

Report from the Voters

*A First Look at 2004 Election Data
and
Common Cause Agenda for Reform*



December, 2004

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Introduction

The 2004 election did not go smoothly, despite the fact that a president was chosen without court intervention, and without the chaos that many observers feared. Thousands of voters, however, waited in line for hours to cast ballots, and requested tens of thousands of absentee ballots that never arrived. Others lacked the most basic information about how to register to vote. These and other problems are just as serious as the hanging chads of the 2000 election, and must be addressed.

On and before Election Day 2004, Common Cause joined with other organizations to monitor voters' experiences and connect voters with their elections officials. We took in nearly 210,000 calls from a national voter alert line, 866-MYVOTE1, run also by the Fels Institute for Government at the University of Pennsylvania, the Reform Institute, the Hispanic Voter Project at Johns Hopkins University and the National Constitution Center. We had more than 1,000 monitors at polling places nationwide, with a concentration in Ohio, Colorado, and New Mexico. We collected 1,700 voters' stories through our website, and have an unprecedented amount of non-partisan data on what happened to voters on Election Day.

The technology behind the 866-MYVOTE1 line was also used as the backbone of another voter assistance line operated by the Election Protection Coalition, a non-partisan collaboration involving more than 100 national, state, and local public interest groups. That line, 866-OURVOTE, connected voters with thousands of lawyers across the country helping voters with problems on Election Day. Both phone lines featured a first-of-their-kind automated poll locator. This report includes information gathered through this phone line as well as from all of Common Cause's efforts. The report provides a preliminary analysis of what we found and concludes with a look at some of the reforms needed to fix our nation's dysfunctional voting systems.

The report also highlights some of the problems in Ohio as a starting point and describes the information Common Cause and others received on Election Day. In Ohio the reports from voters focused on registration problems, access to polling places (long lines, etc.), and absentee ballot problems. Voters also reported problems with voting machines and the use of provisional ballots.

Common Cause will be working with other advocacy organizations to correct the problems we found in our voting system in the 2004 election. In Congress, state legislatures and local election offices, our members and activists will be working to ensure that the next election will make our democracy proud.

*A comprehensive analysis of the MYVOTE1 data will be conducted by the Fels Institute of Government at the University of Pennsylvania in coordination with all members of the MYVOTE1 consortium.

Problems in Ohio on Election Day

The state of Ohio was the key battleground in the presidential election. The 119,000-vote margin between the presidential candidates and the lack of a high-profile post-election legal battle caused some observers to dismiss predictions that Ohio would be “the Florida of 2004.” But it did expose deep flaws in our electoral process:

- Lack of adequate voting machines resulted in many voters having to wait two or three hours to vote. There were also reports of voters waiting as long as seven, eight or even nine hours.
- Registration issues continued to prevent people from voting. County registrars had difficulty updating lists when faced with high numbers of new registrations, voters had difficulty confirming their registrations, and registered voters arrived at the polls on Election Day only to find they did not appear on the rolls.
- Voting rules continued to change up to and into Election Day. Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell ruled that voters who requested absentee ballots – but had not mailed them – would not be allowed to submit a provisional ballot if they went to a polling place to vote. A District Court overturned this rule on the afternoon of Election Day. As a result, absentee voters who never received their ballots were turned away at the polls if they arrived in the morning, but were more likely able to be given a provisional ballot if they showed up in the afternoon.
- Most Ohioans voted on infamously inaccurate punch-card voting systems. While these machines will be gone by the next election, there is little doubt that thousands of votes were lost because of the punch-card related errors. Of the more than 95,000 ballots where the vote for president was not counted, more than 70,000 were from punch-card precincts.

In addition to these statewide issues, there were some local issues that raised concerns:

- At a precinct in Franklin County, a computer recorded 3,893 extra votes for

President Bush. The mistake was discovered when the precinct posted 4,258 votes for Bush despite showing that only 638 voters cast ballots. According to reports, one of the cartridges from the three voting machines in the precinct generated a faulty number when fed to the reader. The cartridge was retested and showed no problems. The malfunction remains unexplained.

