

electionlineWeekly—August 21, 2008

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I. In Focus This Week

The Push for On-Campus Voting

Students seek greater access to polling places

By [Garrett Schlein](#)

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When Texas held its presidential primary earlier this year, Andre Evans was determined make his voice heard. Evans along with approximately 1,000 of his fellow students marched seven miles from Prairie View A&M University to the Waller County courthouse to cast their ballots and make a political statement.

The marchers were responding to a decision by Waller County officials against placing a polling place at the university.

Their election-day protest, while not common, was nonetheless a reflection of the sentiments of students around the country seeking the ability to vote on campus.

College students are demanding access to on-campus voting. On-campus polling places will result in increased voter turnout, they say, while also preventing obstacles that may hinder their participation in the electoral process.

Despite reports for decades of disinterest, alienation or just plain laziness, the nation's youngest voters are turning out in greater numbers and increasing their political clout.

According to the [Harvard Institute of Politics](#), voters aged 18-29 will comprise nearly a quarter of the eligible electorate in 2008.

"Candidates have been reaching out to our voting bloc in a way that has never been done before," said Lauren Ellis, president of the University of Connecticut's College Democrats. Issues including the war in Iraq, job creation and availability and tuition costs mean students will be, "a powerful force in November," she said.

When mobilized – and motivated – students turn out in force.

Joint efforts by organizations like the student government, UCONN Votes Coalition and others resulted in 45 percent student turnout in the 2006 congressional elections, despite not having a polling location on-campus.

Creating on-campus polling places, however, is not always a simple task.

Officials must juggle limited resources and competing priorities. Funding is often limited and therefore the creation of a new polling place is not always an option. Establishing new polling places requires time, effort and broad support to accomplish, not to mention staffing, security, equipment and publicity.

In Waller County, election clerk Debbie Hollan said there are challenges in creating new on-campus polling places – or any others, for that matter.

"Compliance with HAVA means that locations are limited because of accessibility," Hollan said. "Security issues and difficulties for residents to get to the Memorial Center meant a polling location on-campus

would be a difficult environment to control. We hope to have educational programs available in the fall to inform students about voting including information regarding ballot-by-mail and early voting sites”.

Steve Ransom, director of student activities and leadership at Prairie View A&M, said he believed that many of the issues facing students voting would be alleviated if, “a convenient location was found and county officials and students worked to create flawless registration.”

While the county and school appear to agree on educational programs to help students register to vote, Ransom notes that little communication, if any, has occurred yet between the school and the county to coordinate efforts.

Unlike Waller County, Tippecanoe County, Ind. has already set up early voting sites as well as on campus polling locations at Purdue University.

Linda Phillips, county clerk, said she believes that vote centers and early voting sites on Purdue University’s campus benefits residents, faculty and students alike.

“On-campus polling places really do help meet the needs of students and faculty,” she said. “In fact our per vote cost is lower because so many vote there.”

The on-campus polling site received 1,058 early voters during the 2008 presidential primary followed by 1,115 on primary day..

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to creating on-campus polling places is the perception of youth apathy towards voting.

Yet trends from recent years indicate growing participation in the political process.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement [reported](#) that youth turnout grew by almost 10 percent in 2004 when compared to 2000 figures.

Campuses facing increased interest but limited access to polls have employed solutions to meet demand.

Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania and Washington University in St. Louis provide transportation to off-campus polling locations.

Student organizations have also taken the lead in providing transportation for getting individuals to the polls. Yale College Democrats are among numerous others that did so during the 2008 presidential primary and plan to do so for the general election.

“Every election day we run three to four shuttles to the polling place,” said Ben Shaffer, the group’s president. “We have been very able to organize people to the polls and pride ourselves on this.”

