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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-182](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended, contains, among other things, provisions designed to protect the voting rights of U.S. citizens of certain ethnic groups whose command of the English language may be limited. The Department of Justice (DOJ) enforces these provisions, and the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) serves as a national clearinghouse for election information and procedures. The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 mandated that GAO study the implementation of bilingual voting under Section 203 of the act. This report discusses (1) the ways that selected jurisdictions covered under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act have provided bilingual voting assistance as of the November 2006 general election and any subsequent elections through June 2007, and the challenges they reportedly faced in providing such assistance; and (2) the perceived usefulness of this bilingual voting assistance, and the extent to which the selected jurisdictions evaluated the usefulness of such assistance to language minority voters. To obtain details about this voting assistance, GAO obtained information from election officials in 14 of the 296 jurisdictions required to provide it, as well as from community representatives in 11 of these jurisdictions. These jurisdictions were selected to reflect a range of characteristics such as geographic diversity and varying language minority groups.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-182](#). For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr. at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov.

BILINGUAL VOTING ASSISTANCE

Selected Jurisdictions' Strategies for Identifying Needs and Providing Assistance

What GAO Found

All but 1 of the 14 election jurisdictions GAO contacted reported providing some form of oral or written bilingual voting assistance through such things as the use of bilingual poll workers, and each of the 14 jurisdictions reported challenges in providing assistance. Election offices reported providing similar types of oral and written bilingual voting assistance at each stage of the voting process—from voter registration to Election Day—for the November 2006 and subsequent elections. In nine of the jurisdictions, this bilingual assistance was supplemented by efforts of community-based organizations. In part because DOJ guidance intentionally provides jurisdictions flexibility in how they implement bilingual voting requirements, election offices used varied strategies to implement bilingual programs. Election officials in each of the 14 jurisdictions reported challenges in implementing bilingual assistance programs, including difficulty in recruiting bilingual poll workers and effectively targeting where to provide bilingual voting assistance. Officials in nine jurisdictions also noted they would benefit from additional guidance for providing bilingual assistance. The EAC has taken steps to provide additional guidance to jurisdictions, including plans to develop a set of management guidelines for jurisdictions to use in implementing their programs.

GAO identified little quantitative data measuring the usefulness of various types of bilingual voting assistance. Election officials and community-based organization representatives noted that certain forms of assistance, such as having bilingual poll workers, were more useful than others. Some jurisdictions stated that modifications, including outreach to language minority groups, would improve the usefulness of bilingual assistance. While none of the 14 jurisdictions had attempted to formally evaluate their assistance, most reported gathering information about the usefulness of certain aspects of the assistance. While formal evaluations have proven to be a successful means to improve program effectiveness, conducting formal evaluations of the usefulness and effect of bilingual voting assistance is difficult. Key difficulties include identifying the appropriate indicators of success and isolating the effects of bilingual assistance efforts on voters from other influences on election processes. We provided a draft of this report to DOJ and the EAC for comment. DOJ provided no comments, and the EAC's comments described its recent activities on bilingual voting assistance.

Examples of Bilingual Assistance: Polling Place Signage and Poll Worker Name Tag



Source: Election officials.