ENVIRONMENTAL VOTER PROJECT

Report:	How Much Do People Lie About Voting?
Subject:	Findings from a Survey of Registered Voters in Colorado, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Nevada with Comparisons to Public Voter Files.
Date:	January 10, 2018

Executive Summary.

This memorandum reports the findings from a phone survey of 8,587 registered voters in Colorado, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Nevada during August of 2017. Respondents were surveyed through a combination of IVR calls to landline telephones and live calls to cell phones, and were asked to answer the following question:

> *"Not everyone is able to vote in every election. Which of the following is closest to your voting behavior:*
>
> - *Do you only vote in Presidential elections?*
> - *Do you vote in both Presidential and midterm elections, for offices like Governor and Senate?*
> - *Do you vote in every election, including for mayor and other local offices? OR*
> - *Do you not vote?"*

Each person's survey response was then compared to his/her public voting record on state voter files, allowing for an analysis of how often people say they vote vs. how often they actually vote.

78.1% of survey respondents lied and over-reported their actual voting histories. Furthermore, regardless of how a respondent described their voting behavior (whether they claimed to vote in every election, in Presidential & Midterm elections, or only in Presidential elections), a majority of respondents in each response category was always proven to be over-reporting their actual voting history. Only among people who said they "never vote," did we find that a majority of respondents was actually telling the truth.

Preliminary findings show that no particular issue constituency group was more or less likely to lie about their voting habits.

These findings reveal an enormous "social desirability bias" with respect to voting. Even people who rarely or never vote still embrace the societal norm that it's important to be a consistent voter, so they are tempted to lie to pollsters and pretend to be better voters than they actually are.

This data has two significant practical implications: (1) pollsters must redouble their efforts to overcome the social desirability bias with respect to voting, or else their polling results will be increasingly tainted by people who have no intention of ever voting on Election Day, and (2) voter mobilization organizations – such as the Environmental Voter Project – should further experiment with social pressure and peer pressure-based messages, taking advantage of the fact that bad voters still want to be seen as good voters.

Key Findings.

The overwhelming majority of voters lied, and reported voting far more often than they actually did.
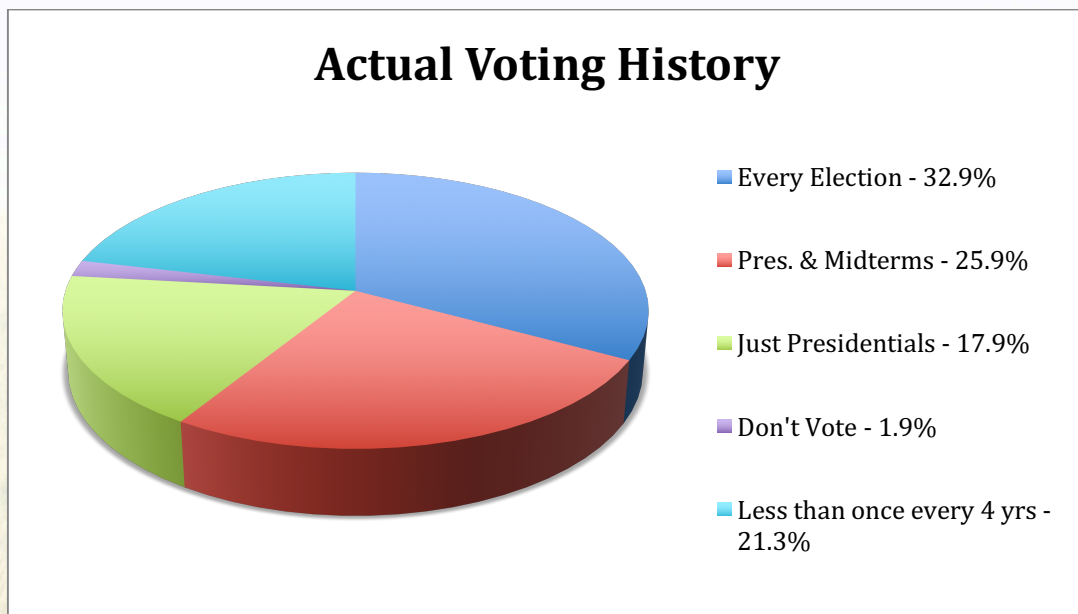
78.1% of registered voters lied, claiming that they voted more often than was actually revealed on their public voter files. 21.3% told the truth, reporting voting histories that accurately matched their public voter files. 0.6% actually under-reported how often they voted.

