

## **I. In Focus This Week**

### **Election administration in New Jersey and Virginia gubernatorial elections**

*Survey shows satisfaction with election day, mixed views on voter confidence*

By [Charles Stewart III](#)

*Special to electionlineWeekly*

Conducting the fourth in a series of surveys to gauge the experience of voters at the polls, a team of researchers associated with the [Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project](#) studied the experience of 2,500 registered voters each in New Jersey and Virginia immediately following the November 3, 2009 gubernatorial elections.

The November 2009 study was a part of the Survey of the Performance of American Elections series that has been funded by the Pew Center on the States' Election Initiative. Previous surveys were conducted immediately following the November 2007 gubernatorial elections in Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi; the February 2008 "Super Tuesday" presidential primary; and the November 2008 presidential election.

As with past surveys, voters in New Jersey and Virginia reported overall high levels of satisfaction with their experience in the most recent election.

In New Jersey, 94 percent of respondents stated that it was "very easy" to find their polling place; 90 percent said their polling places were run "very well;" 2 percent encountered problems with their voter registration; 97 percent waited five minutes or less to vote; 1 percent encountered problems with the voting equipment; and 68 percent reported they were "very confident" their vote was counted as cast.

Respondents in Virginia reported similar experiences: 93 percent said it was "very easy" to find their polling place; 88 percent said their polling places were run "very well;" 1 percent reported problems with their voter registration; 93 percent waited five minutes or less to vote; 1 percent encountered problems with the voting equipment; and 75 percent reported they were "very confident" their vote was counted as cast.

One issue that has emerged since the controversial 2000 presidential election is that election administration has become more subject to partisan conflict, and voters have begun to interpret the fairness of elections from the perspective of whether their candidate won. The results from the 2009 survey, combined with results from previous surveys in this series, help to illustrate this point.

First, consider New Jersey, where the Democrat Jon Corzine was defeated in a tight, bitterly fought race by Republican Chris Christie. While 68 percent of New Jersey voters overall stated they were "very confident" their own votes were counted as cast, 73 percent of Christie's voters were very confident, compared to 63 percent of Corzine's.

This is in contrast to the 2008 presidential election, in which Obama carried New Jersey 57 percent—42 percent over McCain. There, 79 percent of Obama voters, compared to 60 percent of McCain voters, stated they were very confident their vote was counted as cast.

New Jersey also participated in the 2008 Super Tuesday primary. Hillary Clinton won the Democratic primary in the state, and 78 percent of her supporters stated they were very confident their votes were counted as cast, compared to 73 percent of supporters of other candidates. John McCain won the

Republican primary in New Jersey; 79 percent of his supporters were very confident, compared to 49 percent for the supporters of other candidates.

Second, consider Virginia, where the Republican Bob McDonnell defeated the Democrat Creigh Deeds by a comfortable margin in the gubernatorial race. Here, 56 percent of the McDonnell voters, but only 41 percent of the Deeds voters, stated they were very confident their votes were counted as cast. Following the 2008 presidential election, in which Obama carried Virginia 53 percent–46 percent, 79 percent of Obama voters but only 68 percent of McCain voters were very confident their vote was counted as cast.

Returning to 2009, respondents in both states showed much greater confidence that their own votes were counted as cast than the votes of others.

For instance, while 67 percent of all New Jersey respondents reported they were very confident their *own* vote was counted as cast, only 52 percent expressed similar confidence that votes in their *city or county*, as a whole, were counted as cast; a much lower 39 percent said they were very confident votes were counted as cast *statewide*. Similar numbers appear for Virginia respondents (74 percent, 62 percent, and 50 percent, for these three questions).

These responses are similar for other surveys of government service provision — people usually believe the government services they receive are pretty good, but wonder about the quality in other parts of the state or the nation.

The complete survey not only asked questions about overall experience with in-person and absentee voting and about voter confidence, but also asked questions to understand why non-voters didn't vote, along with questions probing attitudes about popular reform ideas (making Election Day a holiday, voting technology, instituting Election Day Registration, etc.) and voting rights for minorities. A final report detailing the complete survey results, along with a dataset with all the data, will be released in March.

