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John Jackson Dr.
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Friends and Neighbors Government:
Partisanship in County Government in Illinois 1975-2010

By

John S. Jackson

Professor of Political Science Emeritus and Visiting Professor

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Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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Abstract This paper documents the partisanship of the elected county officials throughout Illinois for two different periods. The baseline chosen is 1975-1976 and the latest data are taken from 2009-2010. This constitutes a thirty-five year period which includes some of the most volatile years in Illinois and American politics. The findings indicate the counties where the most changes have occurred in the state and those marked by the most political stability. Strong partisan and competitive counties as well as counties where the partisan majority has changed are identified. The results showed that the Republicans had lost ground marginally while the Democrats had gained somewhat. A review of the academic literature is provided which draws from both survey based and aggregate data. The research is placed in the context of the literature's treatment of party change and partisan realignment.

Introduction

Over the course of the past several years the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute has made a major commitment to documenting important trends in the political attitudes and behaviors of the people of Illinois (Jackson, 2004, 2007, 2011; Leonard, 2010, 2011, Jackson and Leonard, 2011). In addition, the PSPPI has focused especially on analyzing these same trends in southern Illinois (Jackson and Leonard, 2011). This complete body of work provides an excellent overview of the current contours of political opinion and voting behavior across the entire state as well as in southern Illinois. We have also demonstrated the systematic differences between the City of Chicago, the suburban "Collar Counties" and the remaining ninety six counties commonly referred to as "Downstate" Illinois. These studies have documented the systematic variations by region which are so important in electoral politics in Illinois.

The institute's research agenda has led to the analysis of a wide variety of political attitudes in Illinois including candidate and office-holder evaluations, voting intentions and behavior, trust in government, support for tax increases and reform proposals, and a wide spectrum of governmental performance and public policy issues. This collection of studies has helped inform and guide the political discourse among public officials, the media, opinion leaders and the voters. We believe this body of research has helped to set the public agenda in the state of Illinois over the past several years. This role constitutes a basic part of the institute's mission which includes helping to inform and elevate the political discourse in Illinois and to enhance civic education in the state.

The Crucial Role of Party Identification

Despite the very wide range of issues and opinions covered in these studies, one constant has been the focus on party identification. Scholars familiar with the academic literature will recognize that party identification is one of the central variables, arguably the central variable, in explaining voting behavior and many other important political behaviors and attitudes as well (Campbell, et al, 1956; Bartels, 2000; Carsey and Layman, 2002; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Beck, 2003). In addition, practitioners

know that the political parties are the most important players in organizing political conflict, recruiting candidates, and contesting elections. Party organizations play an especially important role in a strong party state like Illinois. Parties and the candidates they nominate to carry their banner in the election define the political world for most citizens and help them to make sense of it. We are living in an era of intense bi-polar political competition and conflict in the United States (Lyman and Carsey, 2002). Millions of Americans, about two-thirds of all voters, are deeply attached to one or the other of the major parties as a lodestar in getting their fix on the political universe and all the conflict it entails. For strong partisans and independents alike, the political parties are the major players in the game of politics and they drive the narrative of the political drama which plays out on the news each day. This research is based in that tradition which emphasizes the importance of the political parties.

Methodological and Theoretical Matters

There are two major methods for tapping and measuring partisanship among the voters. The first is the use of psychological or attitudinal measurements of partisanship. This is a venerable tradition in American political science which extends back in time at least to the first national surveys conducted by the University of Michigan team on the 1952 presidential election (Campbell, et al, 1956). In the past six decades the voting behavior studies have become the most important and well-known empirical research body of knowledge in the entire discipline of political science. These studies are based on surveys of the mass voters, almost always based on random samples of subjects. This research tradition has led to and helped enrich the entire public opinion polling industry whose results are widely used and published in the mass media. The polls, and stories interpreting them, especially the so-called “horse race” questions regarding who is ahead and who is likely to win the next election are key elements in the coverage of American campaigns and elections.

The second research tradition is based on the analysis of aggregate voting data. This research approach is dependent on the “behavioral definition” of voting. This tradition argues that the way the voters behave in the election is as important as their responses to questions about their attitudes. These studies are focused on aggregate voting statistics from geographic electoral units. This approach usually means organizing data at the state, county, and local levels of voting returns. This tradition in political science goes back to the founding of the discipline, but it was originally given major impetus by the pioneering research of V. O. Key (Key, 1949, 1956). Key studied state and local voting returns, as well as interviews, especially from the South, and wrote some of the seminal theoretical studies based on those simple local statistics interpreted globally. Key’s research demonstrated that there was much the analyst could learn about national, regional, state and local politics by the study of mass voting statistics.

At the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute we have adapted both the attitudinal and the aggregate data analysis traditions to our research agenda. We have now done three major statewide surveys over the past three years and another is planned for the fall of 2011 (Leonard, 2010, Leonard, 2011). These annual polls have been complemented by two annual surveys of the voters of southern Illinois, and those results have been widely reported (Leonard, 2010; Jackson and Leonard, 2011). More recently the

Southern Illinois Survey was supplemented by two regional surveys done in 1976 and 1977 by the Social Science Research Bureau at SIUC. The report on those comparative returns provided a thirty-five year longitudinal picture of continuity and change in the attitudes and voting behavior of the citizens of southern Illinois (Jackson and Leonard, 2011).

The current paper grows out of several questions stimulated by our statewide and southern Illinois surveys. Those studies documented the extent of partisanship and partisan voting in Illinois and showed how voting behavior had changed over recent elections both regionally and in the state as a whole (Jackson and Leonard, 2011). The aggregate data analysis based studies focused on the statewide returns for the highest profile elections between 1998 and 2010. The survey research data focused on the 2006, 2008 and 2010 elections. The southern Illinois surveys demonstrated how much things had changed in the region between 1976 and 2011 (Jackson and Leonard, 2011, Trani, 2010). The statewide results documented a state in transition from being competitive with a decided lean toward the advantage of the Republican Party to competitive with a lean toward the Democratic Party in the twelve years between 1998 and 2010. The southern Illinois returns suggested that this is a distinctive region caught in a state of flux and perhaps in transition from a long-held attachment by a majority of the voters to the Democratic Party to either being independents or even converting to the Republican Party. At the minimum the southern Illinois voting returns in statewide races demonstrated that the region which was decidedly loyal to the Democratic Party for many decades was routinely voting Republican in state and federal races. We interpreted this phenomenon to be a manifestation of the region's predominantly southern roots perhaps marked by a lag where southern Illinois was following the South out of the Democratic Party to a new loyalty to the Republicans (Ibid).

