



the Presidential Commission  
on Election Administration



# Election Administration: A Review of the Literature and a Strategy for Further Research

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Making Voting Work for  
Voters



Common Sense Non-  
Partisan Solutions



Election Administration as  
Customer Service

# How Far We Have Come

- 2000 Election and Help America Vote Act represent a watershed in the study of the mechanics of U.S. election system.
- Immediate focus turned to questions of “residual votes” – ballots cast but not counted as votes – due to technological malfunction, especially by punch card machines.
- Since 2000, substantial decline in residual votes due to improved balloting technology: In 2008, residual vote rate was near 1%.
- However....

# Problems Remain

Despite technological improvement, votes get lost “in the system” at other points in the process:

- **Registration problems** that prevent voters from voting
- **Wait times** that burden voters and discourage turnout
- **Military, Overseas and Absentee Ballots** that are never received, correctly or timely cast, or counted
- **Provisional ballots** that fail to be counted
- **Ballot design** that causes voters to misvote or undervote
- **Language Difficulties** that lead to registration and voting failures
- **Unaccommodated Disabilities** that lead to greater difficulty in registering and voting

# Goals Identified in Executive Order

Promote the efficient administration of elections:

- To ensure that eligible voters have the opportunity to cast their ballots without undue delay
- To improve the experience of voters facing other obstacles in casting their ballots, such as members of the military, overseas voters, voters with disabilities, and voters with limited English proficiency.

# Specified Factors that Affect the Achievement of the Goals of the EO

Promote the efficient administration of elections:

- **To ensure that eligible voters have the opportunity to cast their ballots without undue delay**
  - Management of polling place, poll workers and voter rolls
  - Voting machine capacity and technology
  - Ballot simplicity and voter education
  - Provisional ballots
- **To improve the experience of voters facing other obstacles in casting their ballots**
  - Members of the military
  - Overseas voters
  - Voters with disabilities
  - Voters with limited English proficiency
  - Absentee voters
  - Victims of natural disasters or emergencies

# Data and Research Challenges

- No census of all eligible voters to evaluate their voting experience or reasons for not voting.
- Highly decentralized and spotty data provision at local level on the basics of voting and elections (total ballots, machine error rates, etc.).
- No national repository or reporting standard for election data.
- Difficulty in defining and assessing effect of single factor in geographically variant “election ecosystems”

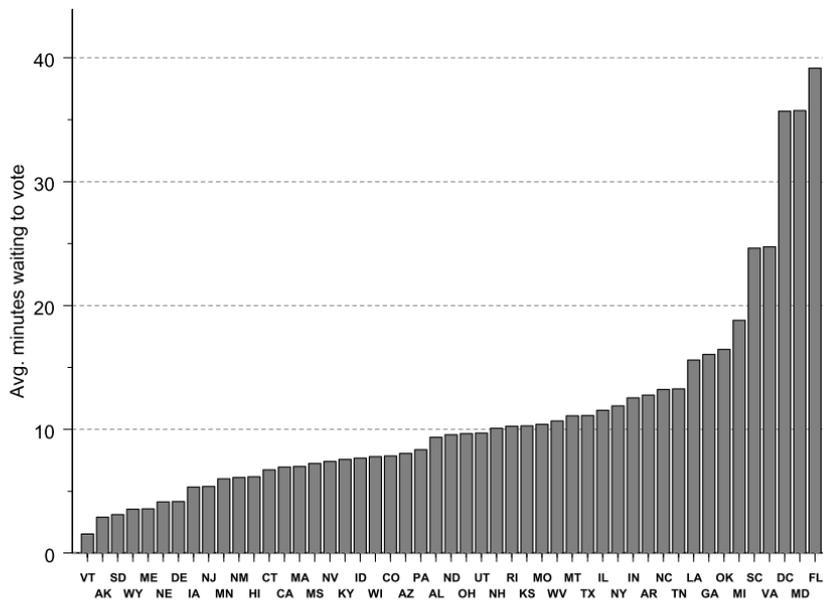
# Research and Data Sources

Therefore, we rely on:

- Sample surveys of the population, such as
  - Census Current Population Survey Election and Voting Supplement (CPS or EVS)
  - Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES)
  - Survey of the Performance of American Elections (SPAEE)
- Surveys of election administrators
  - Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Surveys: Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS)
  - State-specific datasets
  - Data provided by national associations of election administrators
- Incident reports from groups and campaigns
- Qualitative research: e.g., interviews with election administrators

# Waiting to Vote

Figure 1. Average time waiting to vote, 2012.



Source: CCES and SPAE, 2012.

Source: Charles Stewart, Waiting to Vote in 2012

Table 1. Frequency distribution of wait times to vote, 2008 and 2012

	2008	2012
Not at all	36.8%	37.3%
Less than 10 minutes	27.6%	31.8%
10-30 minutes	19.0%	18.4%
31 minutes – 1 hour	10.3%	8.6%
More than 1 hour	6.3%	3.9%
Average	16.7	13.3
Standard deviation	31.4	27.3
Standard error	0.2	0.2
N	18,836	30,124

Source: CCES, 2008 and 2012.

