



EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF KIDS VOTING IN THE 1990 STATEWIDE ELECTION IN ARIZONA

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PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Kids Voting began in 1988 as an experiment in a few Arizona precincts in the cities of Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, and Tempe to increase voter turnout of adults and encourage students to develop the "habit" of voting. Kids Voting has two major objectives. First, it is hoped that by studying the voting process during elementary and secondary school years and by going to the polls with their parents on election day, students of the Kids Voting Program will be better informed and vote in higher proportions than students not exposed to the program. Second, it is believed that because of discussions generated by the Kids Voting

was an “off-year” election and non-presidential year elections are characterized by lower turnout. Elections since the end of World War II were used because Arizona began to experience high growth rates after the war. The regression equation ($Y=a + bx$) with a slope of $-.50$ and a “Y” intercept of 101 predicted that turnout in Arizona in 1990 should have been 55.0%. The actual turnout was 3.9% higher than predicted at 58.9%.

Actual turnout in 1990	58.9%
Predicted turnout	55.0%
Difference in turnout	+ 3.9%

Survey results

While turnout was higher than predicted, it remains to be demonstrated that the increase was due solely to the Kids Voting Program. For instance, a very controversial proposition on the ballot called for the establishment of a paid Martin Luther King holiday. Perhaps the higher turnout was due to the King holiday and not the Kids Voting Program.

In order to determine to what degree the Kids Voting Program influenced voter turnout and to separate out the effects of turnout related to the Martin Luther King holiday, a statewide, Post election survey of 800 registered voters was conducted. After determining if people voted, they were asked the following questions: “Was the Kids Voting Program, in any way, a factor in your decision to vote last Tuesday?” If yes, “Was the Kids Voting Program the **determining factor** in your decision to vote on election day? That is, would you not have voted if it were not for the Kids Voting Program?” Almost six percent (5.7%) of the voters we interviewed said Kids Voting was a factor in their decision to vote; 2.6% said it was the only factor.

When those who voted on the Martin Luther King question were asked the same question: “Was the Martin Luther King holiday the **determining factor** in your decision to vote on election day? That is, would you not have voted if it were not for the Martin Luther King issue on the ballot?”, 4.2% said they went to the polls only because of the King issue. It

simple questions to their students and the children marked their responses on answer sheets. In higher grades, a separate set of questions was asked on questionnaires distributed and self-administered in individual classes.

Evaluations for children in grades K-3: Over eleven hundred children K-3 (1,112) from nine schools throughout Arizona evaluated the Kids Voting Program. They were asked two main questions. The first was, “How much did you like learning about voting in school?” Eighty percent (80%) said a whole lot, 16% choose the option a little bit, and 4% indicated they didn’t like learning about voting. When asked the second question, “Do you want to do Kids Voting in your classroom next year?”, more than ninety percent (93%) indicated they wanted the program continued.

Evaluations for students in grades 4-12 Students in grades 4-12 were asked four questions that evaluated the program: whether or not their interest in voting increased because of the program; if they felt the Kids Voting Program was worthwhile; should the program be continued in their schools; and if Kids Voting should be expanded nationwide. Two thousand six hundred and twenty-eight (2,228) students filled out questionnaires in twenty-one (21) schools throughout Arizona. Because of the large sample size, we were able to evaluate the program by grades, 4-8 and 9-12; by rural versus urban schools; and by race and ethnicity. The evaluations are shown below:

Impact of Participating in Kids Voting on Interest in Voting

	<u>increased</u>	<u>same</u>	<u>decreased</u>	<u>total</u>
All students	58%	36%	6%	100%
Grades 4-8	64%	30%	6%	100%
Grades 9-12	52%	42%	6%	100%
Rural schools	69%	28%	3%	100%
Urban schools	56%	36%	8%	100%
Anglos	65%	31%	4%	100%
Hispanics	54%	38%	8%	100%
Blacks	65%	29%	6%	100%
Native Americans	50%	43%	7%	100%

A majority of students (58%) felt the program increased their interest in voting, with young people in grades 4-8 showing more interest (64%) than those in grades 9-12 (52%). Sixty-seven percent indicated that they discussed voting with their parents frequently or occasionally because of the Kids Voting Program. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of those we questioned felt Kids Voting was either very worthwhile (43%) or somewhat worthwhile (45%). Students in the lower grades (50%) and children attending rural schools (55%) were most supportive of the program. Ninety-one percent (91%) of all students felt the Kids Voting should be continued in their schools and ninety-two percent (92%) felt the program should be expanded nationally.

Teacher evaluations of Kids Voting

One hundred and fifty-nine teachers in twenty-one schools throughout Arizona evaluated the Kids Voting Program. There were sixty-seven (67) teachers in grades K-3, sixty-two (62) in grades 4-8, and forty-four (44) high school teachers. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the teachers felt the program was either very worthwhile (44%) or somewhat worthwhile (51%). Seventy-one percent rated the curriculum excellent (13%) or good (58%) and ninety-five percent (95%) felt the program should be continued at their school and extended nationally.

	<u>teachers</u>	<u>K-3</u>	<u>4-8</u>	<u>9-12</u>
Program was very worthwhile	44%	41%	57%	15%
Program was worthwhile	51%	52%	43%	65%
Program was not worthwhile	<u>5%</u>	<u>7%</u>	<u>0%</u>	<u>20%</u>
	100%	100%	100%	100%
Curriculum was excellent	13%	10%	20%	5%
Curriculum was good	58%	59%	58%	40%
Curriculum was fair	21%	25%	17%	30%
Curriculum was poor	<u>8%</u>	<u>6%</u>	<u>5%</u>	<u>25%</u>
	100%	100%	100%	100%

CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted to evaluate Kids Voting in Arizona indicates the following:

- ☞ *There was very high awareness of the Kids Voting Program in Arizona in 1990. Ninety-two percent of the registered voters in Arizona and 96% of adults with children in grades K-12 were familiar with the program.*
- ☞ *In 1990 the Kids Voting Program increased voter turnout in Arizona by about two and one-half percent.*
- ☞ *Turnout in those precincts which had Kids Voting for two consecutive elections, 1988 and 1990, had turnout rates about two percent higher than precincts where the program was used only in 1990 indicating there may be an "incremental" effect associated with the program; that is, continuing the program over several elections may make it increasingly effective.*
- ☞ *Students, their teachers, and participating parents all rated the Kids Voting Program very highly. Ninety-one percent of the students, 95% of the teachers, and 95% of the participating parents recommended the program be continued in their schools in future elections.*