollens as students, colleagues and friends began this lecture series as a legacy not only to the man, but to his unique brand of scholarship.

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Sixth Annual John C. Bollens Lecture

Mervin Field

Some Promising and Dismal California Political Participation Trends

I am honored to be invited to be the speaker at this gathering, which pays tribute to Professor John Bollens. It is my misfortune in not having had the opportunity to know Professor Bollens on a personal basis, but I am familiar with his prodigious and influential efforts to increase the vitality and the efficacy of representative government.

While I haven't had the formal training to be called a statistician or a mathematician, I do have an affinity for numbers. Dealing with numbers, I am sensitive to the jibes and put-downs directed at me and other "numbers" people. A numbers man is supposed to have a very narrow, dull unimaginative view of the world.

However, some time ago, I ran across a quotation which glorifies someone who deals with numbers, and it gives me support when I periodically suffer waves of guilt in being addicted to numbers, in being a "data junkie."

The quotation is from an unlikely source — an eighteenth-century German poet, Johannes Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe was more than a poet. He wrote extensively on botany, optics and other scientific topics. He was a sage.

He said if you can't describe something in numbers, you are deprived of one of the most potent forms of expression.

Tonight I will be offering some numbers. Comparative numbers, percentages, numbers that convey a picture of a society seemingly withdrawing from the political process, disengaging itself from government, apparently neglecting, if not abandoning, the right to select its governmental leaders.

In thinking about the history of this country, we frequently forget how long our laws systematically disenfranchised so many of our citizens.

After the founding of the Republic in 1789, only those who owned property could vote.

Despite the slaves being freed during the Civil War, African-Americans were effectively denied their right to vote decades after securing that legal right.

Women did not gain the franchise until the beginning of the twentieth century. Think of that! Adult women in this country, who always outnumbered men in the general population, were not allowed to vote until 1911.

It was not until 1972 that we allowed 18-year-olds to register and vote.

Now, despite the fact that many legal and illegal barriers to voting have been lowered or eliminated, we are in reality a nation of non-voters. This country's, this state's ballot boxes are growing increasingly empty.

Participation Trends

Tonight, I will review some dismal trends in voting now in evidence here in California, where I have been tracking voter and non-voter attitudes and dispositions for the past forty-five years.

As you know, California is frequently viewed in many ways as a large microcosm of the nation. With respect to voting issues, that observation would definitely hold.

In 1938, there were little more than four million eligible, voting-age adult citizens in California. In the November general election of that year, which did not feature a presidential race, about 2.6 million or 67% of the citizens voted. This percentage was the highest ever recorded before or after in a non-presidential general election in California.

Participation soon began sliding in the years following, to where in the last statewide non-presidential general election in 1986, the participation rate had fallen to 43% — 24 points lower than the 1938 high.

Between 1938 and today, a number of events and procedural changes increased the opportunity for more people to vote. For example, 18-year-olds were allowed to register and vote for the first time. Registration periods were also extended. An election law change in the 1970's allowed voters to obtain absentee ballots merely by requesting them without having to offer a reason.

So despite reducing the barriers to participation, the trend of voting has been on a steady downward slope.

1966 vs. 1986 Participation Rates

One example that illustrates this massive decline in voting is a comparison of the 1966 and 1986 primary general elections. These elections, twenty years apart, were quite comparable with respect to the kinds of state and local candidates and initiatives appearing on each ballot.

In both elections, there were contests for Governor, Attorney-General, all the other state constitutional officers, all eighty Assembly seats, one-half of all state Senate seats, all the congressional seats, a number of state and local ballot initiatives. There was a full complement of election contests at the local level — races for mayor, city council races, school board elections. In short: the kind of contests where there were scores of candidates and ballot propositions, local and statewide election lures to get voters to go to the polls and vote.

There were about 11.3 million California adult citizens eligible to vote in the 1966 June primary election. In that election, slightly less than 5.1 million actually voted for a participation rate of 44.8%.

Twenty years later, in the June 1986 primary, there were about 17.4 million adult citizens eligible to participate — an increase of over 6 million adult citizens.

As I cited, 5.1 million California citizens voted in June 1966. How much of an increase do you think there was in the total absolute vote 20 years later in the same kind of election where there were six million more eligible adult citizens? Would you say there were two million more who voted, one million more, one-half million more?

There was no increase at all! In fact, just slightly more than 4.9 million voted or approximately 140,000 less than in 1966, despite the fact that the size of the potential electorate had increased by more than six million eligibles.

The participation rate was 44.8% in the June 1966 primary, compared to a participation rate of 28.5% in the same kind of election twenty years later, more than a one-third drop.

A comparison of the 1966 and 1986 November general election participation rates also shows a big decline in participation from about 58% in 1966 to 43% in 1986.

Presidential Election Years

Let's look at voting in Presidential election years. Participation rates traditionally go up when there is a contest for President. Presidential races typically generate more public interest than any other kind of election. Much of this interest is based on the special drama inherent in electing our nation's leader. These quadrennial presidential elections transcend the public's everyday interest in politics.

