

COLORADO

PROGRAM

In Colorado, Election Protection coordinated a 1-866-OUR-VOTE call center in Denver, which fielded calls from across the state. The Colorado Election Protection field program covered Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, El Paso, Jefferson, La Plada, Larimer, Mesa, Montrose, Morgan, Pueblo, and Weld counties.

During the 2012 election season, Colorado voters were confronted with absentee voting problems, voter intimidation concerns, long lines, and registration problems, among other issues.

BEFORE ELECTION DAY

Proof of Citizenship Letters

Colorado Secretary of State Scott Gessler alleged that potentially 11,000 noncitizens in Colorado had registered to vote, and that 4,000 may have cast ballots in previous elections. The Secretary of State's office sent nearly 4,000 letters to individual registrants asking them to prove their citizenship or withdraw as registered voters. After the Secretary of State ran names through the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) database, it was determined that 141 noncitizens had registered to vote and that 35 may have cast ballots. If this was the case, these registrations represented .001% of Colorado's 3.5 million registered voters.

Further investigation revealed that it was unclear how accurate and current the information in the database was, and how many eligible citizens were identified incorrectly as noncitizens. While the Secretary of State's efforts did not reveal the number of noncitizens he had alleged, it did create an atmosphere in which some communities feared registering to vote or thought their registration might be invalidated. In order to alleviate concerns by the communities targeted by these letters, the Colorado Election Administration Work Group, a coalition of groups working on election reform and voting rights issues, reached out to the recipients to inform them that they were still eligible to vote.

2012 VOTING PROBLEMS IN COLORADO



Online Registration

In Colorado, voters can register online through the state website, which includes a mobile-optimized version. However, there were problems with the state’s website that complicated the registration process. A software glitch in the mobile site prevented approximately 800 people from registering between September 14 and September 24. Voters would receive an error message and were not allowed to complete and verify their registrations. Additionally, two calls were received by the Denver 1-866-OUR-VOTE call center from voters who had registered online but did not appear on the rolls. Luckily, these voters had printouts confirming their registration and were therefore able to vote a regular ballot. The call center did receive one report from a voter who claimed to have registered online but did not have any supporting documents and voted a provisional ballot. Secretary of State Gessler admitted that the site required more testing before its roll-out. The state made attempts to publicize that there was a problem with the site, although it is unknown how many of the new registrants were aware of the error and tried to re-register before the election. Emergency rules were put into place that permitted voters in this group to register to vote up to and on Election Day through the use of emergency registration or by voting a provisional ballot.

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, the Hotline received reports from Colorado about long lines, machine breakdowns, and understaffing.

Long Lines and Voting by Mail

In Arapahoe County, there were reports of long lines almost as soon as the polls opened. Several factors accounted for the long lines. Some of the polling locations were understaffed and unprepared for the volume. In some cases, it could take an hour to reach the check-in desk of a polling location, and then another hour if a voter had to cast a provisional ballot. It appeared that a large number of voters on the vote-by-mail list showed up to vote in person and had to vote a provisional ballot, which further lengthened the lines. These

provisional ballots were matched with the mail-in ballot request list to ensure that a voter could not vote twice. In addition, Arapahoe County printed out ballots on demand instead of keeping printed ballots in stock on location. This led to a slowdown not experienced in other Colorado counties that kept printed ballots on hand.

As the number of individuals voting by mail continues to increase, it will remain imperative that Colorado counties, while considering efficiencies of fewer people voting in person, still maintain adequate funding and resources to handle a normal volume of voters. The added time necessary to process individuals who originally request to vote by mail, but then choose to cast ballots in person on Election Day, must be taken into account when considering these policy decisions.

Machine Problems

Colorado voters also reported machine breakdowns and an inadequate number of machines to handle the volume. Election Protection was successful in communicating with election officials and in helping to get additional voting machines deployed to these locations as needed.

Voter Identification

There were reports of poll workers asking only for a driver's license but, when the voter did not have one available, failing to request alternative forms of identification. In most cases, this was because of poorly trained election judges, and the voters were still allowed to vote a regular ballot.