Although most voters do not wait in long lines, several million voters waited for more than two hours in 2012.

# Who waits longer to vote?

- Early voters
- Urbanites
- Racial minorities
- People who live in jurisdictions that had wait times four years earlier

Table 2. Average waiting times to vote, by population density of respondent's ZIP code, 2012.

	Average wait time		
	Election Day	Early voting	Total
1 <sup>st</sup> quartile (least dense)	5.9 (2,588)	4.9 (686)	5.7 (3,274)
2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile	9.5 (6,347)	11.4 (2,312)	9.9 (8,659)
3 <sup>rd</sup> quartile	12.7 (7,038)	21.5 (2,594)	14.9 (9,632)
4 <sup>th</sup> quartile	16.0 (6,527)	24.3 (1,986)	17.7 (8,513)
Total	12.0 (22,500)	17.9 (7,578)	13.3 (30,078)

Table 7-1: Lines for early and Election Day voters

	Early	Election Day
No line	33.46	44.21
Less than 10 min.	27.27	26.86
10 - 30 minutes	20.71	15.80
30 minutes - 1 hour	11.52	8.87
More than 1 hour	7.05	4.26

# Potential Causes for Long Waits

- 1. Large numbers of people arriving to vote at the same time.**
- 2. Too few points of service**
- 3. Length of time it takes to vote**

# Factors that Can Influence Wait Times

## 1. Large numbers of people arriving to vote at the same time

- Length of voting period
- Length and schedule for voting on election day(s)
- Alternative ways to vote

## 2. Too few points of service

- Polling places
- Pollworkers
- Pollbooks
- Voting machines/ballots

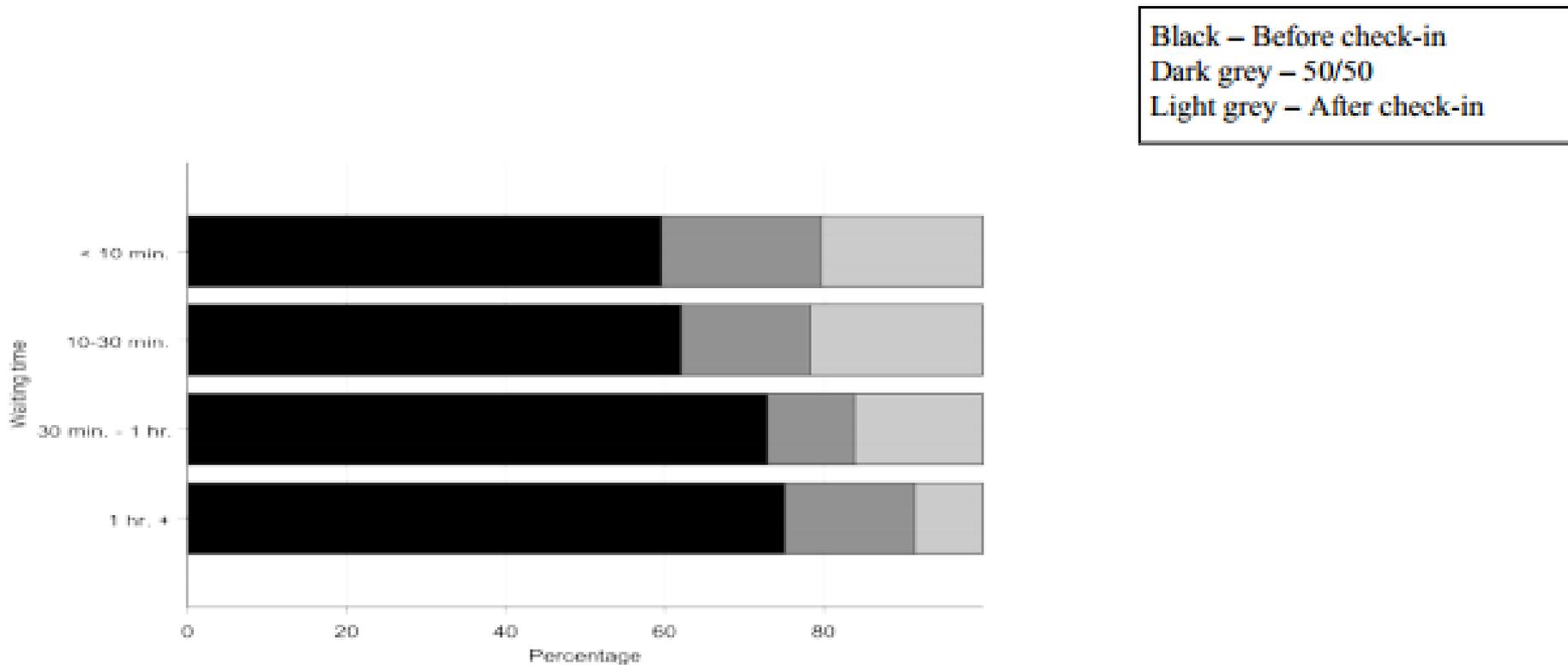
## 3. Length of time it takes to vote

- Time it takes to check someone in, confirm registration status, print/distribute a ballot, vote the ballot, and confirm vote.
- Complexity, usability and length of ballot
- Inaccuracies and lack of usability of poll books and registration lists
- Voter or pollworker confusion



