

Election Reform in Illinois: Ending the Gridlock¹

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Illinois has been ripe for an election controversy like the one seen in Florida in 2000. In fact, a less publicized vote counting dispute with many of the elements seen in Florida occurred in the 1982 Illinois gubernatorial election. Punch card ballots and unrecorded votes are more common in Illinois than in just about any other state. Furthermore, as of the spring of 2003, Illinois had yet to meet any of the major requirements in the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and the state's election system continued to fall short of the main recommendations of several national commissions that studied election procedures after the 2000 elections.

The vote counting controversy in Florida in 2000 inspired varying degrees of self-examination among state and local election officials around the country. Shortly after the 2000 election, nineteen states formed commissions to study their election systems and recommend changes (Palazzolo, Whelan, and Pfeiffer 2003). Illinois was not one of those states. In fact, diagnoses of the state's election system varied dramatically among top officials overseeing election laws. Shortly after the 2000 election, State Representative Mike Boland, a Democrat and chairman of the House Elections and Campaign Reform Committee, stated that "we're a disaster just waiting to happen" (Skertic 2000, 13). In contrast, Ron Michaelson, executive director of the state Board of Elections (the state's top election official) said "I don't think we need fear any election contest in this state with that kind of a margin." He went on, "we've never had a chad problem. Most of our county clerks tell me that they clean off the back of cards before they put them through the card reader" (Schoenburg 2000, 1).² This disagreement on the fundamental need for reform is an example of the basic (and often partisan) disagreements that have hindered election reform in Illinois.

Given the condition of the election system in Illinois, several election reforms have been proposed in recent years, but no significant changes occurred until the 2003 legislative session. Partisan gridlock, the state's deteriorating fiscal condition, the state's political culture, other political reform priorities, and the absence of conditions promoting strong leadership thwarted previous election reform efforts. However, the passage of HAVA and a shift to Democratic Party control of the legislative and executive branches of state government dramatically improved the prospects for reform. These two forces combined in 2003 to help pass the most significant election reform legislation in Illinois in many years.

Election Reform Proposals in Illinois

Despite the differing assessments of the state's election procedures, the Illinois legislature has not lacked for election reform proposals. In fact, the election controversy in Florida fueled a proliferation of election reform proposals in Illinois. In the 91st General Assembly (1999-2000), 32 election reform bills were introduced. In the 92nd General Assembly (2001-2002), at least 63 different bills were introduced to amend the state Election Code.³ These bills ran the gamut of election reform proposals. Several proposals would allow the use of electronic voting machines (currently not certified for use in Illinois) or in-precinct vote counting devices to alert voters of spoiled or incomplete ballots. Other proposals mandated ballot recounts in close elections, set clearer definitions for valid votes, and banned the "butterfly" ballot (which has been used in some Illinois counties for judicial retention contests). Finally, other bills

addressed provisional voting, early and absentee voting, voter registration, access for voters with disabilities, and other areas of election administration.

Regardless of the large quantity of election reform proposals, very little became law before 2003. Only two election reform bills passed in the 92nd General Assembly. One changed the voter registration deadline from 28 to 27 days before an election. The second bill dropped the requirement that candidate names on judicial retention ballots had to be printed in all capital letters. Similarly, only two election reform bills passed in the 91st General Assembly. One allowed high school seniors to serve as election judges. The other slightly relaxed the requirement that voter registration cards be completed in triplicate. While the recent changes are relatively minor reforms, in the long run, allowing high school seniors to serve as election judges could replenish the aging pool of election workers and boost voter turnout in the state.

