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Complaints about county's ballot reach court

A new vote would be unprecedented, and legal experts say that it's unlikely

By Joan Biskupic

Lawmakers move to end use of electors

By Dennis Cauchon

Deep wounds make healing process difficult

Anger lingers despite talk of reconciliation

By Jim Drinkard

Case Study Expert: Ross Baker

Political Science Professor

Rutgers University

USA TODAY Snapshots®

States with highest voter turnout

Share of eligible voters who cast ballots in Tuesday's election:

Minnesota	69%
Maine	67%
Wisconsin	66%
Vermont	63%
New Hampshire	62%

Source: The Associated Press, Committee for the Study of the American Electorate

By April Umminger and Keith Simmons, USA TODAY

Electoral Reform

Summary: The issue of improving the voting process has become a topic of major interest since the 2000 Election. Will history repeat itself? The four USA TODAY articles in this case study provide a basis for discussing the pros and cons of election reform.



Think election was a mess? Look at system

Few standards, old equipment, insufficient staff, inconvenient poll hours — it's a recipe for chaos

By Jill Lawrence
USA TODAY

The lesson of the close presidential election was supposed to be that every vote counts. But when someone finally becomes president-elect, the ultimate lesson may be that life isn't fair.

The prospect of the presidency hanging on a few hundred votes in one state has highlighted problems in every crevice of a patchwork system so fragmented and arbitrary that many analysts are amazed it's held up for so long.

Election decisions are made by 50 states and 3,066 counties. There are numerous ways to vote, 27 manufacturers of voting systems, and methods as old as paper ballots and as new as the Internet.

Where you live determines whether you mail your ballot, punch it or touch a computer screen; whether your polls close at 6 p.m. or 9 p.m.; whether there are plenty of machines and poll workers, or hardly any; whether your

ballot is clear or confusing; and even whether your vote counts a little or a lot.

"Few policy areas other than garbage collection are as decentralized as voter administration," says Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute. "The quality and care and thoughtfulness and execution vary dramatically. It's clear under those circumstances that lots of people trying to exercise their sacred franchise get screwed."

Consider the contrasting experiences of voters in two states.

"I had no problems," says Nancy Davis, 49, a day-care provider in Columbia, Md. "The ballots were pretty simple. You filled in the arrow and everything was to the right on the ballot. The ones in Florida, I could see where they were totally confusing."

Retirees Clarence and Doris Hullfish voted at the church next door to their home in Boynton Beach in Palm Beach County, Fla. They saw lines there all

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2000, 21A

day. When they went to vote, they found eight voting booths featuring 36-year-old technology and two elderly poll workers too busy to help anyone or even give out "I voted" stickers. The paper ballots they received didn't look much like the sample ballot they had cut out of the newspaper. The punch hole for Al Gore didn't line up next to his name. As she watched news reports on TV, Doris Hullfish realized she might have voted by mistake for Pat Buchanan.

"Here we are sending people to the moon, but we are antiquated when it comes to voting," she told her husband over dinner. He wondered why he couldn't vote the same way he renews his driver's license: "You have a computer, and you just touch what you want."

Voters in Detroit last week encountered three-hour lines. In several states, many who registered through motor-vehicle departments found their names weren't on the voter rolls. Minority voters in Florida said they were asked for double identification, while white voters were asked for none. And in Cross Village, Mich., a black bear held voting officials hostage until police came and shot it.

Voting quirks, errors, fraud and the Electoral College, with all its faults and virtues, have been around since the birth of the nation. Usually, they don't matter much. But this year, they converged to create chaos -- recount requests, legal challenges and the possibility that the man who gets the most votes won't win the White House.

"Something is very fishy in all this," says Kim Perry, 28, a department store customer service representative in San Diego. "It's obvious something's really wrong with the system."

Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Government Studies at the University of Virginia, says he has scheduled a conference next year to consider improvements. "The one good thing coming out of this election from hell is an impetus for reform," he says. "I hope."

Why things go wrong

Sharon Priest is secretary of State of Arkansas and head of the National Association of Secretaries of State. Her overriding emotion these days is relief that she's not Florida's secretary of State. "There are so many humans in the process, there are always going to be mistakes," she says.

Most voters across the country still punch paper ballots, even though experts say that system is more vulnerable than any other to voter error, such as not punching a hole all the way through. About 20% use mechanical-lever machines that are no longer made. More than 25% fill in a circle, square or arrow next to their choice of candidates on a ballot. Less than 10% in the 1996 election touched a

computer screen or pushed a button to vote.

