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WORKING PAPER

LANGUAGE VOTES:
Foreign Language (FL) Policy Attitudes
and the 2008 Electorate

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ABSTRACT:

Among the many issues which US voters cast their ballots in the 2008 election were candidate race, the deteriorating economy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and income taxes, among many others. Although several issues related to foreign language (FL) policy were raised tangentially, such as connected to immigration policy, few FL policy issues were raised directly in the Presidential debates, campaign platforms or political advertising. This article documents 1) changes in these policy views during the years of the Bush administration and 2) some intriguing connections between these FL policy attitudes among Obama vs. McCain voters in 2008. The data come seven FL policy questions asked in a 2008 national omnibus survey (as originally developed for the 2000 General Social Survey). Two FL issues in particular, making English the official US language and opposing non-English ballots in elections, correlated significantly with the 2008 vote, even after other strong predictors of vote were taken into account

Among the leading campaign issue areas on which US voters cast their ballots in the 2008 election were the deteriorating economy, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, income taxes, government spending and candidate race among others. Based on his detailed surveys of issue importance, Shanks (personal communication) found economic uncertainty (including jobs, deficits and tax policies), health care and general inequality to be at the top of voter concerns, followed by abortion and other cultural factors.

Although several issues related foreign language (FL) policy were raised tangentially (mainly in connection with immigration), foreign language (FL) policy issues were hardly if ever raised in the Presidential debates, campaign platforms or political advertising. This article documents some intriguing results on this "invisible" campaign issue, when contrasting the FL policy attitudes of Obama vs. McCain voters based on a national probability survey of American adults conducted in 2008.

While several national surveys by the Gallup organization or other prominent polling firms have asked FL policy questions over the years, they tend to ask only one or two questions (that are too seldom repeated), employ interviewers who are less experienced, extensively trained or monitored, and interview samples that are less carefully selected.

Likewise, there have been a number of non-national FL surveys. Based on state-level exit poll and other interview data from California and other border states, Citrin et al. (1990) described the demographic and political backgrounds of supporters of the "official English" policies. Schmid (1992) found some similar correlates among supporters of English-only policies. Tatalovich (1995) found Reagan voters and less educated voters in five states to be most in favor of official English. Ricento (1998) found greater support for official English among Republican and non-Hispanic voters in Texas. Barker and Giles (2002) examined important demographic predictors of support for English-only policies in the Santa Barbara (CA) area.

More recently, Palozzi (2006) developed a more comprehensive language policy scale (LPAS) based on 12 items, six grounded in multiculturalism and six on assimilationalism in order to achieve a more nuanced picture of public opinion on these issues. When applied to a 2002 sample of 300 registered voters (out of 2749 contacted) in Colorado and a 2003 sample of 322 Indiana University students, Palozzi found most of these respondents supported both English-only policies *and* the public use of other languages as well. His LPAS scale was found to be highly predictive of whether his Colorado voters supported a restrictive language state Amendment, far more predictive than demographic predictors of vote intent. Here neither political party nor ideology was predictive, after the LPAS score was taken into account.

Thus, the present survey and analyses allow one to put a number of the sometimes conflicting research findings about FL policy attitudes in the US into more recent and clearer perspective. First, the data come from national probability samples, and second they cover a variety of different policy issues in addition to official English. This article, then, examines how support for these policy issues changed across the years of the Bush

administration, which faced certain language controversies, particularly in the context of a raging national debate on immigration policy (which receded as an issue as the US economy and overseas wars dominated political attention). It examines whether the adoption of "official English" laws in many communities reflects broader public sentiment supporting "restrictive" FL policies.

This article, then, addresses in quantitative analyses 1) the extent to which FL policy attitudes changed since the 2000 GSS and 2) how these FL policy choices were reflected in the 2008 vote for president. It does so using evidence contained in the following tables:

1) Change: Table 2 shows whether American public attitudes have become more "restrictive" during the tenure of the Bush administration, particularly as it attempted to navigate through difficult and controversial issues on immigration and related issues. Moreover, there is a new and simpler dimensional structure underlying these attitudes.

2) Vote predictors: Table 3 then examines whether opponents of English-only or other less-open FL policies, as in some earlier studies, more likely to be found among those voting for the more "liberal" or open candidate.