The institute's statewide and southern Illinois regional level studies illustrate both continuity and change in the way Illinois voters and southern Illinois voters behave. While partisanship is the most important variable anchoring and constraining the individual's perceptions and votes, there is also clearly room for change in the outcome from election to election and more broadly from generation to generation. This is because new groups enter the electorate, turnout rates vary markedly, independents change from one party to another in their voting, the candidates offered by the two parties have widely different appeals, the issues change, and the electoral tides change nationally. It is even possible that the aggregate distribution of partisanship can shift from generation to generation based on individual level change and upon the mobilization of different groups into the electoral coalitions of the two major parties (Anderson, 1976). In the parlance of the discipline, electoral realignment can come along once a generation or more, but it is relatively rare. The research reported in this paper is placed firmly in that theoretical tradition of party de-alignment and party realignment.

This realignment theory is resonant for both the state of Illinois and for southern Illinois across the past three decades. Illinois was a state which was once competitive, but trending toward Republican dominance in state elections for many years. Between 1976 and 2002, Illinois elected only Republican Governors, including James R. Thompson, Jim Edgar, and George Ryan. The General Assembly was more competitive in the 1950s through early 1970s when the Republicans controlled one or both houses of the General Assembly more frequently than the Democrats did. The Republican candidate for president won Illinois consistently from 1968 through 1988. That two decade dominance was then broken by Bill

Clinton who carried Illinois in 1992 and the Democrats have carried Illinois in every presidential election between 1992 and 2008. The presidential tides presaged, and perhaps helped propel, the shift in Illinois from competitive, but marginally Republican, to competitive but marginally Democratic, which we have documented in the statewide races for this era.

The opposite trend has taken place in southern Illinois in state and federal races. This region was a long time bastion of Democratic Party strength going all the way back to the Civil War. Democratic candidates for Governor, U. S. Senator, and President could usually count on a significant margin of support from southern Illinois. This all began to change as the national tides changed and the southern Illinois region began to act more and more like the American South in its presidential and U. S. Senator support patterns in the 21st Century. Scholars who have studied the South extensively have shown how a peculiar region which had once been solidly Democratic can shift to the Republicans in the space of one political generation (Black and Black, 1987).

The same has happened in the opposite direction for the suburbs of Chicago. There the shift in the Collar Counties has been from solid support for the Republican Party to a much more mixed record with significant inroads being made by the Democratic Party especially in statewide and federal races (Colby and Green, 1986, Green, 2003, 2007). This is because the suburbs which were once predominantly white and upper middle to middle class have become much more racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse. The implications of this change in the Collar Counties are even more profound than those in southern Illinois because their population base is both large and growing and their percentage of the statewide vote is ever-increasing. Other fast growing parts of the state, especially what Judis and Teixeira call the “ideopolis” are marked by the probability of becoming more Democratic over time (Judis and Teixeira, 2002). These are the counties where the population is well-educated, ethnically and racially diverse, and generally liberal on the social issues. Judis and Teixeira maintain that such regions are much more hospitable to the Democrats than they are to the Republicans. On the other hand, Daniel Vock has argued recently that most of the population growth in the 2010 census data was attributed to the “exurbs” i.e. those areas in northeast Illinois which are the farthest out from the city and that growth was likely to help the Republicans in the long term (Vock, 2011).

Thus, election outcomes shift and partisanship can change, based on a variety of causal factors, from individual to individual and generation to generation. This shift is usually marked by change in the aggregate voting results at both regional and statewide levels. A formerly majoritarian party becomes the minority party and vice versa. These are possible trends statewide and regionally in southern Illinois, in the rest of Downstate and in the Collar Counties which are of interest and which we have attempted to document in this series of empirical studies.

The Study

This study adopts the county as the basic unit of analysis, and it reports county level election results for the period of 1975-1976 compared to 2009-2010. In previous studies we have reported the results for statewide offices for the period between 1998 and 2010 (Jackson, 2004, 2007, 2011). The voting behavior research literature teaches us that many voters choose a straight-ticket and vote for their

favorite party from top to bottom. Such votes are the anchors of American politics and provide much of the continuity from election to election and generation to generation. Other voters split their tickets and vote for the candidates and issues they favor in lieu of party considerations. For a period in recent American history those split ticket voters' ranks were growing, but that growth has stabilized more recently with the rise of polarized partisan politics (Keith, et al., 1992).

In addition, turnout varies dramatically from election to election. The strong partisans are more likely to go vote than the weak partisans and independents; however, the political circumstances of the moment often produce quite different turnout rates and results from election to election. The dramatically different fortunes of the Republicans in 2010 as compared to 2008 or 2006 were largely determined by differential turnout rates between the two major parties and their base or core constituencies, for example. Turnout is especially different in presidential election years, when it is at its highest. Turnout in presidential elections recently has been at or slightly above sixty percent of eligible voters, as compared to mid-term congressional elections where turnout often ranges from thirty-five to forty percent. State and local turnout levels are often comparable or below the mid-term congressional levels. A reduced electorate produces a much different outcome compared to an expanded electorate.

These are the major dynamics which produce significant change in American politics. It is that potential change which we are attempting to document in this study. The most recent electoral era in the United States has been an especially volatile one. The nation went from a Republican majority in all branches of government in 2006, to a Democratic majority in the executive and legislative branches in 2008. That Democratic majority lasted only two years and the Republicans took control of the U. S. House and made significant gains in the U. S. Senate in the 2010 mid-term elections and the pendulum swung again, this time toward divided government and frequent policy stalemate. Many Americans are very impatient when it comes to their politics. We are quite capable of marching off in exactly the opposite direction when quick and positive policy results are not forthcoming from the last election. This adds to the volatility of American politics which has been the record in national elections between 2006 and 2010. However, local politics can and often are different, providing a measure of stability as we will see.

Those earlier studies then led to the research question which compels the current research. That is, how much are the statewide results reflected in the successes and failures of the two parties at the local level? We will focus here on the county election returns for county offices. A vast literature in political science demonstrated that the county traditionally has been the most important building block in the political party organization for most of the 150 year history of the American parties. The County Chair was a major party leader and a few like the late Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago used the county party chairmanship to exert significant control over his party at the state and even national level.