Each Arkansas county can have a dozen different ballots and several types of equipment. "It would be nice if it were more standardized," Priest says. "People would feel more comfortable." But that can be prohibitively expensive.

In Allegheny County, Pa., record-keeping dates from the 1800s. Of 890,000 people on the voting rolls, a recent study found, up to 115,000 were either dead or living somewhere else. The county plans to spend more than \$1 million to computerize the registry. But voting equipment is more expensive. It dates from the 1960s and would cost more than \$16 million to update, money the county doesn't have.

Deborah Phillips, president of the nonprofit Voter Integrity Project, says election budgets are probably "the most strained in all of state and local government, because elections don't happen every day. There's a tremendous pressure once the smoke has cleared to just hope that (a malfunction) doesn't happen again."

Taking that chance can result in long lines and voter frustration no matter what system is used, Phillips says. Even when the equipment works, "there's no such thing as a perfect voting system. Every system has its weak points."

One key, experts say, is to have good, competent help -- but it's getting harder to find. Poll workers are paid very little or nothing at all; some are required to have training, others aren't. Not only that, says Priest, it's getting harder to find buildings to use as polling places.

Voting as we know it, she says, "may be just sort of phased out, and we'll be forced to go to the mail-in vote. And then you'd be able to vote in the comfort of your own home."

Oregon tried that this year, running the first all-mail general election. Turnout was high with few apparent irregularities, but the count is still going on. The mail-in idea tantalizes some but disturbs others. Critics say it erodes the secret ballot, exposing people to relatives, parishioners, union stewards and business supervisors. They also say it invites fraud.

Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, says the federal government should have a uniform standard ballot for federal elections. It should also help states pay for voting guides and more and better voting machines, he says. "You can relieve long lines," he says. "Double the number of machines or polling stations."

Finding time to vote

The United Auto Workers made it easy this year for

Election Reform Case Study

negotiated an Election Day holiday into its contracts. For nearly everyone else, voting remains a civic chore that must be squeezed into a day that might already include heavy work and family responsibilities.

Some people, such as the self-employed, have flexibility; others have a hard time, even though it is common practice to give employees latitude on Election Day.

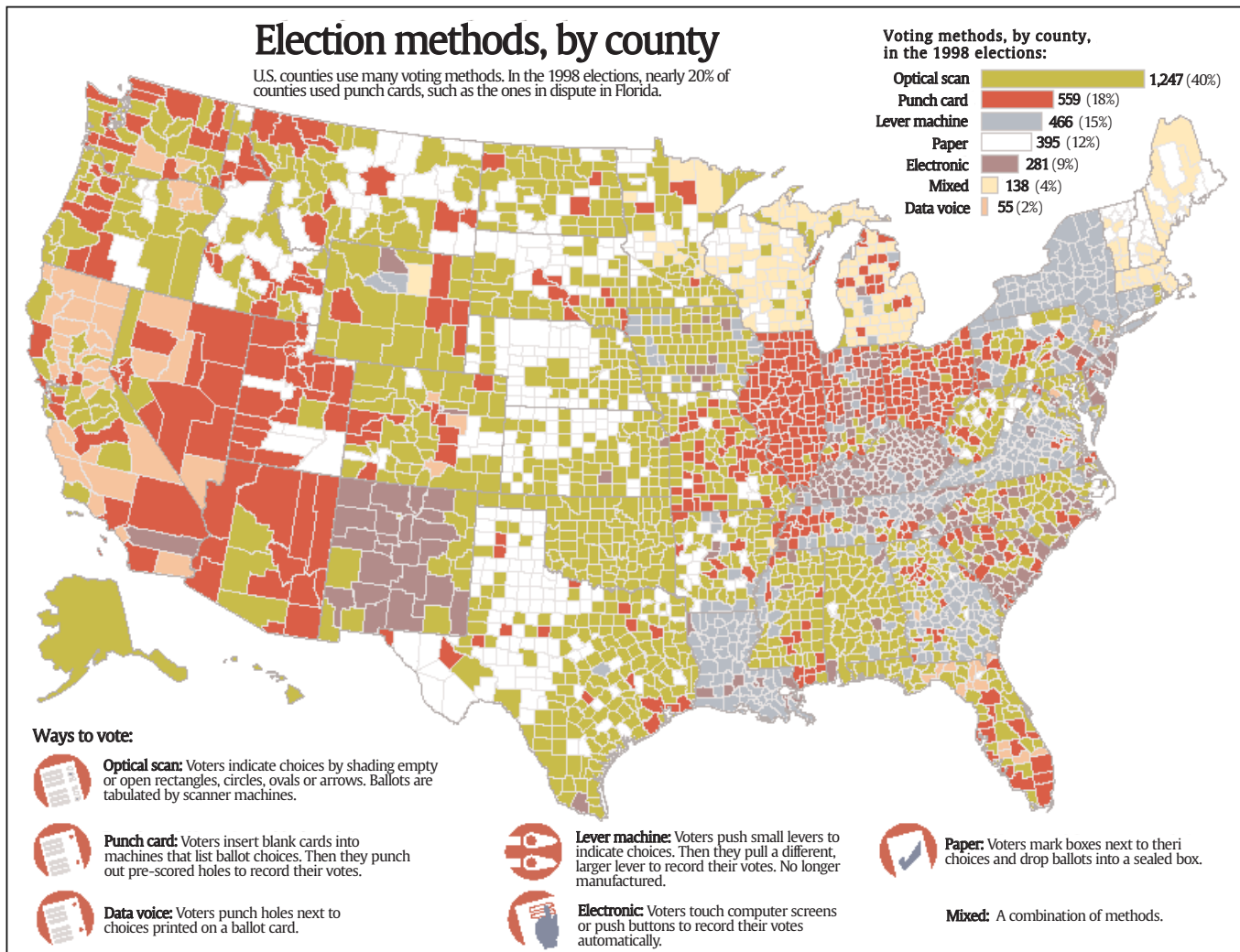
Phillips says she had complaints last week from people who were discouraged from taking any time off from their jobs to vote. Hullfish says his 21-year-old-son Chad, a diesel mechanic, was told to vote on his lunch hour. That wasn't long enough to drive the 30 miles to his polling place and back. So he skipped lunch and both his breaks, left early and made it to the polling place a half-hour before it closed.

