

NEW YORK

PROGRAM

New York City served as one of the major hubs for the Election Protection program. Many of the national call centers were based there, and the New York City call center fielded over 5,700 calls. The Election Protection field program covered all five boroughs of New York City.

Voters in the City and across the state were confronted with problems including long lines, ballot shortages, and delayed absentee ballots.

BEFORE ELECTION DAY

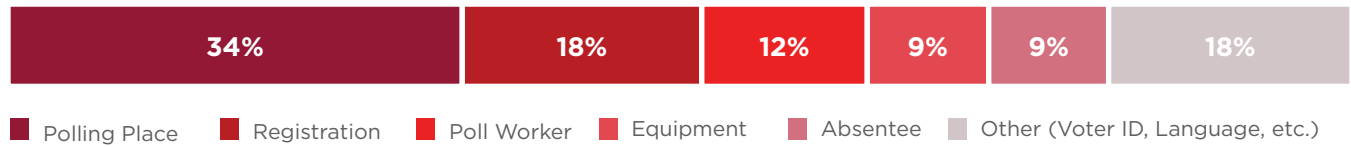
The election system in New York was thrown into a state of uncertainty by Superstorm Sandy, just days before the election. In an attempt to lessen the burden on the election system, the period for receipt of absentee ballots was lengthened, early voting was implemented in New York City for the Saturday and Sunday before Election Day, and perhaps most importantly, voters who had been displaced by the storm were allowed to vote via affidavit (provisional) ballot at any polling location statewide.

New York election officials performed admirably in attempting to address problems posed to the election process by the storm, and Election Protection greatly appreciates their hard work and dedication during a difficult and stressful time. New York's 2012 election experience can be immensely helpful to inform future election administration efforts during times of crisis.

Absentee Ballots

Many callers reported that they never received their absentee ballots. Some individuals had requested absentee ballots, but their requests were never processed. One voter who was attending school out of state sent her request for an absentee ballot, but her request was either not received or not processed. She contacted her local Board of Elections on Election Day, and she was told it was too late to vote an absentee ballot.

2012 VOTING PROBLEMS IN NEW YORK



There were also reports of voters not receiving absentee ballots due to the Superstorm Sandy. One voter in Orange County requested an absentee ballot in advance of the deadline, and the request listed her office address in New York City for receipt of the ballot. Mail delivery to her office was interrupted because of Superstorm Sandy, and she did not receive the ballot. After calling the Orange County Elections Board about voting in a different way, she was treated rudely and had to call many times. Eventually, after consulting with Election Protection volunteers, she was able to download a ballot online and email it to the Elections Board.

ELECTION DAY

Long Lines

Long lines were reported in many precincts, largely due to understaffing and ballot shortages, particularly in Superstorm Sandy-affected areas. The Charles Hill Tower Precinct reported lines in excess of two hours. At P.S. 138 in Kings County, there were reports of voters waiting in line for over three hours, and an estimated 40-50 individuals left without voting after the location ran out of ballots.

Ballot Shortages

Many instances of affidavit ballot shortages were reported, likely due to Superstorm Sandy and voters not being able to vote in their normal precincts. These ballot shortages often went hand-in-hand with long lines. There were also many reports of broken or malfunctioning ballot scanning machines. Election officials were proactive in sending extra ballots to areas that reported shortages, and worked closely with Election Protection to identify polling locations in need of ballots, as well as those with long lines. They also worked to deliver extra voting machines to areas where Election Protection reported machines shortages.

Voter Identification Issues

In New York, no voter identification is required for individuals who are not first time voters who registered by mail. However, Election Protection received reports, both via the Hotline and anecdotally, of individuals being improperly asked for identification in New York City. For example, it was reported that all voters were being asked to show identification at the HolyRood Episcopal Church polling location in Orange County.

Poll Worker Training and Dissemination of Information

Poll worker training was limited in certain storm-affected areas, and there were some reports of poll workers not respecting the Governor's order allowing displaced voters to vote affidavit ballots at any polling location. There was also confusion about the specifics of the order. For example, at Fulton-Montgomery Community College in Fulton County, the Board of Elections refused to give affidavit ballots to out-of-town students living on campus. The campus was not located in an area impacted by the storm. These students were registered to vote in New York, but were from storm-affected areas and wanted to vote in their home counties. The Fulton County Election Commissioner denied them affidavit ballots, saying that they were not "displaced" because they did not live in the storm affected areas.

Election Protection volunteers contacted election officials about polling locations that were incorrectly requiring voters to provide identification, in order to make the officials aware of the incorrect application of the law. In Fulton County, Election Protection did speak with the Fulton County Election Commissioner in an attempt to clarify the Governor's order on affidavit ballots. However, the Commissioner declined to offer affidavit ballots to the students who were attempting to vote.