Control of the Court House and the offices and prerogatives involved provided a reservoir of jobs and patronage critical to the building and maintaining of the party organization at the grass roots level. The County Sheriff, the State's Attorney, the County Clerk, the Circuit Clerk, the Treasurer, Assessor, and Coroner are very important political personages in the American scheme of state and local government. They influence and assist the elections for State Representative and Senator as well as for the other statewide and federal offices. When their party wins they have access to powerful people and they

have the potential to step up and advance their own careers. Richard Ogilvie was Sheriff of Cook County before he became Governor of Illinois. Former Republican Attorney General and candidate for Governor, Jim Ryan was DuPage County State's Attorney before becoming Attorney General. Former United States Senator, Carol Moseley-Braun got her start in elective office as Recorder of Deeds for Cook County. Many other state and federal officials had roots in county court houses and city halls.

Perhaps more importantly, when their party loses statewide, the county and city offices can become a crucial base of support for the party's long term survival and provide a foundation on which future regional and statewide victories can be built. The party may not be dominant or thriving in the statewide contests if they lose the governorship and other constitutional officers, but it is still very much alive if it has a healthy base in the grassroots located at the county court house.

For all these reasons this study focuses on the county, and its major elected officers, as the basic unit of analysis for this study. Fortunately there is an excellent data base available through the Illinois Blue Book which lists all the county officers and their party identification. It is published every two years by the Illinois Secretary of State's office. Data drawn from the Illinois Blue Books of 1975-1976 and 2009-2010 were extracted for the present study. This thirty-five year period essentially encompasses the realignment era in American politics. That realignment was consummated during the period covered in this study. This era includes the time in Illinois extending from Daniel Walker to Pat Quinn as Governor.

The Results

The offices included all the major county level offices each of the 102 counties shares. These consistently covered the Sheriff, State's Attorney, Clerk and Recorder, Circuit Clerk, Treasurer, Coroner, the Regional Superintendent of Educational Services and the Auditor and Assessor when elected. There were several instances where the basic number of elected county officials changed between 1975 and 2010, especially with the elimination of some Auditor positions and variation in appointed versus elected Assessors. The numbers of Independents who held county office were small but also led to some changes in the basic number of Democratic and Republican county officials. Otherwise, all the other offices remain the same over this thirty-five year period. Table 1 provides an overview for all these cases with the two year intervals compared.

(Table 1 here)

There are two generalizations supported by Table 1. The first is that the Republican Party has some advantage over the Democrats in total county offices held in both eras. In 1975-1976 the Republicans controlled 414 county offices, or 56% of the total, and the Democrats controlled only 331 offices, or 44% of the total. This pattern fits well with the results of other studies which ranked Illinois in that era as a competitive state which leaned somewhat toward the Republicans (Ranney, 1965).

The second generalization is that in the ensuing thirty-five years the Democrats gained and the Republicans lost somewhat in party strength at the county level, counting only the sheer number of offices held by both parties. By 2009-2010 the Democrats controlled 337 county offices, or 47% of the total while the Republicans only controlled 387 county offices, or 53% of the total. The Democrats' total

offices held grew by six, but the Republicans' total dropped from 414 to 387. The consolidations which occurred for increased efficiencies and changes from elected to appointed offices apparently disadvantaged the Republicans significantly more than the Democrats. In addition, as noted above, this was an era when the statewide advantage was shifting slightly from the Republicans to the Democrats.

The Republicans lost more than the Democrats did in those office reductions and consolidations probably because more of them occurred in the smaller and more rural counties. After the transitions were complete, the Republicans still held the majority of county offices in Illinois, but it is now by a much narrower majority.

The Republicans have long held a geographic advantage in Illinois by controlling more counties numerically than the Democrats. Of course the Democrats make up for that geographic disadvantage by exploiting their own population advantage. The large urban counties outside the Collar Counties, especially Cook County the most important of all, have traditionally been areas of Democratic strength. The Republicans traditionally controlled the five Collar Counties, but that Republican advantage has diminished somewhat recently as the suburbs have become more diverse in both class and racial terms. Table 2 provides much more detail on the counties regarding the partisan make-up of the major county offices over this period.

(Table 2 here)

As evident from Table 2 there are 40 counties we have classified as "Strong Republican". They are defined by the Republican advantage ranging from 7:0 to 5:2, and other similar combinations, over the Democrats in control of county offices. The Democrats had 32 counties classified as "Strong Democratic" by the same criteria. This left 17 counties which were rated as the "toss-up" or split counties. These were defined by a 4:3, 3:4, 4:4, 3:3, or other similar splits in either 1975 or in 2010. These counties were predominantly in southeastern Illinois with a smattering of counties, like Monroe, Clinton, Grundy, and Winnebago in either southwestern or northern Illinois. The Strong Republican Counties were predominantly in central and northern Illinois which have always been geographic bastions of strength for the Republicans (Jackson, 2010). The basic generalization has long held that the farther north one goes in Illinois the more Republican it becomes, with northeastern Illinois (Cook County), of course, being a major exception to that rule. The Strong Democratic counties were predominantly in southern Illinois with a smattering across the southwestern, west-central, and central parts of the state with Cook being the largest and most important of those. Southern Illinois has long been a stronghold for the Democratic Party although that may be changing. If there is a party realignment underway which is similar to the one already completed in the South, then southern Illinois is the most likely candidate for that transition. We will examine that area in more detail subsequently.

Even more relevant for the realignment hypothesis, there were 13 counties where the majority had changed over the past 35 years. These included 10 counties where the majority changed from Republican to Democratic and only 3 counties where the majority of office holders changed from Democratic to Republican. There was one county, Peoria, which shifted from a Republican majority to a tie. There were two counties, Montgomery and Winnebago, which moved from Democratic majority to

a tie. Those were classified under the Split or Marginal counties. The majority shift counties were scattered from Pulaski, Pope, and Hardin at the southern tip of the state to Will, LaSalle, Mercer, and Knox in the northern end of Illinois. (See Appendix A for a map which illustrates these patterns more graphically).

It is relevant to observe in more detail where these partisan shifts occurred. The three counties which shifted from Democratic to Republican were Morgan, Schuyler, and Vermillion. Morgan and Schuyler are small counties in North Central Illinois, almost adjacent to each other, and are in an area of traditional Republican strength. Vermillion is somewhat larger and is on the eastern border in central Illinois next to Indiana and east of Champaign County, another area of strong Republican organizations. It is more surprising that those counties had Democratic majorities in 1975-1976 than that they shifted to Republican majorities by 2009-2010. (See Appendix B for each county's classification by population).

