

Responses to Reporter Questions on Survey

In preparation for our 2008 Post Election Survey, FVAP has evaluated critiques and commentary voiced by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Westat (a private survey consulting firm) and other organizations regarding our previous surveys. Our 2008 Survey methodologies have been improved to reflect their input. FVAP will use an optimized design for sampling, a three-stage industry standard weighting process to dampen bias from non-response, and cognitive studies to improve question wording. These improvements will support more accurate estimates and provide a firmer benchmark for comparison of general population and Service member voting patterns. Additionally, the 2008 Survey Report will include a comprehensive description of our methodologies and results.

1) data on election turnout among responding military for presidential elections – since 1976

Estimated Voting Participation Rates by Military Branch (Numbers from FVAP Reports - Total Attempting to Vote)								
	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1997	2000	2004
Total Services	38%	48%	55%	64%	67%	64%	69%	79%

2) Methodology of 2004 Survey (as detailed as possible)

Contractors

2000 – Gallup

2004 – Sirota

2008 – DMDC

The characteristics of the Uniformed Service member population group for the 2004 survey were the following:

FVAP target population. Active duty members and full-time active reservists who are U.S. citizens with more than 4 months of service. Spouses and adult children of military members are not a population of interest.

2004 sampling frame. Defense Manpower Data Center's (DMDC's) June 2004 Active Duty and Reserve Master Edit Files. The quality of these files is considered good.

2004 sample. DMDC drew the sample. The sampling frame was segmented to exclude military members with less than 4 months of service and military members who were not U.S. citizens. If a member's citizenship was not known, the member was excluded from the population.

The survey design was a 15,000 member random sample with 3,000 Service members for each of five Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard). Within each Service the cells were evenly divided between officers and enlisted and CONUS and OCONUS, resulting in 20 cells containing 750 members. The design results in a census of Coast Guard officers working overseas and includes a small portion of Army enlisted members stationed in the United States. The OCONUS definition included members in Alaska and Hawaii. Officers included commission and warrants.

The file was sorted by random number before sample selection. However, the sample was 230 short of 15,000 after the first sample pull. The shortage occurred with Coast Guard Officers stationed overseas. Sixteen Service members were added to each cell to increase the sample draw. The resulting cell sizes were 766 except for the Coast Guard, which had 472 in its cells. After the final sample pull, the total sample size was 15,025.

For survey administration, the 2004 Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) file was used to get the home addresses. There was a DEERS address for 97.4% of the sample members. When a home address was not available on that file, sample members were matched to the June 2004 Unit Identification Code (UIC) address file for unit or work address. DMDC had a UIC (unit) address for 93.4% of the sample members.

3) Comparability to other surveys (2000 – 2008)

Differences in Question Wording – In order to address differences between turnout in years, there are several factors to include and which have been addressed. First, voter participation in 2004 included an additional question asked of Uniformed Service members to assess reasons for not voting:

Which of the following were reasons why you did not vote in the November 2004 election?

- I was not interested in voting, too busy, forgot*
- I could not register to vote*
- I had no candidate preference*
- I did not think my vote would matter*
- I did not know how to get an absentee ballot*
- My absentee ballot arrived too late***
- My absentee ballot did not arrive at all***
- The absentee voting process was too complicated*
- Other*

In 2004, voter participation included not only those who indicated they voted in person or by absentee ballot, but also those who attempted to vote but did not because their *absentee ballot arrived too late* or their *absentee ballot did not arrive at all*.

Self-reported voter participation in the 2004 survey, including those who attempted to vote but did not, was 79%. After excluding the percentage who attempted to vote but did not, self-reported voter participation was 73%.

Another difference in the wording of the 2000/2004 and 2008 survey is that the 2008 survey begins with the statement, “A lot of people do not get to vote because they weren’t registered, they were sick, or they just didn’t have time.” This opening statement is similar to the statement at the beginning of questions about voter turnout used by the American National Election Surveys (ANES) since 1948. The purpose of including this statement at the beginning of a question about voter turnout is that it allows nonvoters to save face yet tell the truth about their failure to vote in the previous election (Presser, 1990). If a survey does not include a statement designed to lessen the stigma of nonvoting, then the survey will overestimate the percentage of people who actually did vote (Belli, Traugott, Young, & McGonagle, 1999). Even if all other factors were equal, self-reported voter participation among Service members would be lower in the 2008 surveys than in the 2000/2004 FVAP survey, because the language in the 2008 survey includes a statement designed to make it easier for respondents to admit that they did not vote in the previous election.

4) Re GAO concerns, FVAP response

The GAO’s primary concern has been the low response rates to FVAP’s previous surveys. To encourage participation in 2008, the FVAP has sent pre-notification letters to election officials, has published articles in our monthly newsletters, and will send reminder emails to participants. To make the survey as accessible as possible, it will be available both in hard copy and online.

1) Response rate and level of self-reported voting among officers vs enlisted

FVAP does not have the level of self-reported voting broken down among officers (COs and NCOs) vs enlisted.

A key component of response rate is the cooperation rate; that is, the percent of those contacted who complete a survey. In 2004, the number of completes was 2661. The number of mailed questionnaires was 15,025. The number of undeliverable questionnaires was 5241. Therefore, the response rate was 2661/ (15,025-5,241) or 27.2%. The table below shows the response rate for each of the services as well as the total.

Percentage of Voter Participation Previously Reported in 2004 Quadrennial Survey	
	2004 Quadrennial
Total	79%

2004 Completion Rate					
Branch of Service (from sample)	Number Sampled	Number of Undeliverables	Net Sample	Number of Completes	Response Rate
Total	15,025	5,241	9,784	2661	27.2%

The table below shows the completion rates for the 2000 survey compared to previous survey administrations by branch of service. Rates have declined in the two previous administrations from 1992.

Rate for survey administrations since 1984						
	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
All services	47.6%	52.3%	55%	43.2%	34.1%	27.2%

2) Was the sample weighted to officer vs. enlisted population parameters?

In 2004 the weighting process used was a form of poststratification that is often referred to as sample balancing. The weights were developed by weighting the proportional distribution of completes to equal the distribution of the frame along the following sampling dimensions: the five Service branches, officers versus enlisted personnel, and CONUS versus OCONUS personnel.