



Highlights of [GAO-05-997](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

GAO's past work and the work of others has shown that challenges processing voter registration applications and maintaining voter registration lists can result in individuals arriving at polls on Election Day to find they were not listed as registered. GAO surveyed local election officials in 14 jurisdictions in 7 states (AZ, CA, MI, NY, TX, VA, and WI) to obtain their views on managing voter registration for the 2004 election. GAO selected the 7 states considering characteristics relevant to voter registration, such as whether a statewide voter registration list existed prior to the enactment of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002. Locations were selected within each state to represent one small and one large election jurisdiction.

This report discusses election officials' characterization of (1) challenges receiving voter registration applications, including checking them for completeness; (2) removing voters' names from voter registration lists and ensuring that names were not inadvertently removed; and (3) implementing HAVA's provisional voting and identification requirements. HAVA, in part, requires that states offer provisional ballots to voters not listed as registered who declare eligibility and first-time voters who registered by mail after January 1, 2003, and could not provide identification. GAO offered election officials the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their responses used to prepare this report.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-997](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-997).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William Jenkins at (202) 512-8777 or [jenkinswo@gao.gov](mailto:jenkinswo@gao.gov).

## ELECTIONS

# Views of Selected Local Election Officials on Managing Voter Registration and Ensuring Eligible Citizens Can Vote

## What GAO Found

Local election officials representing all but 1 of the 14 jurisdictions GAO surveyed after the November 2004 election reported facing some challenges processing voter registration applications and took steps to address them. Processing applications received from voter registration drives sponsored by non-governmental organizations posed a challenge to election officials in 12 of the 14 jurisdictions, while half of the officials reported challenges receiving applications from other external sources, such as motor vehicle agencies. Challenges occurred in processing these applications for reasons such as incomplete or inaccurate information on voter registration applications. Half of the officials reported that their offices faced challenges checking applications for completeness, accuracy, or duplicates, citing, among other things, insufficient staffing to check the applications. Steps taken by election officials to address these and other challenges included hiring additional staff to handle the volume of applications received and contacting applicants to get correct information.

All but 1 of the 14 election officials reported that, using various sources of information, they removed names from voter registration lists during 2004 if, for example, voters had moved, were deceased, or were ineligible due to a felony conviction. To help ensure names of eligible voters were not inadvertently removed from voter registration lists, officials reported contacting voters to confirm removal, matched voters' identifying information (such as name and address) with address changes provided by the U.S. Postal Service, and matched voter registration records with felony or death records. GAO reported in June 2005 about problems officials in these same jurisdictions experienced verifying voter information with death or felony information from existing data sources.

GAO's survey showed that all 14 election jurisdictions permitted citizens to cast provisional ballots during the November 2004 election. HAVA gives states discretion to implement provisional voting based on state voter eligibility requirements. According to the election officials surveyed, about 423,000 provisional ballots were cast in 13 of the 14 jurisdictions, and 70 percent of those votes were counted. Also, 8 of the 14 jurisdictions reported challenges implementing provisional voting, in part, because some poll workers were not familiar with provisional voting or staff did not have sufficient time to process provisional ballots. To address these challenges, election officials in these jurisdictions said they hired extra staff or provided training to poll workers.