The counties which shifted from Republican to Democratic majorities are a diverse lot. They included: Effingham, Hardin, Knox, LaSalle, Lawrence, Mercer, Pope, Pulaski, Wayne and Will. Of those, Will is undoubtedly the most notable since it is a large county and represents the increasing diversity of the Collar Counties which has helped the Democratic Party statewide as well as in these local county level offices. LaSalle County in northeastern Illinois is not a Collar County, but it also represents some of that pro-Democratic Party realignment which has taken place in Illinois. LaSalle County voted for the Democrat for Governor, Rod Blagojevich, in both 2002 and 2006 (Jackson, 2007).

Hardin, Pope and Pulaski are in deep southern Illinois. In an earlier analysis we demonstrated how much this area had realigned recently in support of Republican candidates running in statewide races (Jackson, 2011; Jackson and Leonard, 2011). That same realignment is not yet evident at the county level in southern Illinois. Indeed these three counties have shifted in the other direction. There are other counties, like Jackson, Franklin, Randolph, Williamson, and Perry, in southern Illinois which still rank as Strong Democratic at the county level even though several of those are now routinely found in the Republican column in state and federal election results (Jackson, 2007; Jackson, 2011).

So what we have found here is evidence of a bifurcated partisanship, or what is sometimes termed a "split-level" partisanship. Many of these people are Strong Democrats when it comes to voting at the County Court House level even though they do not vote Democratic for state and federal offices. They apparently want their local government, that unit composed of "friends and neighbors" to be controlled by the Democrats. It may be that the Democrats, who are the more ardent advocates of governmental services and the need to take care of social services, education, and infrastructure building, have a natural advantage at this level over the Republicans, who at least nationally are the party most skeptical and critical of providing governmental services. The Republicans nationally want to leave more services to the private sector and reduce or eliminate regulations, and while that position may play well in federal races, it is not necessarily a winner when it comes to that government closest to the people's needs and wants. In addition, many of the Democrats in these counties may be routinely splitting their tickets and voting Republican in the state and federal races while still adhering to the Democratic partisanship which has marked the southern Illinois region for generations.

(Table 3 here)

Table 3 shows the breakdown of southern Illinois counties for the 1975-1976 to the 2009-2010 era. There one can see actual gains in number of offices held and percent of the total for the Democratic Party at the county level despite the fall-off in voting for the Democrats in state and national elections which has occurred in this region during the same period. There apparently is some of that same split-level partisanship in reverse, although not as prevalent, in some of the northern Illinois counties. The net advantage has been to the Democratic Party statewide although it has accrued to the Republicans' benefit in statewide contests in southern Illinois most recently.

Control of county level offices offers a bulwark against the national tides, and the counties can be the foundation which stabilizes the party organization when other larger changes threaten to overwhelm the parties. However, if the national tides beat down too many times on the local seawall they can ultimately result in basic partisan changes of the type which has occurred so dramatically in the white South over the past three decades. Nothing has been more important than that shift in changing American politics recently. It is too early to say which is the more likely outcome of the split level voting which has marked so many southern Illinois voters, and voters in other parts of the state as well, over the period studied here; however, the potential for significant long-term change is definitely in place.

We turn now to the population data as opposed to the geographic data to make an additional point. Table 4 divides the counties by partisanship and adds the element of population data. It is widely understood that while geography is important, and we have maintained in this paper that control of individual counties is crucial to the health of each party, nevertheless, in the final analysis, the American electoral system is built on population as well as geography. In Tables 4 and 5, we classify the counties by partisanship and add the crucial element of population size.

(Table 4 and Table 5 here)

From the data in Table 4 it is quite evident why the Democrats have an advantage in Illinois. Their 32 Strong Democratic counties have a combined population of 6,658,992 while the 40 total Strong Republican counties have a combined population of 4,167,517. The Democratic base amounts to 51.88% of the state's total population while the Republican base totals only 32.49%. While total population is not exactly the same thing as voting strength, it gives a strong clue to the advantages in those counties where the Democratic Party controls the court house as compared to the Republican control of their court houses. The "Majority Change" population data are also instructive. The three counties which changed from Democratic to Republican total 124,176 in population which is slightly under 1% of the state's total population. The ten counties where the shift was from Republican to Democratic total 943,623 or 7.35% of the state's total population. This also indicates an advantage for the Democrats when the partisan gains and losses are compared. Both LaSalle County and especially Will County are the big prizes in this partisan shift which advantaged the Democrats.

The 17 counties which rated as split, and essentially toss up counties, amounted to somewhat under a million in total population. (See Table 4). This constitutes just 7.29% of the state's total population. Thus, the challenge for the Republicans is to hold their base and expand it significantly in both the toss-

up counties as well as potentially in the Majority Change counties and perhaps even in some of the Strong Democratic counties. Some statewide Republican candidates have demonstrated that this is not a pipe dream. Senator Mark Kirk, State Treasurer, Dan Rutherford, and State Comptroller, Judy Barr Topinka showed that they could win in predominantly Democratic counties in 2010 and thus take a statewide victory. Earlier Republican candidates like former Governor Jim Edgar have accomplished the same feat. This may be, however, a clue as to why it is normally the more moderate and less ideological Republicans who control the Republican Party in Illinois. The more extremely conservative wing of the party rarely fields a winner in statewide elections in Illinois. Indeed, they rarely win contested Republican primaries, and when they do, they are usually not then competitive candidates against the Democrats in the general elections although 2010 provided some exceptions to that rule.

The Democratic candidates have a much more straight forward path to victory in statewide elections in Illinois. They need to hold the Democratic Party base, rely on a decent turnout in the Strong Democratic areas, and coast to victory. If they pick up some of the more marginal counties, that is just icing on the cake. This is, of course, why Cook County and the Collar Counties are so important to both parties in statewide races since that is where most of the votes are. We turn next to a closer examination of the three major divisions of the state, Cook County, the Collar Counties and Downstate, which is presented in Table 6.