The primary and general election contests in a presidential year receive extensive media coverage. The election becomes a highly publicized ongoing national event. It is a highly personal choice which is easy to make because we hear and see so much about candidates for so long. In both the 1966 and 1986 Presidential elections, no incumbent was running. With candidates campaigning in both the Republican and Democratic primaries, you would expect an increase in overall voter interest. But that didn't happen.

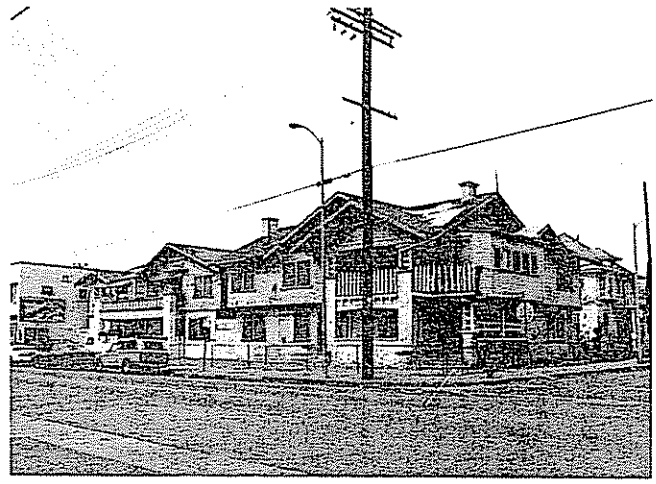
About 49% of California citizens participated in the June 1968 Presidential primary elections. That figure dropped to 32% in the 1988 Presidential primary election. In the general elections, the 1988 participation rate was 54% compared to 62% in 1968 — an eight percentage point drop.

Voter and Non-Voter Dissimilarities

One significant aspect of this sharp decline in participation has resulted in voters and non-voters becoming more dissimilar in demographic characteristics.

Since World War II, California has increasingly been taking on the character of a two-tiered society. The two-tier model shows up in a growing disparity in the distribution of income and the kinds of jobs, educational opportunities, in access to health care, involvement in the political process and many other respects.

California's two-tiered political culture is clearly evident when comparing the characteristics of voter and non-voters in recent elections.



Government budget cutbacks and service reductions have hit minority communities expecially hard.

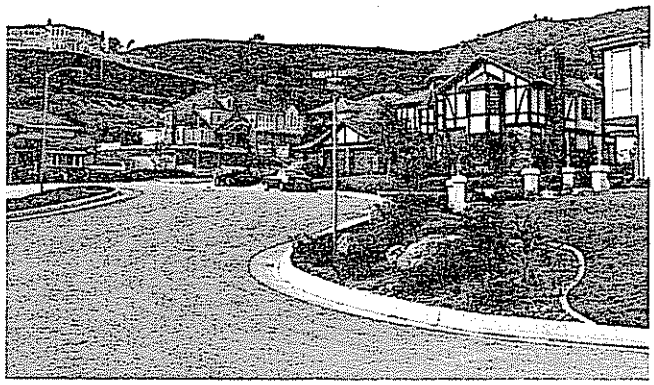
To illustrate this, let me cite an analysis that we made following the last gubernatorial election in 1986.

In the 1986 general statewide election, approximately 43% of the state's adult citizens voted. When we compare voters with non-voters on a variety of demographic characteristics, we find voters in general tend to be older, more educated, whiter, more upscale in income. Conversely, non-voters are younger, have less education, less income, and are disproportionately more Hispanic, disproportionately more black and Asian.

Here are some comparative percentages derived from that 1986 general election:

1) More than four out of five voters (84%) were white. However, whites represented a much smaller proportion of non-voters, (59%). Expressed another way, 41% of the non-voters, but just 16% of all voters, were either Hispanic, black, Asian or some other minority group.
2) While 30% of those voting were 60 years and over, just 13% of the non-voters were in this age group. Conversely, while 35% of all non-voters were 18-29 years of age, just 15% of the voters were in this age group.
3) Forty-two percent of the voters had annual incomes of $40,000 or more compared to 24% of non-voters in this income class.

The data cited came from a statewide election where turnout is typically higher than in local elections. Differences between voters and non-



Affluent white neigborhoods protect themselves against government cutbacks by contracting privately for security patrols and other services.

voters in local elections are frequently greater than those shown here.

For example, in the local elections held earlier this month in many California localities, turnouts were extremely low — in the 15% range — particularly those in L.A. County. These turnout percentages are based on just those who are registered. Calculated on the basis which I have been describing here — all citizens eligible — the participation percentages would be lower.

The press has reported that these local elections produced some unexpected upsets, where they had 10-15% turnouts. I don't know whether these upsets were good or bad for the people in the communities. However, low participation rates on the order of 10-15% make it too easy for highly determined, highly organized smaller groups to impose their views and policies not shared by the large majority of citizens.

