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Washington, DC - 12/09/2008 - Despite widespread predictions of Election Day meltdowns, the election ran relatively smoothly, according to a new national survey. An overwhelming number of voters on November 4—more than nine in ten (91 percent)—said it was very easy to find their polling place; more than eight in ten (83 percent) said their polling place was very well run; and 75 percent said they were “very confident” their vote was counted as cast. The survey of 10,000 Americans, conducted November 5–12, confirms anecdotal reports of voter satisfaction. Pew Center on the States’ Make Voting Work and AARP sponsored the survey, which was conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

The first of its kind since the election, the research poll was released at Make Voting Work’s (MVW) “Voting in America—The Road Ahead” conference today, where Secretaries of State, election officials and experts gathered to discuss and drive election reform.

“Overall, voters give the election system very good grades,” said Michael Caudell-Feagan, director of Pew Center on the States’ Make Voting Work. “But the data does point to issues with voter wait times, absentee voting and inconsistent application of election laws. With momentum building for reform, now is the time to wrestle with where and how to improve our system based on the insights from voters’ direct experience in navigating it. We are confident election officials are committed to identifying and testing innovative solutions.”

Among the survey’s findings:

- On Election Day, African American voters waited more than twice as long to vote (29 minutes) than all other voters, who reported an average wait time of 13 minutes to vote. Early voters said they had to wait an average of 20 minutes to vote, but African Americans again reported an average wait time more than twice as long—43 minutes;
- Only 61 percent of absentee voters said they were very confident their vote was counted as cast, compared to 75 percent of Election Day voters;
- Among those who did not vote, eight percent said they had requested an absentee ballot but it never arrived, 16 percent had registration problems and 10 percent could not find their polling place;
- Almost everyone surveyed said they had at least one form of government ID. Hispanics said they were asked to show ID more often than whites or African Americans in states that require ID;
- More than half of the states require no ID to vote, yet 12 percent of voters in these states not requiring ID said they were asked to present an ID. Meanwhile, in states that require a photo ID, 20 percent of voters said they were never asked for one.

“Over the coming weeks, we will continue to look at the data to learn more about why people had different experiences when they voted,” said pollster Charles Stewart III, professor of political science at MIT. “In February, we plan to release an extended analysis providing breakdowns by state and by

segments of the electorate.”

New Funding to Study Alternatives to Voting by Precinct and Other Innovations

Make Voting Work (MVW) will invest more than \$8 million in 2009 to drive advances in the field -- continuing its focus on voter information, voter registration, audits, polling place management, and military and overseas voting. Launched in 2007, MVW is a unique partnership of the Pew Center on the States with the JEHT Foundation.

“With Make Voting Work, the Pew Center on the States is documenting problems in our election system and identifying opportunities for improvement,” said Susan K. Urahn, managing director, Pew Center on the States. “Our research on the 2008 elections shows that state and local election officials adopted a variety of innovations designed to improve how elections are run. By field-testing these new approaches, Make Voting Work will build the evidence base needed for sound policymaking. And when we know what works, we will explore how to advance policies that lead to significant improvements across the country.”

Initially, the new funding will be applied to six projects that will evaluate the impact of early voting and other alternatives to traditional precinct place voting on turnout, voter convenience and satisfaction, integrity and security of the system, and administrative efficiency and cost. Working with leading election officials around the country, MVW will commission a number of additional pilot projects, case studies and experiments in 2009 to deepen the evidence base available to policymakers, those administering our elections, and the American electorate.

Make Voting Work, a project of the Pew Center on the States, seeks to foster an election system that achieves the highest standards of accuracy, accessibility, efficiency and security. The initiative examines the most pressing election problems, and undertakes and evaluates pilot projects and experiments designed to address them. This research will inform our efforts to identify effective solutions through changes in policies, practices and technology. Further information is available at pewcenteronthestates.org

The JEHT Foundation was established in April 2000. Its name stands for the core values that underlie the Foundation's mission: Justice, Equality, Human dignity and Tolerance. The Foundation focuses on criminal and juvenile justice, international justice, and fair and participatory elections. Working directly with states, in some cases in-depth, is a key part of the Foundation strategy to implement practical change related to its mission.

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