

RESEARCH REPORTS

Reviews of new research at public agencies and private institutions

“Voting Technologies in the United States: Overview and Issues for Congress.”

Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C. 24 pp. Available to the public only at

www.house.gov/markgreen/crs.htm. Author: Eric A. Fischer

After the disputed vote count in Florida turned last fall’s presidential election into a hanging chad, there was much talk of election reform to ensure that America would never again be so bedeviled by undervotes, overvotes, and unintended votes. In an analysis of voting technologies now used in the United States, Fischer, a senior specialist in science and technology resources at the Congressional Research Service, makes it apparent that while improvement is possible, perfection is bound to remain elusive.

Five types of voting technology are now in use: punch cards (used in 37.4 percent of precincts); marksense, or optical scan, the same technology used in standardized tests (24.7 percent); lever machines (21.8 percent); electronic voting (7.3 percent); and paper ballots (2.9 percent). Mixed systems account for the balance. Lever machines (which are no longer made, though replacement parts remain available) and electronic systems can reduce the incidence of overvoting (i.e., voting for more candidates than permitted). But no system can prevent erroneous undervotes or unintended votes, Fischer says. Electronic systems, however, potentially can reduce undervotes by, for example, “indicating via a light or other mechanism the offices for which a voter has not yet cast a vote.” Some touchscreen electronic systems also can discourage unintended votes by letting the voter review a summary of the choices made before the ballot is cast. Internet voting, currently limited to demonstration projects, presents “special challenges for ensuring

authentication, secrecy, and security in the voting process,” Fischer notes.

The clarity of the ballot design can make a difference, as the infamous butterfly ballot in Palm Beach County showed. But design goals can conflict. Large type can enhance readability, for instance, but can push the ballot onto a second page, encouraging errors.

Elections are administered by states and localities through roughly 10,000 jurisdictions at the county level or below. Replacing an existing voting system in a jurisdiction might well cost \$1 million or more, Fischer says. Replacement “may therefore be considered a low priority compared [with] other needs, such as schools and roads.” Recent estimates of a nationwide upgrade in voting systems have ranged from \$2 billion to \$9 billion.

Some reformers urge adoption of a uniform national voting technology or a standard national ballot. But that could have drawbacks, observes Fischer. Since elections are often consolidated, with federal, state, and local candidates, as well as referendums and other items, on the same ballot, a standard national technology “might reduce the flexibility of local governments to respond to local circumstances.” Almost all states now use more than one basic type of voting technology, and a few use all five. “Some observers,” Fischer notes, “believe that the very diversity and decentralization of the voting systems used in the United States enhance the integrity of the voting process by making widespread tampering more difficult.”

“Intercollegiate Athletics: Four-Year Colleges’ Experiences Adding and Discontinuing Teams.”

U.S. General Accounting Office, P.O. Box 37050, Washington, D.C. 20013. 36 pp. No charge.

GAO-01-297. Available at www.gao.gov.

In part because of federal pressure on colleges and universities to achieve “gender equity,” the number of women’s athletic teams

at 1,310 four-year schools has mushroomed in recent decades, to the point where women’s teams now outnumber men’s (by 330). And

Research Reports

since the 1992–93 school year, reports Congress's General Accounting Office, more than twice as many men's teams (386) as women's (150) have been discontinued.

Some 163,000 women (5.5 percent of female undergraduates) took part in intercollegiate sports in 1998–99, up from 90,000 in 1981–82. Soccer experienced the most growth—from 1,855 participants to 19,987. The net number of women's athletic teams increased from 5,695 to 9,479.

On the other side of the gender ledger, about 232,000 men (9.3 percent of male

undergraduates) played in 1998–99 on 9,149 teams—some 12,000 more men and 36 more teams than in 1981–82. Football was the biggest sport, with more than 60,000 players in 1998–99, more than twice the number in the next biggest sport, baseball. Half of the men's sports, including wrestling and gymnastics, experienced a decline in the number of teams.

Of the 1,191 schools that responded to a questionnaire, 948 added one or more women's teams between the 1992–93 and 1999–2000 school years—and 72 percent did so without discontinuing any other teams.

“Breaking Away from Broken Windows: Baltimore Neighborhoods and the Nationwide Fight Against Crime, Grime, Fear, and Decline.”

Westview Press, 5500 Central Ave., Boulder, Colo. 80301–2877. 386 pp. Paperback. \$35.

Author: *Ralph B. Taylor*

“Illusion of Order: The False Promise of Broken Windows Policing.”

Harvard Univ. Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138–1499. 304 pp. \$35.

Author: *Bernard E. Harcourt*

Few social-science propositions have been as influential as the famous “broken windows” thesis. Just as one broken window in a vacant building, if ignored, leads to more broken windows, argued political scientist James Q. Wilson and criminologist George L. Kelling nearly two decades ago, so disorder and petty crimes, if ignored, make law-abiding citizens fearful, put a neighborhood on the skids, and often lead to more serious crime. By attending to panhandlers, rowdy youths, and drunks, they argued, police could reduce serious crime and urban decay.