Who Are the Non-Voters

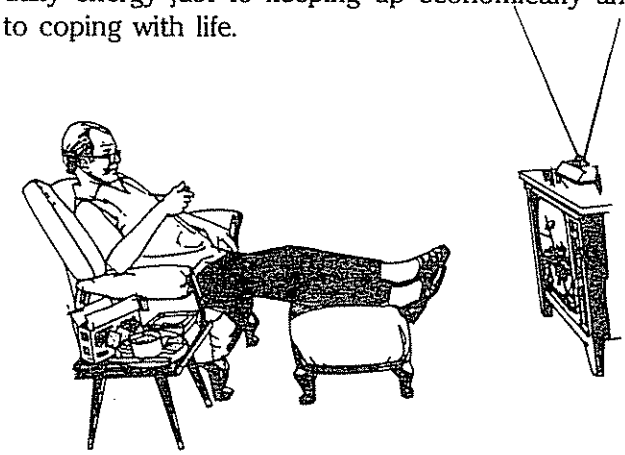
Now who are these non-voters? There has been considerable research on the phenomenon of non-voting, and the literature contains much detailed data and analysis derived from numerous studies. What I offer tonight is a simplistic delineation of non-voters, but I think it reasonably outlines the broad segments.

I will arbitrarily divide the non-voters into four different groups.

Political Passives

The largest group representing about 40% of those unlikely to vote will be people who are completely out of the political mainstream. They can be described as politically passive or politically inert. They are largely low-income, low-educated, disproportionately more Hispanic, black, some Asian groups, and young people. Still, among this 40% will be many people in middle-class households comprising all colors and ethnic groups.

This 40% politically passive group does not attend to politics, to government, or to political affairs. Most of them have not voted much or at all in the past. They watch a lot of TV, but very few newscasts or public-affairs shows. Many of them do not read newspapers, and when they do, political items and governmental issues get bypassed. These people are devoting most of their daily energy just to keeping up economically and to coping with life.



TV and videos have become the predominant source of both information and entertainment for growing numbers of Americans.

Politically Alienated

Another group accounting for 20% of all non-voters can be described as politically alienated. Many of these are former voters. They feel that they can't control or affect government. They feel politically impotent. They don't see how their lives are going to change for the better if they pay attention to politics or vote. They are cynical of candidates and campaign organization promises. They don't think voting will do much about the mounting and heavy problems facing our society. These people feel it doesn't matter whether a Democrat or a Republican wins, or Candidate A or Candidate B gets elected. It doesn't matter who they vote for because they still see crime increasing, the war on drugs being lost, educational

standards going down, the environment more fouled, housing becoming less affordable, health care more costly, transportation in gridlock, homelessness increasing, just to mention some of today's massive societal problems.

There are many other alienated people who do continue to vote because they are still motivated by a residual sense of moral obligation. They don't like voting. They think of it as a chore, but they still see it as civic duty which must be fulfilled and they feel guilty if they do not vote. These are voters who are very close to becoming non-voters, however.

Contented Apathetics

A third group representing about 30% of the non-voters are what I call contented apathetics. Unlike alienated non-voters, contented apathetics have a benign detachment from politics and government. They refrain from voting because they believe their lives will go along in a generally tolerable state without their having to pay attention to what's going on politically.

Some of these people may be roused to vote in a particular election if they are importuned by a neighbor, a boss, a union or somebody else. However, contented apathetics are becoming less motivated to vote because their ranks are now being populated by people who have had little history of voting. If you haven't ever voted and you're in your thirties or older, there is very little likelihood that you will start voting.

System Disenfranchisees

The last of the four non-voting groups represent about 10% of the non-voters. They can be called "system disenfranchisees." These are people who have voted in the past and would like to vote. They are not registered, but will become interested during the closing weeks or days of an election campaign. The desire to vote strikes them, but they discover too late that they can't vote because they are not on the registration lists. These include people who have just moved, and other people who may have been previously purged from the voting rolls. Whether it is good or bad for a democratic society when a large portion of its citizens do not vote is a subject which for

centuries has concerned philosophers and political scientists, as well as many observant citizens.

Briefly, those who would like to see higher rates of participation and are disturbed by low levels of voting argue the following:

1) High levels of voting participation is a basic requirement for our country's continued vitality.
2) The act of voting is a step which increases citizens' political involvement and makes for healthier democracy. Low voter turnouts result in government by elites in special interests.
3) Low voter turnouts result in government by elites, special interests.
4) Low voter turnouts fragment society, separate people from their government.
5) Low voter turnouts make it easier for candidate initiative campaign managers, using sophisticated campaign technology and vast sums of campaign money, to target and turnout their unrepresented special interest constituencies.

Encapsulating the attitudes of those who view low participation in dismal terms is the late Robert Maynard Hutchins, who once said: "The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference and undernourishment."