Thus, a large number of election reform proposals awaited the 93rd Illinois General Assembly at the beginning of 2003. At least 59 election reform bills were introduced in 2003. The main election reform vehicle was Senate Bill 428. It contained the main provisions for meeting Help American Vote Act requirements (including provisional voting, voter identification, a voter registration database, a definition of a valid vote, an account to receive federal funds, and certification of electronic voting machines), as well as several elements added by Democratic leaders.⁴ The legislature passed SB428 at the end of the regular legislative session in late May of 2003, and Governor Rod Blagojevich signed it into law in August. In addition, in March 2003 the Illinois Board of Elections established a state planning committee to review the state's election system and prepare a state plan for complying with HAVA. The committee,

which included a vast array of constituencies and considered a full range of reform issues, issued a preliminary state plan in August after taking public comment during the summer. Thus, HAVA had a mobilizing effect in Illinois, as seen in other state election reform commissions formed immediately after the 2000 elections.

Aside from the relatively minor legislative changes prior to 2003, some Illinois counties initiated changes in election administration shortly after the 2000 election. Five counties replaced punch card ballots with optical scan voting methods. They include Lake and DuPage counties, two large suburban counties outside of Chicago. In addition, Chicago and suburban Cook County spent \$25 million on error-detection devices to count punch card ballots in each precinct. These equipment changes went into effect in the 2002 elections. Finally, Chicago and Cook County developed an ambitious voter education initiative with instructions on casting a proper ballot and a list of voter rights. The program included posters, brochures, and instructional videotapes and featured animated characters, “Chad and Dimples,” resembling two perforated pieces of a punch card ballot (see Figure 1). There was a noticeable drop in the number of unrecorded votes cast in Chicago and suburban Cook County in 2002, although it is unclear whether the new vote-counting devices or voter education efforts are responsible for that improvement (Holt 2002).

As the following sections indicate, election reform in Illinois has been a story of competing forces and priorities. On the one hand, the competitive nature of elections in Illinois (the Florida factor) and the quality of the state’s election laws have indicated a need for significant legislative changes for many years. On the other hand, longstanding partisan disagreements over election administration, the state’s fiscal situation and

political culture, the absence of strong leadership and active interest groups, and external events have prevented election reforms in Illinois.

The Florida Factor

Although Illinois has been trending toward the Democratic Party in recent presidential and statewide elections, it has had several competitive statewide contests. In fact, the 1982 gubernatorial election (discussed in more detail below) was extremely close and featured some of the same recount disputes seen in Florida in 2000. Illinois is generally regarded as a battleground state that attracts a lot of campaign activity in presidential elections (Wayne 2000, 207-209). Democrats have carried the state in the last three presidential elections, but Republicans carried the state in six straight presidential campaigns from 1968 to 1988. In addition, in seven of thirteen statewide contests during the last three major election years (1998, 2000, and 2002), the winning candidate failed to get more than 55% of the vote. As noted above, there was a “Florida effect” in the Illinois legislature, as the number of bills to amend the Election Code increased substantially after 2000. The state’s election laws and procedures provided several targets for legislative changes.

Capacity of Election Law

The Illinois Board of Elections was created in the 1970s as the central election authority for the state, overseeing voter registration and election administration. Before

retiring in 2003, Ron Michaelson had been the executive director of the Board of Elections since its inception. He and his staff (one of the largest state election offices in the country) are universally respected as knowledgeable and competent stewards of the state's election process. However, the structure of the Board requires bipartisan consensus (often absent on matters of election law) to make significant regulatory changes. As a result, the Board of Elections tends to favor the status quo and, as one longtime participant in Illinois politics puts it, 'the Board doesn't try to get too far out in front on anything.'⁵

Many election administration decisions (e.g., voting equipment, ballot design) are made locally. In Illinois, elections are administered by 110 local jurisdictions. There are 102 counties in the state, each with its own election authority (in almost every case the county clerk). In addition, eight cities in Illinois have independent election authorities.⁶ There is a fair amount of coordination between state and local election administration. In the past, the state has helped pay the salaries of election judges (the workers who operate polling places every election) and the state provides mandatory training for election judges. In addition, the state requires that voting methods meet federal standards, and local authorities must use voting systems certified by the state (Election Reform Information Project 2002a, 6-12).

