

Election Reforms Urgently Needed

By Roy Minet (Rev. 09/15/21)

Elections are the *only* mechanism by which citizens can hope to have any meaningful control over their government. The primary objective of an election is to make the best possible decisions when choosing citizens' representatives who will wield the fearsome force of government over everyone's lives.

Elections probably aren't the best way to make such important decisions, but we nevertheless use elections so that the decision-making power stays dispersed and does not fall into the hands of a small group or a dictator. Elections *are* democracy; without elections *that citizens can implicitly trust*, there is no democracy.

Obviously, it is of paramount importance that the integrity of elections be assiduously guarded. Once lost, regaining election integrity is hard to accomplish and unlikely to happen. Election integrity means that outcomes (decisions) must be solely the result of voters freely expressing their sincere opinions through guaranteed-to-be-secret ballots.

Citizens should be able to vote on election day and have final results promptly (within three or four hours after the polls close). Election integrity must be unquestionably solid so results can be trusted. No one, especially the losers, should ever think it necessary or worthwhile to question results, insist on recounts or file lawsuits. We have seen how disruptive that can be.

Elections in the United States today are dangerously far from meeting the standards described above. Sadly, election integrity has deteriorated somewhat in recent years, primarily caused by attempts to provide "easier" or "more convenient" voting options, and by ill-advised uses of newer technology. Improvements made possible by new technology definitely should be implemented, but great care must be taken lest they turn out to be steps backward. Hanging chads and direct recording electronic (DRE) voting machines which have no audit trails come to mind.

Achieving airtight integrity of elections actually is quite difficult. Maintaining it requires eternal vigilance. The overall process and every part of it must be carefully thought through. Every step must be engineered to make fraud substantially impossible.

It must be extremely difficult and highly unlikely that election results could be nefariously controlled or influenced by any special interest group. If fraudulent influence should nevertheless somehow occur, its detection and correction must be virtually certain. Furthermore, the evidence required for successful prosecution must be available.

Here are five important areas in which improvement is needed to attain the high level of election integrity to which citizens are entitled. All are needed. Each one by itself will make a large improvement. They are listed in priority order.

- **Substantially all voters should vote in-person at their neighborhood polling place on election day.** Eliminate use of mail-in voting and early voting. Especially mail-in voting has many serious vulnerabilities. Complete ballot secrecy *cannot* be guaranteed. There is plenty of time and opportunity for fraudulent manipulation out in the wide world in the days and weeks before ballots are returned; some kinds of fraud are nearly impossible to detect and prosecute. Ballot secrecy is compromised. Therefore, allow only the minimum number of absentee ballots required for voters who apply for them and have a bona fide and compelling reason. Beyond such very limited exceptions, there simply is no valid reason not to vote at a polling place. If grocery stores and even Disney World can operate safely with masks and distancing, surely this can be done at polling places.
- **Replace the Plurality voting method with a dramatically better voting method.** It has been known for 250 years that Plurality is a truly awful voting method with very serious problems. It is a contributing cause of the increasing polarization which is reaching uncomfortable, if not dangerous, levels. BAWV (Best/Alternate/Worst Voting) is the recommended replacement. IRV (Instant Runoff Voting) is not nearly good enough. (In fact, none of the many RCV, or Ranked-Choice Voting, methods is nearly good enough.)
- **Remove artificial barriers to ballot access.** All political parties should be “created equal.” Any political party that can demonstrate a modicum of public support (simply defined to be at least 0.05% of statewide voter registration) should be qualified to nominate candidates to appear on general election ballots. More competition (voter choices) is a good thing. Parties may establish their own rules for nominating procedures, primaries and conventions, but must bear all costs of their operations. No taxpayer dollars should ever be spent for the benefit of any private political organization (such as funding primary elections or subsidizing conventions).
- **Cleanly and simply eliminate any possibility of gerrymandering.** All electoral district boundaries should be drawn using a guaranteed-to-be-completely-impartial geometric procedure called “Precinct-Preserving Splitline.”
- **Improve polling place procedure and efficiency through careful use of modern computer technology.** Final results (including write-ins) can be available within 20 minutes of poll closing and 100% verification is easy and practical to ensure unquestionable integrity. It is worth the money to equip polling places so that peak wait times are ten minutes or less.