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For The People & The Press

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Regular Voters, Intermittent Voters, and Those Who Don't
WHO VOTES, WHO DOESN'T, AND WHY

*A Survey Conducted in Association with
The Associated Press*

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Regular Voters, Intermittent Voters, and Those Who Don't **WHO VOTES, WHO DOESN'T, AND WHY**

They vote – but not always. Compared with Americans who regularly cast ballots, they are less engaged in politics. They are more likely to be bored with the political process and admit they often do not know enough about candidates to cast ballots. But they are crucial to Republican and Democratic fortunes in the Nov. 7 midterm elections.

They are the *intermittent voters*: Americans who are registered to vote but do not always make it to the polls. They differ significantly from those who vote regularly. For one thing, they're less likely to be married than are *regular voters*. Intermittent voters also are more mistrustful of people compared with those who vote regularly. They also are less angry with government, though no less dissatisfied with President Bush than are regular voters, according to a survey conducted Sept. 21-Oct. 4 among 1,804 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in collaboration with the Associated Press.

A Spectrum of Voters and Non-Voters: How They Differ				
	----- Voting Frequency -----			
	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Inter-</u>	<u>Registered,</u>	<u>Not</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>mittent</u>	<u>but rare</u>	<u>registered</u>
Total	35	20	23	22=100
<i>Agree with each statement...</i>				
Interested in local politics	91	76	57	45
Duty as citizen to always vote*	88	80	60	39
This election matters more	83	74	67	67
Feel guilty when I don't vote	72	70	57	45
Know little about candidates	44	60	76	68
Bored by what goes on in DC	25	38	42	43
Angry with government	24	15	14	22
Issues in DC don't affect me	15	25	32	27
Voting doesn't change things	13	18	30	33
Sometimes too busy	8	12	29	43
Difficult to get to polls	8	8	19	30
* Based only on those who 'completely agree.'				

The survey also finds large differences between Americans who are *not registered to vote* or *vote only rarely*, and intermittent or regular voters. The two groups at the bottom of the voting participation scale are much less likely than regular or intermittent voters to believe that voting will make much of a difference. They also are less likely to agree with the statement: "I feel guilty when I don't get a chance to vote."

To understand who votes and who doesn't, survey respondents were divided into four groups based on their voting history, attitudes about voting, and interest in the current campaign. Together,

these groups span the breadth of political participation, from regular voters to democracy's bystanders¹:

Regular voters. These are adults who are currently registered to vote. Nearly all regular voters cast ballots in the 2004 presidential election; most say they “always” vote and that they are certain to vote in the upcoming congressional election. Together, they constitute roughly a third (35%) of the adult population.

Intermittent voters. All intermittent voters say they are registered to vote, but fewer acknowledge always voting. They report less certainty of voting in the upcoming election and less interest in the campaign compared with regular voters. Intermittent voters make up 20% of the population.

Registered but rare voters. About a quarter of Americans say they are registered to vote, but acknowledge that they rarely make it to the polls (23%). Fully three-quarters (76%) say they sometimes feel they don't know enough about the candidates to vote.

Unregistered adults. These are Americans who say they are not registered to vote, or indicate their registration may have lapsed. They comprise 22% of the population.

Regular and Intermittent Voters

Turnout estimates suggest that more Americans than usual for an off-year election will go to the polls next month. Still, even the most optimistic of these models suggest that fewer than half of eligible Americans may vote, well below turnout in the 2004 presidential election. A key for both Republicans and Democrats is convincing the intermittent voters in their respective ranks to vote on Nov. 7.

These intermittent voters are the most important “swing” group in politics – distinguished not by their partisan leanings but by their voting behavior. They swing in and out of the electorate from election to election.

1 The regular voter group approximates those who reliably vote in both presidential elections and off-year elections. Intermittent voters approximate voters who typically turn out in presidential elections but not in off-years. Registered but rare voters approximate those who occasionally vote but do not do so regularly. Because no single indicator (other than voter registration) is indispensable in determining a person's likelihood of voting, the three groups of registered adults reflect different combinations of responses to the series of questions on voting history and intention. These groups were designed to be an approximation of different patterns of the regularity and intensity of electoral engagement.

