

VOTING IN 2010: Ten Swing States

ILLINOIS

Illinois' elections system has not been scrutinized as much as some other states in the past because it has not been terribly competitive. That is not the case this year. While Illinois and particular counties in Illinois do an overall good job at trying to ensure fair and equal elections, the state does have some laws that could prove problematic.

POLITICAL OUTLOOK

- The US **Senate** race for President Barack Obama's former Senate seat is very competitive, as polling shows either a dead heat or a gap of single digits in the contest between US Rep. Mark Kirk (R) and State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias (D).
- The **gubernatorial** race may also be tight, as State Senator Bill Brady (R) will be facing Governor Pat Quinn (D) who replaced disgraced former governor Rod Blagojevich.
- At least 3 **House** districts also have competitive campaigns.

OBSTACLES TO VOTING

- Voters who are "**challenged**" at the polls must show two forms of identification or have another voter testify to their eligibility in order to vote. Elections officials are not provided with clear standards on when to allow a challenged individual to vote a regular ballot. Any registered voter in the state may act as a designated challenger.
- **Provisional ballots** cast in the **wrong precinct** – even if cast in the correct polling site or county – will not be counted for any race, potentially disenfranchising a great number of eligible voters.
- To the potential detriment of **military and overseas voters**, Illinois has no new legislation mirroring the new federal law's requirement that absentee ballots be sent 45 days prior to the election if the voter had requested it in time.
- The state website provides no comprehensive translation of voting information or materials.

EXEMPLARY VOTING LAWS/ PROCEDURES

- Although Illinois registration does close 27 days prior to the Election, Illinois jurisdictions allow eligible citizens to register and vote at the same time **between the close of regular registration and the 7th day prior to an election.**
- **Voting rights** are automatically restored to citizens when they are released from prison; citizens on parole or probation are eligible to vote.
- Only first time voters who registered by mail must **provide identification**, as mandated by the 2002 Help America Vote Act.
- **Provisional ballots** are validated and counted within 14 days of the election by election officials. Voters are not required to take any additional steps.
- Illinois does not jeopardize the privacy and security of overseas and military voters by accepting ballots cast by fax, e-mail, or over the Internet.
- Cook County, Illinois has an exemplary program for **reaching out to new citizens and limited English proficient voters.**

ARIZONA

COLORADO

ILLINOIS

KENTUCKY

LOUISIANA

MICHIGAN

MISSOURI

NEVADA

NORTH CAROLINA

OHIO

Demos



WHAT THE STATE CHIEF ELECTIONS OFFICIAL CAN DO BEFORE ELECTION DAY

- Provide clear instructions to elections officials as to the criteria regarding the voting rights of voters whose **eligibility is challenged** at the polling place. Ensure citizens know of ramifications for frivolous, fraudulent or discriminatory vote caging and challenges.
- Make sure voters and poll workers alike know the correct polling place *and* the correct precinct to ensure they will **not cast a “placebo” provisional ballot**.
- Work with community organizations to conduct more voter **outreach to immigrant and language minority voters** and post Spanish language translated information and materials on the website as soon as possible.
- Establish a clear system for detecting misinformation campaigns and a plan for how the office will **respond** to them to ensure voters have the true information immediately.

In advance of the mid-term elections, Common Cause and Dēmos will release a new report that finds election policies in 10 swing states could disenfranchise voters and impact election results. The report, “Voting in 2010: Ten Swing States,” looks at Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, and Ohio, summarizing each state’s practices, and providing a set of recommendations for improvement.

To view the full report, visit **demos.org/swingstate**
or **commoncause.org/swingstate**.

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