(Table 6 here)

Obviously the Collar Counties combined are a major prize in Illinois politics. Next only to Cook County, which had 40% of the state's total, they can dominate the results in any statewide race. Combined they constitute nearly one-fourth of the total population of the state. In addition, they are growing and have added substantial numbers of people in each census since World War II. When Cook County is added into the mix, you have 65% of the state's total. This leaves Downstate, the other 96 counties, with the remaining 35%. While Downstate is important, especially if the vote is divided almost evenly between Cook and the Collar Counties, Downstate can make a difference. In 1986 Peter Colby and Paul Green published a classic article where they maintained that Downstate usually held the balance of power in statewide races (Colby and Green, 1986). That was undoubtedly often true in their era; however, the data in Table 6 indicate that it is increasingly hard for Downstate to hold the balance because of their reduced percentage of the state's total population. Today, it is the suburbs that are the most crucial battle ground in Illinois. They tend to provide the critical margin of victory for most statewide candidates. They are influential and growing in importance in the electoral equation in Illinois. That is why the increasing diversity, and their increasing tendency to vote for some Democratic candidates, especially of the "Good Government" type who are moderate to liberal on the social issues and conservative to moderate on fiscal issues, is so important in statewide politics.

Again what's happening at the county level is very important to understanding the larger trends. At almost one million people DuPage is obviously the biggest prize in the Collar Counties. For years it has been the backbone of the Republican Party in Illinois and has provided many statewide leaders and candidates. Next are Lake and Will counties which are large and growing. Will, especially, has become much more diverse and now has a five to two advantage to the Democrats in the holding of county level

offices. It alone among the Collar Counties has produced a shift from Republican to Democratic majorities at the county level during the thirty-five year period under study. It also seems to be the most fertile ground among the Collar Counties for the Democrats in the near future. The suburban areas closest to the city of Chicago are the areas of most likely growth for the Democrats. If the Vock thesis is correct, the far out counties, "the exurbs" are the most likely areas fertile for Republican growth in the state (Vock, 2011). The rest of Downstate counts in Illinois politics and in a close election they can still make a difference. However, they do not count for as much as they used to, and they can be overwhelmed in some elections by what is happening in Chicago, the suburbs, and the exurbs.

Conclusion

The empirical results of this investigation did not turn out exactly as expected, which is frequently true in social science research. I originally hypothesized that the data would show significant Democratic gains statewide and significant Republican gains in southern Illinois. Both of these hypotheses were based on extensive study of the county level voting returns in state and federal elections from 1998 through 2010. These were studies done for other earlier publications (Jackson, 2004, 2007, 2011). It is clear that since 2002 Illinois has become a more Democratic state in terms of statewide voting patterns while southern Illinois has been moving in the opposite direction.

The movement of the state toward the Democrats is reflected in the data at the county officials level; however, that change is not marked. The change was 3% toward the Democrats statewide during the time under study. The pro-Democratic trend is perhaps better demonstrated by the 10 counties which saw the partisan majority change from Republican to Democratic compared to only three counties which went from Democratic to Republican majorities. This is an unmistakable trend, but it does not constitute a major realignment, and it leaves Illinois essentially as a competitive state which leans Democratic as opposed to a competitive state which leans Republican which was the situation in 1975-1976. The statewide results in 2010 bear out this characterization since we currently have one Democrat and one Republican in the U. S. Senate, 11 Republicans compared to 8 Democrats in the U. S. House and two of the six state constitutional offices are controlled by the Republicans.

Actually the bigger surprise was the extent of continuing Democratic dominance of the Court Houses in southern Illinois. The Democrats started out as the dominant party in southern Illinois in 1975-1976, and they have extended and expanded that dominance in 2009-2010. There are a lot of historical, cultural, and economic reasons for that dominance which we explored in other recent papers from The Simon Review (Jackson and Leonard, 2011; Trani, 2011). It is abundantly clear that Republican candidates for statewide and federal office have done well in southern Illinois recently. There are several exceptions such as Jackson and Alexander in deep southern Illinois and St. Clair County in the Metro-East area, but otherwise the recent electoral map has featured a sea of red in this region.

It was interesting to find that the Democrats still prosper in the county offices in southern Illinois, and their dominance has grown, not shrunk as we initially expected. In general, people want to feel that their friends and neighbors are in charge of the local governments closest to them. That is the great Jeffersonian tradition which is such an engrained component of the American political culture.

Apparently the voters still favor Democrats over Republicans for that role in this region of the state. When it comes to providing those vital local services that people depend on in their daily lives, which are the services county government specializes in, more Democratic than Republican candidates have been successful in convincing the voters of southern Illinois of their merits. This is also true statewide where Democrats have more than held their own against the Republicans whose ranks have thinned somewhat in the past three and a half decades.

The Republicans still hold the edge statewide in control of more county government offices; however, that edge has declined somewhat in the era studied. The results of this study show that both parties have a strong base in many counties. There were 40 Strong Republican and 32 Strong Democratic counties identified in Table 2. This is almost three-fourths of all Illinois counties where the partisan majority has not changed even though this was a very turbulent era in Illinois and in national politics. While there have been vast political and demographic changes nationally and in Illinois in this era, these Court Houses stand as bastions of party strength and solidarity. They have a distinctively partisan history and their voters have partisan loyalties which are cultivated and handed on from office holder to office holder and generation to generation. Three leading scholars demonstrated the importance of party identification for the social identities of many people and emphasized how much geography, or place of residence, may impact on the stability found in voting across generations in the following:

Consistent with the notion that people harbor party attachments that endure over time is the remarkable persistence of geographic patterns of party cleavage....It seems clear that coalitions formed in one era may shape party attachments many years later, even after the coalitions and the politicians who forged them have passed away (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002, 78)

This means that when a party goes through a period of partisan stress and challenge statewide, as the Republicans did in 2002-2008, and the Democrats did in 2010, they can take strength and comfort from the knowledge that they still retain control of vast quantities of real estate, and often it is real estate that one party has dominated for decades. American politics is marked by periods of both continuity and change, but the county offices analyzed here exhibit far more continuity than change. The counties are the epitome of grassroots democracy where friends and neighbors government and face to face service is valued by the voters and rewarded with long term stability for the parties. The constant voter anger and distrust which is directed toward Washington and Springfield is largely absent at this local level. The white hot rhetoric, which has become such a staple of American politics, is not usually turned toward county government. The other levels of government would do well to envy and emulate some of the better features of county government as captured in this study.

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Table 1

**Party Identification of County Officials
in Illinois: 1975- 1976 to 2009- 2010**

<u>1975- 1976</u>			<u>2009- 2010</u>		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent %</u>		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent %</u>
Total D	331	44	Total D	337	47
Total R	414	56	Total R	387	53
Total	745	100	Total	724	100

Source: Calculated from the Illinois Blue Book 1975- 1976 and 2009- 2010.
Published by the Secretary of State Office.