Do People tell the Truth about Voting?
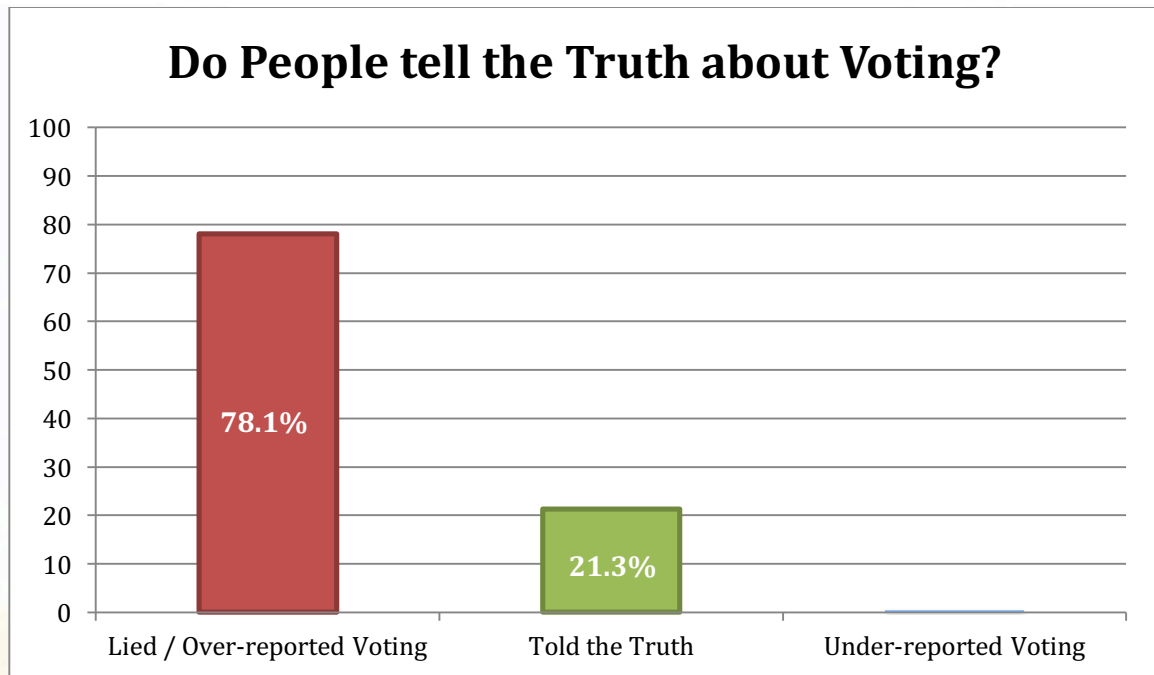
Almost three-quarters (72.5%) of registered voters reported that they vote in every election, even local municipal elections. 18.3% reported voting in Presidential and Midterm elections, and 7.6% reported voting only in Presidential elections. To avoid confusion over the meaning of "every election," surveyors asked "Do you vote in every election, including for mayor and other local offices?"

