

FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION

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IMPACT OF NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT CONTAINED IN FEC REPORT TO CONGRESS

WASHINGTON -- The Federal Election Commission today approved a report to Congress and the President on the impact of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) of 1993, often referred to as the "Motor Voter" law.

States reported 142,995,856 registered voters in 1996, amounting to 72.77 percent of the voting age population. This is the highest percentage of voter registration in any election since 1960, when reliable records were first available. The report notes that voter registration in those states covered by the NVRA* rose in 1996 by 1.82 percentage points over 1992, the previous comparable election. The total nationwide increase in registered voters from 1992 to 1996 was 9,183,680.

The report also notes that the number of Americans actually voting in 1996 declined by over 5 percentage points from 1992, marking the first Presidential election since 1972 -- when the franchise was extended to those 18 - 21 years of age -- that voter registration rose while turnout declined.

Highlights of the report, which covers 1995-96, the first two years in which the new law was in effect, include:

- Motor vehicle offices generated the most voter registration applications, 33.1 percent.
- Postcard registration accounted for almost a third of applications, at 29.7 percent.
- Registration drives, deputy registrars, and in-person registrations accounted for 26.1 percent of all applications.
- All other agencies mandated by the Act supplied a total of 11.1 percent of total voter registration applications. Public assistance agencies supplied 6.3 percent; agencies designated by the states supplied 4.2 percent; disability service agencies supplied .4 percent; and armed forces recruitment offices supplied .2 percent.

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– One-third of all total voter registration applications were changes of name or address.

– A total of 8,723,301 names were deleted from registration lists under the new list verification procedures of the law, while another 7,083,794 registrants were declared “inactive” and will be removed after 1998 if they fail to vote in that election.

Based on problems reported by the states to the FEC’s Office of Election Administration, the Commission has made three recommendations for improving the administration of the NVRA:

- “that states, which do not require all or part of the applicant’s Social Security number, voluntarily (1) amend their election codes to require only the last four digits from all new voter registration applicants, and (2) endeavor to obtain that same item of information from all current registered voters;
- “that states, which have not yet done so, voluntarily (1) develop and implement a statewide computerized voter registration database; (2) ensure that all local registration offices are computerized; and (3) link their statewide computerized system, where feasible, with the computerized systems of the collateral public agencies relevant to the NVRA (motor vehicle offices, public assistance offices, etc.); and
- “that the U.S. Postal Service (1) create a new class of mail for ‘official election material’ that encompasses all mail items requisite to the NVRA and provide the most favorable reduced rates affordable for the first class treatment of such mailings; and (2) provide space in their postal lobbies free of charge to state and local election officials for voter registration material.”

This report, entitled “The Impact of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 on the Administration of Elections for Federal Office, 1994 - 1996,” is the second in a series of reports to Congress, as required by law. Copies are available from the FEC Press Office, Public Records Office, Public Information Office, and the Office of Election Administration. The executive summary of the report, along with the supporting data from five tables within the report, will be available on the Commission’s Web site – <http://www.fec.gov> – after June 20.

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* Forty-four states and the District of Columbia are covered by the NVRA. Idaho, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, New Hampshire, and Wyoming are exempt from the provisions of the Act. Vermont has not yet fully implemented the NVRA due to that state’s Constitutional impediments.

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