Note: The different number of offices in 1975-1976 compared to 2009-2010 resulted from the elimination of some offices as elected officials, most notably the Auditors in some counties and variation in county officials elected as Independents.

Table 2

**Party Competition among County Officials
in Illinois: 1975- 1976 to 2009- 2010**

	Number	Percent %
Strong Republican Counties	40	39
Strong Democratic Counties	32	31
Split or Marginal Counties	17	17
Majority Change: 1975 to 2010	13	13
a) R to D	10	
b) D to R	3	
Total	102	100

Table 3

**Party Identification of Southern Illinois
County Officials: 1975-1976 to 2009- 2010**

<u>1975- 1976</u>			<u>2009- 2010</u>		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent %</u>		<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent %</u>
Total D	79	63	Total D	87	69
Total R	47	37	Total R	39	31
Total	126	100	Total	126	100

Note: "Southern Illinois" here is identified as the 18 southernmost counties in Illinois, all of which are located south of I-64 highway. These included: Alexander, Franklin, Gallatin, Hamilton, Hardin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Massac, Perry, Pope, Pulaski, Randolph, Saline, Union, Washington, White, and Williamson Counties.

Table 4

**Partisanship of Illinois Counties
by Population and Percent of the State**

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Total Current Population</u>	<u>% of State Population</u>
Strong Republican in 1975 and 2010	40	4,167,517	32.49%
Strong Democratic in 1975 and 2010	32	6,658,992	51.88%
Toss Up/ Split Marginal	17	935,784	7.29%
Majority Change 1975- 2010	13	1,068,339	8.33%
a) Republican to Democratic	10	943,623	7.35%
b) Democratic to Republican	3	124,176	0.98%

Table 5

**Partisan Change in Illinois County
Government 1975- 2010
The Split or Toss Up Counties**

Republican to Democratic

<u>County</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>% Population</u>
1 Effingham	34,242	0.27
2 Hardin	4,320	0.03
3 Knox	52,919	0.41
4 LaSalle	113,924	0.89
5 Lawrence	16,833	0.13
6 Mercer	16,434	0.13
7 Pope	4,470	0.03
8 Pulaski	6,161	0.05
9 Wayne	16,760	0.13
10 Will	677,560	5.28
Total	943,623	7.35

N=10

Democratic to Republican

<u>County</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>% Population</u>
1 Morgan	35,547	0.28
2 Schuyler	7,544	0.06
3 Vermilion	81,625	0.64
Total	124,716	0.98

N=3

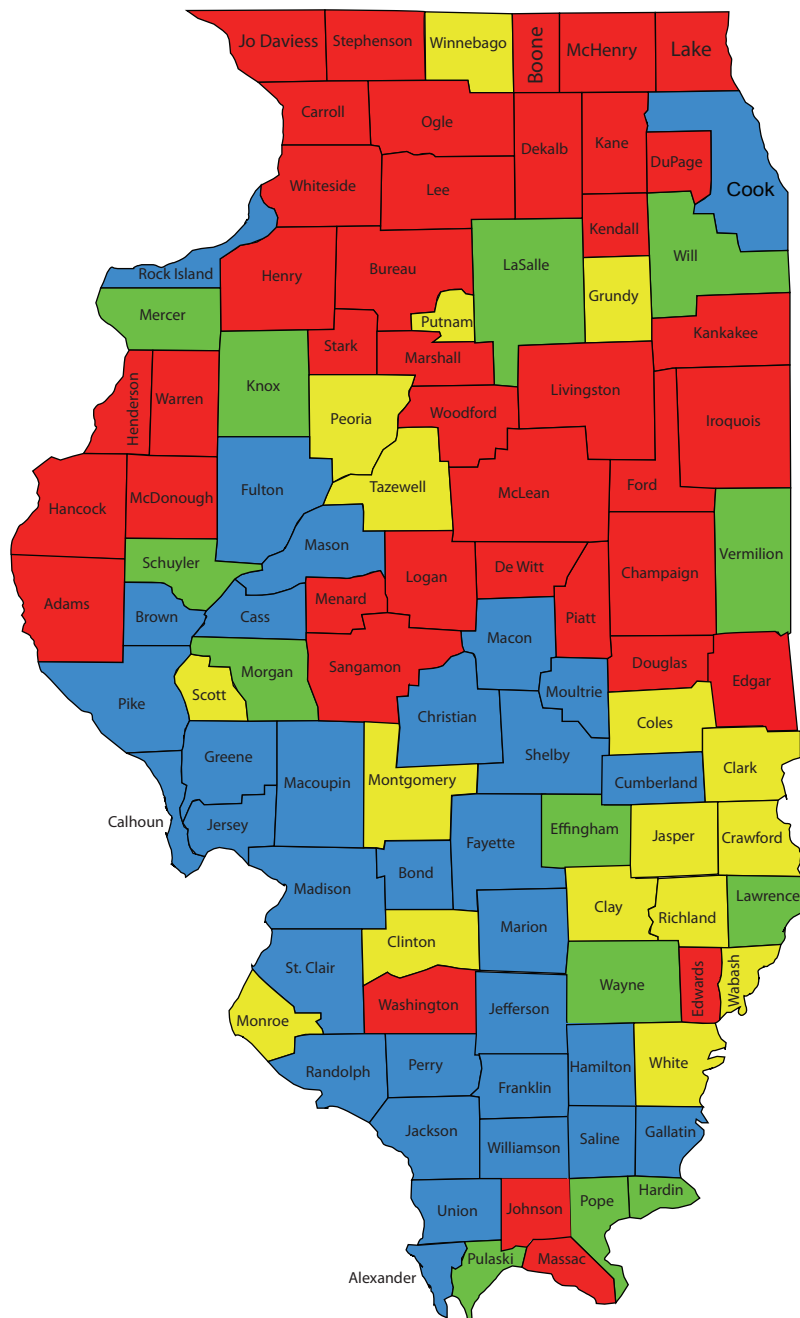
Table 6

**Partisanship and Population of Counties in
the Three Major Geographic Divisions of Illinois**

	<u>Party</u>	<u>Total Current Population</u>	<u>% of State Population</u>
Cook County	D	5,194,675	40.49
Collar Counties	R	3,121,675	24.34
a) DuPage		916,924	7.15
b) Kane		515,269	4.02
c) Lake		703,462	5.48
d) McHenry		308,760	2.41
e) Will		677,560	5.28
"Downstate"	Mixed	4,514,282	35.18