Some observers argue that not voting is as much a right as voting, to pressure people to vote represents an erosion of freedom. Other observers believe that non-voting is rooted in a public mood of contentment, a feeling that things are going along all right and we should not be disturbed by low participation. This attitude was reflected by former North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin and others, but Ervin's quote is interesting. As you know he presided over the Watergate hearings in the mid 1970's, and Ervin said: "I am not going to shed any real or political crocodile tears that people don't care enough to vote. I will be extremely happy if the only people voting were those who thought about the issues and made up their minds and really wanted to vote."

I would not be too disturbed if a 30-40% participation rate, or even lower, reflected a reasonably represented cross-section of the public. But I am disturbed, if not alarmed, at what I see going on in California and other parts of the country. Diminished turnouts mean that a small

number of elites are exercising more control. The agenda of voting elites — whites, college-educated, older people, the unpoor — is demonstrably different than for those who do not vote. The more non-voters grow different from voters in color, in class, in attitudes towards life, we create and build a threatening pressure which could easily explode and alter, for the worse, the future course of our precious democracy.

What Can We Do?

How can we leaven this dismal picture of non-participation by citizens of the world's largest democracy?

I have some recommendations, some ideas, and some notions of what could be done to add vitality to our system. But first, recall the visit to the United States earlier this year by the new President of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, when he addressed a joint session of Congress. In that remarkable speech, the insightful playwright and formal political prisoner articulated most eloquently this country's role in a world where democracy is busting out in so many countries living under authoritarian rule for so long.

Havel said, "As long as people are people, democracy in the full sense of the word will always be no more than an ideal. One may approach it as one without a horizon, in ways that may be better or worse, but it can never be fully attained. In this sense, you in the United States merely approach democracy. You have thousands of problems of all kinds, as other countries do, but you have one great advantage. You have been approaching democracy uninterrupted for more than 200 years."

The first thing that we can do to accelerate our slow-moving approach to the horizon of healthier democracy is to remove the barriers which deny motivated citizens the opportunity to vote. We need to reduce sharply or eliminate entirely the requirement that a citizen must be on registration rolls sometime prior to an election. Currently, in many states the registration lists are closed sometime before an election. There is really no reason for this kind of residency requirement.

We should allow citizens to register on a year-round basis at Department of Motor Vehicles offices, schools, libraries, colleges, unemployment

offices, public health centers, and other state and local agencies. The system of agency-based registration is flexible and cost-effective. We should allow citizens to register on election day and to be allowed to vote on the spot.

Our country is the only democracy where the government makes it so difficult for citizens to vote.

Partisan and special interests, as well as many election officials, have resisted attempts to simplify registration and voting procedures. They are correct in their arguments that agency-based and election-day registration will mean more work, more staff and larger budgets. However, the additional monies required to make it easier for citizens to vote would be a small cost in maintaining the health of our democratic system.

Critics of any moves to loosen up the registration and voting procedures also are fearful that this would invite fraudulent voting. They say that some people might be induced to register and vote twice, that it would encourage groups or even parties to stuff ballot boxes.

Obviously, there will always be people who would cheat, steal, or commit fraud when it comes to money or some coveted material things. However, dealing with a simple and infrequent act of voting is another matter. We're in a situation where most of our citizens do not have a desire to vote. The likelihood that a significant number of people would rush around various voting places on election day in order to engage in multiple voting is very small. There will be some people, induced perhaps by a sense of mischief, who might try multiple voting, but I cannot see them damaging the process so extensively that election losers will be transformed into election winners or vice versa.

Today we have too many public watchdogs, too many whistle-blowers, for any organized wholesale vote-cheating to occur. And I would wager that if election-day registration and same-day voting were enacted in California, the net effect of increased voting fraud would be as negligible as the random and benign errors that have always existed in the honest counting of ballots.

Extend Voting Period

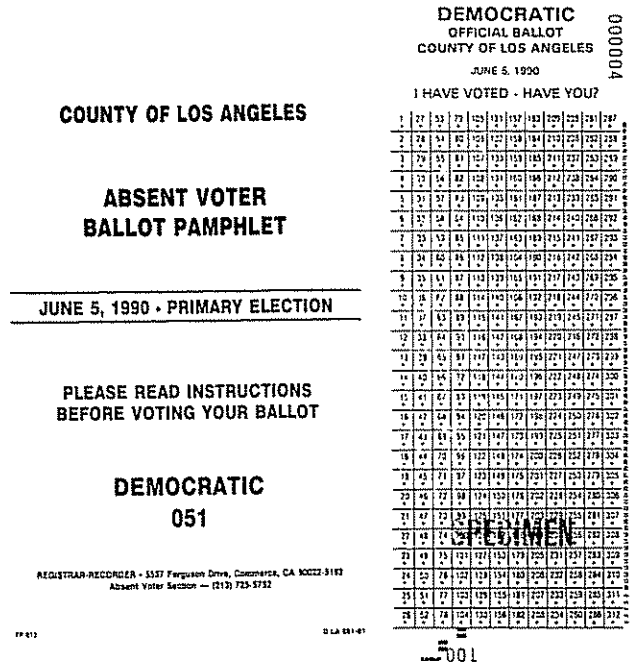
We should also extend the voting period from one day to two consecutive days. The simple

expansion of voting periods at the precincts from 13 hours to 26 hours over a two-day period should add significantly to participation totals. Citizens who plan to vote on the first day and encountered some intervention which kept them from voting would have the opportunity of voting the second day. Car trouble, sudden illness, unexpected work requirement, forgetfulness — whatever kept the citizen from voting the first day wouldn't interfere with voting on the second day.