Discussion of election administration in Illinois often begins with voting technology. The punch cards that bedeviled election officials in Florida are ubiquitous in Illinois. A higher proportion of voters in Illinois cast their ballots on punch cards than in any other state in the country. A large majority of election jurisdictions in Illinois still use punch card ballots (see Table 1). In the 2000 presidential election, 97 of the state's

election authorities used punch card ballots and 91% of the ballots were cast on punch cards. The rest of the state's voters use optical scan methods. Some optical scan systems count ballots in precincts with devices that alert voters when they have marked the ballot incorrectly (e.g., for too many candidates). The voter then has an opportunity to correct any ballot errors. Other optical scan systems count the ballots at a central location (such as the county courthouse) and do not provide the same error correction feature. Electronic voting machines (DREs) have not been certified for use in Illinois, which has prevented local jurisdictions from using newer touch-screen voting devices.

[Table 1 about here]

A large part of the controversy with punch cards in Florida involved unrecorded votes, in which people went to the polls but failed to cast a valid vote for president. These unrecorded votes are the result of “undervotes” (where voters make no selection) and “overvotes” (where too many selections are recorded). Several studies conclude that unrecorded votes are more common with punch cards than any other type of voting equipment, probably because punch card voting involves several steps that can malfunction or cause confusion (Saltman 1988; Caltech/MIT Voting Project 2001; Brady et al. 2001; Knack and Kropf n.d.; Kimball, *et al.* 2001, 2003).

The same problem is evident in Illinois elections. In recent elections, the frequency of unrecorded votes has been much higher in Illinois than in the rest of the country (see Table 2). For example, over 190,000 Illinois voters (3.9 percent) failed to cast a valid vote for president in 2000, the highest rate in the country among states that

keep reliable data on the number of ballots cast.⁷ By comparison, 2.9% of voters in Florida failed to cast a valid vote for president in 2000.

[Table 2 about here]

The prevalence of punch cards helps explain why unrecorded votes are so common in Illinois (Quirk, Kuklinski, and Habel 2002). The rate of unrecorded votes in Illinois is much higher in jurisdictions that use punch cards than in places that use precinct-count optical scan balloting (see Table 3). The error-correction devices on precinct-count voting systems seem to make a difference, because central-count optical scan systems do not perform much better than punch cards in Illinois. Research confirms the same pattern in other states: unrecorded votes are less common with touch-screen voting machines and precinct-count optical scan systems than with punch cards (Knack and Kropf n.d.; Kimball 2003). Thus, it is no surprise to see several legislative proposals to replace punch card voting and encourage new voting technology in Illinois. In fact, the state met the April 29, 2003 deadline to apply for federal funds under Title I of HAVA to replace punch card ballots.

[Table 3 about here]

Given the equal protection rationale for the *Bush v. Gore* Supreme Court decision, the practice by local election officials of scraping chad off punch card ballots before inserting them into the counter may cause some concern. The practice is not sanctioned

by a state law or regulation. However, in written instructions for election judges, the state Board of Elections advises to make sure that the backs of punch card ballots are “free of chad or chips” (Illinois Board of Elections 2003, 23). County election officials indicate that this advice is not uniformly followed. One local election staff member was surprised to learn that other counties handle punch card ballots that way.⁸

A related gap in Illinois election law is the absence of unambiguous definitions as to what counts as a valid vote (for example, whether a hanging chad counts as a vote or not). One county election official complained that “nothing is clearly defined” when it comes to standards for valid votes.⁹ As part of the effort to comply with HAVA, in 2003 the Board of Elections and the state legislature considered proposals with more specific definitions of a valid vote for each method used in the state.

As HAVA is implemented, Illinois will be trying to catch up in some other areas of election administration. For example, Illinois currently does not comply with HAVA requirements regarding provisional voting, statewide registration databases, or voter identification standards (Election Reform Information Project 2003a, 9-14). To be fair, the state Board of Elections began work on a statewide voter registration database well before HAVA was passed.

