

# PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

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### *Vanishing Voters?*

"Registration and Turnout" by Ruy A. Teixeira, in *Public Opinion* (Jan./Feb. 1989), 1150 17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

After Election Day 1988, the Reverend Jesse Jackson declared that Governor Michael Dukakis could have triumphed by a "margin of enthusiasm" if only he had inspired poor and minority voters to go to the polls in greater numbers.

Similar sentiments were voiced by many Democrats after George Bush's 54-46 percent victory. And, at first glance, says Teixeira, a public opinion specialist at Abt Associates, they make a certain amount of sense. After all, voter turnout in 1988 dropped to 50 percent of the voting-age population, the lowest in any presidential election since Calvin Coolidge defeated Democrat John W. Davis in 1924. Last year, 52 percent of all voting-age whites cast ballots, while only 46 percent of blacks and 23 percent of Hispanics did. The affluent (incomes over \$50,000) "out-voted" the poor (under \$12,500), with a 57 percent turnout versus 31 percent.

Moreover, minorities and the poor went heavily Democratic. Blacks cast 85 percent of their ballots for Dukakis, Hispanics 69 percent. Sixty-two percent of the poor voted for the Massachusetts Democrat.

Yet, says Teixeira, a better turnout at the polls by these pro-Democratic groups still would not have added up to a Dukakis victory. If black and Hispanic turnout had been 10 percentage points *higher* than the white rate, Dukakis would have gained 4.3 million votes. But he lost the election by more than 6.9 million. If the turnout of poor people had exceeded that of the well-

to-do by 10 points, Dukakis would have won only an additional 3.5 million votes.

What about the Electoral College? According to Teixeira, even a 10 percentage point increase in black and Hispanic turnout would not have affected the outcome in California and other key states.

All of this assumes that the poor people (or blacks or Hispanics) who did not vote would have divided their ballots between Dukakis and Bush in the same proportion as those who did vote. But some critics believe that most nonvoters belong to an alienated liberal/Left "silent majority."

What if they gave an election and *everybody* came? According to a CBS News/*New York Times* opinion survey, Teixeira notes, "George Bush would still have won the election—except by a bigger margin!"

For Democrats, he concludes, the lesson is clear: "They lost the presidency because they didn't have enough support in the nation as a whole, not because [too many] of their people failed to show up." A change in the party's politics or candidates can improve its fortunes. For the nation, however, the shrinking electorate poses a more profound challenge. Not only has the turnout of the voting age population (now 180 million) been slipping; voter registration and the turnout of registered voters have also been dropping. The precise causes are a mystery, says Teixeira, but the fact that millions of Americans do not participate in their nation's political life seems to point to chronic civic maladies.