- In Warren County, located outside Cincinnati, the county office building where ballots were being counted was locked down on election night barring reporters and the public from viewing the vote count. County officials claimed that the building was closed because of a tip from a FBI agent claiming that there was a potential terrorist threat. The FBI has denied giving such a specific warning.

400,000 Voters Call Phone Lines

Nearly 210,000 people called the 866-MYVOTE1 voter alert line to seek information about their polling place, make a statement about their voting experience, and/or connect to their local elections boards. Nearly 97,000 of those calls were made on Election Day, while more than 111,000 calls were made in the week prior and days immediately after Election Day. More than 102,000 calls were from voters seeking information about their polling place location, and about 55,770 voters left recorded statements describing their voting experience. Nationwide, almost half of the callers who attempted to connect to their local board of elections either before or after Nov. 2 failed to do so. On Election Day, 55 percent of callers who attempted to reach their board of elections failed to connect.

Combined, the two nationwide voter phone lines, 866-MYVOTE1 and the Election Protection hotline, received more than 400,00 calls from voters. On Election Day alone, the two phone lines took in more than 200,000 calls. Before Election Day, about the same number of voters called with questions and comments, mostly about registration, polling place location and early voting.

The 866-MYVOTE1 line allowed voters to transfer to their local elections board for help. In some counties, a significant number of calls transferred to the local elections board were not completed,

indicating a lack of responsiveness on the part of local elections officials. In some cases, the low response rate may have been due to calls being made outside normal business hours, a problem that will need to be addressed to accommodate busy lives and differing work schedules of many voters.

The 866-MYVOTE1 line also allowed voters to record a statement about their experience and volunteers recorded 866-OURVOTE callers' problems, either electronically or by hand. This report describes some of the problems reported to both lines from Ohio and New Mexico. In addition, it incorporates the data gathered by an extensive poll-monitoring program Common Cause helped organize in both states as well.

Common Cause and Votewatch

Another element of Common Cause's election monitoring efforts was a collaboration with Votewatch, a non-partisan, non-profit organization committed to free and unfettered elections. The two organizations operated a volunteer-driven election monitoring and reporting system that incorporated three methods for collecting data:

- Teams of trained volunteers administered post-voting surveys regarding polling place operations to a statistically relevant sample of voters in New Mexico and Ohio;
- Thousands of voters across the country completed a one-page survey on their own voting experience;
- And hundreds of voters went to their polling place to gather "end-of-the-day" tallies as they were posted in precincts.

Our Election Day effort mobilized about 1,000 individuals across the country. In New Mexico, volunteers monitored 43 precincts in Bernalillo County and gathered 905 surveys from voters leaving the polls. In Ohio, volunteers monitored 14 precincts in Cuyahoga County and gathered 212 surveys from voters leaving the polls.

This data was combined with information collected from one-page surveys completed by more than 800 voters nationwide. A team of survey research experts is completing a comprehensive analysis. The full report of the Votewatch program will be completed in the near future.

What We Heard From Voters

This section of the report combines select information from the 866-MYVOTE1 and 866-OURVOTE data from Ohio and New Mexico. As mentioned above, neither individual phone line, nor the two lines together can be considered a comprehensive representation of the problems voters had in those states, or across the country. It is likely that there were many voters in both states

Total Calls to Phone Lines

Phone Line	Election Day	Total-to-Date
866.MYVOTE1	96,783	208,524
866.OURVOTE	108,868	205,877
Total	205,651	414,401

who had problems described below, plus other problems not reported to us. If anything, we have underestimated the problems on Election Day. We do know that there is a need for more expansive monitoring programs, possibly by the government, to collect useful data on our nation's voting systems.

In Ohio and in New Mexico, voters called proportionately more about problems with registration and poll access issues, such as long lines and polls closing off schedule. Many of the calls about registration were from people who expressed a genuine desire to vote but simply did not know what to do. People did not know where to register, how to register, or even what it meant to do so. Just days before Election Day, both 866-MYVOTE1 and 866-OURVOTE received thousands of calls from people looking for this basic information, indicating a need for better resources and outreach to citizens about the mechanics of voting and registration.

