Voter ID law tested during primary elections

By Kayla Milliniks / Published April 14, 2014

Texas’ new voter ID law had little to no effect on the 2014 primary elections, but a variety of political leaders say the true test will be in the general election.

The 2014 Texas primary elections were the second statewide elections where the Texas voter ID law was enforced.

The statewide, combined Republican and Democrat turnout was 6.63 percent this year, an increase compared to the 5.09 percent turnout in 2012.

Democratic and Republican leaders agreed that the ID law is primarily white and middle to upper class, so the voter ID law should not affect them.

“It will mostly affect people in poverty-stricken, rural or inner-city areas,” said Lise Ross, founding president of the League of United Latin American Citizens of Tarrant County.

Despite the voter ID law’s having little to no effect on the 109th, Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Brooks said 109 residents should continue to be aware of the law and the issues surrounding it.

Brooks has been actively speaking out against the law since it was passed in 2011.

Brooks said he believes that the voter ID law is unconstitutional and works to take the vote away from African-Americans and Hispanics.

Tarrant County Election Administrator Steve Raborn said he was unaware of any complaints made about the law during the primary elections.

“Everyone seems to understand what the acceptable IDs are,” Raborn said.

“Everyone did a pretty good job in 2014, but there were a lot of issues that came up in 2014,” said James Riddensnyder, a TCU political science professor, said although the new law seemed to run smoothly during the primaries, this election might not show how the law will pan out during a general election.

“I think the primaries really don’t test the law very well because turnout is low, and only the most politically engaged participate,” he said. “Those who participate in primaries are likely to have problems with ID.”

Ann McClure, president of the Tarrant County Democratic Women’s Club, said she has been following the law closely since 2012 and has been “very alarmed and concerned” when the law was passed.

“I picked up on the fact that the law could easily disenfranchise women and their vote,” she said. “Most people will use their traditional driver’s license, but I knew my maiden name was not on my voter registration.”

According to the voter ID law, whichever of the seven acceptable IDs voters choose to use must exactly match the name on their voter registration card.

FAD Rhodes, Coordinator for the North East Tarrant County Tea Party’s Liaison and CEO of the Tea Party groups, said the law is a necessity for ensuring people who show up to vote are eligible and who they claim to be.

“I don’t really understand why people are so against it. In our culture we have thousands of things we need a proper ID for,” he said. “I don’t think it’s a threat to the minority or women’s vote.”

“I think that one of the biggest threats to the minority and women’s vote,” he said. “The law will help prevent people from voting Provisionally.

Voting provisionally allows the voter to cast their vote, but it would not be counted unless they brought an acceptable ID within a certain time period, depending on the date they voted.

McClure, who worked early voting and Election Day during the primaries, said she had noticed that potential provisional voters were discouraged by the time period they had to bring in an acceptable ID.

“One woman who came in to vote recently moved back to Fort Worth,” she said. “She was in the process of changing all of her information and IDs and only had a temporary Texas ID. She didn’t know if her actual ID would be ready in time for her to bring it back within the allotted time period, so this could be a potential problem for many people.”

McClure and Rhodes agreed that the true test of the voter ID law would be in the next general election.

Brooks said that the primary electors did not show what they considers the law’s true test.

“Yes, there were more early voters in the election, but back who they were, they were mainly Republicans,” Brooks said. “This law isn’t aimed toward them. It is aimed to suppress the African American and Hispanic vote, which is mainly Democatic.”

Brooks is not the only one with reservations – the U.S. Department of Justice believes the voter ID law is unconstitutional.

The U.S. Department of Justice argued the law violated the Voting Rights Act in a lawsuit filed in August.

The Voting Rights Act requires states to clear any changes in their voting laws with the federal government.

However, the Supreme Court struck down section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, allowing Texas to continue enforcing the voter ID law.

Brooks continues to speak out against the law.

“Even if the law doesn’t directly affect you, it’s something to be concerned about,” he said. “Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere.”

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