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## II. Election Reform News This Week

- On its first day back in session, the Tennessee Senate voted 22-10 to [delay implementation of a law](#) that would have required all Tennessee counties to use paper ballots. The House passed a similar bill, which will delay the implementation until 2012, in the 2009 legislative session. According to *The Tennessean*, the vote appears to put an end to a long legal and political battle between voting rights groups and Secretary of State Tre Hargett's office, which had argued that the law is an unnecessary burden on county election commissions. About 60 local election officials packed the Senate gallery in support of the delay. "It's the folks that work out in the ditches that were going to have been pressed to implement this," Hooper Penuel, administrator of elections for Rutherford County told the paper. "It could have resulted in disaster, and that would not have been what we needed in Tennessee."
- After a 75-minute public hearing, the [Missoula County, Mont. commission voted unanimously to reduce](#) the number of voting precincts by 50 percent and eliminate eight of the county's 37 polling places. The approval means that the county will now need about 150 fewer election judges. According to *The Missoulian*, commission chairwoman Michele Landquist called it "an evolving solution to the problem," in reference to the changes that will take place when House District lines are redrawn after the 2010 Census. "Time is of the essence and I'm concerned that there are too many unknowns with state and federal and county financial uncertainties," Landquist said. "I think we would be remiss as your local elected officials to not take a step to solve this." Of course the consolidation didn't please everyone. Montana Women Vote and Forward Montana both protested any closures, citing what they called a too-hasty process.

- Don't pop any corks yet, but it looks like the Indiana legislature is getting closer than ever before to changing the state's blue laws to allow for the [sale of alcohol on election day](#) while the polls are open. Representatives of the liquor industry said the law was confusing and antiquated because how elections are conducted in Indiana has changed. Alex Huskey, superintendent of the Indiana Excise Police, testified that his officers try to keep bars and restaurants informed about upcoming elections but find that many are confused by local elections for construction bonds, runoff elections or primaries that may not have contested races and therefore no balloting. According to the *Courier-Journal* no one testified against the legislation.
- **Money Watch:** Tennessee wasn't the only jurisdiction taking actions this week with the budget in mind. [Mesa County, Colo.](#) is considering going to an all-mail election for the 2010 primary claiming it would save the taxpayers half a million dollars. Although Missoula County has run into some troubles, that's not stopped [Gallatin County, Mont.](#) from moving forward with a plan to consolidate voting precincts and cut some polling places. In [Illinois](#), anger continues to grow over a new "undervote" law and now county clerks are expressing concerns about the fiscal impact implementing the new law will have on their budgets. City councils in [Ocean City, Md.](#) and [Jacksonville, Fla.](#) are considering moving the date of municipal elections to coincide with state and federal elections in order to save money. The [West Hartford, Conn.](#) town council has asked the town manager to look into the possibility of eliminating some polling places to save money.
- **In Memoriam:** Long-time Wilkes County, N.C. elections supervisor [Audrey Phyllis Featheringham Goodman](#) passed away this week. She was 80. Goodman began working part-time as the supervisor of the elections for the county in 1958. In 1969, the county upgraded the office to a full-time position. She served in that position until her retirement in June 1995.

### III. Research and Report Summaries

*electionline provides brief summaries of recent research and reports in the field of election administration. Please e-mail links to research to [sgreene@pewtrusts.org](mailto:sgreene@pewtrusts.org).*

[Ranked Choice Voting 2009 City of Minneapolis Municipal Elections](#) – Prepared for Mr. Patrick O'Connor, Minneapolis elections director, by St. Cloud State University, December 2009: This survey examines voters', non-voters', candidates' and election judges' views about ranked choice voting (RCV) in Minneapolis. The survey finds 95 percent of voters said RCV was easy to use and 90 percent said that they understand RCV perfectly or fairly well. Three percent of the people voting said they didn't understand RCV and only five percent of non-voters said they didn't vote because of RCV.

### IV. Opinion

Florida: [Election reform](#); [Election costs](#)  
 Illinois: [Early primary](#)  
 Hawaii: [Special election cost](#)  
 Massachusetts: [Voter turnout](#)  
 Minnesota: [Instant-runoff voting](#)  
 Montana: [Poll consolidation](#)  
 New Jersey: [Election dates, II](#)  
 New York: [New voting machines](#)  
 South Dakota: [Simplified voting](#)  
 Tennessee: [Paper ballots](#)  
 Virginia: [Ex-felon voting rights, II, III, IV](#)  
 Washington: [Felon voting rights, II, III, IV, V](#)  
 West Virginia: [Satellite voting](#)  
 Wisconsin: [Election dates](#)

*\*\*some sites require registration*

## **V. Job Opportunities**

*All job listings must be received by 12 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday for publication in our Thursday newsletter. Job listings are free but may be edited for length. Whenever possible, include Internet information. Please email job postings to [mmoretti@electionline.org](mailto:mmoretti@electionline.org)*