

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

"The New American Voter."

Harvard Univ. Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138. 640 pp. \$39.95; paper, \$19.95

Authors: Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks

Less than half of all eligible Americans bothered to vote in the presidential election last year, a fact that deepens the gloom of those who have been worrying for decades about the low levels of voter turnout in the United States. Nearly 63 percent of the voting-age populace went to the polls in 1960, when John F. Kennedy was elected president, but thereafter that figure steadily declined (except for a half-point uptick in 1984), reaching a low of 50.3 percent in 1988. Turnout bounced up to 55.1 percent in 1992, when Bill Clinton was first elected, and then resumed its downward trend last November. Is this long decline an alarming sign of civic decay? Miller and Shanks, political scientists at Arizona State University and the University of California at Berkeley, respectively, have a more hopeful explanation: the decline is a generational phenomenon.

The composition of the American electorate (as well as its size) has changed over the decades. The large "post-New Deal" generation that came of voting age in 1968 or after gradually replaced the habitual voters of the "pre-New Deal" generation that had come of voting age in 1928 or earlier. About 84 percent of these older Americans identified with a political party, and 82 percent were very "socially connected" (home-owning, married, etc.), according to their analysis of election survey data collected at the University of Michigan. The "post-New Deal" generation—whose formative political experience was the turmoil of the 1960s and '70s, or the political disillusion that followed—was different: only 41 percent identified with a party during the 1980s, and only 65 percent were very "socially connected."

While this dramatic generational replacement took place, a middle political generation—the "New Deal" generation that had come of voting age between 1932 and 1964—provided continuity. The turnout of these voters held steady or even slightly increased, thus keeping the nation's overall turnout decline from being worse

than it was. (The increased education level of the electorate and the maturing of the early "post-New Deal" Americans also increased turnout, since education and age strengthen the likelihood of voting.)

As the "post-New Deal" generation entered the electorate during the 1970s, it favored the Democrats. But that preference soon changed. Between 1980 and 1992, Republicans gained, particularly among those just coming of voting age. In the North, this shift came at the expense of independents. In the South, a shift of voters from the Democratic to the Republican ranks, especially among the better-educated, began about 1960.

In fact, the authors point out, the "gender gap" that first appeared during the Reagan years resulted mainly from the failure of white women in the South to move into the GOP at the same rate as white males in the region did. "The Republicans did not have a new problem with women so much as the Democrats have had a continuing problem among men."

The Democrats also seem to have a problem with married voters of both sexes. In 1980, married voters favored Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter by 20 percentage points, while never-married, divorced, and widowed ones gave Carter a very slight edge. In 1992 (leaving aside independent candidate Ross Perot), married citizens gave Democrat Bill Clinton a very slight advantage, whereas other adults went much more heavily Democratic.

Perhaps surprisingly, Miller and Shanks believe that the long decline in voter turnout will soon be reversed. The younger members of the "post-New Deal" generation have all along been more inclined to identify with a party and to be more "socially connected" than their older brothers and sisters. These more recent additions to the electorate look more like those who came of voting age during the 1950s and early '60s, and that suggests—despite the drop last November—that turnout will rise again in the years ahead.

"In the Lion's Den: A Primer on Mounting Christian Persecution around the World and How American Christians Can Respond."

Freedom House, 1319 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. 56 pp. Free.

Editor: *Nina Shea*

Millions of Christians are being persecuted around the world today, according to Freedom House, a secular human-rights organization, yet their plight has received little attention in the West.

Surveying the situation in China, Sudan, Pakistan, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Egypt, and Nigeria, the report by Shea, a program director at Freedom House, and her colleagues details widespread discrimination as well as the torture, imprisonment, and killing of Christians.

The Chinese government, the report says, systematically oppresses Christians, who number between 15 million (according to official data) and 100 million. "In China today, there are more Christians in prison because of religious activities than in any other nation in the world. Protestants are arrested and tortured for holding prayer meetings, preaching, and distributing Bibles without state approval, and Roman Catholic priests and bishops are imprisoned for celebrating Mass and administering the sacra-

ments without official authorization." In a government crackdown during the first half of last year, police destroyed at least 15,000 unregistered churches and other religious buildings.

In Sudan, Christians have been locked in civil war for more than a decade with the National Islamic Front regime. Christian children are often kidnapped by government agents, beaten, and sent to Islamic re-education camps or sold as slaves. Christian Solidarity International estimates that more than 25,000 Christian children from the Nuba Mountains region alone have been abducted and sold into slavery.

In part because they fear losing access for their missionaries abroad, Christian churches in the West have largely been silent about such persecution. U.S. political leaders "barely mention human rights at all," Shea and her colleagues say. Recently, however, the U.S. State Department named a new Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, with Shea among its 20 members.

"Does Money Matter?: The Effect of School Resources on Student Achievement and Adult Success."

Brookings Institution Press, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

296 pp. \$39.95; paper, \$18.95

Editor: *Gary Burtless*

Would simply throwing more money at public schools improve the dismal academic performance of U.S. youngsters?

"If better performance automatically followed higher spending," notes Burtless, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, "the deterioration in average achievement would not have occurred in the first place." Between 1966 and 1980, when most of the decline in scores on standardized tests took place, average spending per student, adjusted for inflation, rose more than 60 percent. Since 1960, not only has spending per pupil tripled (in constant dollars), but the student-teacher ratio has fallen more than a third, and teachers' salaries have risen by half.

Eric Hanushek, an economist at the University of Rochester, summarizing findings from 377 studies, says that researchers "have found no systematic relationship" between stu-

dent achievement and per-pupil spending, teacher-student ratios, teacher pay, or the other things "that reformers (and researchers) always assumed matter." Added resources *can* improve achievement, but most schools do not use them effectively, he believes. One reason may be that teachers and other school personnel lack material incentives to improve student achievement.

Princeton University economists David Card and Alan B. Krueger, however, argue that pumping more money into schools boosts students' earnings after graduation. But that finding holds true, Julian R. Betts, an economist at the University of California at San Diego, replies, only when one looks at statewide averages; with data on individual schools and their graduates, it collapses.

Burtless's conclusion: management, not money, is the key to better schools.