The Election May Be Decided Before November 6

by Phyllis Schlafly

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The presidential debates start October 3 and extend to October 22. But who wins or scores in the debates will have no influence on tens of thousands of Americans who will have already cast their votes for President and are not permitted to change their minds.

In 2008, 31 percent of voters cast their ballots prior to Election Day, and the count was more than half in some battleground states. The percentage is expected to top 40 percent this year since early voting is now allowed in 32 states and began in Iowa on September 27.

In 2008, John McCain received more votes than Barack Obama on Election Day in Iowa and in several other states, but Obama carried those states because his get-out-the-vote campaign was based on a month of voting rather than just on Election Day. Iowa even allows the creation of temporary voting locations aimed at serving particular constituencies, so when Michelle Obama spoke at the University of Northern Iowa she told her audience to go immediately and cast their ballots just a few steps away at a special voting site.

In 2008, many Floridians cast their ballots prior to Election Day, and Obama won Florida by a surprisingly large margin. This year, statistical analysts may predict before Election Day which presidential candidate wins Florida and imply that the election is over.

How many will then take the trouble to vote on Election Day? That would be as silly as betting on a football game that was played last year.

Look at this year's battleground states. Party strategists estimate that 70 percent of ballots will be cast before November 6 in Florida, North Carolina, Colorado and Nevada, and at least 30 percent of ballots in Ohio, Wisconsin and Iowa.

The Democrats and union organizers have become very skilled at exploiting early voting. The Obama campaign is already sending out hundreds of field organizers and volunteers to "chase ballots" and make sure they carry votes for Obama.

Their assignment is to locate those they believe are Obama voters and nag them until they actually go to the polls. As an inducement, the organizers tell these voters that when their names come off the Obama target list, they will no longer get calls and mail from the campaign; in other words, the way to stop the political harassment is to hurry up and vote.

Early voting is exacerbating the influence of big money doled out by the Super PACs. Early voting requires candidates to spend large amounts of money and buy expensive television ads over many weeks, which most grassroots, non-establishment candidates can't afford to do.

A major defect of early voting is that it exponentially increases opportunities for ballot fraud and voter intimidation, and thereby undermines respect for elections and for confidence that our elections are fair and honest. It is virtually impossible to have the same safeguards and security measures against voter fraud that we maintain at regular polling places on Election Day, such as the requirement for voter ID and having poll watchers all day from the two major political parties.

Early voting, especially early weekend voting, also raises the prospect of increased voter intimidation of groups of people who are driven to the polls to vote under the supervision of those who brought them. Groups known to have been driven to the polls for early voting include employees from certain industries, union members, and even patients in nursing homes who may not be fully cognizant of the purpose of the trip.

When early voting is allowed by mail, the voter is subject to intimidation from those who watch him mark his ballot or to whom he shows his ballot before he mails it. If the vote pleases the watcher, the voter can collect an anticipated reward in cash, merchandise, or some benefit. Whatever happened to our precious secret ballot?

Unfortunately, the Obama Administration and the courts have interfered with sensible attempts by states, including Florida and Ohio, to cut back excessive early voting The Obama Administration invoked its power under the Voting Rights Act to prevent several counties in Florida from reducing early voting hours.

Encouraging people to close their minds and cast an irrevocable ballot weeks before Election Day is as harmful to a fair election as it would be to allow jurors to vote guilty or not guilty before they hear all the evidence in a trial. Long trials can, indeed, be very inconvenient to jurors, but that's no excuse for allowing them to vote on what could be a matter of life-or-death before they hear all the arguments pro and con.