# At what stage in the voting process do people wait

**Table 6. Wait Times Before, During, and After Initial Check-In**



Source: SPAE, 2012<sup>18</sup>



# Poll workers and Polling Places

- 878,000 poll workers (in 43 reporting states) and 132,000 polling places; roughly seven per polling place (EAVS 2008)
- Training:
  - Requirement vary considerably by jurisdictions 18 states leave poll-worker training entirely to local jurisdictions, 22 develop training materials for every jurisdiction, and 10 have training programs that combine state-mandated curriculums with local training programs. (Pew (2007))
- Recruitment:
  - Harder in large counties than in smaller (NaCo 2006)
  - Source of recruitment varies by jurisdiction size with political parties more likely to recruit as jurisdiction gets smaller. (NaCo 2006)
  - Roughly 45% of jurisdictions report difficulty in recruiting sufficient pollworkers (2010 EAVS)
- Pay:
  - Varies considerably by jurisdiction: \$85 to \$225 for 12 to 16 hour days (Pew 2007)



# Pollbooks and Registration Lists

Ansolabehere and Hersh (2013) (2010 data)

**Table 5-1. National Summary Statistics**

Number of Listed Registered Voters	185,445,103
Missing Address Information	224,046
Predicting Undeliverable	6,507,871
Missing Birthdate	24,501,377
Predicted Deceased	1,836,837
Predicted as Deadwood	6,740,264
Missing Registration Date	2,984,683
Records without Missing Address, Undeliverable, Deceased, or Deadwood Flags	169,317,778



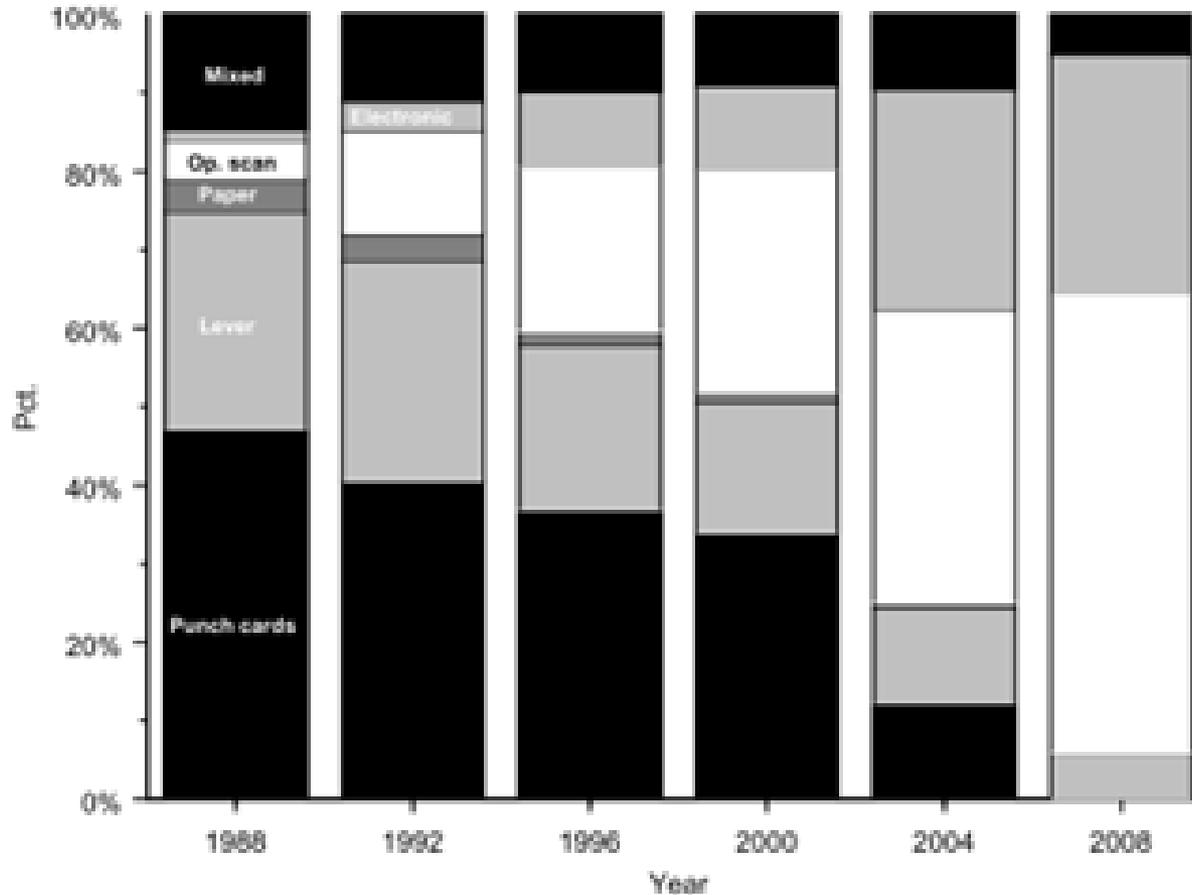
# Accurate lists as bedrock for polling place efficiency