Reported Voting History

- Every Election - 72.5%
- Pres. & Midterms - 18.3%
- Just Presidentials - 7.6%
- Don't Vote - 1.6%
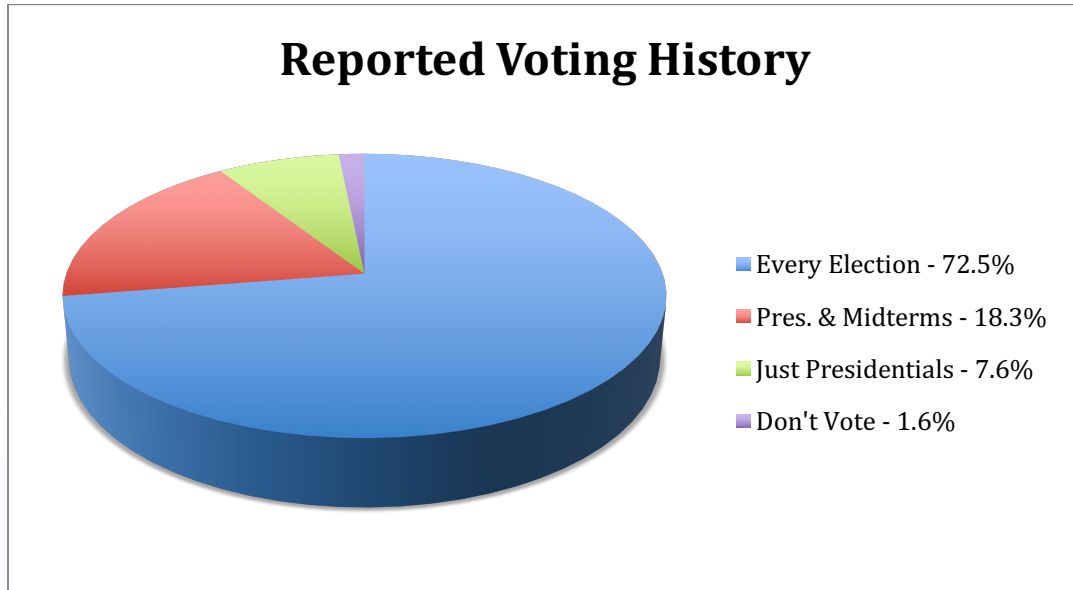
The survey respondents' <u>actual</u> public voter files revealed a different story – only 32.9% of the respondents actually voted in every, single election, followed by 25.9% voting in Presidential and Midterm elections, and 17.9% only in Presidential elections. Surprisingly, a large number of respondents (21.3%) voted less frequently than "in every Presidential election."

Actual Voting History

- Every Election - 32.9%
- Pres. & Midterms - 25.9%
- Just Presidentials - 17.9%
- Don't Vote - 1.9%
- Less than once every 4 yrs - 21.3%

Of the four survey response categories, only among respondents saying "I don't vote" did a majority of registered voters respond truthfully. In all other response categories, a majority of respondents lied and over-reported their voting histories.

Only 12% of the "I vote in Every Election" respondents were found to have responded truthfully. Moreover, even when giving this category of respondents the benefit of the doubt (perhaps they forgot that they missed an election or two), only 38.9% were able to meet a less-stringent standard of having voted in 80% or more of their eligible elections.
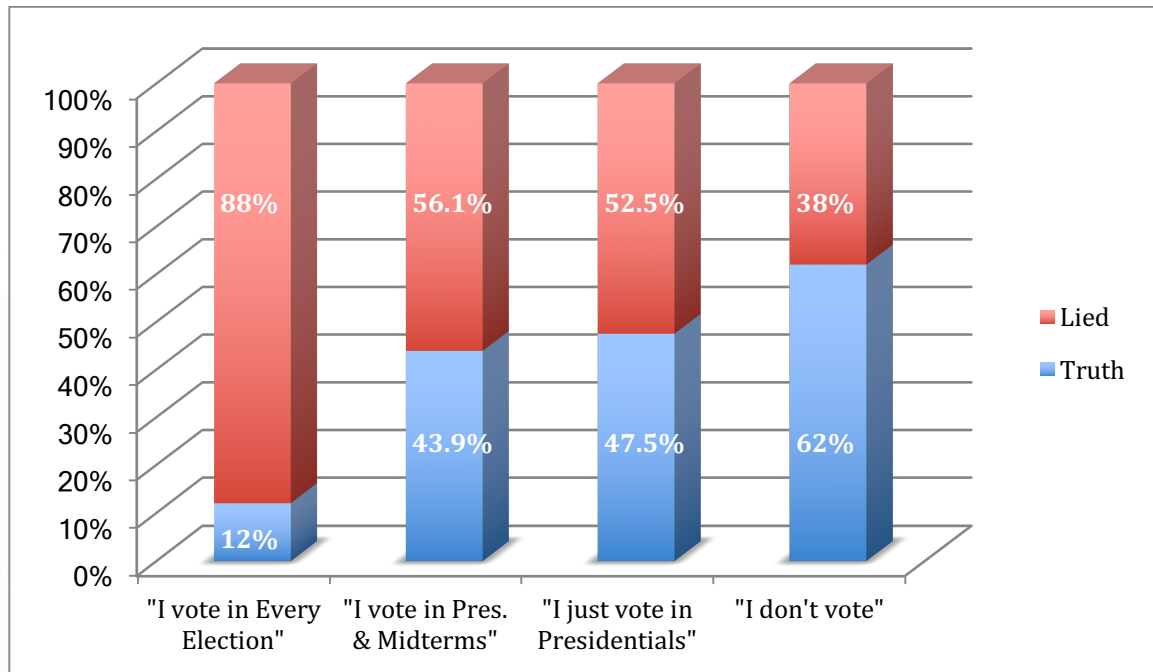
There was no discernable difference among issue constituency groups (i.e. voters who prioritize the environment vs. voters who prioritize lower taxes) when measuring whether certain types of voters were more or less likely to lie about their voting histories.[1]

Practical Implications.