II. Election Reform News This Week

- A federal judge this week upheld Arizona’s [proof-of-citizenship law](#). According to *The Arizona Daily Star*, U.S. District Judge Roslyn Silver rejected arguments that the requirements to have certain documents present a financial hardship for some. She said some data show the law has a slightly harsher impact on Hispanics and American Indians than it does on others. But the judge said the overall effect of that was so minimal as to be virtually insignificant. Nina Perales, attorney for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said she believes Silver “came down on the wrong side of the law.” Perales said no decision has been made on an appeal.
- With the 2008 presidential election just 75 days away, election officials are already making predictions that [all will not go smoothly](#) on the first Tuesday in November. According to *The New*

York Times, flaws in voting machines used by millions of people will not be fixed in time for the presidential election because of a government backlog in testing the machines' hardware and software. The flaws, which have cast doubt on the ability of some machines to provide a consistent and reliable vote count, were supposed to be addressed by the Election Assistance Commission, the federal agency that oversees voting. But commission officials say they will not be able to certify that flawed machines are repaired by the November election, or provide software fixes or upgrades, because of a backlog at the testing laboratories the commission uses. "We simply are not going to sacrifice the integrity of the certification process for expediency," said Rosemary E. Rodriguez, the chairwoman of the commission.

- eBay, Craig's List, foreign countries. Across the nation, states are looking for ways to off-load their expensive – and now useless – electronic voting machines. A report by *The Associated Press* this week says that there is no official tally of just how many machines are being offloaded or put into storage, but it's well into the thousands. Five months ago, Florida began unloading nearly 30,000 touch-screen machines to a recycling company, which will strip, crush or try to sell the devices to other countries and states. The recycling company earns part of all sales. Ohio can't do anything about selling its \$138 million system until lawsuits filed by the manufacturer and the secretary of state get sorted out.
- Despite being the de-facto next congressman in the 6th Congressional District in Denver, [Colorado Secretary of State Mike Coffman](#) said that he will not resign his position until after the November 4 election. "The thing I've committed to is to see Colorado through this next general election, this presidential election," Coffman told the *Pueblo Chieftain*. "What I plan on doing is, probably starting between the middle of this month through the end of October, do an inspection tour of every county in the state to make sure that they are ready for the presidential election."

III. Research and Report Summaries

electionline provides brief summaries of recent research in the field of election administration. Note some articles require a subscription. Please e-mail research links to sgreene@electionline.org.

[Helping Franklin County Vote in 2008: Waiting Lines](#) - Prepared by Dr. Ted Allen and Dr. Mikhail Bernshteyn, Sagata Ltd. and Chris Rockwell, Lextant

In a preliminary report prepared for the Franklin County, Ohio Board of Elections, the consultants make recommendations to reduce the possibility of long lines at the polls as occurred during the November 2004 election. Using data from previous elections, a mock election and simulation models the consultants foresee the possibility of long lines at some polling locations this November. They state adding 200 voting machines could help, as well as encouraging the use of absentee voting. Using potential ballot length, they create a formula for voting system allocation that can be adjusted if the length of the ballot increases.

[Vendors are Undermining the Structure of U.S. Elections](#) - Prepared by Ellen Theisen, Co-Director, VotersUnite.Org, August 18, 2008

Using case studies of different election jurisdictions, the author describes how many counties and states are overly dependent on voting system vendors resulting in unwanted consequences. The Help America Vote Act and state legislators are also cited as reasons why local officials had to rely more on vendors. The report points to two states and two local jurisdictions that have decreased their dependency on vendors.

Books

[Democracy in the States: Experiments in Election Reform](#) - By Bruce E. Cain, Todd Donovan and Caroline J. Tolbert, eds., Brookings Institution Press 2008

"Combining accessibility and rigor, leading scholars of U.S. politics and elections examine the impact of reforms intended to increase the integrity, fairness, and responsiveness of the electoral system. While some of these reforms focus on election administration, which has been the subject of much controversy since the 2000 presidential election, others seek more broadly to increase political participation and improve representation."

IV. Opinion This Week

National: [Election rules](#)

California: [National popular vote](#)

Colorado: [Vote counting](#)

Florida: [Early voting](#)

Nevada: [Problems at polls](#)

Ohio: [Electoral College](#); [2004 election](#); [Jennifer Brunner](#)

Pennsylvania: [Voter turnout](#)

Tennessee: [First district House race](#); [Early voting](#)

***some sites require registration*

V. Job Postings This Week

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