3) Political orientations: Do voters who support more open FL policies differ in their vote after other political factors are taken into account, especially by their party identification (the major predictor of American voting behavior), as well as by specific issue attitudes about energy policy, terrorism and homosexuality, as examined in Table 4.
.
Before examining these questions, we turn to methodological information about the sources of data to address them.

Survey Methodology

GSS 2000:

The seven FL policy questions shown in Table 1 were first developed in the 2000 General Social Survey (GSS). The 2000 GSS was an in-home 90-minute personal survey that has been conducted at one-to-two year intervals since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago. The GSS is widely used by social scientists and policy analysts, and it is considered the premier instrument to monitor social trends and social life in the United States.

As shown in Table 1, the first item in the GSS FL module asks about making English the official US language was asked in a dichotomous "favor-oppose" format, while the subsequent six questions in four-point Likert-scale format, with response options ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (4).

Table 1: GSS/UNF Foreign Language Policy Questions

** 1. Do you favor a law making English the official language of the United States, or do you oppose such a law? (Favor, 1; Oppose, 2; DON'T KNOW)   **(-.41) ***

2) Now please tell us whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of these statements (present hand card 49):

a. Children in the U.S. should learn a second language fluently before they finish high school.   **(.16)**

b.   Bilingual education programs should be eliminated in merican public schools.   **(-.30)

c.   Speaking English as the common national language is what unites all Americans.   **(-.23)

d. Learning a foreign language is as valuable as learning math and science in school.   **(.27)**

e.   English will be threatened if other languages are frequently used in large immigrant communities in the U.S.   **(-.30)

f   Election ballots should be printed in other languages in areas where lots of people don't speak English   **(.44)**

Although asking different questions, that 2000 GSS in some ways served to update Eddy's (1980) initial detailed national survey of American's FL policy attitudes. Thus, Eddy reported 47% of 1979 survey adults thought learning a foreign language should be required in high schools (and 90% thought language courses should at least be offered in high school and about 75% in grammar schools). That contrasts with the 80% in 2008 (and 76% in the 2000 GSS) in Table 1 below who agreed that high school students "should learn a second language fluently", higher support figures perhaps because the word "required" was not used.

Robinson, Rivers and Brecht (2006) were able to use these 2000 GSS data to derive some new perspectives and insights about the state of FL policy opinions in the public. These include the significant age as well as education differences in FL opinions, their interconnection with a respondent's ability to speak a FL, and the two different and distinct dimensions that underlay them -- namely support for "English-only" policies (items 1, 2b, 2c, 2e and 2f) and support for secondary-school students taking FL courses (items 2a and 2d).

2008 UNF Election Survey:

The seven items in Table 1 were then included in a 2008 RDD national election survey conducted by the Public Opinion Laboratory at the University of North Florida (UNF) in October-November of 2008. This was a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey using Random-Digit-Dial (RDD) sampling, in which all US telephone numbers have an equal chance of selection. The interview took about 15 minutes to complete with this national probability sample of 1008 adult respondents aged 18 and older. In each selected household, one adult person was interviewed at random also using random selection procedures.

Trained interviewers hired and trained by the UNF Lab conducted the interviews. In addition to a full day general training session before hiring, interviewers went through a focused training session on the various questions and goals and modules of the present survey. Appendix A provides more details on the sample composition and further survey details.

The correlations of each item with the Obama vs. McCain 2008 vote are noted in Table 1. It can be seen that two FL issues (making English the official US language and opposing non-English ballots in elections) correlated highly significantly (r=.40) with vote, with FL proficiency for high school students showing the lowest correlation (.16) – but one that is still quite significant.

Results

As can be seen in Table 2, there was wide variation in the support for these policy positions across both years. Combining the strongly and less strongly positions in the Table 1 responses, close to or more than 70% agreed in both years that English should be the official US language (Q1), that high school students should become fluent in a foreign language (Q2b), and that FL is of equal educational value as math or science

Table 2: 2000-08 Changes in for Foreign Language Policy Questions

1.Do you favor a law making English the official language of the United States, or do you oppose such a law?

2000: Favor: 78%; Oppose: 22%

2008: Favor: 72%; Oppose: 28%

2. Now please tell us whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each of these

statements

a.   Children in the U.S. should learn a second language fluently before they finish high school.