There also have been some efforts to change the recount procedures in Illinois. Currently, there are no provisions for an automatic recount in a close election. A candidate must work through the courts to get a recount. In a close election, the loser can ask the local election authority for a “discovery” recount of up to 25% of the precincts. For statewide races, the candidate must file separate petitions for discovery recounts in each election jurisdiction. The petitioner must pay for the recount, and the discovery

recount does not change the official election results. If the discovery turns up favorable evidence, the losing candidate may formally contest the election in circuit court (statewide candidates go to the Illinois Supreme Court). The court can hear evidence and order a recount, and the court has the power to declare a winner or void the election (National Conference of State Legislatures 2001a, 96-105). Given the fairly cumbersome process, it may be no surprise that a statewide recount has never occurred in Illinois. In fact, there is some uncertainty about how a statewide recount would proceed.¹⁰

Legislators have sponsored bills to have the state pay for mandatory recounts in very close contests (where the margin of victory is less than 0.5% of the votes cast).

Given the state of election law in Illinois, one might imagine a Florida-like scenario where a vote counting controversy erupts in a close election. In fact, it is not a hypothetical matter. Illinois had its own version of a statewide recount controversy in the 1982 gubernatorial election, between Republican incumbent Jim Thompson and Democratic challenger Adlai Stevenson III. Some of the details are eerily similar to the controversy in Florida. The day after the election, each campaign touted vote totals showing its candidate in the lead. Unofficial statewide totals two days after the election had Thompson leading by 9,401 votes out of a little more than 3.6 million votes cast, and Thompson declared victory (Lambrecht 1982). Stevenson refused to concede, and as some counties re-canvassed to produce their official tallies, the margin between the two candidates dwindled. Stevenson still had not conceded defeat twenty days after the election when the Illinois Board of Elections certified the election results with Thompson ahead by 5,074 votes. Instead, Stevenson petitioned for partial discovery recounts in 58 mostly Democratic counties (UPI 1982). This fueled a vigorous legal and public

relations battle between the two campaigns. Alleging “voting irregularities,” Stevenson asked the Illinois Supreme Court to order a recount (Lambrecht 1983, 6A). Two months after the election, the Supreme Court finally denied Stevenson’s recount request in a bitterly divided 4-3 decision, and Stevenson conceded defeat (Lambrecht 1983, 1A).

Given Illinois’ previous experience with an extremely close statewide election, the recount controversy in Florida likely produced a sense of déjà vu among longtime election officials. For some in the Illinois legislature, this helped motivated a slew of election reform proposals after 2000. However, until 2003 election reform proposals in Illinois have been thwarted by several factors, especially partisan divisions.

Party Control

It is difficult to overstate the importance of partisanship in the story of election reform in Illinois. Before 2003, divided government was the norm in Illinois. From 1997 to 2003, Illinois had a Democratic majority in the state House, a Republican majority in the state Senate, and a Republican governor, and the distribution of seats in the legislature has often been evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.

In addition, the party leaders in each legislative chamber are very powerful in Illinois, due to their influence over the agenda and a large cache of campaign funds and staff. Until 2003, the legislative leaders had held their positions since the early 1980s. Because of the close competition between parties in Illinois, any proposed changes in election procedures are closely scrutinized to determine which party will be helped or hurt. As a result, there have been several highly-charged partisan disputes over election

changes in recent years. For example, Republican Governor Jim Edgar resisted implementation of the federal motor voter law in the 1990s. While Governor Edgar publicly claimed that he was resisting an unfunded federal mandate, conventional wisdom held that easier access to voter registration would help Democrats more than Republicans.

Another partisan dispute involves the straight-party option on ballots. Several observers attribute Democratic victories over incumbent Republicans in some Cook County races in 1996 to a vigorous “Punch 10” (the ballot location for the straight Democratic ticket) campaign in the Chicago area (Lewis, Taylor, and Kleppner 1997; Schoenburg 1998; Novak 1998). In fact, the Democrats won enough seats to regain control of the state House of Representatives after the 1996 elections.

