

Overview of the 1984 National Election Studies

The 1984 Election Studies were, without doubt, the most comprehensive studies of a presidential election year ever conducted by any research organization. They are by far the most complete studies in the series of election studies which the Center has been conducting without interruption since 1952. You may be interested in a few of the important features of this unique study:

year-long monitoring of public opinion and evaluation of presidential candidates

The portion of the National Election Studies in which you participated, and about which this report is written, is called the "Pre-Post." Interviewing for the "Pre-Post" surveys began in early September, 1984, and ended the day before the election, with a reinterview after the election (concluding in early January, 1985). This survey allowed us to closely monitor public opinion during the intensive campaign period (Sept.-Oct.) and people's evaluation of the campaign and the candidates after the election (Nov.-Jan.).

scientific samples representative of the entire nation

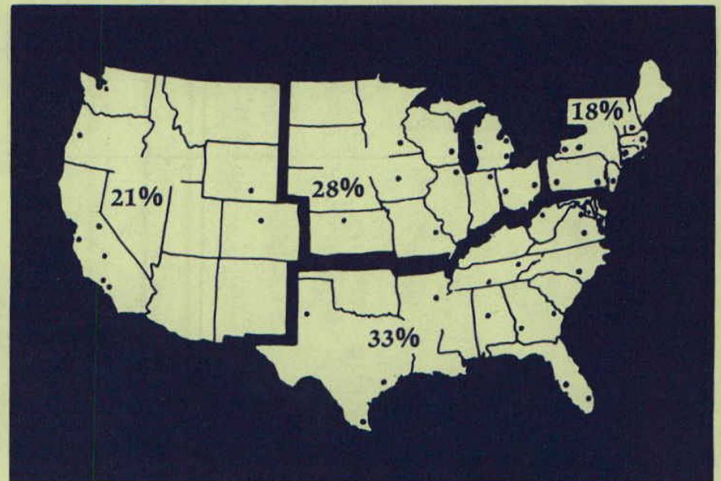
Respondents (people whom we interviewed) in our Pre-Post study were members of a national sample drawn scientifically to represent with accuracy the diversity and variety of the people in our nation. The sample was divided into four parts, each part assigned to a two-week interviewing period between the beginning of September and Election Day, in order to assure a fairly even number of interviews taken during the various stages of the last two months of the presidential campaign. The black dots on the map identify the areas in which interviewing took place. These areas are located in 30 states, 134 congressional districts and 101 counties. In the course of the study, 2,257 individuals were interviewed from these areas; and, 1,989 were reinterviewed after the election. Whenever a respondent moved from the areas in which he or she was originally interviewed, arrangements were made to reinterview the respondents at their new place of residence, wherever this happened to be. If movers had not been followed, our original sample would have become distorted with the resulting loss of those who changed residence.

reinterviews with the same group of respondents

We attempted to interview all of our respondents twice, the initial interview occurring between Labor Day and Election Day, and the "follow-up" interview occurring after Election Day. Talking more than once with the same respondents allows us to understand better the process of change and development in people's feelings and opinions. Our initial interview tells us how people feel "then" but only with the subsequent reinterview are we able to find out how the campaign and the actual election have changed their feelings and opinions and the direction of the change compared to where they stood at an earlier time.

1984 Respondent Report — Pre/Post Election Study

Some months ago, one of our interviewers visited your home seeking your cooperation in a study of the 1984 presidential election conducted by the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan. At that time we said that we would send each participant a report summarizing the major findings of the study. This, then is the report of a study made possible by your participation and the participation of other people who, like you, gave freely of their time. The project staff acknowledges with appreciation your willingness last year to be part of the 1984 Election Studies.

