

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

rectly to local governments. The power of the states "as the governments which determine and control the functions, finances, and boundaries of local units" is weakening. Americans, Nathan concludes, should avoid "further reductions in the role of state governments in national domestic policies."

The Real Non-Voter

"Why is Turnout Down" by Howard L. Reiter, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Fall 1979), Elsevier North Holland, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

There has been a steady decline in the proportion of eligible voters who cast their ballots in U.S. presidential elections—down from 62.8 percent of the electorate in 1960 to 54.4 percent in 1976. Alienation due to the Vietnam War, the recent enfranchisement of 18-to-20-year-olds, and the growing numbers of eligible voters 70 years of age and older have all been blamed by political commentators for the downturn—unjustly, says Reiter, a political scientist at the University of Connecticut.

Reiter analyzed data on voter turnout from the 1960, 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976 elections. He found the decline in voting to be centered among *white* voters of all ages, not just among the "traditional" low-turnout groups (e.g., the young and the old). The percentage of blacks who voted actually increased. Those least likely to cast ballots were poor whites with little education—these people, he writes, "have been dropping out of the electorate at greater rates than wealthy and highly educated whites."

Contrary to a widely held assumption, most white nonvoters listed themselves as independents, not Democrats. But those who did give a party preference, writes Reiter, were "considerably more likely to be Democrats than Republicans." Nonetheless, an analysis of the presidential preference of nonvoters shows their choices to be erratic—e.g., in 1960, nonvoters were more likely than voters to favor Nixon; in 1968, they preferred Wallace over Nixon.

The drop in voting among poor whites may cause elected officials to be less responsive to their needs. It is a vicious circle, Reiter observes. The less attention paid to the concerns of poor whites, the more they will believe they have no reason to vote.

The Religious Factor

"Religion and Presidential Politics, 1980" by Albert J. Menendez, in *Worldview* (Nov. 1979), Subscription Dept., P.O. Box 349, Fort Lee, N.J. 07024.

Religion is "the silent issue in U.S. politics," suggests Menendez, a free-lance writer. Yet ever since American Catholics deserted the Democratic Party of fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan, giving the