Absentee ballots were another major problem reported by voters to both voter phone lines. Most of the calls were from people who had requested a ballot, and were still waiting to receive it. In fact, the reporters who broke the story about the missing absentee ballots in Palm Beach, Florida, used information collected on 866-MYVOTE1 to confirm that Broward County had failed to mail nearly 60,000 absentee ballots. Many callers also complained of problems with provisional ballots and voting machines. The remaining problems fell into the categories of intimidation/suppression, ballot problems, and identification problems. Each of the problem types is described below in more detail

with a sampling of calls from both 866-MYVOTE1 and 866-OURVOTE.

Registration

"I went down to the precinct, which I voted in 2000. My name was not on the list and I check with the board of elections they told me to go to my last address where I moved from seven years ago. I went to that voting place and my name wasn't there. I called back again, then they said, I was cancelled, saying that I didn't vote since 1996. I voted in 2000 so I should have been on there if not I would have known then because I was at the voting place. So I just want to know what's going on, they cancelled me on and I should have been on there. I voted in 2000. Thank you."

- Dwayne F., Summit County, Ohio

Calls to 866-MYVOTE1 indicated the registration was one of the biggest problems for voters on Election Day. Many voters expressed frustration with the registration process and some apparent inaccuracies in polling places. Most states face a 2006 HAVA deadline to establish statewide databases. Ensuring the fairness and accuracy of those voter lists will be a major challenge for elections officials.

Some of the specific problems callers reported include the following:

- Laverne C. in Miami County, Ohio, said she went to the poll with her registration card with the proper address on it, but was made to vote with a provisional ballot. She said she had called her election board and got no answer.

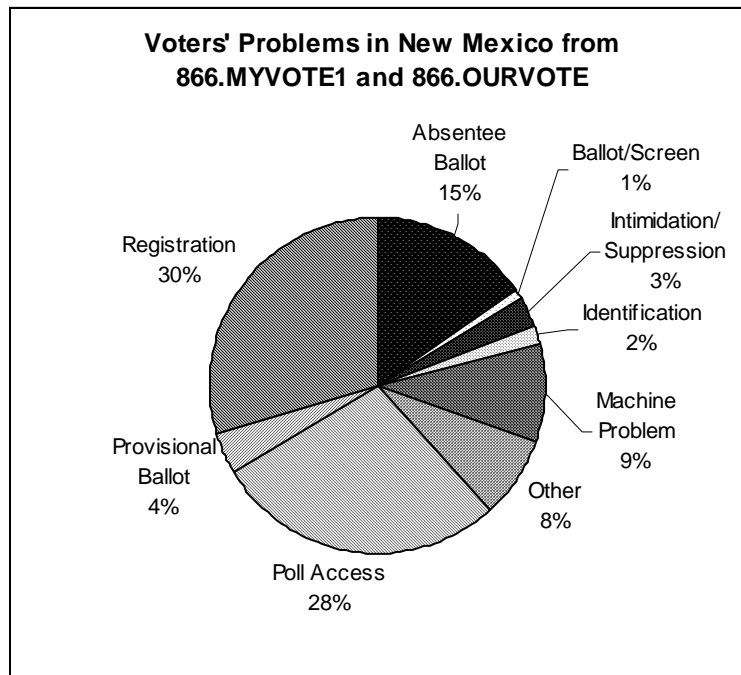
- In Summit County, Ohio, a first-time voter went to vote with proper identification but was not on the list. She said part of the list was apparently missing.
- Another voter in Summit said he was not listed at his neighborhood precinct and was advised to drive to his old polling place. He did this but was not on that list either. He

called and found that he his registration had been cancelled because he had not recently voted, even though he had voted in 2000.

Absentee Ballot

"I'm in Las Vegas. My Name is Louis A. I have talked to the board of elections in Ohio two or three times. I've faxed them twice. I've waited on hold several times. I've sent an application and filled it out for my absentee ballot and no comment from anybody. I want to

vote. I desperately want to vote and I would like to get my ballot."