Another important reason for extending voting over a two-day period is that it would stimulate more grassroots effort in getting out the vote. In virtually every election — whether it's a statewide primary in a general election, or a special local election — there are many contests for mayors, for city councils, county supervisors, schools and other local school board elections. In these types of elections you have the grassroots campaign organizations with the greatest stake in the election outcome.

As things stand now, grassroots activists can reach people prior to an election and urge them to vote, but generally they can't determine who has voted until very late on election day. This does not allow them much time to reach non-voters and urge them to vote. If there were a two-day election period, then local people and party organizers working on campaigns could review the lists at the precincts after the first day and determine who has not voted. Given that kind of situation, there will be much more time to reach non-voters and get them to the polls on the second day.

While the local organizers might be interested primarily in just one issue, the citizen when voting will be presented the full ballot containing all the other local and statewide contests. It has been demonstrated that when citizens are motivated primarily by one ballot item, they will vote on many other candidate races and ballot proposition contests. There is drop off, and variations in the total number in respect to the contests on the ballot. Many voters at the last minute hastily read a ballot pamphlet, check the newspaper for recommendations, talk to their spouses or somebody in the household, or vote along the party line or the group line. Even if the decision of how to vote on these comes at the last minute, it will still be a vote.



Campaign managers increasingly rely on early and wide distribution of absentee ballots for a winning edge.

Increase Voting By Mail

Another trend which could be promoted more and result in greater participation would be to increase voting by mail. During the past ten years, absentee voting has been on the increase in California and in other states which have eased the absentee voting rules. Now anyone can vote absentee by simply requesting in advance a ballot without having to give a reason.

There is evidence that many absentee voters are making more informed ballot choices in the privacy of their homes when they have time to think about their decisions.

As I have described before, many minority groups are not participating in proportion to their adult population weight; many minority group members are not used to the idea of voting. They are inhibited for many cultural, social and personal reasons. They are uncomfortable or fearful of going down to a strange church or some public building to participate in an unfamiliar exercise. Voting by mail also makes it easier for voters to consult colleagues for advice.

Campaign Practices Inhibiting Voting

I believe the abominable way we have been conducting our political campaigns in the 1970's and 1980's has contributed to the citizens losing touch with elected officials, becoming more cynical of candidates and the election process and less motivated to participate.

We have seen the cost of campaigning soar to astronomical heights with candidates relying more and more on TV spot commercials which have taken on harsher, more negative and repulsive tones.

The increase in "attack" TV ads is related to the fact that citizens are withdrawing and becoming more disconnected, more disengaged from the political process. Candidates and campaign managers, in their desperation to retrieve these disinterested voters, feel that they have to resort more and more to "attack" ads. They have found that these do get voter attention. Photographs of executed prisoners, a woman being stalked in a deserted street, a depiction of a convict committing a horrible crime while on furlough, scenes characterizing judges as a cynical bunch of connivers — these are the examples of negative ads, the attention-getting devices used in recent campaigns.

As candidates and campaign managers see voters distancing themselves from the process, they feel it necessary to be even more harsh and more shocking in their TV ads. They want to get attention. It's almost like trying to grab the ears and eyes of a voter.

Some political observers worry openly that the old-fashioned polling place may become a casualty of voter apathy and absentee balloting.

The situation is analogous to farmers initially using a small amount of a pesticide to gain increased crop production. Each year the farmer has to use more amounts of the pesticide, until he gets to the point where the accumulated amount of the poisons over the years have made the land barren and unproductive.

I believe there is little question that the obscene sums of money being raised in political campaigns today are horribly distorting the process.

We need to make drastic changes in the ways campaigns are run. Many good people who run for office, who would like to campaign in a positive way, today find it necessary to spend most of their campaign time in raising money. They run from one fund-raising event to another. When they're on the telephone, as they are more frequently, they're soliciting for money — attack ads.

There is one significant step which would reduce the need for raising obscene amounts of campaign money and reduce campaign costs. This would be for broadcasters and cable television networks to give a certain amount of time during each campaign season to each of the political parties, the candidates, and formal organizations who promote and/or oppose ballot initiatives.

The free licenses that radio and TV stations get from the federal government is being allowed to print money. In 1988, TV advertising revenues amounted to some $27 billion. The amount that broadcasters would have to give up for free political advertising would only be a microscopic portion of that vast revenue sum that they collect.

Britain, France, Italy, Japan, West Germany and many other smaller countries give free TV time to candidates. Only Norway and Sri Lanka do not permit free television time for their political parties.