2000 Strongly agree: 27%; agree: 49%; disagree: 22%; Strongly disagree: 3%

2008 Strongly agree: 40% ; agree: 40%; disagree: 15%; Strongly disagree: 6%

b.Bilingual education programs should be eliminated in American public schools

2000: Strongly agree: 6%; agree: 16%; disagree: 50%; strongly disagree: 28%

2008: Strongly agree:10%; agree:13%; disagree: 41 %;strongly disagree: 36%

c.   Speaking English as the common national language is what unites all Americans.

2000: Strongly agree: 26%; agree: 50%; disagree: 21%; strongly disagree: 3%

2008:Strongly agree: 39%; agree: 38%; disagree: 17%; strongly disagree: 6%

d.   Learning a foreign language is as valuable as learning math and science in school.

2000: Strongly agree: 21%; agree: 43%; disagree: 31%; strongly disagree: 5%

2008: Strongly agree: 32 %; agree: 36 %; disagree: 24 %; strongly disagree: 8%

e.   English will be threatened if other languages are frequently used in large immigrant communities in the U.S.

2000: Strongly agree: .9%; agree: 24%; disagree: 51%; strongly disagree: 16%

2008: Strongly agree: 16%; agree: 22%; disagree: 40%; strongly disagree: 22%

f   Election ballots should be printed in other languages in areas where lots of people don't speak English.

2000: Strongly agree: 17%; agree: 49%; disagree: 22%; strongly disagree: 12%

2008: Strongly agree: 18 %; agree: 30%; disagree: 27 %; strongly disagree: 25%

(Q2d); some 75% also agree and that English unites Americans (Q2c). In contrast, less than 25% agreed that bilingual education should be eliminated(Q2a) and 32-36% that immigrant use of FLs posed a threat to English (Q2e). However, the most significant change in Table 1 was the 18-point increase in the proportions opposing ballots in other languages (Q2f), from 34% in 2000 to 52% in 2008. This result stands out in relation to the relative stability or reliability found for the other six items in Table 2 (which provides further evidence of the comparability of the two surveys).

At the same time, when examined on their own in Table 2, the six Likert-scale items do show an increase in using the "strongly" response options. This is one of many indicators of more "polarized" public on FL issues. As noted below, another indicator was the finding that a factor analysis now found that the items could be grouped around only one factor or dimension. That provides a justification for our simply summing these scores on each item to employ a single pro-FL score or scale to simplify interpretation of differences by background factors on this measure, with reverse coding for the negative items in Table 1. With a score of 4 for each item pro-FL response and 1 for each anti-FL item, scale scores can range from 7 (for the most anti-FL responses) to 28)most possible FL responses).

Importantly, we see a clear break line for those born after 1975, who are more likely to support the teaching and learning of foreign languages, and less likely to support restrictive policies such as "English Only." Further work is required to assess whether this "generation gap" correlates with the greater diversity of the younger population in the US, with changes in attitudes towards immigration among this generation, or with the potential for increased contacts with diverse elements of the population among this generation. In terms of language policy, we believe that this generation gap augurs well for a richer and more dynamic FL teaching and learning environment.

Relation with the 2008 Vote: The sums on this pro-FL scale and its relation with the UNF's sample Obama vote of 55% are shown in Table 3. Higher scores here reflect more support for "open" FL policies (e.g. opposing making English the official language and encouraging of taking FL courses in high school). It can be seen that the Obama vote varied markedly, between 23% vote for those low on the FL scale and 92% of those high on the scale – a 69 point difference, as reflected in an overall .45 Beta correlation (see next paragraph).

However, these differences need to adjusted for the many different predictors of the 2008 vote, which are also related to FL opinions, using the MCA regression program of Andrews et al (1972). MCA was devised by these survey statisticians to provide adjusted figures for each category of these predictors, once the other predictors are taken into account. Basically, what the MCA program does is to "make other things equal", so that differences between men and women, for example, are adjusted for their differing age, race, education and family income characteristics . In addition, the MCA program then summarizes these differences with the use of Beta correlation coefficients, which like other correlations varies between 0 (no difference) and 1.0 (maximum difference).