In response to these losses, Republican leaders in the state legislature drafted a bill to eliminate one-punch voting. The bill passed on a party-line vote on the last day of a lame-duck legislative session (one day before control of the state House of Representatives would revert to the Democrats) and was signed into law by a Governor Edgar. The new law was then challenged in court on several fronts, the most prominent case filed by David Orr, the Democratic Cook County Clerk (*Orr v. Edgar* 1998). Orr argued that the law eliminating one-punch voting would produce long lines at the polls and interfere with the voting rights of elderly and disabled citizens who might be confused by a long ballot without a one-punch option. Another court motion argued that the new law was racially biased, since blacks and other minorities have higher illiteracy rates than whites and thus would have more difficulty completing a full ballot without a one-punch option (Hollinshed 1998). It is also worth noting that the straight-party punch

generally advantages Democratic candidates in statewide races (Kimball, Owens, and McLaughlin 2002). The court challenges were eventually dismissed and the straight-party punch has been absent from Illinois ballots since 1997. Now that the Democrats have regained control in the state capitol, there is speculation that they will bring back the straight-party ballot option. The first bill filed in the state House in 2003 would do just that.

Another partisan dispute arose regarding the new vote-counting machines to be used to detect punch card errors in Chicago and Cook County. While the county bought the machines for each precinct in 1999, they did not use the error-detection feature until 2002 because the legislature would not approve the new technology. Officials in Democratic-leaning Cook County wanted the machines to notify voters of overvotes and undervotes. Legislators in the Republican-controlled state Senate only wanted the technology to detect overvotes, and the legislation stalled. The Democratic party then turned its attention to the courts and won a judge's ruling to allow use of the second-chance feature to detect overvotes and undervotes (Pallasch 2001; Election Reform Information Project 2002b, 45-46).

The partisan gridlock that characterized legislative consideration of the Cook County vote-counting machines was fairly typical of many election proposals in the legislature in recent years. In the usual scenario, Democrats in the state House would pass election legislation, Republicans in the state Senate would object to some provisions, and the two sides would be unable to reach a compromise. Democrats usually blamed Republican state Senate President James "Pate" Philip. As one Democrat noted, when election reforms passed in the House, "Pate Philip made sure nothing moved."¹¹

The Illinois Board of Elections even got involved in a recent election dispute over the printing of nicknames on ballots. In the 2002 general elections, two candidates in Cook County wanted to use political slogans as nicknames on the ballot.¹² Cook County election officials wanted to keep the slogans off the ballot, and the Board of Elections ordered the county to include the slogans. The disagreement escalated into a legal dispute and a judge ordered election officials to keep the slogans on the ballot (McLaughlin 2002; Chicago Sun-Times 2002; Sneed 2002). After the election, the Board of Elections and the state legislature considered proposals to clarify state law regarding nicknames on the ballot. The election reform law passed in 2003 included a provision banning slogans and nicknames from the ballot. When legal disputes arise over seemingly mundane issues such as candidate nicknames, one wonders how public officials can reach a consensus on other aspects of election law.

The 2002 elections swept Democrats into control of Illinois executive and legislative branches of government for the first time in almost thirty years. With a unified Democratic state government in 2003, Illinois was in a position to break the legislative gridlock that prevented significant election reform legislation in previous years. In fact, Illinois avoided some of the bitter partisan disputes over voter identification and restoring voting rights for felons that have stalled HAVA compliance legislation in other states in 2003. However, while partisan gridlock has temporarily ended, other factors, especially the state's fiscal condition, provide barriers to election reform.