If candidates could get free or much less expensive TV time, it would drastically reduce the amount of campaign money that needs to be raised. This in itself would attract newcomers to the political arena who might otherwise be inhibited by the awfully high monetary stakes needed just to get into the game. The time now spent by candidates could be directed into efforts that would have a greater chance of involving and stimulating voters.

There would be opportunities to revive our weakened political parties.

In conclusion, I would like to say something about polls. Polls are facing many problems and misuses in the way they are conducted, in the way they're used. I could spend hours in talking about that. However, the basic positive aspects of polling are still operative. I have always believed that polls are one of the most marvelous, positive social inventions of this century. I was first infected by this belief more than 50 years ago, and I am thankful the infection remains.

After candidates are elected they must govern. While we're voting less, becoming more disengaged with the political process, we still must have a government. Elected officials need to know how the whole public is thinking. Candidates who get elected must govern for everybody, not just those few who voted. This is where reliable, objective issue-oriented polls can continue to make a positive contibution to a more healthy democracy by providing accurate, unvarnished feedback on how the public thinks and behaves.

Notwithstanding the frequent reports of incompetent, corrupted officials, most of the people in positions of power at various levels of our local, state and national government are competent, dedicated and well-intentioned. Our citizenry fervently wants a government that works. Most of these citizens may be out of the habit of voting, but I think we can change that situation if we can recognize the reasons for this and take some obvious steps to correct it. Thank you.

Left to right: Prof. David Wilson, Supervisor Ed Edelman, Mrs. Virgene Bollens, and speaker Mervin Field.

Questions and Answers

Question: Doesn't the fact that campaigns are raising so much more money now than they used to do indicate that there is more across-the-board interest and involvement in political campaigns?

Answer: There is much more money being raised now, that's true. However, it is a case of a relatively small proportion of givers donating larger sums of money. Campaign money doesn't come in at $10 a crack. It is at $1000 a crack or more. Political action committees (PAC'S) raise enormous sums of campaign money. A $50,000 contribution from a corporate PAC may represent $1,000 from fifty different people. However, those fifty people are under obvious pressure to be sure and make the contribution.

California is a cornucopia of money for political campaigns. California is a vast financial political orchard. Almost any candidate with any claim to fame can find enough financial trees to shake and impressive sums of money drop.

Question: Aren't legislators receiving more mail now than they used to? Doesn't that represent more involvement by citizens?

Answer: Yes, there is more mail going to members of Congress and state legislatures. However, it is not representative of individuals thinking for themselves and taking the time to sit down and write an individual letter. A growing proportion — now representing most of the mail received — represents organized mailing. Different groups urge their constituents, members, readers, etc., to mail in the enclosed postcard to their representative or state legislator.

Question: Is it not the case that a decline in voting represents a manifestation of the public exhibiting less confidence in our governmental system?

Answer: Yes, most assuredly. A sizeable portion of the public throughout our history has been what might be termed as alienated from the

political process. They have subscribed to the comment made by George Wallace and others that there is "not a dime's worth of difference between the two parties."

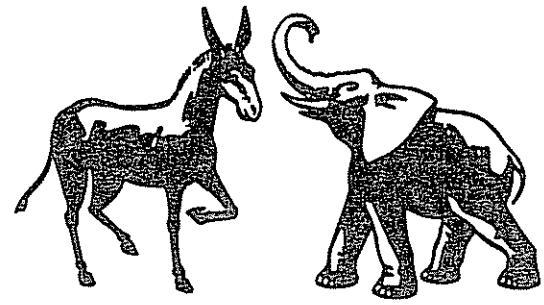
Alienation is on the increase. There is a growing awareness, a growing fear, that the massive problems society is facing cannot be effectively dealt with by government. The public is more inclined to think that neither political party nor candidate for office has the power to deal with such problems as the drug trade, increase in crime, problems in education, health care and other problems. In the past, many voters went to the polls out of anger. They voted out of a desire to change conditions. Too many now see that nothing changes after an election. As a result, there is more withdrawal from the process, and a growing belief that government is less able to perform satisfactorily.

Question: Isn't it the case that the declining proportion in voting in recent years is due to the big increase in citizen population made up of adults who are immigrants from other countries, who long have had a history of not participating in government?

Answer: There is no question that one of the reasons for the decline in proportion of participation is due to the fact you just cited. A portion of the non-voters is made up of 18-20 year olds who were given the right to vote in California during the early 1970's. This is a group which historically participates less in elections.

The huge increase in the number of citizens who were born in a foreign country, not educated to be involved in democratic processes, is part of the decline in the voting proportions. However, with all that, there is nevertheless a decline in voting among second, third, fourth generation Americans who grew up here, educated in our system, who once voted but have dropped out of the process.

Question: Do you see the weakening of the political parties, the lack of cohesion among the parties, as part of the decline in participation?



