

**2008  
Illinois State Election Analysis  
and Commentary**

- A. Turnout**
- B. President**
- C. Cook County States Attorney**

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**Preface:** Barack Obama's historic 2008 presidential victory has been dissected by many individuals from every possible angle. This report will not dwell on the campaign but the results in the state of Illinois.

For over thirty years, I have been writing and commenting on Illinois politics and though some things remain the same, vast geo-political changes have taken place in certain parts of the state. And these changes have turned Illinois from a politically competitive state to a very dark blue Democratic bastion.

Three decades ago, understanding statewide elections in Illinois rested on the following premise. A race between a solid Democratic candidate and a equally solid Republican candidate would be decided as follows: The Democrat's victory margin in Chicago would be matched by the Republican's victory margin in suburban Cook and the Five Collar counties (DuPage – Kane – Lake – McHenry and Will) – thus making the remaining downstate 96 counties – The Key To Victory. In short, whoever carried downstate would win the election. Much of the GOP's seven consecutive gubernatorial victories (1976 – 1998) were due to this scenario.

Unfortunately, for Illinois Republicans the state's geo-politics has dramatically changed in favor of the Democrats. Downstate is no longer the key to victory and, in fact matters very little in electing statewide candidates. Why? Democrats have increased their Chicago margins and winning percentages to mind boggling heights, but even more important suburban Cook County votes now add significant margins to a Democratic candidate's statewide total. And even in the collar counties – once bedrock GOP territory – Democratic candidates have made major political inroads in statewide races, especially in the counties of Lake and Will. In sum, Illinois politics has tilted to the northeastern part of the state.

Clearly, Obama and his presidential bid was a special moment for the state. However, his 2008 staggering victory over John McCain is merely the high end of an existing pattern that prevents Republicans from holding a statewide office.

The GOP Illinois geo-political dilemma can be summarized in a single sentence – The vote margins a solid Democrat gains in Cook and the Collars can not be erased by downstate Republicans.

## **A. TURNOUT**

As Table 1 reveals – all four of the state’s voting regions increased their turnout numbers compared to 2004. However, like the 2004 voter turnout, only the five collars in 2008 increased their percentage of the statewide vote. Nearly one-fourth of Illinois voters in this election were collar county residents. Twenty years this collar turnout percentage growth would have created political euphoria among Illinois Republicans – but those collar county GOP glory days are only a memory, especially in statewide, congressional and some legislative races. Incredibly these once rock rib conservative Republican bailiwicks have become some of the most politically competitive and battleground areas in the state.

### **A/1 – Chicago**

2008 Chicago turnout numbers are shocking to the city’s long-time political observers. Only a few traditional heavy turnout southwest and northwest side white ethnic wards are able to compete in the turnout sweepstakes. In the top 2008 twelve turnout wards only #19 on the southwest side and #41 on the northwest side make the list (#41 – came in twelfth). Four huge middle-class southside African-American wards #21 - #8 - #6 - #34 were in the top twelve – as their voters responded to Obama’s candidacy. However, the big 2008 turnout news is which other six wards had the top turnouts.

Three of these six wards are located in the near north lakefront #42 - #44 and #43 while the other three wards are gentrifying wards #32 and #47 on the north side and #2 on the near southside. In raw numbers, only seven wards had 30000+ voter turnouts and five of these wards were lakefront and gentrifying wards. The late Mayor Richard J. Daley would truly be startled if he were alive today to observe that in his city, yuppies are now out-voting ethnics and for that matter nearly everyone else.

As in the past, the bottom twelve turnout wards contain larger numbers of Latino voters. Latinos once again did not vote their legal population numbers – even with a Latino running for a high profile county office. Moreover, low Hispanic turnout numbers is a key factor driving the turnout decrease in once powerful northwest and southwest side wards. Ongoing Latino movement into these neighborhoods has simply reduced the vote power of old white ethnic wards.

### **A/2 – Suburban Cook County**

Ten townships produced the major chunk of the suburban vote. Once again Thornton led the way with a 70000+ turnout while three other townships Wheeling, Proviso and Worth had 60000+ turnouts. The six remaining top turnout townships (45000+) were Maine, Schaumburg, Bremen, Orland, Palatine, and Niles. Only two of these ten (Thornton and Proviso) are not located in the northwest or southwest sections of the county.

Politically speaking, Thornton and Proviso produced huge Democratic margins, but even more interesting is that a majority of the remaining top turnout townships also gave Obama significant margin wins. To be sure, several of these townships had meaningful

black populations which boosted Obama's numbers. However, it is not hyperbole to suggest that unless Republicans regain strength in these massive vote producing townships, their chances for future statewide wins remain "iffy" at best.