Usability and accuracy of registration lists/poll books feed into polling place management:

- Longer waits as pollworkers struggle to match names
- More provisional ballots if names do not match lists
- Greater likelihood of late or unmailed absentee ballots if addresses are inaccurate



# Shifts in Voting Technology (EDS)



Mixed blessing: Shift to electronic voting lowers residual votes but also, all else equal, is associated with longer wait times. (Stewart 2013)



# Ballot Usability: length and complexity

**Reductions in lost votes due to technological improvement offset somewhat due to design problems**

- **Ballot length** – *average* general election ballots have 14 contests plus referenda
  - Typical ballots have between 11 and 90 contests including referenda
  - Most items on the ballot are local (about 70% of the contests) (NIST 2006)
- **Referenda word count and reading level** – on average, each referendum is 100-150 words long, written without regard to reading level (NIST 2006)
- **Rejections due to usability:** Over 400,000 absentee and provisional ballots rejected from 2008 to 2010 due to voter errors. (Brennan Center 2012)



# Ballot Usability: design issues

When there is / are	Voters
split contests across columns	overvote
responses on both sides of names	overvote
formatting is inconsistent or too consistent	undervoting
instructions are complicated or lacking	make mistakes
no instructions for for correcting ballots	lost votes
multiple contests on the same screen	undervote



# Voter Education

**Table 11.5. Availability of Specific Voter Information on State Web Sites**

Does web site have:	Available	Unavailable	Total
Online registration*	22	78	100% (N=50)
Polling place locations**	94	6	100% (N=50)
Registration Verification*	82	18	100% (N=50)
Absentee ballot information**	96	4	(100%) (N=50)
Confirmation that absentee ballot is counted**	31	69	100% (N=50)
Provisional voting information	72	28	100% (N=51)
Confirmation that provisional vote is counted***	34	66	100% (N=49)

\*North Dakota is excluded because it does not have voter registration

\*\*Oregon is excluded because it uses an all mail system

\*\*\*Minnesota and Idaho are exempt from provisional voting because of their same day registration policy.

Atkinson in Burden and Stewart (2013)



# Provisional Ballots

- Both a solution and a problem:
  - prevent outright disfranchisement
  - but high rates of casting and rejection may signify something awry in the electoral system.
- 2,100,000 provisionals in 2008; 62% were counted (1.7% of all votes counted). (EAC 2008)
- Four states account for 2/3 of provisional ballots: Arizona, California, New York and Ohio.
- States use provisional ballots for different reasons: Higher rates (4x) of provisional voting and acceptance among states that had provisional voting pre-HAVA and (3x) that give provisionals to voters who requested an absentee ballot



# Provisional Ballots

## WHY PROVISIONAL BALLOTS ARE REJECTED

This represents data for 464,647 rejected ballots.  
See state notes for further details.

### REASONS WHY PROVISIONAL BALLOTS WERE REJECTED NATIONWIDE

Voter not registered in state

45.3%

Other/miscellaneous

31.3%

Ballot cast in wrong precinct

11.3%

Problems with provisional ballot administration

6.0%

Ballot cast in wrong jurisdiction

3.4%

Insufficient identification

1.2%

Already voted

1.2%

NOTES: Percentages do not add to 100 percent because not all categories of reasons why provisional ballots were rejected are included. Problems with provisional ballot administration include (but are not limited to) no signature on the provisional ballot application or envelope, a non-matching signature, incorrect or incomplete forms, no ballot in the envelope or more than one ballot in the envelope.

SOURCE: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009

## PROVISIONAL BALLOT SUBMISSION RATES

Provisional ballots submitted as a percentage of total ballots cast for president in the November 2008 election.

### STATES WITH TEN HIGHEST RATES

Arizona	6.61%
Alaska	6.27
California	5.89
DC	5.53
Utah	4.45
Ohio	3.63
Kansas	3.25
New York	2.66
Colorado	2.17
Maryland	1.94

### STATES WITH TEN LOWEST RATES

Wisconsin	0.01%
Vermont	0.01
Wyoming	0.02
Maine	0.04
Connecticut	0.04
Kentucky	0.05
Michigan	0.08
South Dakota	0.09
Delaware	0.10
Hawaii	0.11

NOTE: Wisconsin, Wyoming and Maine allow election day registration.

SOURCE: Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009

# To improve the experience of voters facing other obstacles in casting their ballots:

- Members of the military
- Overseas voters
- Absentee ballots
- Voters with disabilities
- Voters with limited English proficiency
- Victims of natural disasters or emergencies



# Military Voting Problems

## **Difficulty registering at correct address**

- Twice as likely to experience registration problems as general population
- 77% registered (FVAP 2008) but often at wrong address

## **Difficulty receiving ballots on time**

- 17% of registered active duty military said they requested an absentee ballot but did not receive it. (FVAP 2008)

## **Difficulty casting ballot (wildly different estimates)**

- FVAP (2008): 54% of military personnel cast ballots
- 13.7% of UOCAVA voters cast ballots.