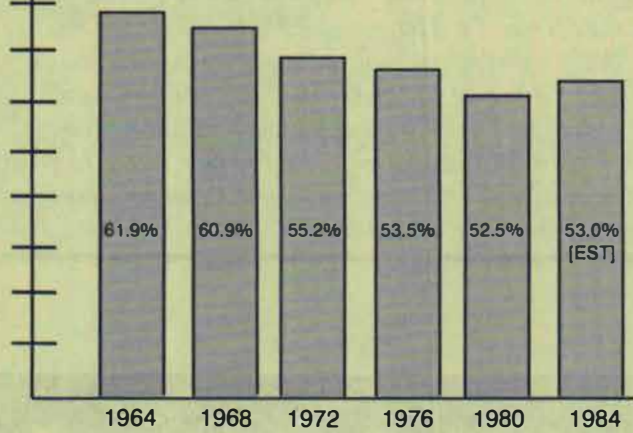


SUMMARY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR RESPONDENTS

As the map above indicates, 18% of our respondents reside in the Northeast, 28% in the Midwest, 33% in the South, and 21% in the West. Our respondents range in age from 18 to 94 years with the average age being 44. Blacks constitute 11% of our sample, whites 87%, and the remaining 2% is composed of other racial minorities. Females comprise over half the sample, 56%. The majority of respondents, 59%, are presently married, 14% are either divorced or separated, 11% are widowed, and 16% have never married. A little under one quarter of our respondents, 23%, have finished fewer than 12 years of schooling, more than one-third, 36%, have completed high school, and even more, 41%, have attended at least one year of college. Our respondents also come from different occupational backgrounds: 25% are employed in professional and management positions, 23% are in clerical and sales, 34% are laborers and service workers, 2% are farmers, and 15% are full-time homemakers.

FIGURE 1

Percent of Eligible Citizens Voting in Presidential Elections Since 1964*



* Bureau of the Census

TURNOUT

People's participation in presidential elections has been one of our traditional areas of interest. As can be seen from the census figures on turnout in Fig. 1, the steady decline in voter turnout in presidential elections since 1964 was slightly reversed in the 1984 election.

Contrary to some past patterns of vote participation, women and men in our survey are **exactly** equal in their turnout rates, and households with union members are only slightly (6%) more likely to report voting than non-union households.

On the other hand, the turnout rate by region shows that the south continues to vote at a rate which is 11% less than other regions of the country.

Interestingly, too, it is still the case that strong partisans, either Democrats or Republicans, are 25% more likely to vote than are people who report no party attachment at all, the independents.

SOCIAL GROUP SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The social group profile on the opposite page shows that Reagan's voters were likely to be men, respondents with at least a high school degree, whites, conservatives, residents of the northeast and north central states, and residents of households with no labor union members. Mondale did better than Reagan among respondents from union households (56%), blacks (89%), liberals (69%), and respondents with grade school education (56%). The groups giving majorities to Mondale have throughout our studies been especially strong supporters of candidates from the Democratic party.

A great deal of attention during the campaign was given to the "women's vote" for Mondale. Speculation on the effect of Mondale's adoption of a female running mate was standard media fare throughout the campaign season. However, only among the single (never married) women did Mondale

get the majority of the women's vote (59%). Contrary to expectations, women who work outside the home tended to vote for Ronald Reagan (55%). Reagan's strongest base of female support came from women who are full-time homemakers (66%). Although Mondale did not gain the support of the majority of women, women did vote more Democratic than did men.

Reagan's strength across regions was considerable; only in the southern border states did Mondale offer a real challenge. Reagan showed almost uniform strength across age groups, appealing only slightly less to older Americans who showed the highest percentage (3%) support for third party candidates. Reagan's support from respondents who have had high school and college educations was very strong, and this support has increased since he ran in 1980. In 1984, 61% of our voters in both of these groups voted for Reagan; in 1980, 58% of our voters who had some high school and only 54% of our voters with some college supported Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter.