Some states halt voting at 6 p.m., others at 9 p.m. Gans says they should all adopt New York's hours, 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Others propose a more radical solution, such as voting on Sunday (as many other countries do) or making Election Day a national holiday. One suggestion: voting on Veterans Day, as a homage to the democracy defended by veterans. "There's no reason why this country can't begin giving Election Day the respect it deserves," Phillips says.

Countries all over the world hold elections on weekends. A 1987 study by the Congressional Research Service found that countries that voted on non-work days all had higher turnouts than the United States. The average U.S. rate was 53.6% of the voting-age population in presidential years, compared with 77% in other countries where voting is not compulsory. Critics caution that Sunday or holiday voting could lead to more fishing trips rather than higher turnout.

Whatever happens, they say, a new voting holiday should not be set on Friday or Monday, which would tempt voters to leave town for a three-day weekend.



Source: Election Data Services (www.electiondataservices.com), Federal Election Commission Research by Paul Overberg and April Umminger; graphic by Frank Pompa and Dave Merrill, USA TODAY

Election reforms may be on the way

On the plus side, a day off or Sunday voting could increase turnout and likely would make it easier to find poll workers. High-school students could be tapped for poll work, especially those who need to perform community service to graduate. "They are very capable, and it would engage them in the electoral process," Phillips says.

If the 2000 election spurs authorities to standardize federal ballots and sink some money into voting equipment -- both considered distinct possibilities after this year's disarray -- will that make the system fair? Not in all eyes.

Some find it troubling that minor-party candidates can swing an election, and that the winner may not clear 50% of the vote. They suggest instant runoff voting, as is done in Ireland, Australia and some British elections. Voters pick a first, second and third choice. If no candidate wins a majority, second choices come into play.

Such a system would have allowed Ralph Nader's voters to vote their conscience this year and still make a second choice, possibly tilting the election to Gore. Of course, Gore might never have become vice president under that system; former president George Bush might have been the second choice of enough Ross Perot voters to win re-election in 1992.

The biggest fairness issue hanging over the election is the Electoral College. Each state has as many electoral votes as it has senators and House members; 48 states award all their votes to the winner. The result this year is that a few hundred votes might determine which candidate wins Florida's 25 electoral votes and the presidency.

Most voters react viscerally to such notions and say the Electoral College should go. "The Electoral College, that's passé. Make it more direct," says Davis, the Maryland voter.