## **Difficulty returning ballot on time**

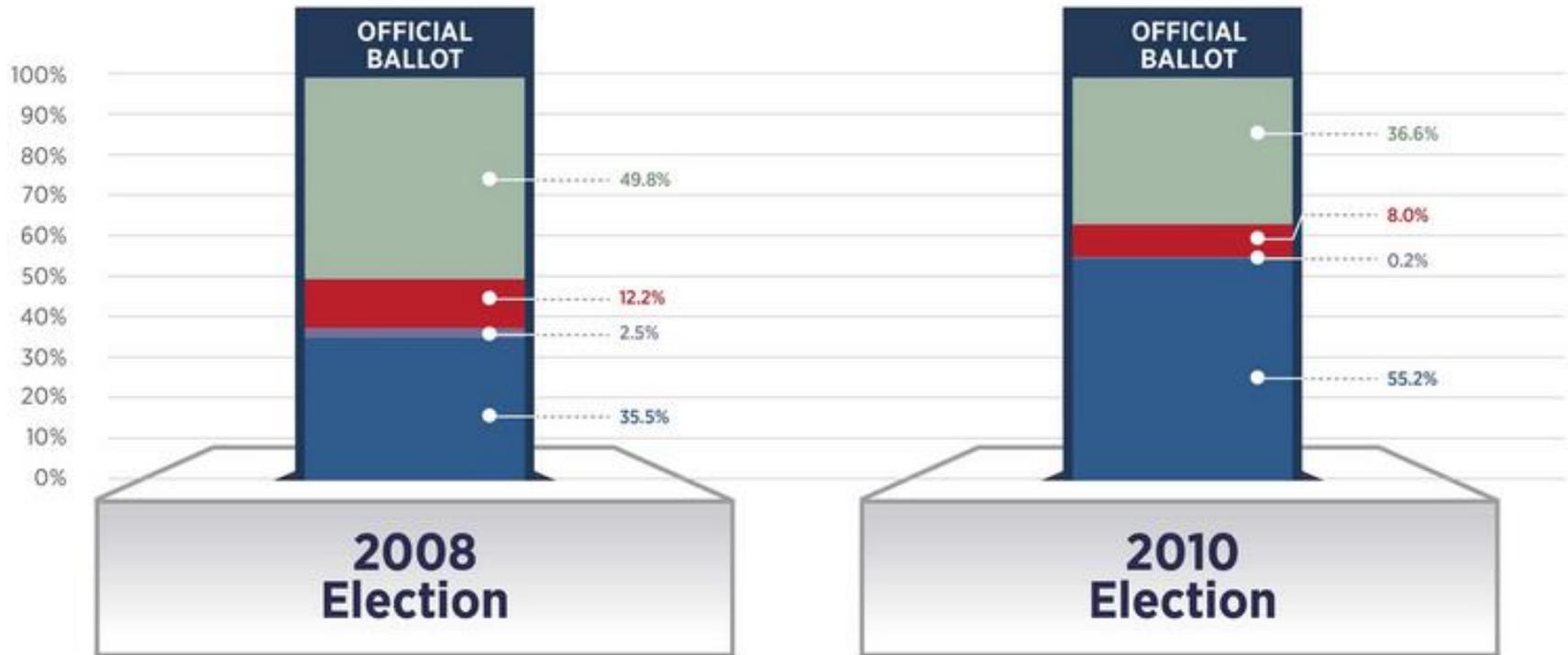
- 91% of the general population returned absentee ballots, but that percentage fell to 62% of military personnel (FVAP 2008, pre-MOVE Act)

## **Difficulty in getting ballots counted**

- 6% of UOCAVA votes not counted (compared to 2% of domestic absentee ballots).