WHICH ISSUES WERE IMPORTANT

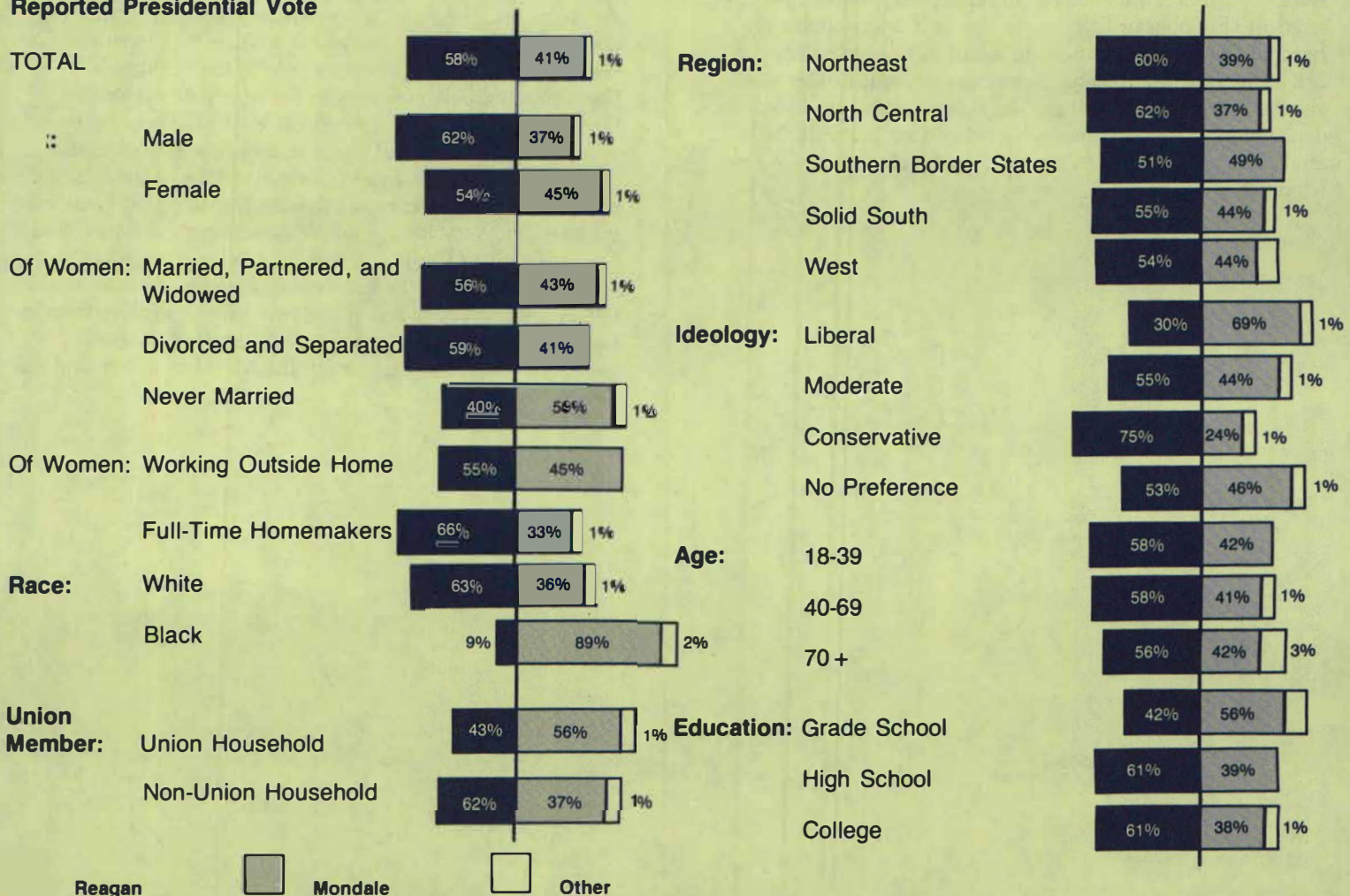
Nations must contend with many problems; we were interested in which problems you felt to be the most important ones facing this country. Economic concerns loomed largest, with government spending and the budget cited by over one-third of you as a major problem. Unemployment also ranked high on your priority list. Though concern with unemployment among our respondents had dropped 6% since 1982, it was still clearly perceived as a serious national problem in 1984. A problem that often accompanies unemployment, poverty and social welfare, was also prominent in your responses. Concerns in the military arena were voiced by many of you. Though you focused on different aspects — the arms race, the threat of nuclear war, and the preservation of peace — your concern over the questions of war and peace was clearly visible. Changes in the economic conditions over the past four years were evident in the level of your concern over inflation. Only 9% of you felt this to be one of the most important problems facing the nation in 1984 but, during the presidential election in 1980, 41% of our respondents placed inflation among the most important problems. Support for the elderly, particularly social security, was expressed in many of your responses. On the international front, relations with the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, Nicaragua and Latin America, are on the minds of many of our respondents.