Fiscal Conditions

As in many states facing a weakened economy, Illinois experienced a revenue shortfall beginning in the fall of 2001 (National Council of State Legislatures 2001b). The situation has only gotten worse since then. In 2003, Illinois faced the largest budget shortfall in state history, estimated at \$5 billion (State of Illinois 2003c). Newly elected Governor Rod Blagojevich proposed 10% cuts in each state agency, including the Board of Elections (State of Illinois 2003a). In addition, the budget shortfall has temporarily forced the state to eliminate its subsidy to counties to pay election judges (Presecky 2003; Holliday 2003). As of August 2003, the state appropriation does not fully fund the election judge subsidy for fiscal year 2004, although there is only one election scheduled during that year. A legislator leading some election reform efforts hopes to pass a bill to raise revenues through additional gaming in Illinois to provide funds for election judges.¹³

In the current fiscal situation, it is unlikely that the state will increase expenditures for new election reforms. Several other needs are viewed as higher priorities. In fact, neither the Governor's State of the State speech nor his first major budget address in 2003 made any mention of election reform, HAVA, or the state Board of Elections (State of Illinois 2003a, 2003b). At least two county election officials do not expect the state to appropriate any more than the 5% match required to receive HAVA funds for election improvements in the next few years.¹⁴

Vested Interests

While the budgetary situation in Illinois has forced every constituency to fight for its share of state funding, election reform has not had many champions. Several organized groups are involved in election reform efforts in Illinois, and many of these interests are currently represented on the HAVA state planning committee. The strongest advocates for change among these interests are groups representing people with disabilities, who have a sizeable presence on the state planning committee. These organizations have pushed for certification and use of touch-screen voting machines because they are more accessible than optical scan ballots.

While several political reform groups (Common Cause, League of Women Voters, and the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform) are represented on the state planning committee, election reform has not been a high priority for these groups. With some justification, reform groups have recently focused on campaign finance reform (Illinois currently has no limits on campaign contributions) and stricter ethical rules for state employees in the wake of a licenses-for-bribes scandal that plagued former Governor George Ryan (discussed below). Among the reform groups on the state planning committee, only the League of Women Voters lists election reform as one of its top priorities for 2003 (Illinois Campaign for Political Reform 2003; Common Cause 2003; League of Women Voters Illinois 2003).

Many local election officials are also on the state planning committee. While there is some coordination between state and local election officials, Illinois is a state that tends to favor local control of government decisions. Local officials have their own set

of unique concerns about proposed election reforms. Most worry about how they will pay for mandated election changes. Some also worry about local access and control over voter registrations once a statewide database is created.¹⁵ In sum, the vested interests in Illinois do not provide a lot of strong advocates for change in election procedures.

Leadership

Furthermore, the conditions for energetic leadership on election reform have been limited in recent years. Election reform was not a stated priority for George Ryan, the Illinois governor from 1999 to 2003. In addition, Governor Ryan was preoccupied with a mushrooming scandal during his entire term in office. The scandal began during Ryan's tenure as Secretary of State, in which state workers in his department gave out driver's licenses in exchange for bribes or contributions to Ryan's campaign fund. The scandal has produced numerous indictments, including Governor Ryan and several of his closest aides. Now that George Ryan has left office, the state budget and other issues are the top priorities for newly elected Governor Rod Blagojevich.

The structure of the Board of Elections also hinders strong leadership on election issues in Illinois. The Board consists of eight members, four Republicans and four Democrats, who are appointed by party leaders in the state. Board action requires five votes, which means that the Board of Elections is unlikely to push for bold changes in election procedures unless they have bipartisan support. The Board also depends on the legislature for its annual appropriation. As one reform activist notes, these realities mean that the Board of Elections "traditionally walks a fine line between the parties."¹⁶

Finally, while there are several active political reform groups in Illinois, these groups have focused more on campaign finance and government ethics in recent years. As a result, election reform has lacked a strong champion in Illinois politics.

Political Culture

Finally, several participants and observers note that there is not a strong tradition of reform in the bare-knuckled customs of Illinois politics.¹⁷ One legislator describes Illinois as having a “tradition-bound, power-based political culture.”¹⁸ In addition, incumbents enjoy tremendous advantages in Illinois legislative elections and win reelection at very high rates. As a result, legislators are often reluctant to change an election process that they have mastered. According to one interest group representative, the power of incumbency in Illinois has produced “an inherent conservatism about a system that elected you.”¹⁹ Despite evidence to the contrary, several state and local election officials continue to believe that punch cards pose no problems in Illinois. Thus, the political culture in Illinois has provided an extra hurdle for election reform proposals.