### **A/3 – Collar Counties**

DuPage remained the collars' best vote producer (420,397). However, in the near future, DuPage may be challenged by fast growing Will (321,577) for the top collar turnout county. Lake county, once second to DuPage, fell to third spot (301,077) while Kane and McHenry trailed far behind. Again, it must be restated, collar county population and turnout growth should be a giant weapon for Illinois Republicans, but for reasons beyond the scope of this report – the state GOP has not taken advantage of this crucial geo-political development.

### **A/4 – Downstate 96**

The downstate 96 turnout story once again reveals the disproportionate amount of this vote coming from only a handful of counties. Specifically, fourteen of these 96 counties cast over 53% of the 2008 total downstate vote. Four of these counties had turnouts of over 100,000 votes. Two of these four were Madison and St. Clair in the southwestern part of the state, while the other two were Winnebago (Rockford) in northwestern Illinois and Sangamon (Springfield) in central Illinois.

The other ten top voter turnout counties (45000+) were scattered throughout the central and northern parts of the state. Politically, the most telling aspect of these fourteen big counties is that McCain carried only one of them (Tazewell). Though as will be seen later in this report, the Republican presidential nominee did win a majority of the downstate 96 counties – most of these were small and low turnout counties. Any potential Republican electoral turnaround in statewide races in Illinois must see GOP political comebacks in most of these fourteen counties.

## **B. PRESIDENT**

Table 2 delineates the Obama landslide in Illinois. He carried all four regions of his home state while capturing nearly 62% of the vote as he piled up an amazing 1,338,146 vote winning margin. As stated earlier, specific campaign events or issues as well as competing political strategies are not part of this report, but the numbers in Table 2 should give chills to Illinois Republicans. If Obama's massive win firms up a new geo-political pattern in Illinois – it will take near cataclysmic events to undo Democratic party dominance in coming statewide races.

## **B/1 – Chicago**

Obama's home town gave their favorite son overwhelming support. He swept all 50 wards with staggering margins and percentages. However, unlike the days of former Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, the city's first and only elected African-American chief executive, Obama had extraordinary vote muscle in non-black wards.

Margin-wise, southside African-American wards gave Obama his largest triumphs. The 21<sup>st</sup> ward gave Obama a 30000+ margin while three other similar wards #8 - #6 - #34 gave him 25000+ margins. Nine other predominantly black wards were in the 20000+ margin category – but of the six wards that gave Obama 18000+ margins – three of them #47 - #44 - #46 were north lakefront or near lakefront wards.

Even more impressive than his ward victory margins were Obama's ward winning percentages. Nineteen wards gave Obama 90%+ of the vote (six of these were 99%+ #34 - #17 - #6 - #21 - #8 – all southside black wards while the other was #24 – a westside black ward). Another six wards gave Obama 85% of the vote, thus giving him wins in half the city wards with a 85%+ winning percentage. Only six wards did not give Obama at least 70% of the vote (#50 - #36 - #45 - #19 - #23 and #41). All of these are northwest and southwest side wards, home to most of the city's remaining white ethnic voters. Lastly, it was only in the 41<sup>st</sup> ward that Obama did not reach the 60%+ figure. This once powerhouse GOP enclave in the city gave Obama only 55.4% of its vote.

As for McCain's Chicago performance, not much can be said if a candidate garners less than 14% of the citywide vote. However, one fact deserves mention. In the far southside African-American 17<sup>th</sup> ward the GOP candidate received less than 100 votes (96) while Obama obtained 23863 votes. Chicago historians may have to look back to see if a major party presidential nominee ever had a ward total of less than triple figures.

## **B/2 – Suburban Cook County**

Obama continued the trend of recent statewide Democratic candidates of doing well in suburban Cook. He carried twenty-seven of thirty townships, received nearly two-thirds of the vote and had a victory margin of 359,677 votes.

No doubt changing demographics have been a huge factor in Democratic suburban vote power growth. Large chunks of the south suburbs are now heavily African-American and there has been black migration to the western and northern suburbs as well. Add to this Hispanic movement to the suburbs and the continuing vote muscle of liberal suburban communities like Evanston and Oak Park – and one sees the present GOP political dilemma. Again, simply put – Democratic statewide candidates are coming out of Cook County with vote margins too huge for GOP voters in the rest of the state to overcome.

As expected, south suburban Thornton township gave Obama his biggest margin – 58,225 votes. West suburban Proviso township came in with an Obama margin of 38,834 votes while five other townships were in the 20,000+ range. Of these seven 20,000+

Obama margin victories - five were in the south suburbs – while the other two were Proviso and Evanston.

