

# The Century Foundation

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# NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Century Foundation Review of State and Local Contests Underscores Need for Election Reform Legislation

**Jan. 24, New York City:** A series of state and local elections that have taken place since the 2000 election debacle have underscored the need for the swift enactment of the provisions in election reform legislation that the Senate is set to pass in the coming weeks. Over the past several months, The Century Foundation has examined the recent gubernatorial races in New Jersey and Virginia, and mayoral races in New York City and Los Angeles to assess what progress has been made since system's flaws were revealed in the past presidential contest.

This series of reports is a follow-up to the Commission on Federal Election Reform, a project cosponsored by The Century Foundation and the University of Virginia's Miller Center and chaired by former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford. Many of the Commission's recommendations are reflected in the Equal Protection of Voting Rights Act of 2001. Among other provisions, this legislation requires states to establish statewide voter registration systems, provide provisional ballots, and ensure that voting systems allow the voter to check and change their ballot before casting it. It also provides federal grants for poll worker training and voter education, among other activities.

According to information in forthcoming Century Foundation reports, some jurisdictions have taken steps to improve the election process, but much more needs to be done.

Among the findings of the election reports:

- New procedures in one jurisdiction in Virginia allowed voters to verify and, if they wanted, change their vote before it was cast. According to an election official in that jurisdiction, unofficial results showed that over votes plummeted from over 600 in the 2000 presidential election to one in the 2001 gubernatorial election.
- Los Angeles County and the City of Los Angeles provided election support to voters who speak English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The county was challenged to provide bilingual poll workers to work in 22 percent of all precincts (18.5 percent in the City of Los Angeles). Their experience with needing to provide multilingual materials and assistance at the polls is instructive for communities across the country with rapidly changing demographics and increasing ethnic diversity.

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- The need for provisional ballots was made clear by the fact that in Los Angeles 15,000 provisional ballots were cast in the 2001 election and more than 100,000 were cast in the 2000 election. In New York City, tens of thousands of voters have cast affidavit ballots in recent years.
- An extensive new effort to train voters, poll workers and challengers in Passaic County, New Jersey resulted in an improved election administration and appreciably fewer problems at the polls during last year's gubernatorial election, according to a federal election monitor.
- In the mayoral election and runoff in Miami, increased voter information and poll-worker training significantly decreased the number of discarded ballots. During the run-off, in which the greatest amount of training and assistance was available, only 1.28 percent of ballots were discarded because of over voting or under voting citywide. The results of the 2000 and 2001 elections in Los Angeles showed that voter education was effective in reducing over votes and under votes, especially among minority voters. The over vote rate in the mayoral race was approximately half the rate in the 2000 presidential election and the under vote rate was approximately 43 percent lower.

The reports, due to be published this spring, were written by Jon Gould, assistant professor of government and politics and visiting assistant professor of law at George Mason University, (Virginia gubernatorial election); Ron Hayduk, professor of political science at City University of New York (New York City mayoral election); Ingrid Reed, director of the Eagleton New Jersey Project, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University (New Jersey gubernatorial election); and Thad Hall, program officer at The Century Foundation (Los Angeles mayoral election).

More details are available on The Century Foundation website ([www.tcf.org](http://www.tcf.org)) and Federal Election Reform Network website ([www.reformelections.org](http://www.reformelections.org)). The report authors are available for comment on the bill. For more information contact Christy Hicks at The Century Foundation, (212) 452-7723.

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