The Pew analysis identifies basic attitudes and lifestyles that keep these intermittent voters less engaged in politics and the political process. Political knowledge is key: Six-in-ten intermittent voters say they sometimes don't know enough about candidates to vote compared with 44% of regular voters – the single most important attitudinal difference between intermittent and regular voters identified in the survey. Intermittent voters also are characterized by feelings of boredom with politics. They are more likely than regular voters to agree with the statement: "I'm generally bored by what goes on in Washington" (38% intermittent vs. 25% regular).

Intermittent voters also are more mistrustful of other people than are regular voters. According to the survey, 40% of intermittent voters say that in general most people can be trusted, compared with 52% of all regular voters. This is another factor that may prevent intermittent voters from building the kinds of community and interpersonal connections that directly lead to political participation.

A Spectrum of Voters and Non-Voters: Views of Country and Community				
	----- Voting Frequency -----			
	<u>Regular</u>	<u>mittent</u>	<u>but rare</u>	<u>registered</u>
	%	%	%	%
Married	65	59	54	44
Most people can be trusted	52	40	35	27
Lived in neighborhood less than one year	3	5	10	23
Know hardly any people in your neighborhood	5	8	14	21
Approve of Bush	40	37	33	36
Satisfied with country	27	32	33	29

One other key difference: Regular voters are more likely than intermittent voters to say they have been contacted by a candidate or political group encouraging them to vote, underscoring the value of get-out-to-vote campaigns and other forms of party outreach for encouraging political participation.

The survey also finds that the demographic factors that distinguish non-voters from voters also differentiate regular from intermittent voters. Intermittent voters are somewhat less well educated and less affluent than are regular voters.

What keeps them voting, at least occasionally? Intermittent voters share two critical characteristics with those who have the voting habit, the survey found. Unlike those who are not registered to vote, big majorities of regular and intermittent voters acknowledge they feel guilty when they don't vote. And both of these groups are less likely to accept the assertion that "voting doesn't really change things" than are those who rarely cast ballots or are not registered.

Non-Voters: Politically Estranged

The survey also reveals broad differences between those who are not registered to vote and regular or occasional voters. Non-voters are politically estranged: They are the least interested in local politics of the four groups and the most likely to say voting doesn't change things. They also are five times more likely to say they're too busy to vote than are regular voters (43% versus 8%).

Americans who are not registered to vote also are more socially isolated from other people: They're less likely to know people in their neighborhood. They also are more likely to be relatively recent arrivals in their current neighborhoods – more than one-in-five (23%) say they have lived in their neighborhood less than a year. People who are not registered to vote also are generally mistrustful of others; just 27% say that most people can be trusted.

Structural factors stand between some of these Americans and the ballot booth. Three-in-ten adults who are not registered to vote say it is difficult for them to get to the polls; this compares with 19% among those who vote rarely, and just 8% each among intermittent and regular voters. This suggests even with recent reforms in voter registration laws, barriers to voting still exist for some Americans. Still, 70% of those who are not registered say it is not difficult for them to vote.

So why aren't they registered? When asked to answer that question in their own words, no single dominant reason emerges. About one-in-five (19%) say they have not had time to register, while nearly as many said they had recently moved. One-in-seven (14%) say they don't care about politics, while about as many express little confidence in the government.

Why Non-Voters Fail to Register

<i>Open-ended responses*...</i>	<i>%</i>
No time or just haven't done it	19
Recently moved	17
Don't care about politics	14
No confidence in government	12
Not a U.S. citizen	7
Illness or disability	4
Just turned 18	3
No point in voting	3
Religious reasons	2
Laziness	2
Don't understand politics	2
Felon/on probation	2

* Top responses listed

Voting and Demographic Factors

Not only do the rich seem to get richer, on Election Day next month they will probably get a disproportionately large say about who gets elected to Congress. So will older people, whites, college graduates and those who frequently go to church, they survey finds. Among those likely to once again stand on the sidelines on Nov.7: relatively large numbers of young people, Hispanics, and those with less education and lower incomes.