Answer: I do. If we had stronger political parties, I think there would be better candidates and more participation in the process. In the situation we have now, candidates bypass the party. They raise money independently, run outside the party, may even run against the party. The political parties are incredibly weak. We would have a better political system if they were stronger. Strong political parties would provide for more long-term accountability of political positions, more effective continuity in policies.

Questions: What do you think of the idea of limiting terms of legislators and other officials?

Answer: The idea of limiting terms is currently a fad, a gimmick. There have been moves recently in California and other parts of the country to pass legislation limiting the terms of elected officials. However, when the issue has been posed in recent polls, large majorities of the public support the idea. They hear of very high reelection rates for incumbents, in the high 90% range, and they think this a way of bringing in new people to government.

I don't think term-limitation is a good way to get better government. While term-limitations might turn out some ineffective officials, it would also drive out very effective officials. Elected officials who have been on the job for some time and who have gained in necessary experience would be denied serving the public. Why penalize these able officials?

The high rate of incumbents being reelected overlooks the fact that the turnover among elected officials is much greater than what those statistics imply. Many legislators retire, die, move on to other political jobs. For example, the

prevailing notion is that today's representatives in Congress have been there for 400 years or so. In fact, much less than one-half of the people in Congress now were there prior to 1976.

Question: If California moves to an early primary in 1992, will that increase participation?

Answer: It may increase participation here in California, but may reduce it in other states — which in the past turned out large voters in presidential primaries. And while presidential primaries are different in attracting more voters than other elections, an early presidential primary might infect otherwise non-voters to participate more in other elections.

An early presidential primary in California might trigger the law of unintended consequences. We don't know whether it will stimulate more candidacies or discourage them. An early California primary might discourage the candidacies of less known candidates who in previous elections needed to run the marathon of Iowa, New Hampshire and the other states in order to gradually get national attention and most importantly the necessary large amounts of campaign financing. While Iowa and New Hampshire would still precede an early California primary, there might now be a sufficient interval of time to allow candidates doing well in the two early states to capitalize on that in California. On the other hand, a candidate who stumbled in Iowa or New Hampshire might find it extra hard to revive his candidacy quickly enough to campaign effectively in such a large state as California.

An early California primary might appeal to very well known national candidates with a lot of money, whose strategy might be to run a knock-out campaign here. If that occurred, it could diminish interest in the primary here with fewer people voting.

Every time there has been a major change in the presidential nominating process, unexpected reverberations have occurred. It is quite possible that an early California primary would result in some unintended negative results — which

would negate any advantage in moving up the election here.

If you had an early primary — contested by a large field of credible candidates — it should result in a high overall vote. Whether this would have long enduring consequences on high levels of turnouts in other elections is another question.

My personal feeling is that it would be better for California and the process to have an earlier presidential primary in this state but not as early as now being discussed. It would be better to have a few small states go to the polls and then a few large ones, with California among the latter group.

Question: Would participation increase if there was a change in registration rules which would allow people to register on election day, for example, and also have some automatic processes which kept citizens on the voting rolls?

Answer: There is legislation now pending in Congress to make it easier for citizens to register and to have the opportunity to vote. Being discussed are such steps as election-day registration, allowing people to vote even if they aren't already listed on the registration rolls. All they would have to do is show proof of citizenship. Other steps being considered are agency-based registration. For example, every time someone applies for a driver's license, they would have the opportunity of registering.

Question: Has there been any change in the way the public feels about taxes?

Answer: Yes, there have been changes over time. During the era beginning after World War II and through the mid-1970's, the California and the national public for the most part were relatively tolerant of taxes. This was during a period when the economy was growing each year and the public supported the idea of extending and adding government services. This was at a time when the public felt that each future year was going to be better economically

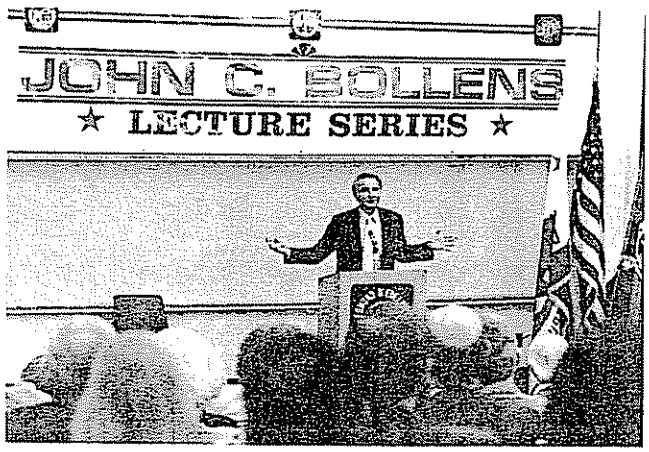
and in other respects than the present or previous years.

That mood began to change during the 1970's. In 1978, California voters approved Proposition 13 and in the following year they passed Proposition 4, the Gann spending-limitation measure. These two initiatives signalled the end of a long, more than thirty-year period, in which there was a high degree of public toleration for increasing levels of taxation.