Since the last presidential election, the number of states that have eased absentee voting restrictions, essentially making it an early voting option, has increased to 26. Many election officials have been promoting absentee balloting to avoid congestion on Election Day. As a result, a significant and growing number of voters used absentee ballots this year.

With the new popularity of absentee ballots, however, there has been increased scrutiny of the mechanics of casting and counting them. Like other election procedures, there are inconsistent rules between states on the handling of absentee ballots. In a number of states, political parties may collect absentee voting applications, and some even let the parties collect the completed ballots. Allowing completed ballots to be held, even for a short time, with political parties has raised concerns about votes being changed or thrown out. In other states,

party operatives are allowed to help voters fill out their absentee ballots, raising concerns about intimidation or undue influence on the voter.

A major story of the presidential election focused on problems with absentee ballots in Broward County, Florida. Tens of thousands of absentee ballots were held up or lost in the mail. Many voters had difficulty voting on Election Day because they were on record as requesting an absentee ballot, but never received one. Many of the calls to 866-MYVOTE1 and 866-OURVOTE from Ohio and New Mexico reflected the same type of problems with absentee ballots, including:

- In Greene County, Ohio, Ida B. reported that her husband was in the military, registered in Alabama but stationed in Ohio. She said she mailed his absentee ballot three weeks before the election and called to check on it, but said no one was helpful.
- A voter in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, reported requesting an absentee ballot three times beginning in September and not receiving it.
- One caller in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, reported being told that absentee ballots were only available to "government employees and persons whose employer would not let them take time off from work to vote on Election Day."

Long Lines and Other Access Problems

"I am calling on behalf of my daughter that is voting in Gambier OH. She just called me and told me that she has waited 7 1/2 hours to vote, 11,000 people on two machines. I just thought you would

like to know that. It's seems a little extreme to me." - John T., Knox County, Ohio

Long lines at precincts were a huge problem nationwide. In Ohio, there were reports of voters at one precinct waiting until 2 a.m. to cast their vote. In Florida, some polling places recorded lengthy

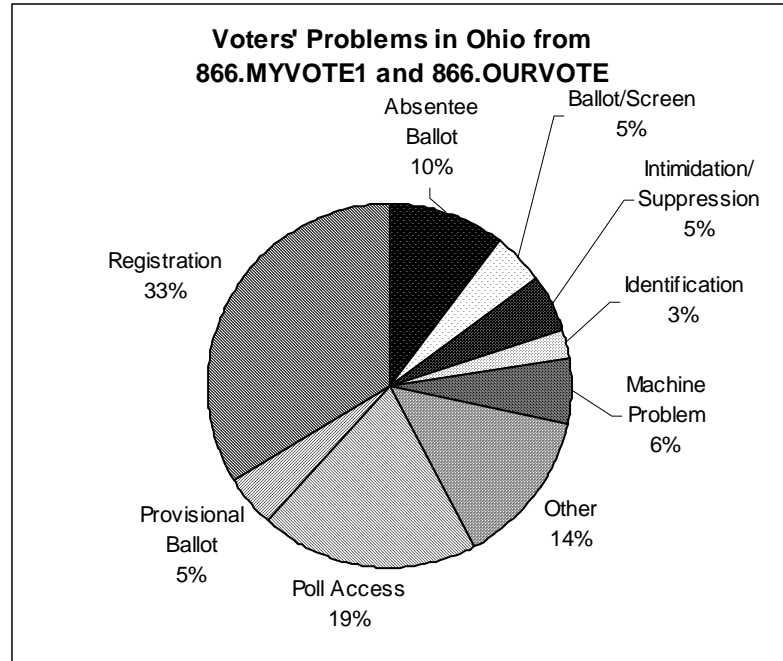
lines for early voting as well. In many polling places, people reported insufficient numbers of voting machines to service the large turnout of voters. Standing in line for several hours in order to vote has been characterized as a new form of "poll tax."

As has been well documented, both parties had massive get-out-the-vote efforts

the 2004 elections. In many states, voter turnout exceeded 1992 and 2000 records. In many places, exceptional turnout forced polling places to remain open later, although some callers reported polling locations closing early or voters being turned away. There is a need to ensure that more voting machines are made available and there are enough poll workers to handle long lines and that voters have options such as mail-in or early voting.