These findings highlight a particularly strong "social desirability bias" with respect to voting habits; in other words, survey respondents are answering questions in a way that they think will be viewed favorably by others, rather than simply answering truthfully. Pollsters have known of this phenomenon for some time, but perhaps weren't aware of its profound depth in the voter turnout context. If the overwhelming majority (78.1%) of registered voters are untruthfully over-reporting their voting habits, similarly large numbers of voters could be over-reporting their *intent* to vote in future elections, which means political pollsters will increasingly

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[1] Since all data was collected as part of a predictive modeling survey, no weights were applied to ensure an accurate reflection of different constituency groups, but the raw data found in the Appendix doesn't suggest that there are significant differences among the various voter groups measured in this survey.

struggle to accurately identify "likely voters" for each election unless they base their analyses off of voter files.

Although problematic for pollsters, these findings highlight an important opportunity for voter turnout organizations. *Social pressure messaging*, which "pressures" people to vote by monitoring their compliance with civic norms (such as the norm of being a good voter), has successfully increased voter turnout in hundreds of recent mobilization experiments.

This study's findings suggest that the reason social pressure messaging is so effective is because there is a profound desire among all registered voters (even those who never actually vote) to be *perceived by others* as being good voters. In short, even awful voters accept the societal norm that being a consistent voter is a good thing; therefore, any messaging that takes advantage of this desire (for instance, by reminding voters that their voting histories are public records that can be viewed by their neighbors) is likely to increase voter turnout in dramatic fashion.

Although this study did not find any demographic sub-groups that were particularly prone to lying about their voting histories, this survey's responses were not weighted to accurately measure such results. In the future, it may be fruitful for researchers to measure whether certain types of voters are more likely than average to over-report their voting histories, since such a result would suggest that these populations might be uniquely susceptible to social pressure turnout messaging.

The Environmental Voter Project.

The Environmental Voter Project (EVP) is a non-partisan nonprofit that uses data analytics to identify environmentalists who don't vote and then applies cutting-edge behavioral science to nudge them into being more consistent voters. EVP has identified 15.78 million poorly voting environmentalists across the United States, and has increased their turnout by 4.7% - 5.1% per election and 12.1% over an entire year, largely by using peer pressure and other social pressure messaging.

Methodology.

This memorandum focuses on the findings from 8,587 registered voters in Colorado, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Nevada, who are a subset of a larger group (9,354 registered voters) who completed a predictive modeling survey that was conducted by IVR calls to landlines and live calls to cell phones during August of 2017. The survey was conducted by Clarity Campaign Labs on behalf of the Environmental Voter Project. Only survey respondents who could be successfully matched to their individual voter file records are included in the data presented in this memorandum.

Since all data herein was collected as part of a predictive modeling survey, no weights have been applied to ensure that samples accurately reflect demographic profiles of individual states, the overall US electorate, or particular issue or demographic sub-populations. This "How Much Do People Lie About Voting" analysis is not meant to measure which groups of people vote or don't vote – that can be accurately assessed simply by looking at voter files – rather, this data measures the *extent* to which registered voters lie and over-report their actual voting habits.
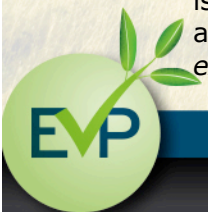
Appendix: Data Tables.

Response to Survey Question		
	N	**%**
Presidential Elections	651	7.6%
Presidential & Midterms	1,570	18.3%
Every Election	6,229	72.5%
Don't Vote	137	1.6%

Actual Voting History Data from State Voter Files		
	N	**%**
Presidential Elections	1,538	17.9%
Presidential & Midterms	2,223	25.9%
Every Election	2,827	32.9%
<1 election per 4 years	1,832	21.3%
Don't Vote	167	1.9%

% of Eligible Elections Actually Voted in, By Response Category, By Number						
	<20%	**20-39%**	**40-59%**	**60-79%**	**80-99%**	**100%**
Presidentials	47	132	17	146	0	309
Pres. & Midterms	145	111	161	180	283	689
Every Election	385	612	1321	1324	1678	750
Don't Vote	85	14	22	5	9	2