TABLE 3: OBAMA VOTE BY FL POLICY SCALE SCORE*

TOTAL SAMPLE (n=777)   55%

7-11 Strong Anti-FL (66)   23%
12-14 Anti   (133)   34%
15-17 Middle (192)   47%
18-21 Pro   (127)   71%
22-28 Strong Pro-FL(142)   92%
   Strong Pro-Anti Difference=   *69 points*

99 Don't know (109)   49%

* Higher scores represent more agreement with the FL "open" items (2a, 2d and 2f) in Table 1 and more disagreement with the "restrictive" items(1, 2b, 2c and 2e).

TABLE 4: OBAMA VOTE BY LANGUAGE POLICY SCORE: MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSES

	SIMPLE	AFTER MCA ADJUSTMENT FOR →			
TOTAL	Bivariate	Party ID	ID+HOMO	ID+H+Nuke	ID+H+N+AGED
	54%	54%	54%	54%	54%
1)LANGUAGE					
1)Str Anti(n=66)	23%	45%	45%	46%	46%
2) Anti (133)	34	49	52	51	51
3)Mid+DK(294)	48	51	52	52	52
4) Pro(127)	71	59	58	57	57
5)Str Pro(142)	92	70	67	67	67
5-1=	+69 pts	+35 pts	+22 pts	+21 pts	+21pts
Eta =	.45	.16	.13	.12	.12
2)PARTY ID					
1)Str Demo (220)	97	85	84	84	82
2)Democrat(128)	82	78	78	77	77
3)Indepndnt(121)	57	56	56	56	56
4)Repblican(140)	13	15	18	18	18
5)Str Repub(142)	4	12	13	13	13
5-1=	93 pts	73 pts	71 pts	71 pts	69 pts
Eta=	.78	.69	.68	.67	.66
3) HOMOSEXUALITY IMMORAL					
1)Str agree(227)	32		47	48	49
2)Agree (115)	47		51	51	50
3)Disagree(114)	71		63	63	62
4)Str disagr(247)	78		65	64	63
4-1 =	46 pts		18 pts	16 pts	14 pts.
Eta =	.41		.17	.16	.15
4) NUCLEAR ENERGY					
1)Strong Pro(212)	35			52	51
2) Pro (201)	51			56	58
3)Dont know(100)	56			57	58
4) Anti (147)	66			54	53
5) Strong Anti(95)	78			60	59
5-1=	43 pts			8 pts	8 pts
Eta=	. 29			.06	.06
5) AGE					
18-24 (70)	**64**				**53**
25-34 (131)	**70**				**57**
35-44 (174)	**47**				**52**
45-54 (175)	**45**				**52**
55-64 (104)	**53**				**59**
65+ (148)	**54**				**57**
Young-old =	.10 pts				-4 pts
Eta=	.18				.06

The Table 3 differences are then adjusted using the MCA regression program to adjust for four other predictors of vote in Table 4, including the most important predictor of vote, namely party identification (having a .78 correlation with vote). Adjusting the FL differences for party ID does drop its correlation to .16, but that is still highly significant and reflects a 25-point difference in the Obama vote between those highly pro-FL (70%) and those highly anti-FL (45%).

The next two MCA adjustments (in columns 3 and 4 in Table 4) add two other largely invisible campaign issues (neither again being the direct subject of campaign debates) predictors of the 2008 vote in the UNF survey, namely homosexual morality (not same-sex marriage, which was a campaign issue) and nuclear energy. Of the two, homosexuality has a much higher initial correlation with the vote (.41) than energy (.29), and that continues to hold after MCA adjustment. The adjusted correlation for the single homosexuality item is about the same as for the FL policy scale (.15), but its (and nuclear energy's) addition to

Finally, the last column in Table 3 shows there is similarly little effect of adding two demographic correlates of vote, namely age and education, into the equation. Indeed, age 65+ voters emerge as more pro-Obama than 18-24 year olds after MCA adjustment (vs. being 10 points less supportive before adjustment).

Figure 1 pictorially shows this decline in predictive performance from Table 3 to the final columns of Table 4. It is possible that including other campaign issues not covered in the UNF survey would further reduce the differences in Table 4, although the homosexuality questions were powerful predictors and these did not affect the relation in any significant way.

Summary and Conclusions:

In this analysis of changes in public FL attitudes since 2000, generally little change was apparent in the direction on six of the seven FLT items, indicating the overall stability of public opinion, as well as the comparability of the two surveys. There was, however, an 18-point decline in support for printing ballots in languages other than English, one that offset the greater support for high school students taking FL courses and the decline in support for "official English". Of further interest were the several pieces of evidence pointing to more divided or "polarized" FL attitudes in the public on FL topics, despite this meager evidence of any basic shift in public sentiments.

