

## EAC Survey Analysis Progress Report

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Madame Chair, Vice Chair, Commissioners. It is a pleasure to come before you today and give you an updated progress report on the analysis we have undertaken of the Election Day Survey for the Election Assistance Commission (EAC).

For the first time in this nation's over 230 year history, the federal government has made an assessment of election procedures used across the land. The Election Day Survey represents the largest and most comprehensive survey of voting and election administration practices ever conducted by a U.S. governmental organization. The survey provides statistics on voter registration; modes of voting, including absentee and provisional voting; overvotes and undervotes for federal offices; and numbers of precincts, polling places, and poll workers. The survey also provides information on voting equipment, including equipment failures, and polling place accessibility.

State election directors and election administrators in the District of Columbia, and four territories—Guam, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—were asked to respond to the survey. The state directors, in turn, sought data from local election administrators. Responses were received from all state-level jurisdictions, except America Samoa and Guam.

The Election Day Survey requested information from a total of 6,568 local election administrators. The forty-three questions on the survey, if all had been completed, would have produced a total of 282,424 individual data items. But there are a substantial number of missing responses. To questions on the number of ballots counted and votes cast for federal offices, response rates are over 90 percent. But on other questions, such as provisional ballots and polling place accessibility, response rates are under 50 percent. Although higher response rates are preferable, it is important to point out that (1) this was the first time the Election Day Survey was administered, and (2) participation in the Election Day Survey was *voluntary*.

As is typical with baseline surveys, many issues were identified with the administration of the Election Day Survey. These issues include:

- There were differences in how state and local election administrators interpreted some of the terminology used in the survey questions. For example, what is a “poll worker?” Or what constitutes an absentee ballot?

Different interpretations of the survey items by election administrators resulted in uneven reporting, sometimes within a state.

- Because of the delays in the creation of the EAC and the time required to obtain the approval of the survey instrument because of the Paperwork Reduction Act, the survey was sent to state election directors just one week before the November 2004 general election. Election administrators did not have enough lead time to plan and set up the systems for compiling the statistics that would be requested by the Election Day Survey.
- The Election Day Survey was distributed to state election directors as an electronic spreadsheet, but responses to the survey were received in a variety of formats. While some state election directors sent the original electronic spreadsheet to local election administrators, others prepared their own surveys of local election administrations, in some cases altering the survey questions. This resulted in even more uneven reporting among the states.
- Election Data Services identified many data entry errors. In some cases, we identified the error, asked for a clarification, and made a correction. However, we did not have the resources to validate all data items, and, consequently, some errors remain.

Despite the problems in administering the Election Day Survey, we believe that reliable information has been obtained for many of the questions and that our work illuminates some of the successes and challenges of election administration in the United States. However, we caution that our findings are still very preliminary and only valid for those jurisdictions that reported. We cannot make inferences for jurisdictions that did not report. We would also caution that the reliability of some responses reduces the overall validity of our efforts.

One purpose of the Election Day Survey was to provide a baseline of election administration data to help the EAC to identify and prioritize issues for study under Section 241 of HAVA. As of now, that baseline has only partly been established. But we continue to receive data—in just the past two weeks, we received 18 separate submissions of new or corrected data

As of now, we would make four main recommendations to the EAC on data collection efforts:

- We would recommend that the EAC hold two symposiums, the first for state election directors and the second for consumers of election data, to produce accurate and consistent definitions of election administration terminology. A set of common definitions will increase the reliability of future data collection. We recommend that the symposiums be held in the near future to allow election administrators time to conform procedures to conform to the new definitions. Right now, for example, many states are in the midst of computer programming for the development of statewide voter registration systems.

- We would recommend that the next Election Day Survey be conducted by a method that provides interactive quality assurance checks. Such a system might be Internet based or consist of a spreadsheet from which respondents could see how different survey questions were related. For example, the number of ballots cast in early, absentee, provisional, and Election Day voting should be equivalent to the total number of ballots cast. Validating responses at the time of data entry will greatly reduce the number of data errors.
- We would recommend, as in previous progress reports, that the EAC expand its clearinghouse role to include the ongoing funding and collection of precinct-based registration, turnout, election returns, precinct maps, polling place information, sample ballots, election manuals, and other items to assist in the analysis of the voting process.
- Finally, as I said earlier, there are errors and omissions in the data from the Election Day Survey. This assessment is not perfect; some of the errors might even point users of the survey data in the wrong direction, but the survey is a start. Consequently, our conclusions are still tentative and a report of the survey is not ready to be released.

So as our fourth recommendation, to help reach the ultimate goal of an election administration baseline representing all election jurisdictions, we would recommend that the EAC consider involving the states in a review of the data that has been compiled so far. Many original state submissions have been updated several times. Such a review would not only provide an opportunity for survey respondents to identify and correct data errors, but also to retrieve some of the missing data needed to complete the survey.

This would certainly improve the quality of the data and coverage of the survey so that more election jurisdictions are represented in the election administration baseline. In addition, census population estimates have been used in the analysis of the survey data received so far. In July, the U.S. Census Bureau will release new population estimates that could be incorporated into the survey analysis for a more current view of voting and election administration statistics.

We would also note that the questions on absentee voting in the Election Day Survey are closely related to the military and overseas absentee ballot survey (UOCAVA), which was conducted shortly thereafter. Coverage rates and data quality issues relating to the UOCAVA survey are even more problematic, and in some instances, it appears that data from the two surveys has been intermingled. A delay in the release of the Election Day Survey to allow a review of the survey data by state election directors could also provide an opportunity to resolve conflicts between the UOCAVA and Election Day Surveys as well as to resolve other data coverage and data quality issues specific to the UOCAVA survey.

Finally, we have begun work on the NVRA study as final data comes into the EAC from that survey. Some of the data items requested are the same or similar

to the information gathered in the Election Day Survey. We are comparing the information right now and will need to resolve differences with the states between the various survey responses.

This concludes my progress report on our work. I'd be happy to answer any questions.