Relative Importance of Problems Facing the United States; Volunteered Answers to "The Most Important Problems Facing this Country" in 1984

% = Number of respondents mentioning the problem

	%
Government Spending, the "budget"	36
Unemployment	29
Poverty, welfare	16
Disarmament	16
Nuclear war	12
Preservation of peace/prevention of war	12
Inflation	9
Aid to the elderly, social security	9
Relations with the USSR	9
Nicaragua, South America, Latin America	7

Support of Social Groups — 1984 Reported Presidential Vote



POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Of our respondents who voted in 1984, 58% voted for Reagan, 41% voted for Mondale, and 1% voted for other candidates. Reagan's margin of victory was 17%. This is 6% greater than his margin in 1980. Since our first Election Study in 1952, only Richard Nixon in 1972 and Lyndon Johnson in 1964 received greater landslide victories. Reagan's large victory margin is especially notable since more of our sample of respondents call themselves Democrats than Republicans. 47% of our respondents who voted said they were Democrats, 45% said they were Republicans, and 8% were independents. Looking at your vote choice, it is clear that a number of "Democratic identifiers" (as political scientists sometimes call them) did not vote for their party's candidate, Mr. Mondale. Defection among Democrats was more than enough to allow Republicans to bridge the 2% advantage the Democratic Party had in number of voters who identified with it. Although Mondale was fairly successful in holding those who called themselves "strong" Democrats, losing only 11% to the Republican camp, he had much more difficulty holding the "weak" Democratic identifiers and the independents who expressed a preference for the Democratic Party. Of these "weaker" Democratic partisans, 33% and 21% respectively, voted for Reagan. Reagan was also aided by the fact that Republican voters remained very loyal to their party's nominee. Of those who identified strongly with the Republican Party, only 4% did not cast their vote for Reagan. Slightly higher defection rates were found for "weak" Republican identifiers and independents who preferred the Republican Party, with 7% and 8% respectively rejecting their party's choice. In addition to holding his party's affiliates and attracting Democrats as well, Reagan was also far more successful than Mondale in attracting independent voters. Among voters who claimed no party affiliation at all, Reagan enjoyed an almost 3 to 1 vote advantage over Mondale.

ISSUE PROFILE OF VOTERS

Reagan and Mondale voters differ considerably on all issues we asked about. The extent of those differences is nicely displayed in positions on spending issues where Reagan and Mondale voters displayed mirror images of each other. On the issue of "governmental services and spending," 20% of Reagan voters want to increase services and spending while 51% of Mondale voters take that position. In contrast, on "defense spending," 46% of Reagan voters want to increase defense spending while only 20% of Mondale voters want such an increase. In terms of government aid to its citizens — be it minorities, women, or guarantees of jobs and a good standard of living — the preferences for less government involvement and more self-help is strongly in evidence among Reagan supporters. The liberal orientation of the Mondale voters on these issues provides a clear contrast. Only on the question of government involvement in Central America do the majority of Mondale and Reagan voters line up on the same side of the issue. However, the proportion of Reagan voters wishing less involvement in Central America (41%) is substantially less than the proportion of Mondale voters (71%) advocating less involvement. In attitudes toward relations with the Soviet Union, Mondale and Reagan voters line up on opposite ends of the issue, with twice as many Reagan voters in favor of a tougher stance toward the Soviets. The issue of abortion appears to be the least divisive, but the liberal coloration of Mondale supporters is apparent here as well.