Appendix A

Counties and County Officers by Party



Legend

- N= 40 Strong Republican counties
- N= 32 Strong Democratic Counties
- N= 17 Toss Up (split/marginal counties majority remains the same or tie)
- N= 13 Majority Change Counties 1975 vs. 2010

Appendix B

Counties and County Officers By Party

County	1975-1976		2009-2010		Current Population	% of State Population
	Democrats	Republican	Democrats	Republicans		
Adams	2	6	2	5	67,103	0.52%
Alexander	5	2	6	1	8,238	0.06%
Bond	4	3	5	2	17,768	0.14%
Boone	1	6	0	7	54,165	0.42%
Brown	7	0	6	1	6,937	0.05%
Bureau	0	6	4	3	34,978	0.27%
Calhoun	4	3	5	1	5,089	0.04%
Carroll	2	5	1	6	15,387	0.12%
Cass	5	2	6	1	13,642	0.11%
Champaign	1	8	1	7	201,081	1.57%
Christian	6	1	7	0	34,800	0.27%
Clark	3	4	2	5	16,335	0.13%
Clay	4	3	3	3	13,815	0.11%
Clinton	4	2	4	3	37,762	0.29%
Coles	3	4	2	5	53,873	0.42%
Cook	8	1	7	0	5,194,675	40.49%
Crawford	3	4	2	5	19,817	0.15%
Cumberland	5	2	5	1	11,048	0.09%
DeKalb	0	7	1	6	105,160	0.82%
Dewitt	2	5	0	7	16,561	0.13%
Douglas	0	7	1	6	19,980	0.16%
DuPage	0	9	0	9	916,924	7.15%
Edgar	2	5	3	4	18,576	0.14%
Edwards	2	5	2	5	6,721	0.05%
Effingham	3	4	5	2	34,242	0.27%
Fayette	5	2	5	2	22,140	0.17%
Ford	0	7	0	7	14,081	0.11%
Franklin	7	0	7	0	39,561	0.31%
Fulton	6	1	7	0	37,069	0.29%
Gallatin	7	0	7	0	5,589	0.04%
Green	5	2	4	3	13,886	0.11%
Grundy	4	3	4	3	50,063	0.39%
Hamilton	6	1	5	2	8,457	0.07%
Hancock	1	6	1	6	19,104	0.15%
Hardin	3	4	7	0	4,320	0.03%
Henderson	2	5	1	6	7,331	0.06%
Henry	0	7	1	6	50,486	0.39%
Iroquois	1	6	0	7	29,718	0.23%
Jackson	6	1	7	0	60,218	0.47%
Jasper	5	2	4	3	9,698	0.08%
Jefferson	7	0	5	2	38,827	0.30%

Jersey	5	2	5	2	22,985	0.18%
JoDavie	2	5	1	6	22,678	0.18%
Johnson	0	7	1	6	12,582	0.10%
Kane	1	8	0	8	515,269	4.02%
Kankakee	3	6	2	6	113,449	0.89%
Kendall	0	7	0	7	114,736	0.89%
Knox	2	6	6	2	52,919	0.41%
Lake	2	5	2	5	703,462	5.48%
LaSalle	3	6	5	3	113,924	0.89%
Lawrence	3	4	4	3	16,833	0.13%
Lee	2	5	2	5	36,031	0.28%
Livingston	0	7	0	7	38,950	0.30%
Logan	2	5	0	7	30,305	0.24%
Macon	7	2	6	2	110,768	0.86%
Macoupin	7	0	7	0	47,765	0.37%
Madison	9	0	7	0	269,282	2.10%
Marion	7	0	6	1	39,437	0.31%
Marshall	1	6	0	7	12,640	0.10%
Mason	7	0	6	1	14,666	0.11%
Massac	1	6	2	5	15,429	0.12%
McDonough	0	7	0	7	32,612	0.25%
McHenry	1	8	0	8	308,760	2.41%
McLean	0	9	0	8	169,572	1.32%
Menard	0	6	0	6	12,705	0.10%
Mercer	2	5	4	3	16,434	0.13%
Monroe	2	5	3	4	32,957	0.26%
Montgomery	5	2	3	3	30,104	0.23%
Morgan	4	2	2	5	35,547	0.28%
Moultrie	5	2	6	1	14,846	0.12%
Ogle	0	7	0	7	53,497	0.42%
Peoria	1	8	4	4	186,494	1.45%
Perry	4	3	5	2	22,350	0.17%
Piatt	1	5	1	5	16,729	0.13%
Pike	7	0	6	1	16,430	0.13%
Pope	2	5	6	1	4,470	0.03%
Pulaski	2	5	4	3	6,161	0.05%
Putnam	3	3	4	2	6,006	0.05%
Randolph	7	0	6	1	33,476	0.26%
Richland	4	2	4	3	16,233	0.13%
Rock Island	9	0	8	0	147,546	1.15%
Saline	6	1	4	3	24,913	0.19%
Sangamon	2	7	1	7	197,465	1.54%
Schuyler	7	0	3	4	7,544	0.06%
Scott	3	4	2	5	5,355	0.04%
Shelby	5	2	7	0	22,363	0.17%
St.Clair	7	2	7	0	270,056	2.10%
Stark	1	6	2	5	5,994	0.05%

Stephenson	0	7	0	7	47,711	0.37%
Tazwell	3	6	3	5	135,394	1.06%
Union	5	2	6	1	17,808	0.14%
Vermilion	6	3	1	7	81,625	0.64%
Wabash	2	5	3	4	11,947	0.09%
Warren	0	7	0	7	17,707	0.14%
Washington	1	6	2	5	14,716	0.11%
Wayne	1	6	4	3	16,760	0.13%
White	4	3	4	3	14,665	0.11%
Whiteside	1	7	1	7	58,498	0.46%
Will	3	6	5	2	677,560	5.28%
Williamson	5	2	5	2	66,357	0.52%
Winnebago	5	3	4	4	295,266	2.30%
Woodford	0	7	0	7	38,664	0.30%
Total for Party	331	414	337	387		
Total in County	745		724		12,830,632	100.00%

Population data were taken from: U.S. Census Bureau 2010.

<http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/index.php>.