Whites continue to be disproportionately represented in the voting booth: 37% of whites are regular voters, compared with 29% of non-whites, including 31% of blacks and 24% of all Hispanics. Conversely, 40% of Hispanics and considerably smaller proportions of blacks (17%) and whites (20%) say they are not registered to vote.

Regular voters also are older than those who are not registered. More than four-in-ten of those ages 50 and older (42%) are regular voters, about double the proportion of 18-29 year-olds (22%). Among those between the ages of 30 and 49, more than a third (35%) reliably go to the polls – a fact that is consistent with previous research that found voting is a habit acquired with age.

Looking at the other end of the participation scale tells the same story, but even more dramatically. Four-in-ten 18-29 year-olds are not registered to vote, double the proportion of 30-49-year-olds and nearly three times greater than those ages 50 or older.

A Spectrum of Voters and Non-Voters: Who Are They?				
	----- Voting Frequency -----			
	Regular	Inter- mittent	Registered, but rare	Not registered
	%	%	%	%
Total	35	20	23	22=100
Men	36	20	21	23=100
Women	34	21	24	21=100
White	37	21	22	20=100
Black	31	23	29	17=100
Hispanic	24	16	20	40=100
18-29	22	13	25	40=100
30-49	35	21	24	20=100
50-64	42	24	20	14=100
65+	41	22	23	14=100
Married	40	21	22	17=100
Not married	29	19	24	28=100
College graduate	46	22	20	12=100
Some college	38	20	24	18=100
H.S. grad or less	28	20	24	28=100
\$75,000+	44	22	23	11=100
\$50K to \$74,999	36	21	25	18=100
\$30K to \$49,999	36	20	21	23=100
\$20K to \$29,999	31	16	18	35=100
Less than \$20K	26	20	23	31=100
Attend Church...				
Weekly or more	39	23	23	15=100
Monthly or yearly	35	18	21	26=100
Seldom or never	31	18	25	26=100

Other factors distinguish the non-voter. Nearly half (46%) of all college graduates are regular voters, compared to 28% of adults who are high school graduates or have less education. In addition, 39% of those who say they attend religious services once a week or more are regular voters, compared with 31% of those who attend church seldom or never. But the survey also finds little gender difference in voting behavior: 36% of men and 34% of women are regular voters.

Non-Voting and Partisanship

Roughly the same proportions of self-identified Republicans and Democrats are regular voters (41% vs. 39%). But Democrats are more likely to be non-voters: 20% of Democrats say they are not registered to vote, compared with 14% of Republicans; among political independents, 27% say they are not registered to vote.

A registration gap also exists between liberals and conservatives, with 29% of self-described liberals saying they are not registered to vote compared with 20% of moderates and 17% of conservatives. However, there are only modest differences in the percentages of conservatives (38%), moderates (35%) and liberals (34%) who are regular voters.

The Politics of Non-Voting: Republicans More Likely to be Registered				
	----- Voting Frequency -----			
	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Inter-</u>	<u>Registered,</u>	<u>Not</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>mittent</u>	<u>but rarely</u>	<u>registered</u>
Total	35	20	23	22=100
Republican	41	25	20	14=100
Democrat	39	20	21	20=100
Independent	30	17	26	27=100
<i>Ideology...</i>				
Conservative	38	22	23	17=100
Moderate	35	21	24	20=100
Liberal	34	17	20	29=100

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a nationwide sample of 1,804 adults, 18 years of age or older, from September 21 to October 4, 2006. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on registered voters (N=1503), the sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on Form 1 (N=890) and Form 2 (N=914) the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points. If based on Form 1 or Form 2 registered voters only (Form 1 N=754 or Form 2 N=749), the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
AND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
EARLY OCTOBER 2006 TURNOUT SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
September 21 - October 4, 2006
N=1804

REGIST These days, many people are so busy they can't find time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to re-register. Are you NOW registered to vote in your precinct or election district or haven't you been able to register so far?