Percentage-wise, the Obama vote performance mirrored his margin wins. Little south suburban Calumet township gave him over 90% of its votes while four other townships (Thornton – Evanston – Rich and Oak Park) were in the 80%+ Obama column.

McCain won three suburban Cook townships – Barrington in the northwest part of the county and Lemont and Orland in the southwest region. Barrington was McCain's top percentage township – 56.3%, while Lemont gave him his biggest margin - 1256 votes. Incredibly, McCain received over 45% of the vote in only one other township (Palos) demonstrating the widespread suburban Cook acceptance of the Obama campaign.

### **B/3 – Collar Counties**

Obama swept all five collar counties. Even now it is hard for me to write such a sentence which would have been considered unimaginable twenty years ago.

Lake County gave Obama his largest margin victory - 58697 votes and his best winning percentage - 59.3%. Will and Kane County gave Obama 55%+ of their vote while DuPage (54.7%) and McHenry (51.9%) provided Obama with less spectacular victories.

Needless to say, Illinois Republicans must regain control of the collars in statewide races. Clearly in 2008 they did withstand major Democratic congressional challenges to their three collar county GOP incumbent congressmen. This fact gave beleaguered Republican operatives something to cheer about on election night. However, it does not take a political guru to suggest that more of these type of GOP candidates will be needed to run in the upcoming 2010 statewide races against the surging Democrats.

### **B/4 – Downstate 96**

Downstate was the most competitive region in the 2008 Illinois Presidential contest. McCain carried more counties than Obama but still ended up losing the region by over 75000 votes. Keying Obama's downstate margin victory was his performance in six large counties which gave him 10000+ margins.

Leading the Obama Downstate 96 margin parade was St. Clair county located in southwestern Illinois across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. St. Clair has a long Democratic voting tradition influenced greatly by its historic, huge African-American population. St. Clair was by far Obama's best margin county – 28,203 votes. To put this number in perspective – adding the vote margins of McCain's five best Downstate 96 counties would not equal Obama's margin in St. Clair alone.

Obama's other 10000+ margin counties were Rock Island, Winnebago, Champaign, and Madison. Each of these large counties has an urban core, a significant black population, labor union activity and in the case of Champaign - a major state university.

Percentage-wise, Obama had fifteen counties give him 55%+ of their vote. Many of these counties are located in the northwestern part of the state and as with Champaign County -three of these counties – Jackson, Knox and DeKalb – are home to large universities.

McCain ran well in rural Illinois. Adams County (southwest) and Effingham County (southeast) were the only two downstate 96 counties to give him 6000+ victory margins. Twelve counties gave McCain 60%+ of their vote while another twenty backed the GOP nominee with 55%+ of their vote. However, these impressive percentage wins did not transfer over into major margin triumphs since most of these counties contain a small number of voters.

Nothing better illustrates the electoral fantasy of some politicians and pundits who articulate a belief that a Republican renaissance in Illinois politics can come from “bottom up”. McCain won sixteen more downstate 96 counties than Obama, but still lost the region by over 75000 votes. The political math is clear – GOP resurgence in Illinois must be based in the population expanding collars and their neighboring suburbs - than from a population dwindling Downstate 96 – especially since the biggest downstate counties are voting more and more Democratic.

### **C. COOK COUNTY STATES ATTORNEY**

Analyzing the Cook County States Attorney race between Anita Alvarez (D), Tony Peraica (R) and, Thomas O’Brien (G) reveals a slightly more competitive version of the Presidential race in Cook County. As Table 3 shows, Alvarez trounced Peraica in Chicago sweeping all 50 wards and beat him badly in the suburbs, winning twenty-four of thirty townships. O’Brien, running a low-key campaign garnered 5% of the vote.

#### **C/1 – Chicago**

Alvarez’s victory was indeed a mini-Obama replay. African-American wards gave her overwhelming support. Led by the southside Big Four — #21 - #8 - #34 and #6 – each of these wards gave Alvarez 20,000+ vote margins while eleven other mainly black wards gave her 15,000+ vote margins.

Percentage-wise – fourteen black wards gave her 90%+ of their vote while ten other mainly black and Hispanic wards were 80%+ for Alvarez. Like in the presidential race, only the northwest side - 41<sup>st</sup> ward (52.3%) gave Alvarez a winning percentage under 60%.

As for Peraica, the above mentioned 41<sup>st</sup> ward was his only 40%+ ward while four other wards - #42 and #43 (north lakefront), #45 (northwest side) and #23 (southwest side) gave him 30%+ of their vote.

O’Brien won a city-wide vote of 5.1%. He ran best in non-black wards, but his vote performance was irrelevant to the election’s overall outcome.