Some specific problems callers reported on Election Day include the following:

- Rachel H. in Knox County, Ohio, said: "No parking spaces, no handicapped spaces, pouring rain. Watched people leave. I thought that was very wrong."
- In Franklin, Ohio, a voter reported: 1) Not enough voting machines 2) 20 different judge elections. 3) Poll workers not enforcing time limit. 4) Two hour delays - lines around the block. 5) Previously had more voting machines. 6) Saw people leaving due to long lines and rain.



- In Franklin, Ohio, a voter reported that 45 minutes after polls opened, no precinct captain had shown up and no one could vote.

Shortly after the voter left the polls to go to work, ballots that had been at the polling site all along were found by Board of Elections staff members.

Ballot Problems

“As I was placing my vote on the card, I checked it out to make sure there were no hanging chads. All my votes that I had punched in were one column to the right. I thought maybe that there was a problem with the voting both I was in. After I reported it, they checked it out, they tried it another one, they gave me another one, I voted again on another ballot, and it came out all right. However, one of the people I saw in line said that it happened to someone else. Now if people aren’t checking the columns to which their numbers are supposed to match, I am concerned that they may have an error in their ballot.” - Ramona K. in Stark, Ohio

The infamous “butterfly ballot” in 2000 in Palm Beach County, Florida, led a significant numbers of voters to accidentally vote for the wrong candidate and focused concern on ballot design and how voting can be made more user-friendly.

This year, voters called about issues including illegible ballots or an insufficient number of ballots available at a precinct. In some locations, there was no language assistance for voters who did not speak English. Some voters, particularly in Ohio, found the punch card system confusing or inoperable. Other callers expressed frustration and anger at some poll workers who were unable or unwilling to help. Some examples from 866-MYVOTE1 and 866-OURVOTE include:

- In Bernalillo County, New Mexico, a caller did not understand the voting machine and eventually cast her ballot before she had completed it.
- In Medina County, Ohio, Linda S. reported: “I realized after I voted that the ballot had no place to vote for president. Maybe the pages were stuck together...”
- A voter in Lucas County, Ohio, reported being told to come back to vote later because there were no more ballots.

Intimidation/Suppression

“Hi, I’m calling about things that were going out in people’s mailboxes saying that Democrats were to vote tomorrow and Republicans were to vote today and not all the news media is telling people the correct things that these things are going around and are incorrect. I just wanted to know why that wasn’t in the news – that people were sending these things out. On all the news media channels.” – Voter in Franklin County, Ohio

Perhaps the most unfortunate Election Day problems concerned reports of incidents of intimidation or suppression of voters. There have been numerous examples reported in states across the country of systematic attempts at misleading groups of voters. Some cases have included misinformation about the time or place of voting. In some states, even the parties were involved in activities meant to intimidate voters. A federal restraining order was issued by a U.S. district court in response to activity aimed at intimidating American Indian voters in a county in South Dakota. The order barred poll workers from writing down license numbers and following the voters out of the poll place.

Other instances include individuals knocking on doors and telling people they could not vote because of their criminal record. Several flyers and handouts have been found instructing people that unpaid parking tickets disqualify them from voting. Common Cause spoke on Election Day with an Ohio woman from a minority community who said that rumors around her neighborhood were that if anyone with an outstanding warrant or ticket went to vote, they would be arrested.

Common Cause heard numerous reports of voter intimidation and other attempts to suppress turnout. Some examples of voter intimidation and suppression reported on the Election Day phone lines include the following:

- In Franklin County, Ohio, Kristin P. reported that all voters were turned away due to a judge not showing up with the voter registration book.

- Also in Franklin County, Brian H. said he was turned away for wearing a “Vote or Die” T-shirt.
- In Cleveland, a poll monitor reported a police car with flashing lights parked outside a polling place, waiting to tow cars. The monitor told the police officer that he might be intimidating voters and said the police officer replied: “People who would be intimidated shouldn’t vote”.