# Reasons for UOCAVA Ballot Rejection – Before and After MOVE Act



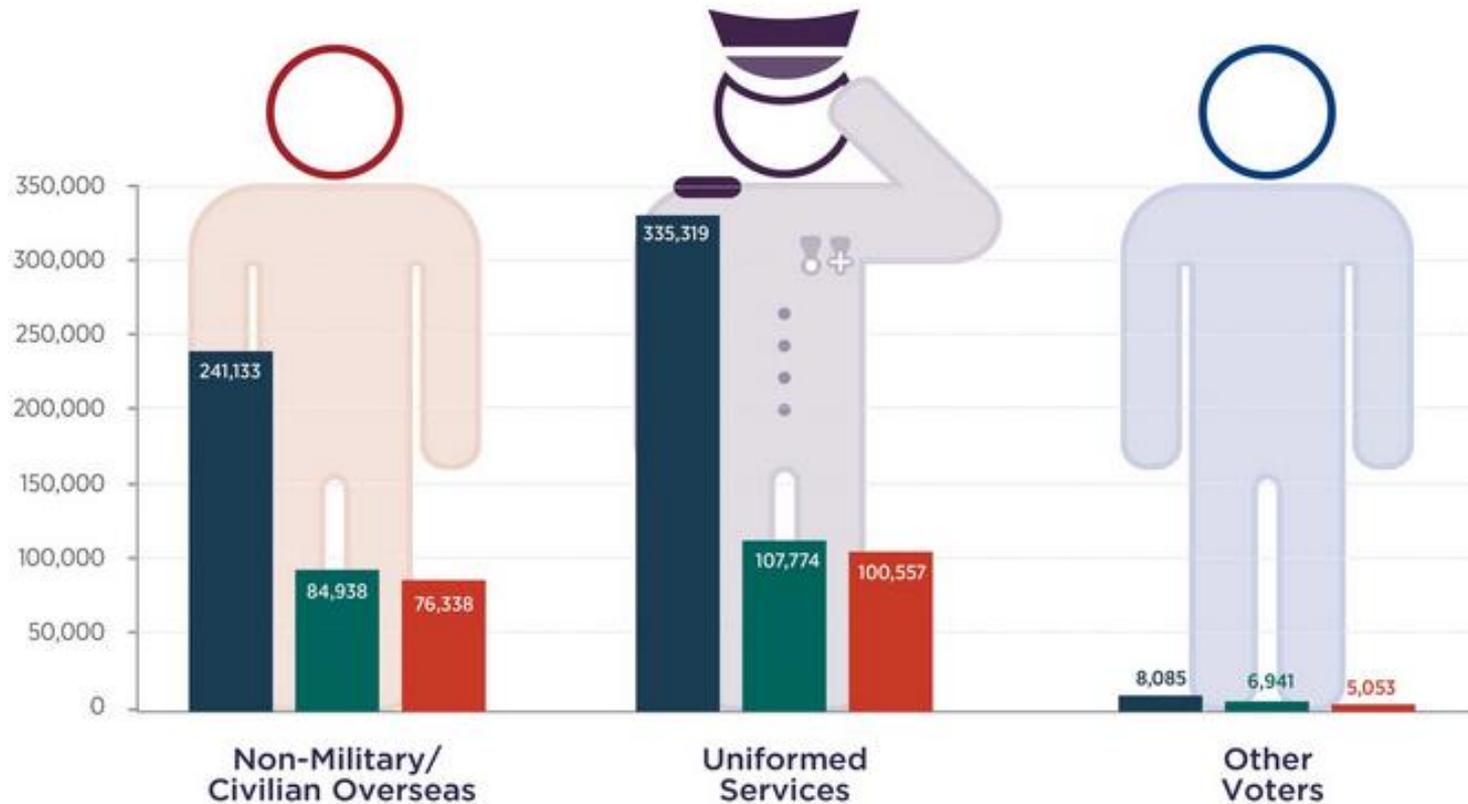
- Not Received on Time or Missed Deadline
- Problem with Voter Signature
- Ballot Lacked a Postmark
- Other

Source: U.S. Election Assistance Commission  
2010 Election Administration and Voting Survey  
Questions B14a-f, [www.eac.gov](http://www.eac.gov)

Note: This graphic does not include the rejected ballots that States could not categorize.



# UOCAVA Ballots Transmitted, Submitted, Counted



Source: EAC (2010)



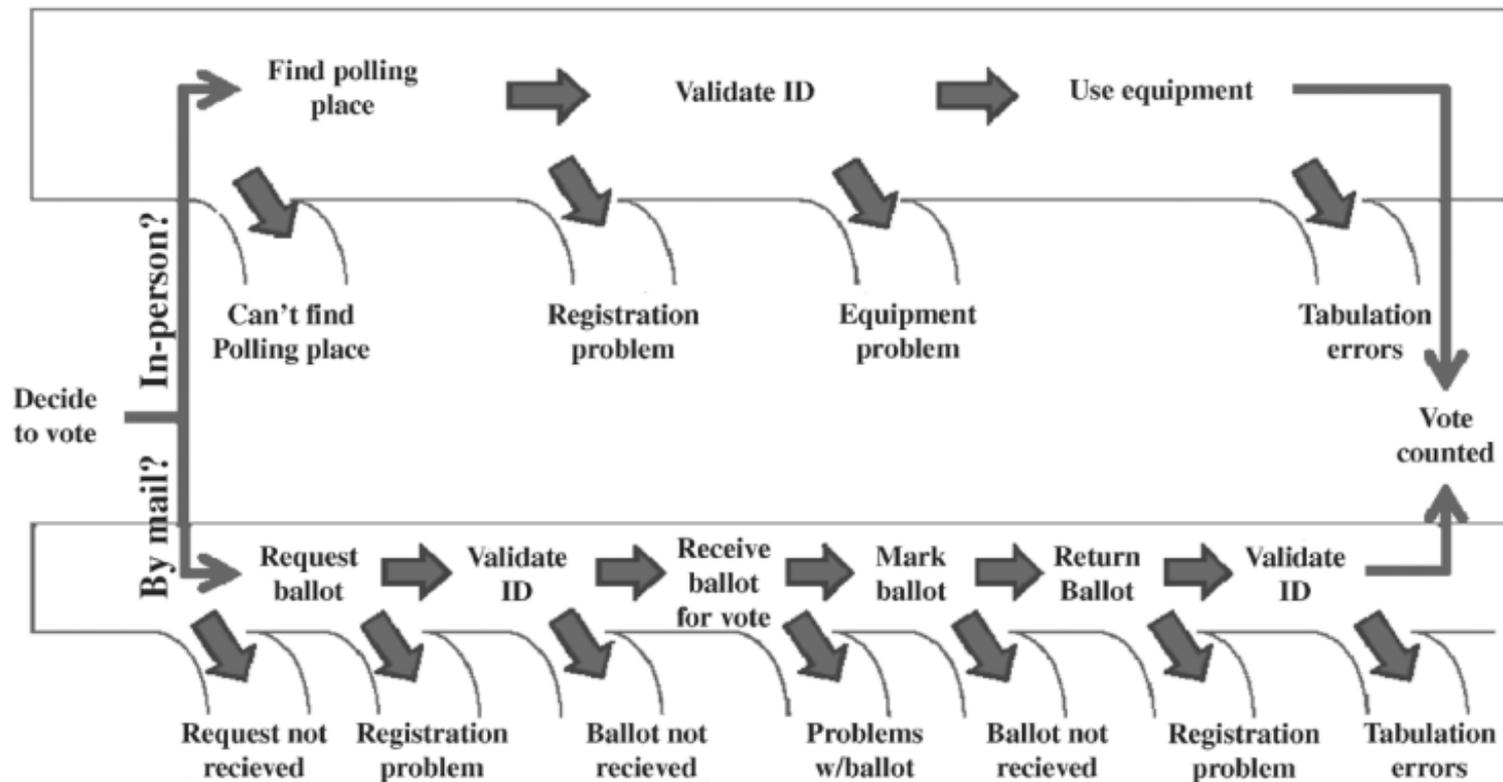
# Remaining Obstacles for Military and Overseas Voters