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED '1' YES IN REGIST ASK:

REGICERT Are you absolutely certain that you are registered to vote, or is there a chance that your registration has lapsed because you moved or for some other reason?

82	Yes, registered
78	Absolutely certain
3	Chance registration has lapsed
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
18	No, not registered
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED '2' NO OR '9' DON'T KNOW IN REGIST, ASK [N=250]:

NR.1 Have you previously been registered to vote, or have you never been registered?

47	Previously registered
53	Never registered
0	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

NR.2 What would you say is the main reason you're not registered to vote? [OPEN END; ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR MORE THAN ONE]

		<i>Medill</i> <u>July 1996</u> ²
19	No time/just haven't done it	--
17	Have recently moved	14
14	Don't care much about politics	21
12	No confidence in government, politics or politicians	--
7	Not a U.S. citizen	11
4	Illness/disability	--
3	Just turned 18	--
3	No point in voting/my vote makes no difference	
2	Religious reasons	--
2	Lazy	--
2	Don't understand politics/I'm not knowledgeable	--
2	Felon/On probation	--
1	Not eligible	--
1	Don't want to get my name on the list for jury duty	2

2 The July 1996 survey was conducted by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and WTTW public television. Based on first mention only.

NR.2 CONTINUED...

		<i>Medill</i> <u>July 1996</u>
	Place where have to go to register is inconvenient/	
1	too far from home	4
0	Don't know how to register	5
0	Work during voter registration hours	4
0	Registered and vote at a previous address	3
7	Other	35
7	No answer/DK/Ref	<u>3</u>
		102

QUESTIONS 3 THROUGH 19 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

ASK ALL:

Q.20 Thinking about the Democratic and Republican parties, would you say there is a great deal of difference in what they stand for, a fair amount of difference, or hardly any difference at all?

		<u>April</u> <u>2006</u>	<u>June</u> <u>2003</u>	<u>Feb</u> <u>1999</u>	<u>March</u> <u>1998</u>	<u>June</u> <u>1997</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>1995</u>	<u>July</u> <u>1994</u>	<u>May</u> <u>1990</u>	<u>May</u> <u>1987</u>
38	A great deal	33	29	33	28	25	34	23	24	25
39	A fair amount	42	49	46	45	48	46	51	45	45
18	Hardly any	21	20	18	23	25	18	24	27	25
<u>5</u>	DK/Ref (VOL)	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q.21 Some people say they are basically content with the federal government, others say they are frustrated, and others say they are angry. Which of these best describes how you feel?

		<u>March</u> <u>2004</u>	<u>Mid-</u> <u>Nov</u> <u>2001</u>	<u>June</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>Feb</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>Oct</u> <u>1997</u>
21	Basically content	32	53	28	33	29
54	Frustrated	52	34	53	54	56
20	Angry	13	8	13	10	12
<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>3</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100

Q.22 Now I am going to read you some statements. For each, please tell me whether you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it. The first one is... (**READ ITEMS; RANDOMIZE**)

		<u>Completely</u> <u>Agree</u>	<u>Mostly</u> <u>Agree</u>	<u>Mostly</u> <u>Disagree</u>	<u>Completely</u> <u>Disagree</u>	<u>DK/</u> <u>Ref</u>
a.	I sometimes feel I don't know enough about the candidates to vote	20	40	21	17	2=100
b.	It matters more than usual who gets elected this year	42	31	16	8	3=100
c.	I'm sometimes too busy to vote	8	13	23	53	3=100
d.	It's difficult for me to get out to the polls to vote	7	8	21	62	2=100
e.	Voting doesn't really change things	9	14	27	48	2=100

Q.22 CONTINUED...