External Events

Despite several factors working against election reform in Illinois, passage of the Help America Vote Act and the recent federal appropriations to fund part of the HAVA requirements have been a shot in the arm. Many election officials were waiting for the federal government to act first before embarking on their own election reforms. HAVA

spurred legislative activity and the creation of a state task force to examine several aspects of election administration. These actions are needed so the state can qualify for federal funds to replace punch card ballots and implement other changes required by HAVA. Furthermore, there has been bipartisan consensus in the Illinois General Assembly on the main legislative provisions to comply with HAVA. Given the state's fiscal difficulties, without HAVA the state was unlikely to adopt election reforms (particularly the punch card buyout and changes to improve access for voters with disabilities).

Conclusion

The story of election reform in Illinois can be divided into two periods: a period of relatively little action before 2003, and a period of furious activity beginning in 2003. While the Florida factor and the quality of election law might lead one to expect major reforms in Illinois, no dramatic reforms passed before 2003. Party control, fiscal constraints, vested interests, leadership, and the state's political culture have worked to stymie reform efforts in recent years. Partisan gridlock is especially important, since partisan calculations hover over every election reform proposal in Illinois.

However, the stalemate was broken in 2003. With unified party control of state government and impetus from HAVA, Illinois passed several election reforms. The good news is that this will bring the state up-to-date in election administration, especially in the areas of voting technology, recount standards, voter registration, access to voters with disabilities, and provisional voting.

At the same time, there is concern that voters and election officials may have to cope with many wide-ranging changes in the next major election. Illinois has already applied for waivers to extend the 2004 deadline by two years for replacing punch card ballots and establishing a statewide voter registration database. Of the state's estimated \$180 million budget for complying with HAVA, almost \$74 million will be spent on new voting machines to replace punch card ballots (Election Reform Information Project 2003b, 13). State election officials expect most counties to switch to optical scan balloting rather than touch-screen machines, because of the lower cost of optical scan systems, because of uncertainties about the security of touch-screen voting machines, and because touch-screen machines have yet to be certified for use by the Illinois Board of Elections.²⁰ Illinois has almost completed its voter registration database and expects to spend only \$3.6 to make the database HAVA-compliant.

Recent elections in other states have demonstrated that election reforms are not problem-free. It will take a significant investment of resources to educate voters and election workers to make the new system work effectively. Illinois plans to spend slightly more than half of its HAVA budget on voter education and poll worker training (Election Reform Information Project 2003b, 13). Thus, it is unfortunate that several staff members at the Illinois Board of Elections, including the executive director, retired in 2003. These retirements represent a significant loss of institutional memory of election procedures in the state. Whether Illinois is ready for election reform or not, it is going to get it soon.

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Table 1
Voting Methods Used in Illinois

Voting Method	2000		2002	
	Jurisdictions	Ballots	Jurisdictions	Ballots
Punch Card	97	91%	92	77%
Central-Count Optical Scan	4	2%	4	2%
Precinct-Count Optical Scan	9	7%	14	21%