- Confusion among election officials post-MOVE as to whether voters must re-register for each election.
- Installation Voting Assistance Offices (IVAOs) – Inspector General unable to contact half of them.
- States inconsistent as to whether Federal Write-in Absentee Ballot (FWAB) constitutes registration application as well, and whether it counts for state as well as federal elections.
- Low awareness of existence of FWAB – (roughly 40% of UOCAVA voters unaware)
- 81% of overseas voters still use post as way of transmitting vote. (OVF 2012)



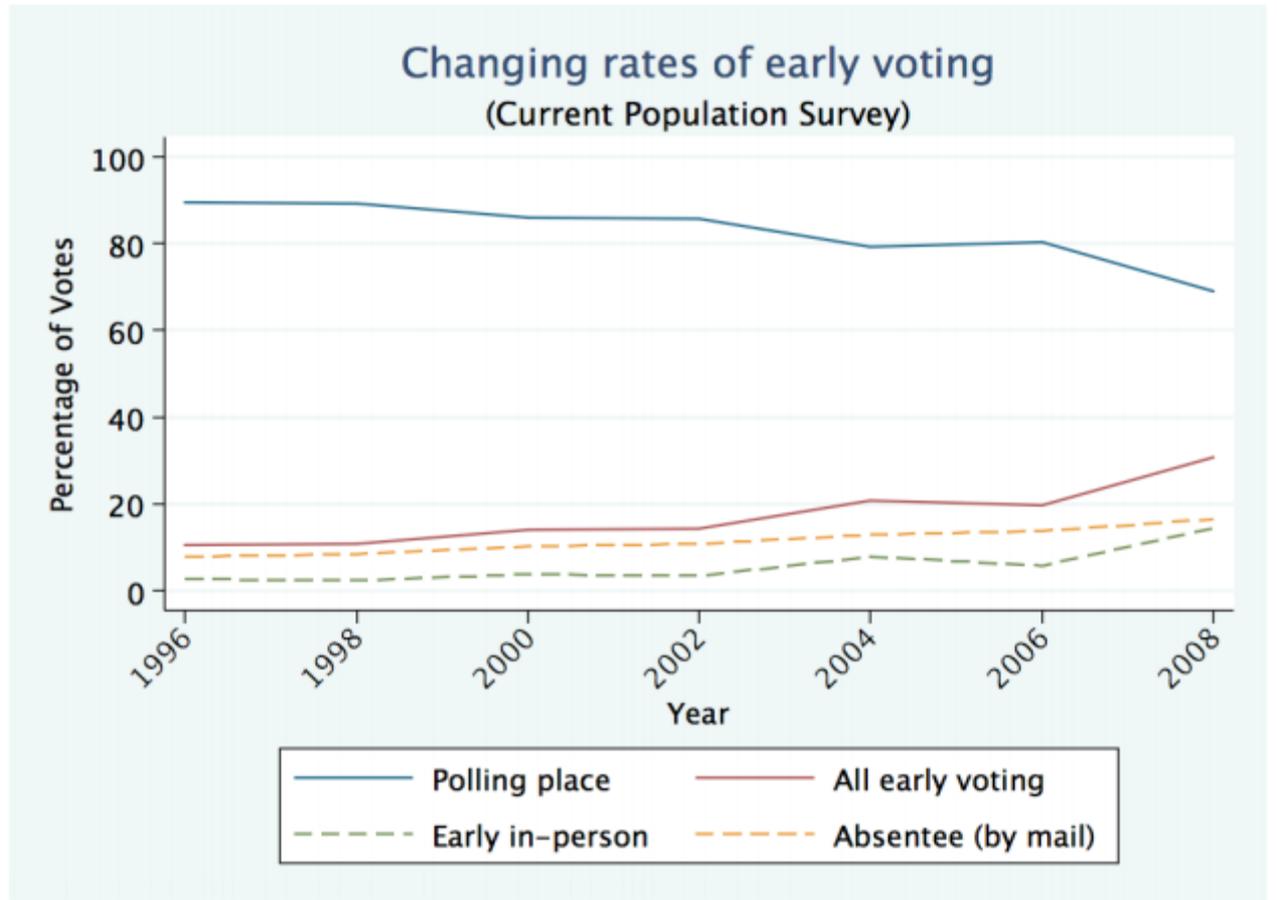
# Losing Votes By Mail: Domestic or Overseas