Thomas Lucas of Tuckerton, N.J., a conservative Republican, says more people might vote under a popular-vote system. Polls showed Gore would win his state, he says, so "perhaps a great many conservative Republicans or on-the-border Republicans would just think the state is going Democratic anyway, so why bother even voting?"

Scholars say the Electoral College lends weight and stability to the voting process. It can magnify a slim popular-vote margin and confer legitimacy on a candidate, as it did in 1960 for John F. Kennedy. It also functions as a firewall. Under a popular-vote system, the Florida recount would have been "a nationwide recount with every ballot box impounded," Ornstein says.

Furthermore, without the Electoral College, Gans says, a presidential campaign would come down to "one big giant national media campaign" with no incentives for grass-roots organizing or visits to states.

Many scholars say they hope this election spurs states to get rid of the winner-take-all system and instead allocate their electoral votes proportionally or by congressional district.

That would put every state in play, they say, and electoral vote totals would more accurately reflect how people actually voted.

But everyone agrees that no matter what improvements are made, voting will always be vulnerable to fraud and error. No matter what happens to the Electoral College, candidates will continue to win by hairs breadths or by accident or, as may be the case right now, by both.

It's rough democracy -- "the fairest system in the world," Sabato says, "but not fair enough."

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AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2000, 4A

Politics

Complaints about county's ballots reach court

A new vote would be unprecedented, and legal experts say that it's unlikely

By Joan Biskupic
USA TODAY

The first legal challenges to the results of the presidential election in Florida claim that the configuration of Palm Beach County's ballot violated state election law and was so "misleading and deceptive" that it violated voters' constitutional rights.

The complaints, brought by two groups of voters and followed by several more lawsuits from individual voters alleging discrimination and other grievances, face huge hurdles in their quest to overturn the election results and force another vote.

"I don't know of any other Florida case where a re-vote was ordered," acknowledges Henry Handler, the lead attorney in one of the cases. "But we think we have the evidence" to prevail.

Florida law says that the general election ballot "shall be in substantially the form" of a vertical list and, in the recent election, required that Democrats be in the second position on the ballot. The Palm Beach ballot that Democrats say confused voters -- and led many to vote for Reform Party nominee Pat Buchanan -- is of the "butterfly" variety, with names of various candidates listed on either side of a center column. Vice President Gore and Sen. Joe Lieberman were listed in the third position, or second from the top on the left side.

Legal analysts on both sides of the partisan divide say courts generally allow such procedural mistakes by elections officials and resist interfering.

"I've seen lots of people complain over the years," says

Mark Braden, a Republican election-law expert in Washington. "But I've never known of a single case where a court has invalidated an election on the basis of what the ballot looks like. Lots of people go to the polls who don't read very well or who don't know English and won't ask for help."

But Michael Gerhardt, a law professor at the College of William and Mary law school who has been an adviser to Gore, countered that "there is genuine cause to doubt the credibility of the electoral process in certain parts of Florida." Gerhardt acknowledges, however, that judges typically are loath to disturb election results and are highly unlikely to call a new election.

The claims likely would be tested under a standard from a 1998 Florida Supreme Court case that asked whether there was "substantial unintentional failure to comply" with state election rules and whether there was "reasonable doubt" about whether an election "expressed the will of the voters."

University of Miami law professor Terence Anderson said that although Palm Beach County voters might have the most valid challenge ever under that standard, any kind of remedy would be difficult to impose. The complaining voters want the general election results voided and new voting held for president and vice president in Palm Beach County.

"I think (those challenging the ballot's validity) can satisfy the standard, but once they do, the question is, what do we do now?" Anderson says. "There is no remedy that wouldn't offend the constitutional values of the rest of the electorate." If a new vote were ordered, he says, Palm Beach would be in the unusual position of effectively deciding, on its own, the

nation's next president.

Analysts agree that no Florida court has ever ordered a new election, and analysts have difficulty finding parallels in other states.

"We've been scrambling all over the last 36 hours to research Florida law," says Jan Baran, a Washington, D.C., election law expert who has represented Republicans. "Now we're looking elsewhere." Baran recalls a 1975 Senate race in New Hampshire that was subject to two elections because the vote was so close that officials could not determine who won.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, recalls a 1974 case in his state in which a court blocked certification of the results and ordered a new election in some precincts.

