

VOTING IN 2010: Ten Swing States

LOUISIANA

While Louisiana does have some good policies in place, many of its laws and procedures are of concern, and there is no particular area of voting in which Louisiana sets an especially high standard, unlike other states in this report. Louisiana has not been the focus of many comprehensive election studies, but this year a competitive Senate race and a couple of close House races provide the opportunity to examine Louisiana's elections more closely. The state appears to not be forcefully implementing the National Voter Registration Act, neglecting the responsibility to register the high number of low income voters who reside in Louisiana. Moreover, the state's highly questionable voter purge practices subsequent to Hurricane Katrina continue to reverberate, and how the state manages its voter list is worth watching.

POLITICAL OUTLOOK

- In the US **Senate** race, US Sen. David Vitter (R) is running for reelection and is facing a challenge from US Rep. Charlie Melancon (D). Polls have fluctuated but Melancon has kept the race competitive.
- The New Orleans-based 2nd House District is expected to have a closely-contested race.

OBSTACLES TO VOTING

- Voters must **register 30 days prior** to the election, potentially leaving many voters out of the process.
- Louisiana has experienced an 88 percent decline in **public assistance registrations** since initial implementation of the National Voter Registration Act – the seventh steepest drop in the nation.
- Laws regarding voter **challenges** are troublingly unclear. Any voter registered in the state may make a challenge, and once challenged, an individual's right to vote is left entirely to the discretion of the majority of the election commissioners at the polling place, with little guidance provided to the commissioners regarding how to make such a determination.
- Election officials do not conduct any formal **outreach for immigrant or language minority voters**, despite the rising number of naturalized citizen voters in the state. **There were 61,952 naturalized citizens in Louisiana as of 2007 and probably a good deal more today. Only 37,084 of "New Americans" – naturalized citizens and their children -- were registered to vote in the state as of that year.**
- A 2007 purge program removed 21,000 names from the **statewide voter registration list** when officials compared the names of Louisiana voters with lists from other states. Although the Secretary of State's office eventually restored many names in the vicinity of New Orleans that they originally struck, list maintenance programs in Louisiana should continue to be monitored.

EXEMPLARY VOTING LAWS/ PROCEDURES

None

ARIZONA

COLORADO

ILLINOIS

KENTUCKY

LOUISIANA

MICHIGAN

MISSOURI

NEVADA

NORTH CAROLINA

OHIO

Demos



WHAT THE CHIEF ELECTIONS OFFICER CAN DO BEFORE ELECTION DAY

- The Chief Elections Officer is required by law to **implement the NVRA** and should coordinate with state public assistance agencies to ensure that all clients are receiving the registration assistance they must get under that statute.
- Provide clear instructions to elections commissioners as to the criteria regarding the voting rights of voters whose **eligibility is challenged** at the polling place. Ensure citizens know of ramifications for frivolous, fraudulent or discriminatory vote caging and challenges.
- Work with community organizations to conduct more voter **outreach to immigrant and language minority voters** and post Spanish language translated information and materials on the website as soon as possible.
- Ensure that all activities related to the maintenance of the voter registration database fully comply with the **National Voter Registration Act**.
- Establish a clear system for detecting misinformation campaigns and a plan for how the office will **respond** to them to ensure voters have the true information immediately.

In advance of the mid-term elections, Common Cause and Dēmos will release a new report that finds election policies in 10 swing states could disenfranchise voters and impact election results. The report, “Voting in 2010: Ten Swing States,” looks at Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, and Ohio, summarizing each state’s practices, and providing a set of recommendations for improvement.

To view the full report, visit **demos.org/swingstate**
or **commoncause.org/swingstate**.

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