		Completely <u>Agree</u>	Mostly <u>Agree</u>	Mostly <u>Disagree</u>	Completely <u>Disagree</u>	DK/ <u>Ref</u>
f.	I feel it's my duty as a citizen to always vote	70	20	5	4	1=100
g.	I'm generally bored by what goes on in Washington	13	23	34	28	2=100
h.	I'm pretty interested in following local politics	28	42	18	10	2=100
i.	Most issues discussed in Washington don't affect me personally	7	17	33	41	2=100
j.	I feel guilty when I don't get a chance to vote	40	22	14	18	6=100
k.	It's complicated to register to vote where I live	3	4	22	67	4=100

QUESTIONS 23 THROUGH 33 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

IF REGISTERED TO VOTE (REGICERT=1), ASK:

Q.34 How confident are you that your vote will be accurately counted in the upcoming election? **[READ]**

BASED ON ALL REGISTERED VOTERS [N=1503]:

		Mid-Oct <u>2004</u>
58	Very confident	62
29	Somewhat confident	26
9	Not too confident	7
3	Not at all confident	4
<u>1</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<u>1</u>
100		100

IF NOT REGISTERED TO VOTE (REGIST=2,9 OR REGICERT=2,9), ASK:

Q.35 If you were to vote this November, how confident are you that votes would be accurately counted? **[READ]**

BASED ON NOT REGISTERED TO VOTE [N=301]:

27	Very confident
37	Somewhat confident
17	Not too confident
15	Not at all confident
<u>4</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

QUESTIONS 36 THROUGH 58 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

ASK ALL:

On a completely different subject...

Q.59 Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

		June 2003	Mid-Nov 2001	Nov 1998	June 1997	Feb 1997
41	Most people can be trusted	35	42	36	42	45
54	Can't be too careful	58	55	57	54	52
3	Other/Depends (VOL.)	4	2	6	3	2
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100

And thinking about your personal life...

Q.60 When you need help, would you say that you can turn to many people for support, just a few people, or hardly any people for support?

		(VOL)			
		Many People	Just A Few	Hardly Any People	No One/ None
Early October, 2006		43	46	10	*
June, 2003		37	48	13	1
March, 2001		43	43	11	2
November, 1998		43	41	14	1
June, 1997		41	45	12	1
February, 1997		39	51	8	1
					1=100

Thinking about your neighborhood for a moment...

Q.61 About how long have you lived in your NEIGHBORHOOD? Have you lived here less than one year, one to five years, six to ten years, 11 to 20 years, more than 20 years OR have you lived here all your life?

9	Less than one year
28	1-5 years
17	6-10 years
17	11-20 years
18	More than 20 years
11	All my life
<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
100	

Q.62 Would you say that you know a lot of people in your neighborhood, some people, just a few, or hardly any?

39	A lot
26	Some
23	Just a few
11	Hardly any
1	None (VOL.)
<u>*</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

QUESTIONS 63 THROUGH 64 IN PREVIOUS RELEASE

ASK ALL:

PVOTE04A In the 2004 presidential election between George W. Bush and John Kerry, did things come up that kept you from voting, or did you happen to vote?

IF YES (1 IN PVOTE04A) ASK:

PVOTE04B Did you vote for Bush, Kerry or someone else?

75	Voted
37	Bush
32	Kerry
3	Other candidate
*	Don't remember which candidate (VOL.)
3	Refused (VOL.)
24	Did not vote (includes too young to vote)
*	Don't remember if voted (VOL.)
<u>1</u>	Refused (VOL.)
100	

IF NO (2 IN PVOTE04A), ASK [N=321]:

PVOTE04C What was it that kept you from voting? [OPEN END; DO NOT READ; ACCEPT MULTIPLE RESPONSES BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL]

		<i>Medill</i> <u>July 1996</u> ³
16	Not old enough	12
15	Not registered	20
12	Didn't like the candidates	12
11	Not interested in politics	10
7	No particular reason	10
6	Not a citizen	9
6	Working	4
5	Illness	2
4	Traveling	4
3	Busy	--
	No point in voting/my vote	
2	makes no difference	--
2	Felon	--
	No confidence in Gov't, politics	
2	or politicians	--
1	Religious reasons	--
1	No way to get to the polls	2
6	Other [SPECIFY]	12
3	No answer	<u>2</u>
		99

3 The July 1996 survey was conducted by Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and WTTW public television. Based on first mention only. Asked about voting in the 1992 election.