FIGURE 2: THE VOTE-BY-MAIL PIPELINE





# A Trend Away from Election-Day Polling Place Voting

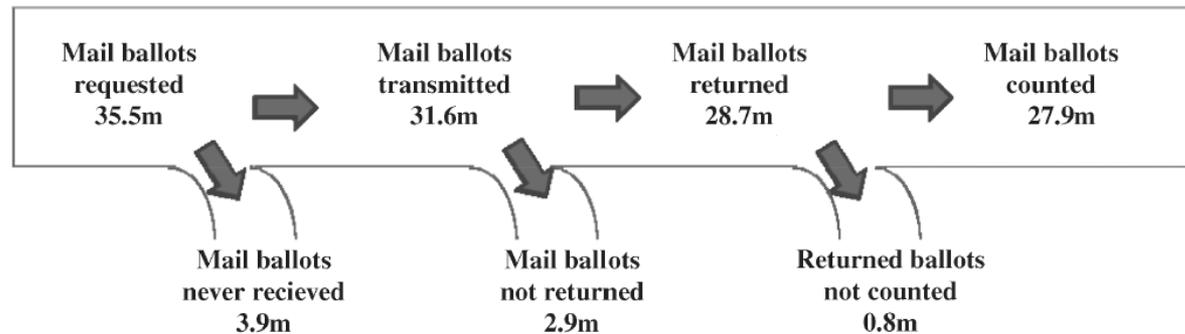




# Absentee Ballot Problems

- 7.6 million lost absentee votes in 2008 (Stewart 2010)

FIGURE 5: LOST VOTES FROM MAIL-IN-BALLOTS



- Greater potential for design errors and voter mistakes – on application, ballot, and envelope.
- Affects polling place lines and number of provisional ballots as those registered absentee show up on election day.



# Absentee voting more popular among voters with disabilities

Asked of all respondents (voters and non-voters)(Schur 2013)

If you wanted to vote in the next election, how would you prefer to cast your vote?

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
In person at polling place	58%	68%
By mail	25%	14%
On the Internet	10%	16%
By telephone	5%	2%
Don't know	2%	1%

**=> People with disabilities are less likely to prefer voting at polling place, but still a majority want to do so.**



# Low Voter Turnout Among Disabled

- Disability turnout gap of 4-21 percentage points in 12 surveys over 1992-2010 – 3 million disabled nonvoters in 2008
- Lower turnout is only partly explained by standard voting predictors: resources (education and income), recruitment, and feelings of political efficacy
- Barriers to voting by disabled (2008):
  - 73.7% of polling places had some barrier to accessibility for voters with disabilities in 2008 (mostly outside or at the building entrance)
  - 50% of polling places had one or more potential impediments in the path from parking area to building entrance



# Reported difficulties among those voting at polling place in 2012

	<u>Disability</u>	<u>No disability</u>
1. Finding or getting to polling place	6%	2%
2. Getting inside polling place (e.g., steps)	4%	0%
3. Waiting in line	8%	4%
4. Reading or seeing ballot	12%	1%
5. Understanding how to vote or use voting eqt.	10%	1%
6. Communicating with election officials	2%	1%
7. Writing on the ballot	5%	0%
8. Operating the voting machine	1%	1%
9. Other type of difficulty	4%	1%
<b>Any of above</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>8%</b>

**Source: Schur et al 2013**

# Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Voters

- Of those who do not register to vote, between 1.4% and 1.7% cite difficulties with English as the reason. (CPS)
- Areas with high levels of LEP voters report higher rates of provisional balloting.
- On average, officials in jurisdictions with high shares of language minorities estimated that 5.5% of the voters needed assistance, but in reality the number was 10.9%. (Tucker 2005)
- 14% of covered jurisdictions (under the VRA) provided voters neither oral nor written assistance. (Tucker 2005)



# Strategy for Further Research

1. Four hearings around the country to gather input from the public, with particular need concerning areas about which little research exists (e.g., natural disasters and voting).
2. Outreach at meetings of election officials (IACREOT, NASS, NASED, Election Center).
3. Meetings with interest groups, stakeholders and experts in respective areas of executive order.
4. Mine new survey data set to be released this summer (e.g., EAC surveys)
5. Seek out and analyze additional datasets from states and localities.
6. Gathering of public input through Commission website: [www.supportthevoter.gov](http://www.supportthevoter.gov)