The peculiarities of state and local law govern election procedures across the USA. But in a separate Palm Beach lawsuit, brought by three voters hoping to establish a class-action case alleging that the ballot violated their constitutional right to vote, federal law would govern. That presents an even higher legal hurdle: Judges have ruled that to rise to the level of a constitutional violation, election officials must have discriminated intentionally.

Latest Fla. recount results

A tally by The Associated Press shows Republican George W. Bush leading Democrat Al Gore by 229 votes with 66 of 67 counties (not Seminole) counted. Gore has a net gain of 2,234 votes from the election-night count. Bush has a net gain of 679 votes. The last count of all 67 counties before the recount showed Bush leading Gore by 1,784 votes.

County	Gore	Bush	Gore change	Bush change
Alachua	47,365	34,124	65	62
Baker	2,392	5,610		
Bay	18,850	38,637		
Bradford	3,075	5,414	3	1
Brevard	97,318	115,185		
Broward	386,561	177,323	43	44
Calhoun	2,155	2,873		
Charlotte	29,645	35,426	4	7
Citrus	25,525	29,766	24	22
Clay	14,632	41,736	2	-9
Collier	29,918	60,433	13	7
Columbia	7,047	10,964		
De Soto	3,320	4,256	-2	
Dixie	1,826	2,697	1	-1
Duval	107,864	152,098	184	16
Escambia	40,943	73,017	-15	-12
Flagler	13,897	12,613	6	5
Franklin	2,046	2,454	4	6
Gadsden	9,735	4,767	170	17
Gilchrist	1,910	3,300		
Glades	1,442	1,841	2	1
Gulf	2,397	3,550	8	4
Hamilton	1,722	2,146	4	-7
Hardee	2,339	3,765	-2	1
Hendry	3,240	4,747	1	4
Hernando	32,644	30,646		
Highland	14,167	20,206	15	10
Hillsborough	169,557	180,760	28	47
Holmes	2,177	5,011	23	26
Indian River	19,768	28,635	-1	8

County	Gore	Bush	Gore change	Bush change
Jackson	6,868	9,138		
Jefferson	3,041	2,478	3	-3
Lafayette	789	1,670	1	1
Lake	36,571	50,010	16	47
Lee	73,560	106,141	30	18
Leon	61,425	39,053		
Lew	5,398	6,858	-5	-2
Liberty	1,017	1,317	6	1
Madison	3,014	3,038	3	
Manatee	49,177	57,952	8	4
Marion	44,665	55,141	17	6
Martin	26,620	33,970	1	106
Miami-Dade	328,764	289,492	62	36
Monroe	16,483	16,059		
Nassau	6,879	16,280	-73	-124
Okaloosa	16,948	52,093	24	50
Okeechobee	4,588	5,057		-1
Orange	140,220	134,517	105	41
Osceola	28,181	26,212	4	-4
Palm Beach	269,696	152,954	751	108
Pasco	69,564	68,582	14	1
Pinellas	200,629	184,823	417	-61
Polk	75,196	90,191	219	90
Putnam	12,102	13,447	11	8
St. Johns	19,502	39,546	20	49
St. Lucie	41,559	34,705		
Santa Rosa	12,802	36,274	7	26
Sarasota	72,853	83,100	-1	
Seminole				
Sumter	9,637	12,127	3	1
Suwannee	4,075	8,006	-9	-8
Taylor	2,649	4,056	2	6
Union	1,407	2,332	8	6
Volusia	97,063	82,214		
Wakulla	3,838	4,512	3	1
Walton	5,642	12,182	5	6
Washington	2,798	4,994	2	11
TOTALS	-	-	2,234	679

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AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2000, 4A

Lawmakers move to end use of electors

By Dennis Cauchon
USA TODAY

The presidential election's state of limbo has renewed congressional efforts to abolish the Electoral College and have Americans choose presidents by direct popular vote.

Several senators and House members said they will start the long, difficult process of trying to amend the Constitution to change the 213-year-old way presidents are elected.

A constitutional amendment needs support from two-thirds of the House and Senate, then must be approved by legislatures in three-fourths of the states.

Opponents of the Electoral College expect congressional hearings and debate to focus attention on a process they call antiquated and undemocratic.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., who introduced a proposed constitutional amendment last week, said the Electoral College "was created over 200 years ago by Founding Fathers who didn't trust the voters. Those days are over. I think most people, after this election, believe we ought to simplify (the system)."

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill., also support a constitutional amendment to end the Electoral College system.

