

*U.S. Elections*

# Butterflies, Chads, Dimples

by Richard W. Soudriette

The chaotic November 2000 Presidential Election has led to unprecedented interest in election reform. During the excruciating 37 days of uncertainty following the November 7th election, weaknesses in the U.S. election system were exposed to the entire world. The media bombarded us with images of lumbering levers on antiquated voting machines and hordes of tired election officials squinting at piles of punch-card ballots. Americans who are normally oblivious to the mechanics of election-day woke up on November 8th to learn that the fate of the 43rd President of the United States was literally hanging by a chad.

The lesson from the 2000 election is that the key to credibility of the election process is professional and independent election administration. The image of members of the U.S. House of

Representatives calling into question the legitimacy of the entire election process on the floor of the house was chilling and reminiscent of what often occurs in struggling democracies.

In the U.S., we have a tradition of elections being the purview of state and local election boards and commissions throughout the fifty states, 3,300 counties, and 4,500 municipalities. This decentralized structure is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees certain powers to the states. But until this past November, most Americans had not recognized that the U.S. is a patchwork quilt of election authorities. A December 14, 2000, Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 61% of Americans support standardization of election procedures, development of a standard ballot, and the adoption of uniform election equipment. Congress followed suit by introduc-

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ing a wide range of election-reform legislation ranging from providing grants to state and local governments for the purchase of new voting equipment, to creating a new Federal Government agency dedicated to election process and procedure.

Potential solutions abound. State legislatures are trying to determine how to answer the voter-intent question posed by the U.S. Supreme Court. Congress is trying to determine how to make sure the same problems and issues do not happen again.

Organizations and professional associations representing state and local election officials have formed task forces to study the election process and make recommendations to legislators. County, city, and township organizations are also trying to determine how to deal with the projected demands for new voting and vote-counting equipment and with all of the technical and administrative support it will require.

The focus of this issue of *Elections Today* explores many of the administrative and technical questions that were raised in the U.S. 2000 Presidential Election and are currently being studied in its aftermath. The authors presented here are state-and-local, professional election-administrators and academics who

have long years of experience in the area of election administration, political science, and public administration. We hope you will enjoy reading the views and opinions of these election professionals who are on the firing line and learning how they would like to solve their election problems. Their insights are essential to the ongoing debate to improve the electoral process in the United States.

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This issue of *Elections Today* is dedicated to Mr. Richard Scammon, one of the original IFES board members, who recently passed away. Dick Scammon was one of the greatest authorities in the field of elections of the 20th Century. Recently he donated a vast portion of his international collection to IFES for use in the F. Clifton White Center for Participatory Democracy. We salute Dick Scammon, who was both a consummate scholar and a true gentleman.



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