



Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

PUBLIC STATEMENT

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California Elections: Our Work is Not Complete

Dean C. Logan, the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk for the largest electoral jurisdiction in the country, wrote the following statement in response to Pew Research Center's Elections Performance Index, which examines election administration performance across the United States.

Here we are one month outside of 2012 and past the Presidential Election; the nightly polls and endless television ads have ended – a welcome reprieve – yet the mechanics of how voters get registered and how elections are run in the United States remains a focal point in the national media.

First, there was the President's remark in his acceptance speech and again in the inaugural address sounding the call to eliminate the long lines for voting that played repeatedly on network news and video blogs leading up to and on Election Day. This week MIT released data detailing the length of time voters waited to vote across the country and associated impacts based on race/ethnicity, age and region. California fared very well in the study coming in with some of the shortest wait times for voting in the nation.

Then this week, the Pew Center on the States released a first-of-its-kind Election Performance Index, ranking states on a series of election-related performance measures in the 2008 and 2010 elections. The index looked at measures like voter registration rates, turnout, availability of online voter information tools, options for voting by mail and provisional voting. The report was sobering; underscoring wide variances in election practices from state-to-state and illustrating the need for further reform and modernization.

Compared to other states, California did not stack up well in the index. It would be easy to be defensive about the surprisingly low performance ratings – and, there are good reasons to question the ability of the index to measure complexities such as size, diversity, and voter-friendly election laws but, there is another story to be told about this report and an opportunity to utilize it as a springboard for discussions about future election reforms in California. More than a grading system or competition among states with distinct populations and laws, the index helps us better appreciate the complexities and challenges in measuring the health of our elections infrastructure.

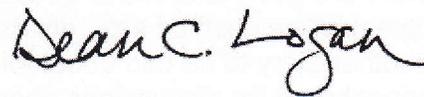
For many years, California has been a standard bearer for progressive election reforms that seek to expand and protect the franchise. Efforts include: mailing every voter an official sample ballot and voter guide, no excuse and permanent Vote by Mail, and a voter-friendly provisional voting process that, in 2012, helped ensure more than 300,000 voters in L.A. County were able to vote. California's efforts to protect the rights of voters with limited English ability and/or disabilities are also unparalleled.

Pew's Election Performance Index is a good reminder that heading into 2012, California was beginning to fall behind other states in terms of progressive and innovative election reforms. Hoping to reinvigorate the state's appetite for election reform, last year a collaborative of local election administrators, good government advocates, civil rights organizations and civic engagement leaders came together and formed the group Future of California Elections. With support from the James Irvine Foundation the group seeks to provide a shared vision for the future of California elections.

In short order, the state's new online voter registration system was authorized and implemented; greatly enhancing voter access and participation in the Presidential Election. A related proposal passed to allow Election Day voter registration with implementation prudently and appropriately linked to completion of a comprehensive and secure statewide voter registration database scheduled to go live in 2015. Similar efforts and initiatives are resulting in improved voter educational materials, enhanced transparency, greater accessibility and increased accountability in our elections.

The demographics of California's electorate are evolving and the elections process must evolve too. California cannot afford to slip behind; not because we want to best other states in a broad reaching comparative study, but because we have an obligation to provide California voters with a 21st century voting process.

That is the most important message to be taken from the new Election Performance Index. Improved voter participation, more measurable cost effectiveness and lower risk of disenfranchisement depend on maintaining momentum, anticipating future needs and a path of continuous improvement. In this, California should seize the opportunity to lead.



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