At the same time, a parallel polarization became evident with respect to age. There appeared a clear dividing line between those born before and after 1975 in FL policy attitudes, possibly because these younger adults have been exposed in both school and work environments with those who come from other cultures and who speak other languages. These age differences become even more evident when the Table 2 data are analyzed from a cohort analysis perspective (See Appendix B).

Moreover, while essentially being a non-issue direct during the 2008 campaign, FL policy attitudes clearly are reflected in the vote for Obama. His supporters may not have had those views much on their minds when casting their ballots, but these views do reflect concerns that could well emerge if FL policy issues come more to the fore during his administration,

particularly in connection with the larger issue of immigration. Much the same holds for the bedrock issue surrounding homosexuality, views on which are also highly correlated with FL policy.

OBAMA VOTE BY FL SCOREobama vote by FL
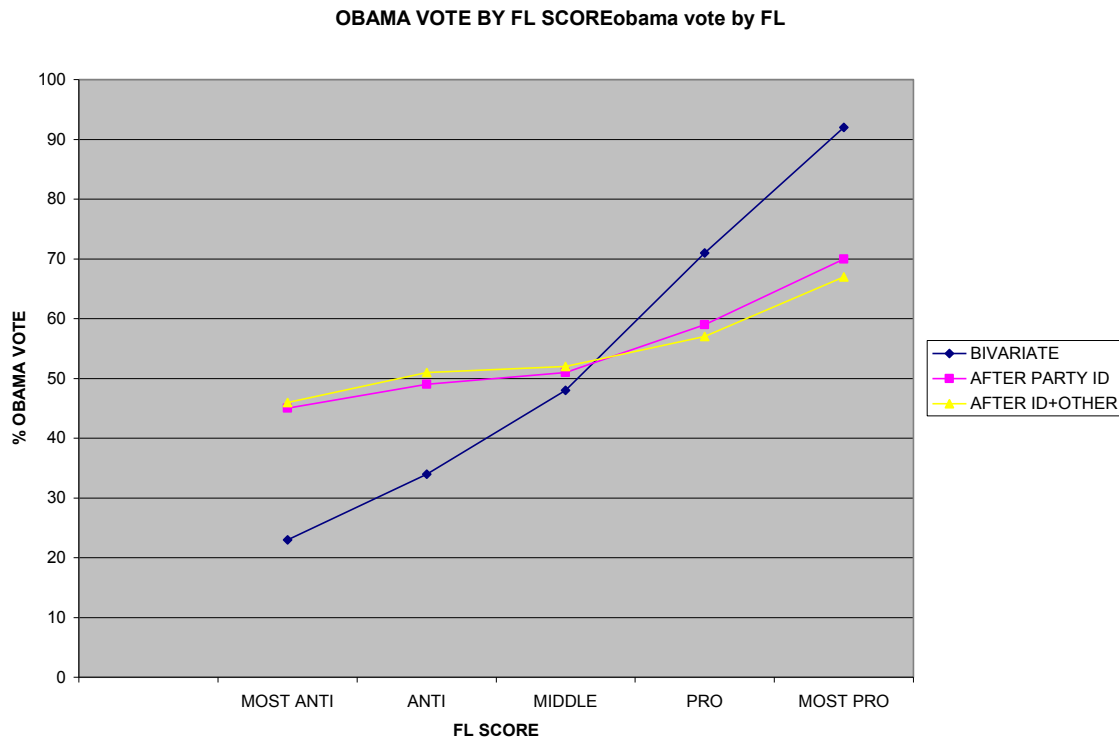
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Appendix A: UNF Methodology: October-November Omnibus Survey 2008

Overview
This survey completed telephone interviews with 1008 adult Americans. The survey was conducted by the Public Opinion Research Laboratory at the University of North Florida. The interviews, conducted in English and Spanish, were completed from November 5 through November 17, 2008. Analysis is weighted by Census Bureau data on age, education, income, marital status, employment status, race and region. The margin of error for the entire sample is +/-3.0%, with that margin of error being higher for cross tabulations.

Sample Design
The telephone samples were provided by Genesys Sampling Systems at Marketing Systems Group. These samples were drawn using standard list-assisted random digit dialing (RDD) methodology.