At issue is the indirect way presidents are elected.

Each state gets electoral votes equal to the state's congressional delegation: two senators, plus the number of House members. For example, California has two senators and 52 House seats, so it gets 54 electoral votes. Vermont

has two senators and one House member for three electoral votes.

Electors meet on the third Monday in December in their state capitols to cast ballots that determine the next president.

In every state but Maine and Nebraska, state legislatures have decided that the top vote-getter gets all the electoral votes in that state. Maine and Nebraska allocate electoral votes for each congressional district won, plus two for the statewide winner.

"It's the winner-takes-all rules that create the controversy. But states have more leverage when they do it this way," said John Samples, director of the Center for Representative Government at the libertarian Cato Institute and a supporter of the Electoral College system.

Samples and other Electoral College supporters say the system forces presidential candidates to have broad appeal. A candidate can't pile up a huge number of votes in one region of the country and almost none in another and expect to win.

Winner-take-all rules also strengthen a state's importance. California's importance would be diluted if it distributed electoral votes by congressional district. The presidential candidate who won the state might receive 30 votes to his opponent's 24, rather than a grand prize of 54.

"This election showed the Electoral College worked — at least as well as the popular vote," says political scientist Gary Glenn of Northern Illinois University. "In an election like this, no system can solve the problem of the people not making a clear choice."

AS SEEN IN USA TODAY NEWS SECTION, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2000, 3A

Deep wounds make healing process difficult

Anger lingers despite talk of reconciliation

By Jim Drinkard
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON -- Al Gore's concession speech Wednesday night ended the most protracted and bitter presidential election in more than a century and left the victor, George W. Bush, to govern a divided country.

Gore, 52, used both earnestness and humor as he sought to soothe the nation, and particularly his supporters who remain bitter. "I call on all Americans -- I particularly urge all who stood with us -- to unite behind our next president," he said in a speech televised nationally from his ceremonial office next door to the White House he had hoped to occupy.

Bush, who at age 54 will become the nation's 43rd president, spoke less than an hour later from the chamber of the Democratic-controlled Texas House of Representatives, a venue chosen as a symbol of the bipartisanship that was a hallmark of his tenure as governor.

"I'm optimistic we can change the tone of Washington, D.C.," Bush said. "I know America wants reconciliation and unity. I know Americans want progress. And we must seize this moment and deliver."

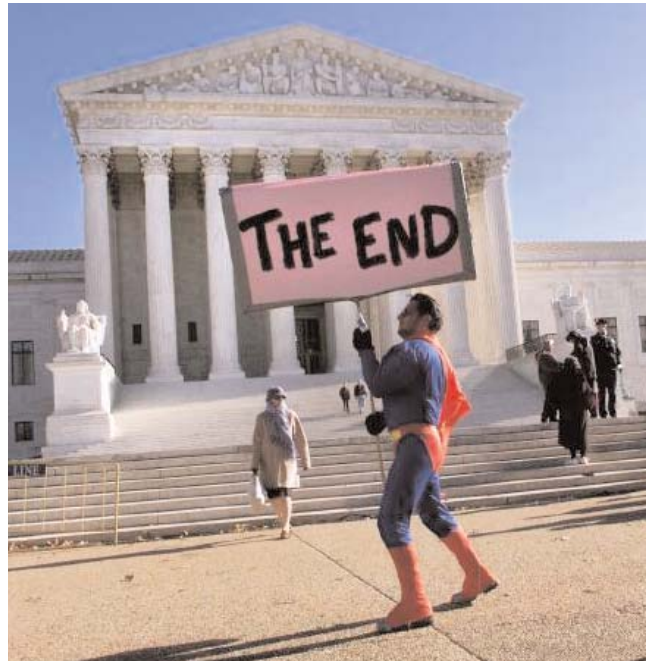
Gore said that although he strongly disagreed with the U.S. Supreme Court decision that ended his hopes, he accepted it.

"This is America. Just as we fight hard when the stakes are high, we close ranks and come together when the contest is done," the vice president said.

Just before the 9 p.m. ET speech, Gore telephoned Bush to concede the race and offer congratulations. It was Gore's second concession. The first, made in a phone call to Bush on election night, was withdrawn a short time later. "I promised him that I wouldn't call him back this time," Gore cracked.

The healing won't be easy. The reaction from many Democrats was bitter, and the divide in the government and the electorate is deeper than it has been in generations.