## **C/2 – Suburban Cook County**

Like in the city, Alvarez's suburban vote totals were a modified Obama rerun. The same townships that gave Obama huge wins also came through for Alvarez, albeit with smaller but still significant margins e.g., Thornton (49556) and Proviso (29883).

Thirteen township gave Alvarez 60%+ of their vote with Calumet and Thornton leading the pack (80%+).

Peraica won six townships – Barrington/Lemont/Orland (all of these carried by McCain) as well as Riverside/Palatine/Palos. Of these, only Barrington and Lemont gave him 50%+ victories. Like McCain – Peraica produced no massive margin township triumphs to (1) offset Alvarez's landslide numbers in heavily minority and liberal townships; and (2) Alvarez's ability to win in formerly solid GOP northwest townships.

## **SUMMARY**

To paraphrase Charles Dickens, these are the worst of times – for Illinois Republicans. In Cook County, they face an 80/60 Democratic juggernaut. Explanation – Democrats winning 80% of the Chicago vote and 60% of the suburban Cook vote. These percentages not only make Republicans non-competitive in Cook County, but it also makes winning statewide races very difficult.

Adding to the worst of times scenario is the Democratic surge in the collar counties. Obviously, Obama was a special case this year, but for the past several elections the collars have been tracking more Democratic. Nothing captures this new reality better than seeing on election night GOP leaders boasting about retaining their three collar county incumbent Congressmen. A few years ago these battles would have been ho-hum Republican locks and not major political “free-for-alls”.

Lastly, downstate – traditionally the state's most competitive voting region – remains competitive. However, it is political folly to suggest that the Downstate 96 is capable of producing GOP landslide margins to counter (1) Democratic power in Cook County or (2) reduced Republican strength in the collars. The math simply does not work.

Right now the Illinois GOP needs a Democratic political meltdown to shake or break the geo-political coalition that has produced the party's statewide dominance.

In short – Illinois politics – as of January, 2009 – sees the political football solely in the hands of the Democrats with the Republicans hoping for a major fumble.

**TABLE 1 – Turnout**  
**2008 Illinois General Election**

Voter Turnout by Region – Compared to Illinois 2004 General Election

	2008		2004		2008 vs. 2004 Difference	
Region	Vote	*** State % of Vote	Vote	State % of Vote	Vote	State % of Vote
Chicago	1105998	19.7	1063860	19.9	+ 42138	- .2
Suburban Cook County	1056242	18.8	1024867	19.2	+ 31375	- .4
* Five Collar Counties	1378034	24.6	1232602	23.0	+ 145432	+ 1.6
Downstate 96 Counties	2070789	36.9	2030226	37.9	+ 40563	- 1.0
** Statewide Total	5611063	100%	5351555	100%	+ 259508	
<b>NOTES</b>						
* Five Collars – DuPage/Kane/Lake/McHenry/Will						
** Illinois has 102 Counties						
***Due to rounding off total % may not equal 100%						

**TABLE 2**

**2008 Presidential Vote in Illinois**

	<b>Barack Obama (D)</b>	<b>John McCain (R)</b>
<b>Chicago</b>		
Votes	930866	149255
Margin	781611	
%	85.4%	13.7%
Wards Won	- 50 -	- 0 -
<b>Suburban Cook 30 Townships</b>		
Votes	698158	338481
Margin	359677	
%	66.6%	32.3%
Townships Won	- 27 -	- 3 -
<b>5 Collar Counties</b>		
Votes	745390	573576
Margin	171814	
%	55.8%	42.9%
Counties Won	- 5 -	- 0 -
<b>96 Downstate Counties</b>		
Votes	1045259	970215
Margin	75044	
%	51.0%	47.3%
Counties Won	- 40 -	- 56 -
<b>Statewide Total</b>		
Votes	3419673	2031527
Margin	1338146	
%	61.9%	36.8%
Counties Won	- 46 -	- 56 -

**Note: Percentage based on all votes cast for President**

**TABLE 3**

**2008 Cook County States Attorney Vote**

	<b>Anita Alvarez (D)</b>	<b>Tony Peraica (R)</b>	<b>Thomas O'Brien (G)</b>
<b>Chicago</b>			
Votes	782554	159336	50753
Margin	623218		
%	78.8%	16.1%	5.1%
Wards Won	- 50 -	- 0 -	- 0 -
<b>Suburban Cook 30 Townships</b>			
Votes	595898	335275	48348
Margin	260623		
%	60.8%	34.2%	4.9%
Townships Won	- 24 -	- 6 -	- 0 -
<b>Cook County Grand Total</b>			
Votes	1378452	494611	99101
Margin	883841		
%	69.9%	25.1%	5.0%