As we noted, there was a considerable defection from the Democratic camp in 1984, and it appears that issue positions may have played an important role in that defection. Distinguishing between Reagan Republicans and Reagan Democrats, we find differences do exist between the two groups of supporters but that the differences are less than those found between Reagan Democrats and Mondale voters. The attractiveness of Reagan for defecting Democrats is clear: On every issue, except "government services" and "involvement in Central America," Democratic defectors bear a closer resemblance to the Reagan Republicans than to their fellow Democrats. Even on the two issues, "involvement in Central America" and "government services," Reagan Democrats are equidistant from the Mondale voters and the Reagan Republicans.

Voters' Issue Profile

REAGAN VOTERS

Issue Area	Independents and Mondale			
	Reagan Voters	Republicans	Democrats	Voters
Govt. Spending				
Govt. should provide fewer services, reduce spending a lot	50%	55%	35%	14%
In-between	30	29	31	35
Govt. should provide more services, increase spending a lot	20	16	34	51
Aid to Minorities				
Govt. should help minorities	20%	19%	23%	45%
In-between	33	34	34	32
Minorities should help themselves	47	47	43	23
U.S. Involvement in Central America				
U.S. should get more involved	32%	35%	27%	15%
In-between	27	27	20	15
U.S. should become less involved	41	38	53	70
Defense Spending				
Decrease spending	18%	14%	28%	53%
In-between	36	38	33	27
Increase spending	46	48	39	20
Govt. Help to Women				
Govt. should help	24%	22%	28%	54%
In-between	34	36	32	27
Women should help themselves	41	42	40	10
Cooperation with Russia				
U.S. should cooperate more with Russia	23%	21%	26%	56%
In-between	25	25	25	27
U.S. should get tougher with Russia	52	54	49	19
Jobs and Standard of Living				
Govt. should guarantee jobs and good standard of living	17%	15%	22%	56%
In-between	21	18	31	17
Individuals should get ahead on their own	62	67	47	27
Abortion				
Abortion should never be permitted	12%	13%	10%	9%
Permitted in case of rape, incest, or mother's life threatened	32	32	30	26
Permitted when need clearly established	23	24	25	20
Always permitted	33	31	35	45

CANDIDATE EVALUATION AND PERFORMANCE

In addition to voicing certain issue positions during the campaign, candidates also project certain images. We were interested in how you felt towards them. One way we measured your feelings was by your placement of these candidates on the "feeling thermometer." You felt the warm toward Reagan, giving him an average score of 61. Mondale and Ferraro were not far behind, both at 57, and Bush just slightly lower at 55.

FEELING THERMOMETER RATINGS (MEANS)

	ALL	MEN	WOMEN
RONALD REAGAN	61	63	60
WALTER MONDALE	57	55	59
GEORGE BUSH	55	56	55
GERALDINE FERRARO	57	56	59

Moving on to more specific questions about Reagan and Mondale, we probed whether something they have done or the kind of persons they are, has ever provoked certain feelings. On the dimensions asked, Reagan appears to have prompted a wider range of feelings. Reagan has caused more of you to feel "hopeful," "proud," and "sympathetic toward him" than has Mondale. However, more of you also report feeling "angry," "afraid," and "disgusted" with Reagan than with Mondale.

You also gave us your impressions of how well a series of traits describes all four candidates in the presidential election. Comparing your opinions on Reagan and Mondale, there are similarities on a number of dimensions such as "intelligent," "knowledgeable," and "moral." But, as can be seen in Figure 3, there are a number of traits on which you view them differently: Phrases of "commands respect," "provides strong leadership," and "inspiring" are seen as more descriptive of Reagan. In contrast, Mondale is perceived as "more compassionate," "caring," "understanding of people like you," and "in touch with ordinary people."