- A voter in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, recently changed her name and was flagged as problematic. She was told to report to Corey County where she was told she wasn’t on the roll either.

Identification

“To vote at the O’Leary Police Station as a Democrat, they’re making you produce your identification cards, and on your voter rights it says that they may not ask you to produce any type of identification card. That’s at the O’Leary Police Station in O’Leary Ohio.” – Voter in Lorain County, Ohio

HAVA established limited new ID requirements, which stipulated that first time voters who registered by mail would be required to present some form of identification. Some states went further and required all voters to show ID. In our calls, it appears that local elections officials misunderstood either HAVA or state regulation with regard to ID requirements and applied them inconsistently or incorrectly. There were, for example, reports people, including poll workers, asking voters for identification.

Some examples of the problems voters reported about identification requirements are as follows:

- In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, a caller reported a poll worker refused to allow a woman and her daughter to vote because they had the same name. The woman said that if both of them could not vote, neither of them would and left.
- Another caller from Cuyahoga County said the precinct judge required her to provide confirmation of her address when she was not a first time voter. The precinct judge would not let her give proof or state the last 4 digits of her SSN. The judge would not let her vote and did not offer her a provisional ballot.

Voting Machines

“When I voted at Kaiser High school today, the ballot did not fit correctly into the voting machine and the girl came up and told me that I had to smash it in there. I felt uncomfortably with that, I feel like I did not vote correctly.” - John D. of Montgomery, Ohio

While elections officials generally expressed satisfaction with the use of electronic voting, there were some notable problems and this technology will require improvement and further scrutiny. In Ohio, an older electronic voting machine inexplicably added 4,000 additional votes for Bush. In North Carolina, a newer machine lost 4,500 votes, an error that may force the state to run new elections for two statewide offices. In Maryland, a citizens’ group, True Vote MD, stationed poll workers in a number of precincts and observed dozens of problems with voting machines.

There has been much attention paid to the problems with punch-cards voting systems, particularly in Florida in 2000 and since then to the security and reliability of the electronic voting machines that many jurisdictions purchased to replace punch cards. Our Election Day phone lines logged many calls describing problems with voting systems of all types, indicating a need for further improvement of the design and management of voting equipment. Voters reported poll workers beating on voting machines with their fists and kicking the machines because they would not work properly. Some specific examples include:

- In Lucas County, Ohio, a voter reported that the machine that scans the completed ballot was broken. Had been broken since 1:15 p.m. (Voter was there at 2:45 p.m.) The caller, who voted earlier in a different precinct, did not personally experience the problem. But while her mother was voting, this voter watched as poll workers told people to put their completed ballots to the side because the machine was broken.
- In Franklin County, Ohio, a voter went in and tried to vote for president, but nothing

lit up even though he pressed an option. Pressed "vote" and the machine went to the next screen. Complained to official and was told that there was nothing they could do.

- A voter Lucas County, Ohio, reported wanting to write-in a presidential candidate but was told that if she did the machine would not be able to read the remainder of her selections. Said she was basically forced to vote for a presidential candidate not of her choosing.

Provisional Ballots

"This is Judy. My son registered in his government class in High School, and when he went to vote today he was not permitted to vote and was not given a provisional ballot. I'd like to know why he was unable to vote. They said that he was not registered but he registered in class. This is a right, a constitutional right. And I am extremely upset at what happened." - Voter in Hancock, Ohio

One of the most prominent features of the Help America Vote Act was requirement that voters not on the voter list be allowed to cast a provisional ballot, which would be counted if the voter was later determined to be eligible.

However, HAVA did not establish national standards for the use of provisional ballots. Requirements for using these ballots varied across the country, and even within each state. For example, a precinct in Illinois allowed people who voted at the wrong polling place to submit provisional ballots, while in a nearby county they were not permitted. In Ohio especially, the issue of when a provisional ballot would be counted was the subject of intense litigation just prior to Election Day.

Before Election Day, Ohio's Republican Secretary of State, Kenneth Blackwell, ruled that provisional ballots cast at the wrong polling place would not count. Democratic party lawyers filed suit against the ruling but in the end, Blackwell's ruling stood – although confusion over the handling of provisional ballots extended into Election Day. After the election, the Democratic Party filed a lawsuit with the state regarding the counting of 150,000 provisional ballots, saying

the state did not have uniform standards for counting these ballots.

