

Native Voting In Village Alaska

This paper summarizes in non-tabular form the results of a study of Native voting behaviour in rural Alaska between 1958 and 1968.¹ Election results from every precinct corresponding to a community identified by the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska² as "predominantly Native" were recorded on IBM cards. Separate cards were made for each precinct in each general election year between 1958 and 1968. In addition to the results of the major election contests, each card contained the name of the community (which is synonymous with the precinct), its election district, the total number of voters in the primary election which preceded the general election, and the predominant ethnic composition of the community, which was determined from authoritative ethnographic sources.^{3,4,5} Information from these cards was transferred to magnetic tape and processed by computer. It should be noted that the resultant data pertain only to *rural* Native electoral behaviour. Omitted from consideration are Native voters who reside in urban areas, and in predominantly non-Native rural towns (Skagway, Cordova, Valdez, Seward, Seldovia, Talkeetna and elsewhere). The Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska estimates that something over 70 per cent of Alaska's Natives live in 178 villages or towns that are predominantly Native — places where half or more of the residents are Native. Another 25 per cent of Alaska's Natives live in urban centres of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kodiak and Sitka. The remainder live in non-Native towns and in one- or two-family locations. It should also be noted that most Native villages have some resident non-Natives whose votes are included in the published precinct total. In the cases of Dillingham and Bethel, this non-Native population component is sizeable.

NUMBER OF RURAL NATIVE VOTERS

Data show that 12,097 rural Natives voted in the 1968 general election. This is 4,931 more than voted in the general election a decade earlier, and represents a 69 per cent increase between 1958 and 1968. The number of Eskimo voters almost doubled during this period — from 4,485 to 8,640 — whereas the number of Southeast Indian (Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimpsian) voters stayed relatively constant — from 1,101 in 1958 to 1,218 in 1968, or an 11 per cent increase.

Interior Indian (Athabascan) voters increased from 1,186 in 1958 to 1,674 in 1968, and Aleut voters increased from 394 in 1958 to 565 in 1968, 43 per cent and 41 per cent increases respectively. The largest number of Eskimos and Interior Indians voted in 1968. However, the largest number of Aleuts and Southeast Indians voted in 1964.

NUMBER OF VILLAGES PARTICIPATING IN ELECTIONS

The number of Interior Indian, Southeast Indian and Aleut villages participating in elections remained relatively constant between 1958 and 1968: elections were held in 29 Interior Indian villages in 1958 and again in 1968; elections were held in 9 Southeast Indian villages in 1958 and again in 1968; elections were held in 10 Aleut villages in 1958 and again in 1968, although in 1962, 1964 and 1966 elections were held in 11 Aleut villages. Therefore, the increase in voters from these cultural groups noted above is attributable to population growth, heightened political interest, or both. The situation is less clear in the case of Eskimo villages, however. Thirty-three more Eskimo villages participated in elections in 1968 than in 1958 (the largest single increase in voting Eskimo villages occurred between 1960 [74] and 1962 [102]). Thus, the sizeable increase in Eskimo voters noted above appears to be largely explained by both population growth and the significant increase in the number of villages participating in elections.

TURN-OUT IN PRIMARY VS. GENERAL ELECTIONS

No data are available on the turn-out of registered voters in Alaska because the state has had no voter pre-registration requirement. Neither can any useful estimates of turn-out of eligible voters be made in the rural areas because of the lack of reliable data on age breakdown of population. But a comparison can be made of rural Native turn-out in primary and general elections. Such a comparison reveals that voter turn-out for primary elections is significantly lower in Southeast Indian villages than in villages of the other Native groups. Among all rural Alaska Native voters the turn-out for primary elections is significantly higher than that in the United States as a whole (50 per cent or less of general election turn-out), with rates running from 49 to 78 per cent of general election turn-out.

DISTRIBUTION OF RURAL NATIVE ELECTORAL STRENGTH (1968)

Rural Native electoral strength is concentrated in northern and western Alaska

where there are no sizeable urban centres and many scattered Eskimo and Aleut villages. In 7 election districts the Native village vote constitutes 75 per cent or more of the district total (nos. 12 [Aleutian Islands], 13 [Bristol Bay], 14 [Bethel], 15 [Yukon-Kuskokwim], 17 [Barrow-Kobuk], 18 [Nome], 19 [Wade-Hampton]). Seven state legislative representatives and 3 state senators are elected from these predominantly Native election districts (there is a total of 40 state representatives and 20 state senators). In 8 of the remaining 12 election districts the Native village vote constitutes 27 per cent or less of the total district vote (nos. 1 [Ketchikan-Prince of Wales], 2 [Wrangell-Petersburg], 3 [Sitka], 5 [Lynn Canal-Icy Straits], 6 [Cordova-Valdez], 10 [Kenai-Cook Inlet], 11 [Kodiak], 16 [Fairbanks-Fort Yukon]), and in 4 districts there are no predominantly Native precincts (nos. 4 [Juneau], [Palmer-Wasilla-Talkeetna], 8 [Anchorage], 9 [Seward]).

PARTY PREFERENCE OF NATIVE VILLAGES

Of the two major U.S. political parties, the Democratic party is clearly the stronger among rural Native voters in Alaska. (During the period 1960 to 1968, no candidate identified with a party other than the Democratic and Republican parties drew an appreciable vote.) In each election contest for U.S. president, state governor, U.S. representative and U.S. senator between 1960 and 1968 (5 general elections and 14 separate contests), the percentage of votes cast for Democratic candidates in the Native villages exceeded the percentage of votes cast for the same Democratic candidates in the state as a whole by an average of 12 percentage points. In none of the 14 single contests did the state-wide electoral support for a Democratic candidate exceed the Native village electoral support.

Although the data show a clear over-all preference for the Democratic party in rural Native precincts, they also show that the patterns of party preference are not static. In 1968, for example, 60 villages (38 per cent of the total) registered a Republican or no clear party preference. This compares with 30 such Republican or competitive villages (19 per cent of the total number) in 1966, and only 11 (7 per cent of the total number) in 1964. Of the 54 villages which registered a Republican party preference in the five general elections between 1960 and 1968, 26 did so in only one of these elections. Of the 17 Eskimo villages that indicated a Republican party preference in 1960, only 9 did so again in 1968. The vil-

lages in individual election districts show different degrees of attachment to the dominant party. In the 1968 general election in the seven election districts controlled by Native voters, for example, villagers voted solidly Democratic in four districts (nos. 14 [Bethel], 17 [Barrow-Kobuk], 18 [Nome], 19 [Wade-Hampton]) and highly fragmented their vote along party lines in three districts (nos. 12 [Aleutian Islands], 13 [Bristol Bay], 15 [Yukon-Kuskokwim]).

The figures themselves offer no clues to the reasons for shifting party preference. Party loyalty may, in fact, be very weak in a number of villages; village voters may be influenced by important issues or strong personalities; or village voters may be receptive to intense local campaign efforts.

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Winter Observations of Mammals and Birds St. Matthew Island

Remote and uninhabited St. Matthew Island, lying 60° 30' N. 172° 30' W. on the continental shelf of the Bering Sea, is infrequently visited in summer and very rarely seen in the winter. The only signs of past human habitation are the wind-torn remains of a World War II naval observation station and the rectangular depressions of a couple of Eskimo house pits, of undetermined age, on the southwest side of the island. The last known visit to the island was during the summer of 1966.¹