These differences in perceptions of the two candidates correspond with differences in issue positions among their supporters. Mondale loyalists are more supportive than are Reagan voters of the government's helping people to get ahead, guaranteeing a standard of living, and providing services. The "strong leadership" trait, viewed as characteristic of Reagan, fits well with his supporters' greater concern with a tougher stance toward the Soviets, greater involvement in Central America, and more defense spending.

Some of the distinctions between the presidential candidates carry over to their running mates. Geraldine Ferraro, as is Mondale, is seen as more "caring," "compassionate," and "in touch with ordinary people" than is her counterpart, George Bush. However, unlike Mondale, Ferraro edges out her opponent on the dimensions of "inspiring" and "strong leadership." In fact, on none of the dimensions asked is Bush clearly perceived in a more favorable light. On the dimension of "hard-working," Ferraro is rated most positively of all the candidates, with 92% of you feeling that "hard-working" describes Ferraro very well or quite well, Mondale is rated second with 89% and, interestingly, Reagan was the lowest scorer with 69%.

The Ferraro candidacy was a novel factor in this election. It prompted speculation that we would see a "women's vote." Women did indeed vote more Democratic than did men, as women have since 1980. Feelings toward both Mondale and Ferraro are significantly more favorable among women on most of the dimensions we asked. On the "feeling thermometer" as well, women rank the overall Democratic ticket higher than the Republican. Although generally few significant differences emerge between men and women in their perception of Reagan, and the majority of women did cast their votes for Reagan, certain groups of women, those working outside of the home and particularly those who have never married, were decidedly less supportive of and less favorably disposed toward Reagan. On two dimensions on which Reagan clearly out-distanced Mondale — "inspiring" and "provides strong leadership" — we found that women were significantly less likely than men to perceive Reagan as having these strengths.

FIGURE 2

Has something the candidate has done or the kind of person (he/she) is, ever made you feel. . .

(% responding "YES")

	All Respondents		Reagan Voters		Mondale Voters	
	REAGAN	MONDALE	REAGAN	MONDALE	REAGAN	MONDALE
Angry	48	30	30	48	71	16
Hopeful	60	41	87	16	34	78
Afraid	24	17	11	30	47	5
Proud	55	30	85	15	28	54
Disgusted	46	30	27	50	71	13
Sympathetic	47	35	67	26	33	58
Uneasy	46	35	30	54	73	21

FIGURE 3

Traits: How much does (trait) fit your impression of the candidate?

(% responding "EXTREMELY WELL" or "QUITE WELL")

	REAGAN	MONDALE	BUSH	FERRARO
Hard working	69	89	79	93
Decent	84	91		
Compassionate	60	79	66	80
Commands respect	79	60		
Intelligent	83	86		
Moral	82	85	80	77
Kind	76	84		
Inspiring	60	43	48	67
Knowledgeable	77	81	82	81
Sets a good example	68	66	68	68
Really cares about people like you	47	64	46	64
Provides strong leadership	71	49	55	62
Understands people like you	43	59		
Fair	58	77		
In touch with ordinary people	36	66	43	67
Religious	71	76		

GOVERNMENT SPENDING PRIORITIES

In light of your concern with the federal budget, we were interested in identifying programs in which you would like to see government spending either increased or decreased. While we know that overall, citizen demand for a reduction in the federal budget is high, there is no clear consensus among our voters as to which areas should receive a cut in federal spending support — in fact, in no area was there majority support for a decrease in government spending. Among the areas about which we inquired, a reduction in government spending for food stamps received the most support (36%), followed by a reduction in defense spending (27%), and reduction in spending for assistance to blacks (22%). Support for decreased spending in all of these areas was sharply defined by which candidate the voter supported. Support for decreased government spending for food stamps and assistance to blacks came mostly from respondents who voted for Reagan, while support for a cut in defense spending came from those who voted for Mondale.