Police in New York and other cities began to take that advice in the mid-1990s—and, lo and behold, the crime rates fell. Other factors, such as demography and increased incarceration, were also at work, however [see *WQ*, Winter 2001, pp. 121–122]. Now, Taylor, a professor of criminal justice at Temple University, attacks the broken windows approach as less than it's been cracked up to be, and Harcourt, a law professor at the University of Arizona, insists it is fundamentally flawed.

Drawing on extensive interviews and inspections of Baltimore neighborhoods over recent decades, Taylor finds that panhandlers and other disorderly persons, and

abandoned buildings, graffiti, and other forms of physical deterioration, did encourage some fear, crime, and neighborhood decline—but not as much as zealous advocates suppose. Looking at 66 neighborhoods selected in 1981, Taylor calculates that “incivilities” (disorder and deterioration), both as perceived by residents and independently assessed, made for higher neighborhood rates of assault and rape a decade later. Moreover, the independently assessed “incivilities” boosted the later homicide rates. Yet the pattern was inconsistent: None of the “incivility” indicators seemed to affect the later robbery rates.

Nor did any “incivility” indicators seem to contribute significantly to lowered neighborhood status (as reflected, for example, in a softening of the housing market). In neighborhoods where disorder and deterioration were independently judged extensive in 1981, poverty and vacancy rates increased faster than elsewhere. But when the “incivility” measure used was based on residents' assessments, no similar pattern appeared.

Taylor's conclusion: Police should not blindly assume that attending to “broken windows” is the best use of their resources. “Crime fighting may be more important

than grime fighting for long-term neighborhood preservation.”

Harcourt goes much further. Not only is there little solid evidence to support the broken windows thesis, he argues, but the very category of “disorder” is an imprecise and artificial one that is being used to justify

police crackdowns on people previously regarded as harmless nuisances. “Repressive” broken windows policing, he maintains, makes things worse, with “increased complaints of police misconduct, racial bias in stops and frisks, and further stereotyping of black criminality.”

WILSON CENTER DIGEST

“Veterans as Revolutionaries.”

A speech by Anthony J. Principi, U.S. secretary of veterans affairs, at a Wilson Center Director’s Forum, Mar. 14, 2001.

In 1932, thousands of Depression-scarred World War I veterans converged on Washington with their wives and children to demand immediate payment of promised future “bonuses.” Congress refused, most of the discouraged vets and their families went home, and the government resorted to armed force to disperse the many remaining diehards, one of whom was fatally shot. The significance of that “Bonus Army” protest was not lost later on officials planning for the reintegration of World War II veterans into postwar society, said Anthony J. Principi, the U.S. secretary of veterans affairs.

Soldiers returning from the battlefields can turn into “either an asset or a threat to the society they serve,” he noted. “History is littered with governments destabilized by masses of veterans who believed that they had been taken for fools by a society that grew rich and fat at the expense of their hardship and suffering.”

Partly to avert such unrest, the U.S. government offered generous benefits to the GIs returning from World War II—and ushered in a very different sort of revolution. “Much of what we now think of as normal in middle-class America,” Principi said, “is rooted in those GIs—and the veterans’ benefits they used to transform our country. . . . In many ways, veterans have been the point men in the revolutionary expansion of federal involvement in the lives of Americans.”

Before World War II, relatively few Americans went to college, Principi noted. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (the “GI Bill”) offered education benefits to veterans, including up to \$500 a year for college tuition. Between 1944 and 1956, the

federal government spent \$14.5 billion to help 7.8 million returning World War II veterans (slightly more than half of the total) to get a college education or vocational training. Since then, the government has vastly expanded higher-education subsidies and loans to the general population.

The GI Bill also offered home loans, Principi observed. Before the war, home purchases were hard to finance. “A long-term, no-down-payment home loan was unknown and, for most, homeownership was nothing but a dream.” GI loans helped some 4.3 million veterans buy homes in the decade after the war. Today, Washington offers a raft of mortgage subsidies to the population at large through institutions such as the Federal National Mortgage Association and the Federal Housing Administration.

After World War II, Principi said, the Veterans Administration health care system also “entered into a partnership” with private medical schools. An estimated 40 percent of physicians practicing today got at least part of their training in the VA health care system. VA medical research, he said, “led the way to a successful treatment for tuberculosis” and sped a number of technological advances.

Ironically, the “revolution” veterans wrought has meant that they now enjoy few benefits that the general population lacks, Principi noted. Their benefits are viewed differently today. Instead of being a reward for service, helping veterans find their way in civilian life and “catch up” with their peers who did not serve, the benefits now are simply “part of the remuneration package” given to members of the all-volunteer force.