

# ILLINOIS

## PROGRAM

On Election Day, Election Protection field volunteers monitored polling locations in the cities of Chicago and Aurora as well as in Cook, Dupage, Kane, and Lake Counties. Chicago was also home to an Election Protection Hotline call center.

The most significant problems reported to Election Protection in Illinois were recurring polling place confusion, voter registration problems, woefully undertrained poll workers, and voting machine breakdowns.

## BEFORE ELECTION DAY

In late July 2012, True the Vote transmitted a National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) notice of intent to sue letter to 160 counties in 15 states, including over 20 counties in Illinois. The letter alleged that the number of registered voters exceeded the number of eligible voters in each county and concluded that counties were thereby violating the NVRA mandate to conduct periodic list maintenance programs, demanding that the clerks purge their voter rolls of ineligible voters or face a lawsuit. However, under the NVRA, states are also prohibited from conducting a systematic list maintenance purge within 90 days of a general or primary election for federal office – the “quiet period.” Otherwise, eligible voters could be purged from the rolls with no recourse on Election Day. In response to the letters, Election Protection partners sent a letter of its own, advising clerks of the 90-day “quiet period.” Clerks responded to Election Protection’s letter, assuring that voters would not be purged during the prohibited period.

## ELECTION DAY

### *Polling Place Confusion*

Polling place confusion this year was exacerbated by redistricting, polling places changes, and precinct consolidations. The use of multi-precinct polling places exhibited problems typical of such setups, with many voters reporting disorganized polling locations and confusion about which line they were supposed to stand in to vote. Voters also reported

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## 2012 VOTING PROBLEMS IN ILLINOIS



there was little oversight of polling place operations and a lack of adequate signage to direct voters to their correct precinct. There were reports of unhelpful election judges telling voters they had to know their precinct number beforehand to know which line to stand in. Making matters worse, the City of Chicago's website was down for much of Election Day, making precinct information harder to find. Voters were concerned that they had accidentally voted at the wrong precinct, in which case their ballot would be rejected, even though they were at the correct polling location. Others were having trouble just identifying their correct polling location. One caller from Chicago who went to the polling location near her house was told she was not registered there. Poll workers directed her to a second location; when she went to that location she was again told she was not registered there and was directed to a third location. Finally, she went online to the Board of Elections website, which directed her to yet another location. That fourth location also did not have her on the list, so she ended up casting a provisional ballot.

### *Voter Registration Problems*

Illinois Election Protection also received numerous calls from voters who were told they were not registered to vote. There were multiple reports of voters who registered or updated their registration information at DMV offices, but their registrations were never processed. One Cook County voter reported that he updated his voter registration information in June 2011 when he renewed his driver's license, but when he showed up to vote on Election Day a poll worker told him he was not registered and could not vote. Another caller from McHenry County who was previously registered under her maiden name at her parents' address updated her registration information when she renewed her driver's license, but on Election Day she could not be found on the voter rolls at all with either her old or new registration information. Similarly, in Dupage County, a voter renewed her driver's license through an online transaction and simultaneously registered to vote online, but the DMV did not update its records. The election judge told the voter that a lot of people had had the same problem at her polling place.

In other cases, Election Protection volunteers verified voter registration information in the State Board of Elections database and confirmed that voters were in fact registered and at the correct polling place, even though they were not showing up on the rolls at the polling place when they went to vote. In addition, there were reports of a higher than average number of eligible voters either on the supplemental rolls, which some election judges failed to check, or dropped from the rolls entirely. This situation may have resulted in a higher rate of provisional ballots issued to voters who were entitled to a regular ballot. There was also a great deal of confusion among voters and poll workers about provisional ballot rules and multiple reports of poll workers refusing to issue provisional ballots to voters who should have received them.

#### *Poll Worker Problems*

Election Protection received many reports from voters complaining about a variety of problems with poll workers incorrectly applying rules and wide variance in the application of rules across precincts and jurisdictions. Voters reported some election judges improperly requiring voter ID, despite there being no general identification requirement to vote. Voters reported election judges refusing to issue regular ballots to voters who had their absentee ballot with them to turn in for cancellation. In addition, many voters found their names on the absentee ballot list when they went to their polling place, despite never requesting or receiving an absentee ballot. Machine breakdowns in some polling places were exacerbated by election judge uncertainty as to when or how to issue paper ballots.

Community partners also reported problems with language assistance. In some precincts, translated materials were not displayed prominently or were even left unused in envelopes. Some bilingual judges reported not clearly understanding when they were allowed to assist language minority voters and expressed reluctance to leave the election judge table to assist voters. Further, in some precincts, the polling places were not accessible to handicapped voters, and some election judges refused to offer curbside voting.

#### *Machine Breakdowns*

Finally, machine breakdowns were widespread. Election Protection received reports of machines not being able to read paper ballots, failing machines, and polling places running out of ballots. At one polling location in Stone Park, Cook County, touchscreen voting machines were improperly calibrated, which made the machines unusable, and poll workers were instructed by county election officials to recalibrate the machines after every four voters. Machine malfunctions were also reported in Lansing, Oak Lawn, and throughout Chicago.