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## EDITORIAL

## New Standards for Elections

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**T**he 2004 election may not have an asterisk next to it the way the 2000 election does, but the mechanics of our democracy remained badly flawed. From untrustworthy electronic voting machines, to partisan secretaries of state, to outrageously long lines at the polls, the election system was far from what voters are entitled to.

It's patently obvious that presidential elections, at least, should be conducted under uniform rules. Voters in Alaska and Texas should not have different levels of protection when it comes to their right to cast a ballot and have it counted. It's ridiculous that citizens who vote in one place have to show picture ID while others do not, that a person who accidentally walks into the wrong polling place can cast a provisional ballot that will be counted in one state but thrown out in another. States may have the right to set their own standards for local elections, but picking the president is a national enterprise.

This is obviously a job for Congress, and it deserves the same kind of persistent, intense lobbying effort that reformers have given the issue of campaign finance. But improvements by the states may be easier to achieve, and will clearly help prod Congress by their good example. Advocates should push every level of government to be part of the solution:

1. A holiday for voting. It's wrong for working people to be forced to choose between standing in a long line to vote and being on time for work. Election Day should be a holiday, to underscore the significance of the event, to give all voters time to cast ballots and to free up more qualified people to serve as poll workers.
2. Early voting. In states that permit it, early voting encourages people to turn out by letting them vote at times that are convenient for them. And it gives election officials and outside groups more time to react to voting problems ranging from faulty voting machines to voter intimidation.
3. Improved electronic voting. For voters to trust electronic voting, there must be a voter-verified paper record of every vote cast, and mandatory recounts of a reasonable percentage of the votes. The computer code should be provided to election officials, and made public so it can be widely reviewed. There should be spot-checks of the software being used on Election Day, as there are of slot machines in Nevada, to ensure that the software in use matches what is on file with election officials.
4. Shorter lines at the polls. Forcing voters to wait five hours, as some did this year, is unreasonable, and it disenfranchises those who cannot afford the wait. There should be standards for the number of voting machines and poll workers per 100 voters, to ensure that waiting times are reasonable and uniform from precinct to precinct.
5. Impartial election administrators. Partisan secretaries of state routinely issued rulings this year that favored their parties and themselves. Decisions about who can vote and how votes will be counted should be made by officials who are not running for higher office or supporting any candidates. Voting machine manufacturers and their employees, and companies that handle ballots,

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should not endorse or contribute to political candidates.

6. Uniform and inclusive voter registration standards. Registration forms should be simplified, so no one is again disenfranchised for failing to check a superfluous box, as occurred this year in Florida, or for not using heavy enough paper, as occurred in Ohio. The rules should be geared to getting as many qualified voters as possible on the rolls.

7. Accurate and transparent voting roll purges. This year, Florida once again conducted a flawed and apparently partisan purge of its rolls, and went to court to try to keep it secret. There should be clear standards for how purges are done that are made public in advance. Names that are due to be removed should be published, and posted online, well in advance of Election Day.

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