In a number of areas, mostly dealing with social problems, there was strong voter support for an increase in federal spending: Dealing with crime (54%); spending on public schools (52%); social security (48%); medicare (46%); and government jobs for the unemployed (50%). While voters for both candidates tended to agree that spending to deal with crime should be increased, support for increased spending in the other four areas was at least 24 percentage points higher among Mondale voters than Reagan voters.



Government Should Increase Spending



Government Spending Should Remain The Same



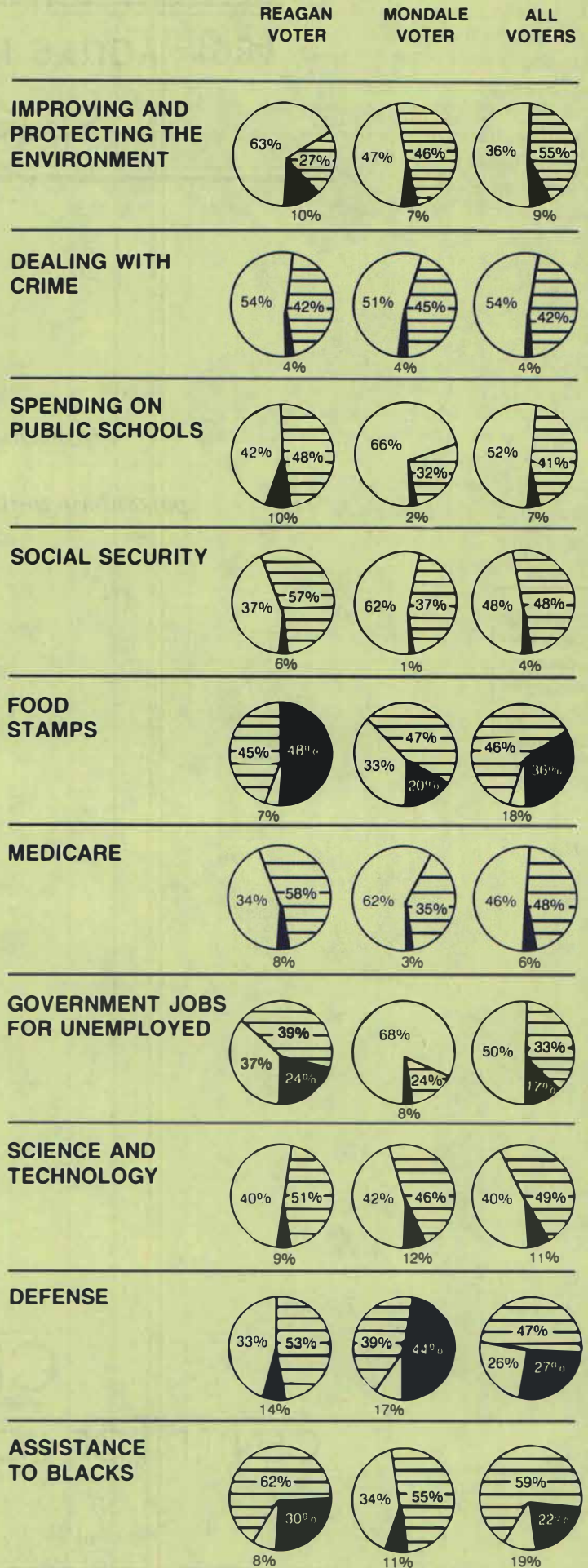
Government Should Decrease Spending

The discussion above has highlighted some of the results of our 1984 Pre-Post Election Studies. We would like to thank you again for your cooperation. If you would like any additional information or if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact us.

For further information you may write to:

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Report to Respondents

AMERICAN NATIONAL ELECTION STUDY, 1984