Some of the problems callers reported with provisional ballots on Election Day include the following:

- In Medina County, Ohio, a voter went to the incorrect polling place 20-30 min before closing but was told he could vote provisionally. At head of line, however, at 5 min to closing he was told he could not vote with provisional ballot, and that he would have to go to correct polling place but it was too late.
- Karen M. in Clermont County, Ohio, was told that her registration was lost, so she was given a provisional ballot and was then told that it wouldn't be counted. She said the ballot was thrown in a box under a table.
- In Trumbull County, Ohio, Pam B. didn't vote in the last election and was told that Ohio law states that if you do not vote you are not registered anymore. She wasn't aware of that and feels that this should be made known to the public.

What Needs To Be Done?

There is still work to be done analyzing information gathered on Election Day and determining what are the best solutions to the problems we encountered. This section of the report outlines key issues and what needs to be done.

Reauthorize and Strengthen the Voting Rights Act

The next Congress will have no more important task than to extend the historic Voting Rights Act, which expires in 2007. This law is the bedrock of protection for minority voters and must be strengthened and extended. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been extended by Congress in the past - the last time for 25 years. While the most egregious and obvious forms of discrimination were eliminated by this Act, we continue to see insidious efforts to keep minorities from the polling place.

Address the Problems Voters Face in Registration

Registration must no longer be a barrier to voting. In 2000, an MIT/CAL Tech study estimated that 3 million voters were disenfranchised because of registration problems and registration problems appear to have been the most frequently encountered problem in 2004. Too often, lengthy pre-election deadlines and voter list mistakes disenfranchise voters. As a starting point, current laws must be followed in the spirit in which they were intended - to enable eligible voters to cast votes that are counted.

Election Day registration should become a national standard.

The numerous problems with registration, including destruction of registration cards, nitpicking requirements intended to disqualify voters, and the inadequate implementation of the Motor Voter Act eleven years after its enactment are all reason to implement reforms such as Election Day registration.

There should be national guidelines for registration, not a hodge-podge of local and state requirements that often lead to the disenfranchisement of voters.

Enforce Laws Prohibiting Voter Suppression/Intimidation

The U.S. Department of Justice and state and local authorities must have in place programs to protect Americans from efforts to intimidate voters at the polling place and before the election.

The Justice Department as well as state elections officials must make monitoring and defending the right to vote a top priority.

Government agencies need to make strong statements about protecting the rights of voters on Election Day and prosecute illegal activities intended to intimidate voters.

While it is important that only eligible voters are allowed to vote, it is also important that political parties and other advocates not engage in activities such as systematic and arbitrary challenging of voters intended to intimidate voters and disrupt elections.

Local and state election officials should allow international and nonpartisan election observers to observe polling places without prior notice or permission, provided they do not disrupt Election Day.

Develop Uniform Provisional Ballots Standards

Provisional ballots must be fully implemented as a meaningful safety net for voters when there are problems with registration or ID requirements.

Voters should be allowed to cast a provisional ballot even if they have to vote in wrong precinct. Every provisional ballot cast by an eligible voter should be counted. There must be uniform standards for counting these ballots.

Poll workers must be fully trained on the use of provisional ballots and must inform voters about their right to cast a provisional ballot.

Reduce Partisanship in Election Administration

Government officials in charge of running elections should not be engaged in partisan political activities at any time.

Where elections officials are appointed, the appointment process should be free of partisan considerations and the election offices should operate in an independent and nonpartisan manner.

Fix, Replace, Test, and Maintain Voting Machines

The nation still has not fixed the machinery of voting. Millions of Americans voted on discredited punch card or lever machines. About one-third of voters used electronic voting machines that are unreliable and insecure. Elections officials need to step back and take another look at what is the best technology for voting.

All systems need better testing, maintenance, and independent certification. All systems must be auditable. The process for testing and certification must be open, and computer security experts should be allowed access to the voting machine computer codes to strengthen the security of the systems and prevent tampering.