"There is all this nice talk about how it will lead to a new era of bipartisanship, but tempers will be short," political analyst Rhodes Cook said. "There is a sense that people are aggrieved. They aren't happy as a result of this election."



By Tim Dillon, USA TODAY

A ruling wraps it up: The sign carried by Bush supporter Scott LoBaido outside the Supreme Court Tuesday said it all.

Gore's decision to drop out came Wednesday morning, 12 hours after the U.S. Supreme Court, split along ideological lines, blocked further recounting of disputed ballots in Florida. Those ballots represented Gore's last hope of erasing Bush's narrow margin in the state that was the key

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to the presidency.

The high court's pronouncement came like an exclamation point at the end of a too-long sentence. It wrote a close to two years of campaigning and to a five-week overtime period of legal wrangling.

When the Supreme Court halted the count Saturday, an unofficial Associated Press tally found that Bush's lead in Florida had dropped to a bare 177 votes -- one-tenth the margin on Election Day. But history may record that Bush actually won by the margin of the Supreme Court's 5-4 decision.

The dramatic developments capped a political season that many felt already had gone on too long, stretching back into the hazy mists of memory. It was hard to recall, for example, Bush's first steps to raise money for his nomination bid in the summer of 1998, or Gore's early struggles to extricate himself from the scandals of his boss, Bill Clinton.

It was the fourth time in history that a president won office without carrying the popular vote, and the first time in 112 years. Bush, who trailed Gore nationally by 337,600 votes, becomes the second son of a president to gain the White House, joining John Quincy Adams.

The election pitted two Ivy League sons of political privilege, one trying to redress his father's bitter defeat in 1992 by Clinton and Gore, the other seeking to take the job for which he had spent a lifetime preparing. Their post-election battle spawned dozens of lawsuits and exposed a dark underside to the nation's electoral process that few Americans knew about.

"This election is clearly an instant classic," Cook said. Since popular voting for president began nationally in 1824, just six of 45 White House elections have been decided by less than 1 percentage point.

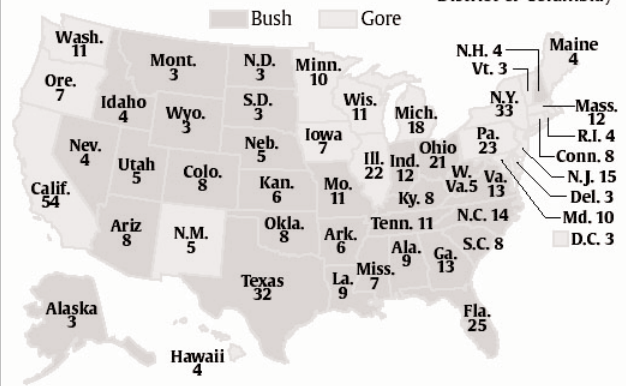
But just five days before the Electoral College meets to formally select Bush as president, it was clear that the bitterness of the past five weeks would not fade immediately. Bush will be trying to lead the most divided government in generations. The Senate is split 50-50, and the national popular vote for the House was even closer than the vote for president -- a GOP advantage of 84,000 votes out of 78.8 million cast in contested races.

"It's going to be difficult to rally a strong level of support for a new administration," said Rep. Earl Pomeroy, a North Dakota Democrat. "The circumstances of this election will give Bush less initial leeway than most presidents have."

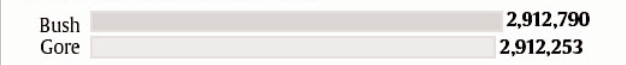
The tone was particularly resentful among some black elected leaders. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., a Democrat from Illinois, said halting the vote recount reminded him of a

Bush wins presidency by small margin

Electoral votes Bush **271** (30 states)
 (Number of states) Gore **267** (20 states and District of Columbia)



Florida count
 The Florida count certified by the secretary of State and submitted to the Electoral College gave George W. Bush a lead of 537 votes over Al Gore, 0.009% of the votes cast in the state.



Nationally
 Gore led by 337,576 in the popular vote nationally, 0.3% of the total votes cast.



Source: The Associated Press and data compiled by Jean Simpson, USATODAY USATODAY

Third World coup d'etat, adding: "I see it as undermining the legitimacy of a President Bush, should he be elected without all of the votes being counted."

