

G A O
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-450](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The 2004 general election was the first presidential election that tested substantial changes states made to their election systems since the 2000 election, including some changes required by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). HAVA required some major changes in the nation's elections processes, not all of which had to be implemented by the November 2004 election. HAVA addressed issues of people, processes, and technology, all of which must be effectively integrated to ensure effective election operations. GAO initiated a review under the authority of the Comptroller General to examine an array of election issues of broad interest to Congress. For each major stage of the election process, this report discusses (1) changes to election systems since the 2000 election, including steps taken to implement HAVA, and (2) challenges encountered in the 2004 election. For this report, GAO sent a survey to the 50 states and the District of Columbia (all responded) and mailed a questionnaire to a nationwide sample of 788 local election jurisdictions about election administration activities (80 percent responded). To obtain more detailed information about experiences for the 2004 election, GAO also visited 28 local jurisdictions in 14 states, chosen to represent a range of election system characteristics.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any recommendations at this time.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-450.
www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-451SP.
www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-452SP.

To view the full product or the related surveys, click on the links above. For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr., at (202) 512-8777 or JenkinsWO@gao.gov.

ELECTIONS

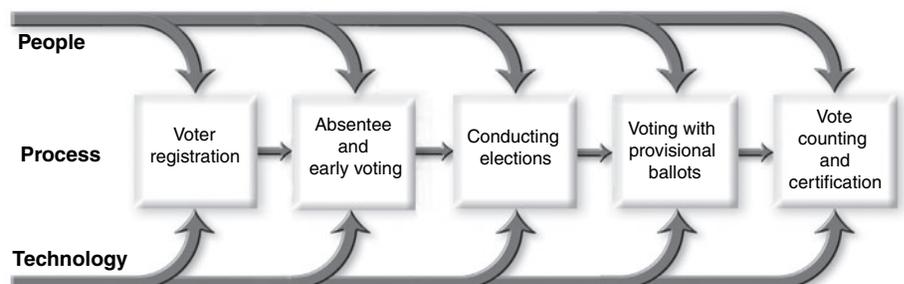
The Nation's Evolving Election System as Reflected in the November 2004 General Election

What GAO Found

In passing HAVA, Congress provided a means for states and local jurisdictions to improve upon several aspects of the election system, but it is too soon to determine the full effect of those changes. For example, 41 states obtained waivers permitted under HAVA until January 1, 2006, to implement a requirement for statewide voter registration lists. States also had discretion in how they implemented HAVA requirements, such as the identification requirements for first-time mail registrants. Some local election jurisdictions described different identification procedures for first-time mail registrants who registered through voter registration drives. Although states differed regarding where voters who cast provisional ballots for federal office must cast those ballots in order for their votes to be counted, provisional voting has helped to facilitate voter participation. HAVA also created the Election Assistance Commission, which has issued best practice guides and voluntary voting system standards and distributed federal funds to states for improving election administration, including purchasing new voting equipment. The results of our survey of local election jurisdictions indicate that larger jurisdictions may be replacing older equipment with technology-based voting methods to a greater extent than small jurisdictions, which continue to use paper ballots extensively and are the majority of jurisdictions. As the elections technology environment evolves, voting system performance management, security, and testing will continue to be important to ensuring the integrity of the overall elections process.

GAO found that states made changes—either as a result of HAVA or on their own—to address some of the challenges identified in the November 2000 election. GAO also found that some challenges continued—such as problems receiving voter registration applications from motor vehicle agencies, addressing voter error issues with absentee voting, recruiting and training a sufficient number of poll workers, and continuing to ensure accurate vote counting. At the same time, new challenges arose in the November 2004 election, such as fraudulent, incomplete, or inaccurate applications received through voter registration drives; larger than expected early voter turnout, resulting in long lines; and counting large numbers of absentee ballots and determining the eligibility of provisional voters in time to meet final vote certification deadlines.

The Election Process Involves the Integration of People, Process, and Technology



Source: GAO.