Procedure
Interviews were conducted from November 5 through November 17, 2008. As many as 6 attempts were made to contact every sampled telephone number. The sample is released in replicates- representative subsamples of the larger sample.

Analysis
Respondent gender, age, race, education, and income were weighted to data from the Census. Responses "Do not know" and "Refused" were removed for analysis purposes.

Sample Disposition
Table 4 below table illustrates the disposition coding for all sampled callback telephone numbers ever dialed in this survey.

Table 4: Sample Disposition (UNF October-November Omnibus 2008)

Total Numbers Dialed	14410
Business	548
Computer/Fax	1020
Cell phone	73
Other Non-Working	1448
Working Numbers	**11321**
Working Rate (%)	**78.6**
No Answer	2136
Busy	1219
Answering Machine	3197
Callbacks	396
Other Non-Contacts	48
Contacted numbers	**4325**
Contact Rate (%)	**38.2**
Refusals	3219
Cooperating Numbers	**1106**
Cooperation Rate (%)	**25.6**
No Adult in HH	4
Language Barrier	42
Ineligible by Screener Question	0
Eligible Numbers	**1060**
Eligibility Rate (%)	**95.8**
Interrupted	52
Completes	1008
Completion Rate (%)	**95.1**

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APPENDIX B: COHORT DIFFERENCES

 Cohort Analysis: In analyzing survey data like these, it is often more instructive to examine these age differences from a cohort perspective, that is following the same age cohorts across time. Thus, most people who were 25-34 in 2000 were now 35-44 in 2008, and most of those 55-64 were now 65+. From this cohort perspective, one sees much less instability in Table 5, particularly for those over age 35 – where for example all groups in the post-1975 generations show a 14-22 point increase in opposition, while those born after 1975 become *more* supportive of providing ballots in other languages. In the case of making English the official language, one sees generally small increases in support rather than the 11-point decrease found among those born after 1975 – those who were 18-24 in 2000.

 That same cohort perspective is important for the two items on the value of taking a FL in high school. On both items, there is 10-12 point increase in support among those born after 1975, in contrast to virtually no change among those born 1975 or earlier. Moreover, these positive views among those born 1975-82 are shared to almost the same extent among those under age 18 in 2000, that is those born 1982-1990. In 2008, 87% of 18-24 year olds and 88% of 25-34 year olds supported taking a FL in high school and 81% of 18-24 year olds and 78% of 25-34 year olds thought FL was as valuable as math or science.

Table 5: Cohort Differences in Foreign Language Attitudes

	YEAR	YEAR	GSS Question						
RESTRICT	2000	2008	ENGOFF	Q1	COHORT	NOBILING	Q2b	COHORT	Engunite
COHORT	N=	n=(126)	2000	2008	(-28)*	2000	2008	(-6)*	2000
18-24	187	179	73	62	-11	12	10	-2	67
25-34	276	202	67	72	5	18	16	-2	70
35-44	315	172	72	81	9	22	26	4	77
45-54	263	116	81	90	9	24	29	5	73
55-64	140	155	90	88	-2	25	25	0	84
65+	181	-155	88	88	0	39	25	-14	91
TOTAL	1262	950	77%	72%		22%	18%		76%
ETA=			0.12	0.26		0.15	0.17		0.14
SCHOOL									
			TWOLANG	Q2a	COHORT	FORLANG	Q2d	COHORT	BOREN
	n=	n=126)	2000	2008	(+17)*	2000	2008	(+13)*	1983-90
18-24	187	179	70	88	18	68	78	10	1976-82
25-34	276	202	76	75	-1	64	65	1	1966-75
35-44	315	172	76	74	-2	66	65	-1	1956-65
45-54	263	116	76	77	1	67	62	-5	1946-55
55-64	140	155	79	77	-2	59	64	5	1936-45
65+	181	-155	74	77	3	56	64	8	1900-35
TOTAL	1262	950	75%	80%		64%	77%		
ETA=			0.02	0.13		0.05	0.17		
	TOTAL								
ETA=			0.02	0.13		0.05	0.17		
	TOTAL								

* No direct comparison, since this group was less than age 18 in 2000. Differences in parentheses thus refer to difference between 18-24 year olds in 2000-2008, as shown in Table 3.