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American Statistical Association Calls for Audits to Increase Confidence in Electoral Outcomes

ASA Board adopts position on Electoral Integrity

ALEXANDRIA VA (PRWEB) MARCH 17, 2008 – The Board of Directors of the American Statistical Association (ASA) today called on the federal government to take actions, including election audits, that would assure greater levels of voter confidence in electoral outcomes. The specific actions recommended by the Board include conducting broader research into the integrity of elections, providing tools to help election officials conduct high-integrity elections, and recommending designs of acceptable ballots as well as procedures for testing ballots on the actual machines that will be used to record the results.

The Position on Electoral Integrity adopted by the ASA Board at its March meeting states, “It is critical that the integrity of central vote tabulations be confirmed by audits of voter-verified hard-copy records in order to provide high – and clearly specified – levels of confidence in electoral outcomes... Certification of any electoral outcome should require substantiating evidence that the putative winner was the intended selection of the plurality of voters. Compelling statistical evidence of electoral failure should be accepted as a basis for judicial remedy.”

The ASA statement also encourages state governments to adopt routine monitoring of all electoral procedures to ensure continuous quality improvement.

The ASA Board position statement resulted in part from knowledge gained through the involvement of several ASA members in the controversy following the contested elections of 2000 (Presidential), 2006 (Florida Congressional), and the ongoing concern over the need for a paper trail in the upcoming presidential elections.

“After reviewing reports of statistical evidence of problems in several recent races,” said Peter Lachenbruch, ASA President and Board Chair, “the Board felt it was important for the ASA to urge establishment of electoral processes that reaffirm the public’s trust in our elections. Statistical methods can provide confidence in well-conducted contests. They can also identify common sources of problems and help avert future electoral failures.”

The complete ASA position statement follows:

“Trustworthy elections demand integrity throughout the entire electoral process, from voting laws and regulations to details of implementation, including maintaining voter registration lists and a secure chain of custody for voted ballots. All processes and data of US elections should be subject to statistically sound, continuous-quality monitoring and improvement. Data releases should be comprehensive and timely and follow standardized, readily analyzable formats. It is critical that the integrity of central vote tabulations be confirmed by audits of voter-verified hard-copy records in order to provide high -- and clearly specified -- levels of confidence in electoral outcomes.

"The American Statistical Association recommends that the federal government synthesize and extend existing research into the effects of various practices on the integrity of elections, and disseminate tools that help voting officials to efficiently conduct high-integrity elections. In addition, the federal government should provide examples of acceptable and unacceptable ballot designs and specify procedures for adequate pre-testing of ballots on the actual machinery to be used in the election. The ASA encourages state governments to adopt routine monitoring of all electoral procedures to ensure continuous quality improvement. Certification of any electoral outcome should require substantiating evidence that the putative winner was the intended selection of the plurality of voters. Compelling statistical evidence of electoral failure should be accepted as a basis for judicial remedy."

About the American Statistical Association

The American Statistical Association (ASA), a scientific and educational society founded in Boston in 1839, is the second oldest professional society in the United States. For more than 160 years, ASA has been providing its 18,000 members serving in academia, government, and industry and the public with up-to-date, useful information about statistics. The ASA has a proud tradition of service to statisticians, quantitative scientists, and users of statistics across a wealth of academic areas and applications. For additional information about the American Statistical Association, please visit the association's web site at <http://www.amstat.org> or call 703.684.1221.

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