

VOTING

WHAT'S CHANGED, WHAT HASN'T, & WHAT NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

POST-ELECTION UPDATE

We released our report, *Voting: What's Changed, What Hasn't, & What Needs Improvement* in advance of the 2012 federal elections. In the November 2012 federal elections, conducted immediately after the release of our report, we observed three significant issues that will need attention in coming months.

First, in many parts of the nation—but perhaps most importantly in the battleground state of Florida—we saw **long lines** for early voting and on Election Day. In some cases the wait to vote lasted for hours. As a consequence of these long lines, some voters may decide not to wait to cast a ballot; the long lines raise tempers and put unnecessary pressure on poll workers and election administrators. Thus long lines lead to lost votes.

Second, **provisional ballot** usage was prevalent in many places. Provisional ballots often serve as a “fail-safe” mechanism that helps votes from being lost. But they also create ancillary problems: they exacerbate long waits in polling places, distract poll workers from other tasks, and confront voters with confusing paperwork. Provisional ballots are like a canary in the coal mine for problems in election administration and voter registration.

Third, **Hurricane Sandy** disrupted the election all along the Eastern Seaboard. Sandy displaced voters and poll-workers, shut down planned polling places, disrupted necessary electrical service, and limited access to polling places. Untold votes were lost due to Hurricane Sandy, despite the significant efforts that election officials undertook to ensure that voters could cast their ballots. Emergency provisions to allow electronic balloting, including voting online, were arranged at the last minute.

These three problems need immediate attention. We recommend:

First, the U.S. EAC and state and local election officials must study the **reasons for long lines** in November 2012. Expanding early voting may help. Also providing those locations with better-trained staff, sufficient voting materials, and ample voting machines are likely critical to minimizing voter waits in the future.

Second, state and local election officials need to examine their **use of provisional ballots**. Election officials should study ways to improve the accuracy of registration databases immediately prior to elections, audit their voter registration systems after the election, and work to streamline the provisional balloting process.

Third, federal, state and local election officials must study the disruptions caused by Hurricane Sandy, examine how election officials in the affected states reacted to those disruptions, and develop contingency plans for dealing with similar emergencies in the future. This is not the first widespread disaster to affect elections—Hurricanes Katrina and Rita affected elections in the southeastern U.S., and the 9/11 tragedy disrupted elections in New York City. Election officials should examine their **contingency plans**, develop strategies for dealing with disasters, and make sure that their laws and regulations allow for emergency balloting procedures.