CALTECH/ MIT
VOTING TECHNOLOGY PROJECT
A multi-disciplinary, collaborative project of
the California Institute of Technology - Pasadena, California 91125 and
the Massachusetts Institute of Technology - Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

TITLE 2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections

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Key words:
2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections

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July 19, 2009
Acknowledgements

• Sponsors
  – Pew Center on the States
  – JEHT Foundation
  – AARP

• Research Team
  – Michael Alvarez (Caltech)
  – Stephen Ansolabehere (MIT & Harvard)
  – Adam Berinsky (MIT)
  – Thad Hall (Utah)
  – Gabriel Lenz (MIT)
Survey Background

- Gauging the quality of the voting experience
- Research design
  - 200 respondents contacted in every state, or 10,000 total
  - Survey in the field the week following Nov. 4
  - Pilot surveys conducted on in Nov. ’07 and Super Tuesday ’08
  - Parallel nationwide survey
    - Limited set of questions
    - 32,800 total respondents
Overall, the experience of voters on Election Day* was positive

- 90% said it was “very easy” to find their polling place
- 2% said they encountered a registration problem when they went to vote
- The average voter waited 15 minutes to vote
  - 63% said most of this time was waiting to check in
- 2% said they encountered voting equipment problems
- 82% said their polling place was run “very well”
- 67% said the performance of polls workers was “excellent”
- 70% said they were “very confident” that their vote was counted as cast

*63% of voters
Early voting* experience was very similar to that of Election Day

- 88% said it was “very easy” to find their polling place
- 2% said they encountered a registration problem when they went to vote
- The average voter waited 20 minutes to vote
  - 62% said most of the time was waiting to check in
- 2% said they encountered voting equipment problems
- 81% said their polling place was run “very well”
- 67% said the performance of polling workers was “excellent”
- 74% said they were “very confident” that their vote was counted as cast

*18% of voters
Absentee voters* also satisfied

- 2% said they encountered problems receiving their mail ballot
- 2% said they encountered problems marking their mail ballot
- 84% said they found the instructions easy to follow in marking their ballot
- 56% said they were “very confident” that their vote was counted as cast
- Of those who reported not voting, 2% reported a problem requesting, but not receiving, an absentee ballot.

*19% of voters
Voter identification presents issues

- Do voters have identification?
- How uniformly are voter identification laws implemented?
Almost all voters have identification

• 95% of all voters have a drivers license
  – 97% for Whites
  – 84% for Blacks
  – 90% for Hispanics

• 83% have a drivers license that is unexpired, has the voter’s name, and has the voter’s current address
  – 86% for Whites
  – 66% for Blacks
  – 74% for Hispanics

  – 64% for ≤ 30 yrs old / 86% for > 30 yrs old
  – 70% for ≤ 5 yrs in current residence / 92% for > 5 yrs
Voters are asked for photo ID at varying rates on Election Day

- 16% of voters in the 23 “HAVA only” states say they were required to show a photo ID
- 80% of voters in the 3 “photo ID required” states say they were required to show a photo ID

- Racial differences in rate of being asked in “HAVA only” but not “photo ID required” states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HAVA only</th>
<th>Required</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lines a issue in 2008 election

- Lines longer for early voting (23 min.) than for Election Day voting (15 min.)
- Almost 2/3 of voters report that most of the wait was to check in, not to gain access to a machine or booth

- Lines longer for Blacks (27 min.) than for Whites (13 min.), Hispanics (13 min.), Asian Americans (10 min.) or Native Americans (9 min.) on Election Day
  - Racial differences consistent with 2006 CCES, Nov. ’07, and Super Tuesday studies
Confidence measures indicate lingering partisanship

- 75% of Election Day, 73% of early voting, and 60% of absentee voters state they were “very confident” their vote would be counted as cast
  - Democrats more confident: 76%D vs. 67%R
  - Blacks and Hispanics more confident: 78%B vs. 76%H vs. 69%W
  - No relationship between type of voting machine used and confidence
- Confidence strongly correlated with partisanship of state
  - Democrats more confident in Democratic states
  - Republicans more confident in Republican states
  - Independents less confident in battleground state
Democratic respondents

Confident that vote will be counted as cast (4="very confident")

Pct. of vote cast for Obama

Democratic respondents
## Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Pct. supporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Require identification in order to vote</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make election day a holiday</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatically register everyone to vote</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move election day to weekend</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow registration at polls</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absentee ballots via Internet</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run all elections by mail</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

• Substantive findings
  – Positive voting experience for most voters
  – Voter ID
  – Lines
  – Confidence

• More research is to be done
  – Final report posted at Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project web site: vote.caltech.edu