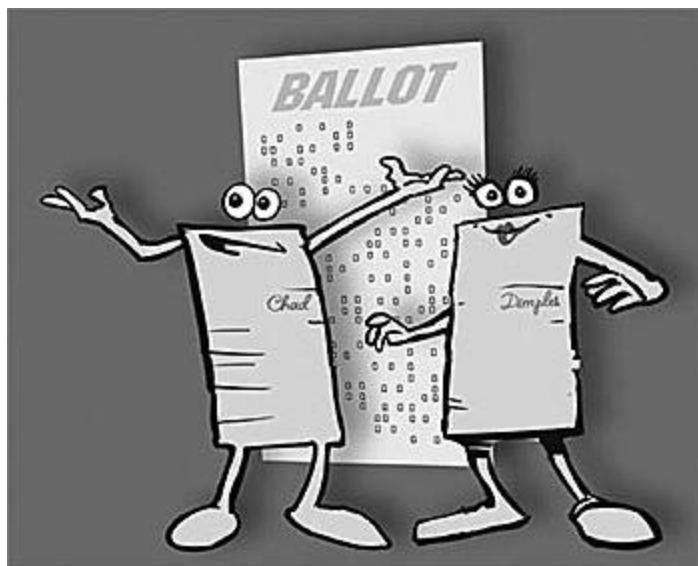
Table 2
Unrecorded Votes in Illinois and the United States in Recent Elections

	President (2000)	Governor (2002)
Illinois	3.9%	3.1%
Rest of the United States	1.7%	1.9%

Table 3
Unrecorded Votes in Illinois by Voting Technology

	President (2000)	Governor (2002)
Punch Card	4.3%	3.6%
Central-Count Optical Scan	4.6%	3.3%
Precinct-Count Optical Scan	1.0%	1.4%

Figure 1
“Chad and Dimples”:
Characters in Cook County Instructional Materials



Source: Cook County Election Department (2002)

¹ Thanks to Susan Mason for research assistance on this project.

² To be fair, Michaelson has supported provisions allowing counties to replace punch card ballots with newer voting technology (Colindres 2000; Schoenburg 2000; Election Reform Information Project 2002b, 46).

³ Bills that only contained technical changes to the state Election Code were not included in the totals reported in this paper. Copies of bills and legislative status reports were retrieved from the Illinois General Assembly web site (<http://www.legis.state.il.us/>).

⁴ Some of the added provisions would drop the limit on the number of registration forms deputy registrars are allowed to pick up from election officials, allow out-of-county residents to serve as party poll watchers, apply financial disclosure requirements to non-candidate interests, lower the petition signature requirement for some contests, and ban the use of political slogans as nicknames on ballots. While Republican legislators objected to many of these added provisions, GOP members supported the basic HAVA compliance provisions. Interviews conducted August 18 and 19, 2003.

⁵ Interview conducted May 15, 2003.

⁶ The cities with their own election boards are Aurora, Bloomington, Chicago, Danville, East St. Louis, Galesburg, Peoria, and Rockford.

⁷ Several states do not collect information on the total number of ballots cast. Among these states, Mississippi likely had a higher rate of unrecorded votes than Illinois in 2000 (see Kimball et al. 2001).

⁸ Interview conducted May 6, 2003.

⁹ Interview conducted May 6, 2003.

¹⁰ Interview with Pat Freeman, staff member at the Illinois Board of Elections, conducted May 13, 2003. In another twist, the statewide discovery and contest procedures do not apply to presidential elections. It is unclear Illinois law allows any recount in presidential contests (Siegel 2002). The legislature is currently considering a bill to explicitly apply the current procedures to presidential contests.

¹¹ Interview conducted April 21, 2003.

¹² The two candidates were Les “Cut the Taxes” Golden, a Republican running for state representative, and Stephanie “Vs. the Machine” Sailor, a Libertarian running for Congress (Sneed 2002, 6).

¹³ Interview conducted May 16, 2003.

¹⁴ Interviews conducted May 6, 2003.

¹⁵ Interviews conducted May 6, 2003.

¹⁶ Interview conducted May 14, 2003.

¹⁷ Former Chicago Alderman and ward boss Paddy Bauler famously remarked that “Chicago ain’t ready for reform yet” when Richard M. Daley was first elected mayor in 1955 (Royko 1971, 214).

¹⁸ Interview conducted May 16, 2003.

¹⁹ Interview conducted May 14, 2003.

²⁰ SB 428 requires a voter-verified paper audit trail for electronic voting machines. Interview conducted September 8, 2003.