% of Eligible Elections Actually Voted in, By Response Category, By %						
	<20%	**20-39%**	**40-59%**	**60-79%**	**80-99%**	**100%**
Presidentials	7.2%	20.3%	2.6%	22.4%	0.0%	47.5%
Pres. & Midterms	9.2%	7.1%	10.3%	11.5%	18.0%	43.9%
Every Election	6.2%	9.8%	21.2%	21.3%	26.9%	12.0%
Don't Vote	62.0%	10.2%	16.1%	3.6%	6.6%	1.6%

% of Voters Who Accurately Report Voting History, By Issue-Priority Group		
	Told the Truth	**Lied**
Jobs-First Voters	21.8%	78.2%
Schools-First Voters	20.8%	79.2%
Environment-First Voters	19.9%	80.1%
Public Safety-First Voters	23.7%	76.3%
Lower Taxes-First Voters	21.5%	78.5%

EVP

ENVIRONMENTAL VOTER PROJECT | How Much Do People Lie About Voting?

Actual Voting Histories of Issue Groups, By Response Category, By Number[2]

Response: "I vote in Presidential Elections."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
0%	12	20	3	4	7
33%	32	33	23	16	27
50%	1	7	6	2	1
66%	37	24	22	23	40
100%	67	67	51	40	83

Response: "I vote in all Presidential & Midterm Elections."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
<20%	32	32	31	14	41
20-39%	23	20	23	13	28
40-59%	26	35	33	23	48
60-79%	42	27	43	20	43
80-99%	75	45	53	29	79
100%	151	109	145	73	202

Response: "I vote in every election, including for mayor and other local offices."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
<20%	102	95	69	41	115
20-39%	153	137	158	50	170
40-59%	288	250	329	101	367
60-79%	312	205	332	123	392
80-99%	386	224	374	150	533
100%	186	106	172	66	217

Response: "I don't vote."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
<20%	24	23	5	12	22
20-39%	6	1	-	1	6
40-59%	3	4	1	4	11
60-79%	2	-	-	-	1
80-99%	1	1	2	1	4
100%	-	-	-	-	2

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[2] When comparing voters' statements to their actual voting records, we reviewed public voter files for every election for which data was available back to 2006, while accounting for each voter's age and eligibility (i.e., a current 21 year old would not be penalized for missing an election in 2012 when she was only 16).

Actual Voting Histories of Issue Groups, By Response Category, By %

Response: "I vote in Presidential Elections."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
0%	8.1%	13.2%	2.9%	4.7%	4.4%
33%	21.5%	21.9%	21.9%	18.8%	17.1%
50%	0.7%	4.6%	5.7%	2.4%	0.6%
66%	24.8%	15.9%	21.0%	27.1%	25.3%
100%	45.0%	44.4%	48.6%	47.1%	52.5%

Response: "I vote in all Presidential & Midterm Elections."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
<20%	9.2%	11.9%	9.5%	8.1%	9.3%
20-39%	6.6%	7.5%	7.0%	7.6%	6.3%
40-59%	7.4%	13.1%	10.1%	13.4%	10.9%
60-79%	12.0%	10.1%	13.1%	11.6%	9.8%
80-99%	21.5%	16.8%	16.2%	16.9%	17.9%
100%	43.3%	40.7%	44.2%	42.4%	45.8%

Response: "I vote in every election, including for mayor and other local offices."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
<20%	7.1%	9.3%	4.8%	7.7%	6.4%
20-39%	10.7%	13.5%	11.0%	9.4%	9.5%
40-59%	20.2%	24.6%	22.9%	19.0%	20.5%
60-79%	21.9%	20.2%	23.2%	23.2%	21.9%
80-99%	27.0%	22.0%	26.1%	28.2%	29.7%
100%	13.0%	10.4%	12.0%	12.4%	12.1%

Response: "I don't vote."

Eligible elections actually voted in	Jobs	Schools	Environment	Pub. Safety	Lower Taxes
<20%	66.7%	79.3%	62.5%	66.7%	47.8%
20-39%	16.7%	3.4%	-	5.6%	13.0%
40-59%	8.3%	13.8%	12.5%	22.2%	23.9%
60-79%	5.6%	-	-	-	2.2%
80-99%	2.8%	3.4%	25.0%	5.6%	8.7%
100%	-	-	-	-	4.3%