

Elections study: Voters like fresh faces at polling places

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A new study shows counties can boost voters' trust in elections by making an investment in the human side of elections by recruiting new poll workers.

The findings come from a study by Kent State University's Ryan L. Claassen, who collaborated with Brigham Young University researchers Quin Monson, Kelly Patterson and David Magleby, to conduct exit polling following the 2006 midterm election in Ohio's Franklin and Summit counties.

The research team used exit polling to assess voters' reaction to service at voting locations. The study's authors focused on voters' reaction to poll workers since voters' reaction to poll workers has been shown to be related to voters' confidence that their vote will be counted accurately.

Voters gave higher marks to precincts staffed by new poll workers recruited from local schools and businesses to take a day off and be "street-level bureaucrats" on Election Day, according to the study published by American Politics Research.

"The perceived quality of poll workers matters a great deal, and will particularly be important this November where many voting locations are expected to be crowded," says Claassen, Kent State assistant professor of political science. "With better service comes more trust and confidence – and trust and confidence are important because when voters lack confidence they have no incentive to participate."

In Ohio's Franklin County, local employers, unions and teachers were asked to recruit employees and students to serve as poll workers on Election Day. A concentrated effort was made to enlist younger poll workers who might be more comfortable with new voting technology.

In the Kent State-Brigham Young study, sponsored by Brigham Young's Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, both poll workers and voters completed evaluations about their experiences. An analysis of voter evaluations shows voters gave a more positive evaluation to polling places with the new recruits. Further, voters' evaluations matched poll workers' confidence in their training.

Source: Kent State University

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