In 1980, the Reagan era, which promised lower taxes and a smaller government, was ushered in. One of the trend measures which we have used to measure how the public feels about government and taxes is a question which goes like this: "In general, government grows bigger as it does more and provides more services. Government gets smaller as it provides fewer services. If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government with less taxes, or a larger government providing more services with more taxes?

During 1980 and 1981, the division of sentiment in California was on the order of 60% in favor of a smaller government, fewer services, less taxes and about 30% in favor of a larger government, more services and more taxes with about 10% unsure of where they stood on the question. Now the pendulum is swinging toward a larger government, more services and more taxes.

There hasn't been a reversal of the public's position. Right now the public is about evenly divided 45% to 45% on the issue.



Supervisor Ed Edelman makes the introductions for Mervin Field at the Sixth Annual John C. Bollens Lecture.

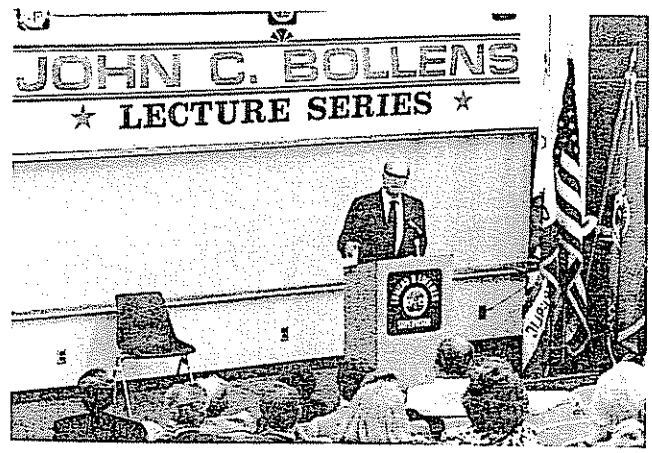
More specifically, we find that the California public is ready to tax itself for what it believes to be specific services which it believes are necessary. Our polls show that when responding to questions about the willingness to tax themselves for increasing the police or fire departments, more sewage facilities, libraries, schools and other needed services large minorities are in favor. In fact, in recent years in California a large majority of local tax-increase initiatives for particular services have been approved by voters. Where the public is not supportive of tax increases is where the revenue would go into a general fund to be allocated by local, state or federal legislators.

Question: What's so wrong with low turnouts? We have had low turnouts in the past, and things turned out all right.

Answer: Low turnouts by themselves are not necessarily troublesome. We have had low participation rates in the early part of our history, not only because eligible citizens didn't bother to vote, but also because we used to systematically disenfranchise people by limiting voting rights to property owners, whites, and imposing other restrictions.

Low rates of participation — even as low as 5% or 10% — wouldn't be bad if they were representative.

However, what is happening now is that the declining minor portion of the total electorate



Mervin Field emphasizes a point during his remarks.

who do participate are not representative of the total citizen public. Those voting in California and the U.S. today as I detailed earlier are becoming more and more dissimilar in needs, viewpoints and in class characteristics than those who do not vote.

We would have a healthier democratic society today if more people voted. The act of voting would induce more people to think about their choices even if the degree of thinking was limited in time, and in contemplating the qualifications of candidates and the pros and cons about initiatives.

We probably can get by with a government which is elected by a small portion of citizens. That government can go about its business if the larger public remains quiescent in a state of contented apathy. However, as the voting class becomes more and more elite, and elected officials believe that the only people that they have to be responsive to are the small portion of voters, then we are heading for trouble.

The Sixth Annual John C. Bollens Lecture
was presented April 26, 1990
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MERVIN FIELD

Mervin Field founded Field Research Corporation in 1946, and, later, the California Poll. The California Poll is a unique continuing public opinion news service, widely recognized as an authoritative source of public opinion utilizing sophisticated survey methodology. Since 1947, the California Poll has published more than 1500 reports on a wide variety of political, social and public policy issues.

In 1976, Mr. Field established the Field Institute, which took over the California Poll operation. The Field Institute is a non-partisan, non-profit public policy research organization sponsored by academic institutions, government agencies, foundations and various media.

Since 1956, the California Poll and, later, the Field Institute, has maintained a continuing relationship with the University of California and California State University campuses, wherein all of its survey data is regularly deposited. This extensive and growing body of poll data has become an invaluable resource for scholars and public policymakers. It is a unique and rich archive that is used in political science, journalism, sociology and survey research courses.

Field Research Corporation and the Field Institute now comprise one of the largest survey research centers with headquarters in the West. It has a permanent staff of more than 75 people and it regularly employs scores of part-time interviewers.

Mr. Field has held offices in the American Marketing Association and the American Association for Public Opinion Research. He helped establish the National Council of Published Polls, and is one of the founding directors of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations and a former director of the Advertising Research Foundation. He is a member of the Advisory Council to Roper Center Survey Research Center at UC Berkeley, the New York Market Research Council, European Society of Market Research and the World Association for Public Opinion Research.