Appendix C
Strong Republican Counties in 1975 and 2010

County	1975-1976		2009-2010		Current Population	% of State Population
	Democrats	Republican	Democrats	Republicans		
Adams	2	6	2	5	67,103	0.52%
Boone	1	6	0	7	54,165	0.42%
Bureau	0	6	4	3	34,978	0.27%
Carroll	2	5	1	6	15,387	0.12%
Champaign	1	8	1	6	201,081	1.57%
DeKalb	0	7	1	6	105,160	0.82%
Dewitt	2	5	0	7	16,561	0.13%
Douglas	0	7	1	6	19,980	0.16%
DuPage	0	9	0	7	916,924	7.15%
Edgar	2	5	3	4	18,576	0.14%
Edwards	2	5	2	5	6,721	0.05%
Ford	0	7	0	7	14,081	0.11%
Hancock	1	6	1	6	19,104	0.15%
Henderson	2	5	1	6	7,331	0.06%
Henry	0	7	1	6	50,486	0.39%
Iroquois	1	6	0	7	29,718	0.23%
JoDaviess	2	5	1	6	22,678	0.18%
Johnson	0	7	1	6	12,582	0.10%
Kane	1	8	0	7	515,269	4.02%
Kankakee	3	6	2	5	113,449	0.89%
Kendall	0	7	0	7	114,736	0.89%
Lake	2	5	2	6	703,462	5.48%
Lee	2	5	2	5	36,031	0.28%
Livingston	0	7	0	7	38,950	0.30%
Logan	2	5	0	7	30,305	0.24%
Marshall	1	6	0	7	12,640	0.10%
Massac	1	6	2	5	15,429	0.12%
McDonough	0	7	0	7	32,612	0.25%
McHenry	1	8	0	7	308,760	2.41%
McLean	0	9	0	7	169,572	1.32%
Menard	0	6	0	6	12,705	0.10%
Ogle	0	7	0	7	53,497	0.42%
Piatt	2	5	1	5	16,729	0.13%
Sangamon	2	7	1	6	197,465	1.54%
Stark	1	6	2	5	5,994	0.05%
Stephenson	0	7	0	7	47,711	0.37%
Warren	0	7	0	7	17,707	0.14%
Washington	1	6	2	5	14,716	0.11%
Whiteside	1	7	1	7	58,498	0.46%
Woodford	0	7	0	7	38,664	0.30%
Total for Party	38	256	35	245		
Total in County	294		280		4,167,517	32.49%

Strong Democratic Counties in 1975 and 2010

County	1975-1976		2009-2010		Current Population	% of State Population
	Democrats	Republican	Democrats	Republicans		
Alexander	5	2	6	1	8,238	0.06%
Bond	4	3	5	2	17,768	0.14%
Brown	7	0	6	1	6,937	0.05%
Calhoun	4	3	5	1	5,089	0.04%
Cass	5	2	6	1	13,642	0.11%
Christian	6	1	7	0	34,800	0.27%
Cook	8	1	7	0	5,194,675	40.49%
Cumberland	5	2	5	1	11,048	0.09%
Fayette	5	2	5	2	22,140	0.17%
Franklin	7	0	7	0	39,561	0.31%
Fulton	6	1	7	0	37,069	0.29%
Gallatin	7	0	7	0	5,589	0.04%
Green	5	2	4	3	13,886	0.11%
Hamilton	6	1	5	2	8,457	0.07%
Jackson	6	1	7	0	60,218	0.47%
Jefferson	7	0	5	2	38,827	0.30%
Jersey	5	2	5	2	22,985	0.18%
Macon	7	2	6	2	110,768	0.86%
Macoupin	7	0	7	0	47,765	0.37%
Madison	9	0	7	0	269,282	2.10%
Marion	7	0	6	1	39,437	0.31%
Mason	7	0	6	1	14,666	0.11%
Moultrie	5	2	6	1	14,846	0.11%
Perry	4	3	5	2	22,350	0.17%
Pike	7	0	6	1	16,430	0.13%
Randolph	7	0	6	1	33,476	0.26%
Rock Island	9	0	7	0	147,546	1.15%
Saline	6	1	4	3	24,913	0.19%
Shelby	5	2	7	0	22,363	0.17%
St.Clair	7	2	7	0	270,056	2.10%
Union	5	2	6	1	17,808	0.14%
Williamson	5	2	5	2	66,357	0.52%
Total for Party	195	39	190	33		
Total in County	234		223		6,658,992	51.88%

Majority Change (1975 v. 2010)

County	1975-1976		2009-2010		Current	% of State
	Democrats	Republican	Democrats	Republicans	Population	Population
Effingham	3	4	5	2	34,242	0.27%
Hardin	3	4	7	0	4,320	0.03%
Knox	2	6	6	2	52,919	0.41%
LaSalle	3	6	5	3	113,924	0.89%
Lawrence	3	4	4	3	16,833	0.13%
Mercer	2	5	4	3	16,434	0.13%
Morgan	4	2	2	5	35,547	0.28%
Pope	2	5	6	1	4,470	0.03%
Pulaski	2	5	4	3	6,161	0.05%
Schuyler	7	0	3	4	7,544	0.06%
Vermilion	6	3	1	7	81,625	0.64%
Wayne	1	6	4	3	16,760	0.13%
Will	3	6	5	2	677,560	5.28%
Total for Party	41	56	56	38		
Total in County	97		94		1,068,339	8.33%

Toss Up/ Split Marginal Counties in 1975 and 2010

County	1975-1976		2009-2010		Current Population	% of State Population
	Democrats	Republican	Democrats	Republicans		
Clark	3	4	2	5	16,335	0.13%
Clay	4	3	3	3	13,815	0.11%
Clinton	4	2	4	3	37,762	0.29%
Coles	3	4	2	5	53,873	0.42%
Crawford	3	4	2	5	19,817	0.15%
Grundy	4	3	4	3	50,063	0.39%
Jasper	5	2	4	3	9,698	0.08%
Monroe	2	5	3	4	32,957	0.26%
Montgomery	5	2	3	3	30,104	0.23%
Peoria	1	8	4	4	186,494	1.45%
Putnam	3	3	4	2	6,006	0.05%
Richland	4	2	4	3	16,233	0.13%
Scott	3	4	2	5	5,355	0.04%
Tazwell	3	6	3	4	135,394	1.06%
Wabash	2	5	3	4	11,947	0.09%
White	4	3	4	3	14,665	0.11%
Winnebago	5	4	4	4	295,266	2.30%
Total for Party	58	64	55	63		
Total in County	122		118		935,784	7.29%