We must ensure that the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and National Institute for Standards and Technology have sufficient funding for setting standards for certification of voting systems.

Electronic voting machines need a voter-verified paper trail. Voting machines must allow disabled voters to be able to vote privately and independently.

Develop and Implement Comprehensive Poll Worker Training and Recruitment Programs

Poll workers are the backbone of the nation's voting system. But too often, at the polling place, poll workers fail to apply established laws and procedures, often because of a lack of training. Government and voters rights advocates must work together to develop a new model for the critical task of staffing polling places on Election Day.

The federal Election Assistance Commission and other elections agencies must be sufficiently funded and given authority and direction to make poll worker training and recruitment a top priority.

Models for citizen involvement, such as the current system for jury duty, should be considered for elections.

Poll workers must be trained to ensure that voters with disabilities have access to the polling place. Polling places must be accessible - too often they are not.

Fully Implement the Voter Database Provision of HAVA

As most states face a 2006 Help American Vote Act (HAVA) deadline for establishing statewide voter databases, we must ensure that all registered voters are in fact on official voter lists and that the process of establishing the databases is open to the public.

Voter databases must be accurate and they must not be subject to sweeping purges of voters that often eliminate active, eligible voters.

Voters should easily be able to confirm their presence on the voter rolls by phone or on the Internet.

The technology must be open, must be rigorously tested, with vendors subject to restrictions on partisanship or other conflicts of interest.

Adopt flexible voter ID requirements that do not have the effect of disenfranchising low-income and young voters.

Requiring an ID as a prerequisite for voting can be a barrier to voting, especially for low-income, minority or young voters.

ID requirements should reflect the lives of some voters who move more often, do not drive, or simply do not have the types of ID required in some states.

Increase federal, state and local funding for elections.

There is a need for a long-term commitment to funding our elections at the federal, state and local level.

HAVA needs to be fully funded. Funding for election machinery and administration provided in HAVA was the first time the federal government has help fund elections. But by raising standards without fully funding HAVA, Congress and the Administration have increased the burden on state and local governments.

Funding is necessary not only for voting machines, but for other critical needs such as voter education, poll worker training and voter databases.

Ease the process of re-enfranchisement

Millions of Americans cannot vote because states either permanently deny them that fundamental right or make it difficult to restore. The right to vote should be restored to people who have been convicted of a felony and have served their time in prison.

Voting is generally the only right denied to rehabilitated individuals. Because voting is integral to being a productive member of society, America should be encouraging rehabilitated felons to vote, not prohibiting them.

Re-enfranchisement should be automatic, and individuals who have paid their debt to society should not be required to take additional actions to restore

their right to vote.

voters confront no barriers to voting and that they can be confident their vote was counted.

Increase Voter Education

Voters need more information about voting — easily accessible, widely distributed material on their rights as voters and the mechanics of voting.

While voters have a responsibility to be informed, it is the responsibility of elections officials to reach out and ensure that voters are fully informed.

Voting is a right that should not be undermined because a voter does not know exactly how to operate a particular voting system.

Expand Election Day: Absentee/Early/Mail-In Voting/Election Holiday

The turnout in this year's presidential elections was encouraging and exciting. But the U.S. still has one of the lowest voting participation rates in the world. We should continue to knock down another barrier to voting - a lack of time - by expanding the ways and the time when people can vote.

We need to expand the hours of polling places and make early voting available in more jurisdictions, particularly on weekends. People who are working two jobs, long hours, or have childcare and other responsibilities may not be able to vote during the 12 or 15 hours that polling places are open on Election Day.

States should look to reforms such expanded mail-in and easy absentee voting, or making Election Day a holiday.

Conclusion

We learned on Election Day that our democracy's most critical element, our system of voting, remains troubled and many Americans continue to experience difficulty navigating a system that falls far short of our view of ourselves as the world's greatest democracy.

This report was first look at the data gathered by Common Cause and other organizations and will, along with forthcoming reports, provide the basis for pressing ahead with new efforts to reform our voting system and make certain that in future elections