But Republicans sounded a more hopeful note. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., called on both sides to go to work on "common-sense" legislation. "Our system has endured a great trial, and the wounds that have come from the passions of partisanship must begin to heal for the good of the country," Hastert said. Senate GOP leader Trent Lott took heart in what he termed Bush's "calm demeanor and reassuring manner of the last few weeks."

The General Services Administration, which has been reserving 90,000 square feet of office space near the White House and a \$5.3 million transition budget for the winner, was prepared to turn over the keys and the money to vice president-elect Dick Cheney today.

In Tallahassee, the state Senate, which had planned to convene Wednesday to consider a resolution appointing the state's 25 electors as an insurance policy for Bush, recessed after hearing of Gore's concession plans.

"We may have reached the point of finality," Senate President John McKay said.

Behind the Story: A Reporter's Notebook



Jill Lawrence
Political reporter,
USA TODAY

In the aftermath of the election, I felt nobody was looking at the big picture — that is, that the election raised questions of fairness on every level, from the principle of the Electoral College right down to whether names lined up with punch holes on ballots. I decided to pull it all together with some ideas for reforms. I didn't know this, but (computer-assisting reporter) Paul Overberg was working separately on a map graphic that showed how piecemeal the system was. An alert editor forwarded me a message about the map and we were all thrilled when we discovered how well the story and graphic worked together. The story also gained a lot from our polling department, which forwarded me names of poll respondents who had agreed to be interviewed by phone if a reporter wanted further comments. Imagine how excited I was when I asked one man where he lived and he said he was from Palm Beach County, Florida! He and his wife had great details of their experience in that hapless county. Ultimately, I was able to combine concepts, details, human experiences, academic analysis and some good suggestions for the future into a fairly comprehensive look at the overarching questions of whether the election had been fair, and how fair any election could be.

Jill Lawrence is a political writer at USA TODAY. She was a columnist for The Associated Press and a free-lance magazine and newspaper writer before joining the paper in July 1996. She has covered every presidential campaign since 1988, specializing in trends, profiles and analysis. She won a National Headliner Award for her AP columns in 1995, and taught journalism at American University in 1997.

Jill received a music history degree from the University of Michigan in 1975 and a masters degree in journalism from New York University in 1976. She started her journalism career with UPI in Charleston, W.Va., where she covered coal, floods, politics, triple-A baseball and the state legislature. She joined AP in Harrisburg, Pa., in 1979 and became the primary reporter on the Three Mile Island nuclear accident. She moved to Washington with AP in 1982.

She lives in Washington with her two sons and her husband, John Martin, who is editor of governing.com.

Additional resources

electionmethods.org

www.whitehouse.gov

www.democrats.org

www.rnc.org

www.issues2000.org

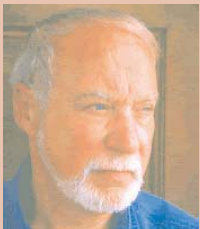
For discussion

1. If you were a member of a racial or religious minority group which system—electoral college or direct election—would you be inclined to support in order to increase the political influence of your particular group?
2. If you learned that many studies by social scientists reveal that many Americans know little about politics and government, would this make you more or less likely to support direct elections?
3. In the articles you read, a number of political experts predicted before the 2000 presidential election that a candidate who lost the popular vote but received a majority in the electoral college would produce an immediate demand to scrap the electoral college. This didn't happen and does not appear likely to happen. Why do you think this is the case?

Future Implications:

1. By emphasizing the act of voting — as opposed to other forms of political participation such as contacting elected officials and working in campaigns, or even demonstrating — don't we risk reducing our involvement in democracy to the few minutes it takes us inside the voting booth to flip a lever or touch a screen to the exclusion of other forms of participation?
2. A group of political scientists has estimated that the chances of a single individual's vote being decisive in a presidential election is about one in 10,000,000. Given the time it takes to vote and the obstacles that are sometimes encountered by voters, they raise the question of whether voting is even a rational act. It's likely, then, that if a voter decided to stay home on election day the outcome of the election would not be affected. Are more voters going to be asking themselves, "Why should I bother to vote?" This should get us to thinking about what, in fact, are the incentives to vote on the part of the voter?

About Ross Baker



Ross K. Baker is Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. He spent three years on Capitol Hill as a speech-writer for three senators in the 1970s, as a consultant to the Democratic Caucus of the House of Representatives in the 1980s and as aides to Republican Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska and Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont in 2001. He is author of *Friend and Foe* in the U.S. Senate and House and Senate, and is a regular contributor to the Los Angeles Times and Newsday.