

New Survey Suggests that Voter IDs Are Not the Problem

American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management Sampled Registered Voters in Three States

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WASHINGTON, D.C. (Jan. 9, 2007) – Based on a random sample of registered voters in Indiana, Mississippi and Maryland, a new study by American University's Center for Democracy and Election Management (CDEM) finds, surprisingly, that only 1.2 percent of registered voters lack a government-issued photo ID, and more than two-thirds of all registered voters in the three states feel that the electoral system would be trusted more if people had to show an ID to vote.

The full report, ***Voter IDs Are Not the Problem: A Survey of Three States*** is available online at <http://www.american.edu/ia/cdem>.

“In brief, the fears that ID requirements could disenfranchise many voters appear unfounded simply because almost all registered voters have photo IDs,” said Professor Robert Pastor, co-director of CDEM. “Our report notes that the laws and the application of ID requirements have not been implemented uniformly and gradually, and this has fostered the impression that it is designed to disenfranchise. States could transform what was perceived as a problem into an opportunity by sending mobile units to actively register voters and provide them free photo IDs.”

The survey indicates that a very small percentage of registered voters will be adversely affected by ID requirements. The surveys also show that nearly a quarter of the registered voters in the three states lack confidence that their votes will be counted accurately, and an even greater number perceive that fraud is more widespread than experts believe.

Additional highlights of the survey and the report include:

- The issue of showing a photo ID as a requirement of voting does not appear to be a serious concern in the three surveyed states. Almost all registered voters have an acceptable form of photo ID available (e.g., driver's license, passport, military ID or some combination of these documents). About 1.2 percent of registered voters do not have a photo ID, but half of those have documents proving citizenship, and most of the states have provisional or absentee ballots or other exceptions that could permit people to vote.
- Registered voters without photo IDs tended to be female, African-American, and Democrat. However, that number of registered voters in our survey was too small (24 of 2,000) to draw definitive conclusions about this group. A much larger problem among poor and minorities is not registered voters without IDs, but those who are not registered.
- More than 97 percent of all registered voters in the three states surveyed could produce proof of citizenship – either a birth certificate, a passport, or naturalization papers.
- A quarter of all respondents lack confidence that their votes will be counted accurately.
- Nearly one-fifth of registered voters saw or heard of fraud at their own polling place, and an even larger number – 64 percent of all respondents - reported hearing of fraud elsewhere.

- More than two-thirds of respondents believe the U.S. electoral system would be more trusted if voters were required to show a photo ID.
- Nearly all – 96 percent – of voters in this study said showing a photo ID would not make them less likely to vote.
- Approximately 80 percent of voters in this study would support a national photo ID if provided free by the government.

Since the 2000 election, one of the most contentious issues in election administration has been voter identification requirements. Beyond the minimum national requirements defined in the “Help America Vote Act of 2002,” twenty-seven states have passed laws requiring or requesting some form of identification from voters at the polls on election day. This week the Supreme Court is hearing oral arguments about an Indiana state law that requires a photo ID.

Opposition to voter IDs has come largely from those who fear that this requirement will disenfranchise voters who do not have IDs or would find it difficult to acquire them. But they were unable to locate a single individual in Indiana who was prevented from casting a ballot because they lacked an ID. This survey suggests why. Only 1.2 percent of registered voters in the three states surveyed lack a photo ID, and in the Indiana survey, only 0.3 percent lack a photo ID.

CDEM organized the Commission on Federal Election Reform, chaired by former President Jimmy Carter and former Secretary of State James A. Baker, III, and issued a report in September 2005 with 87 recommendations on ways to improve the electoral process. The Commission sought to bridge the gap between Republicans who supported IDs as a way to eliminate electoral fraud and Democrats who feared IDs could disenfranchise voters. The Commission recommended using the “Real ID card” for voter identification and having states play affirmative roles in registering new voters and providing them free photo IDs. This two-part proposal was designed to increase the integrity of the ballot and widen access to voting.

“Voter IDs Are Not the Problem” recommends that states implement ID requirements gradually and uniformly and with significant funding to widen the registration base. The authors of the study are Robert Pastor, co-director of the CDEM and professor at American University; Robert Santos, senior institute methodologist at the Urban Institute; Alison Prevost, project manager of CDEM; and Vassia Gueorguieva, junior fellow of CDEM. CDEM commissioned a survey of registered voters from NuStats, a research firm in Austin, Texas. The firm interviewed a total of 2,000 registered voters, divided about equally among the three states.

The Center for Democracy and Election Management, a center within American University’s School of Public Affairs, educates students and professionals on best practices in democracy and conducts research on the management of elections. It serves as a venue for public policy discussions and provides an institutional base for international scholars to study and teach on democratic processes. CDEM has conducted election reform projects in Nigeria, Mexico and in the Middle East.

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