

CHAPTER XI

STATISTICS

The election statistics published at present are very incomplete. The boards of elections in a few of the largest cities publish annual reports which contain election results and certain other statistical data,¹ and in a few states some election statistics are published in the state blue book, or in some other form, by state officers, but these are exceptional cases.² Certain election statistics also appear in privately printed almanacs, but these are limited to the most important elections and to selected jurisdictions. If one wishes to know the number of registered voters in the various counties of a state, the vote cast at local elections throughout the state in a given year, the trend of registration and voting, a comparison of the vote cast at special elections with other elections, etc., in most states he would find it practically impossible to secure information. It would seem that elections, which are the basis of our many governments, are important enough to warrant the publication of systematic, orderly, regular, and complete statistics.

On the other hand, in the jurisdictions where election statistics are printed, it is very common for them to be given in needless detail. For example, the secretary of state of Ohio published in 1930 a bulky report of Ohio election statistics, containing 475 pages. The first eighty pages contained summaries of the election results by counties for the various state offices in the partisan primaries and the general election, the total registration and vote cast by counties, and a limited amount of historical material, showing, for example, the vote cast for candidates for governor in each election since 1803, the vote cast in judicial elections and for presidential electors, etc. These statistics are useful and should be published, but, it must be added, there follow over three hundred

¹ For example, New York, Boston, and Milwaukee.

² California, Ohio, Wisconsin, New York, and other states.

pages which contain a detailed statement of the vote cast for governor in the 1926, 1928, and 1930 elections, not merely by counties, but also by precincts throughout the state. No useful purpose is served by such detail. It is an unnecessary public expense. The statistics on the vote for governor by counties would be quite adequate, and statistics for past elections should be confined to summaries of the entire state. The practice of publishing the results of the election of various officers by precincts is very common, but is ill advised. For city elections the vote cast by wards is sufficient for all purposes. The same is true of county elections, with the exception that for rural districts it is necessary to use some other unit; for example, the legislative district. In state elections the vote cast for the various candidates by counties is sufficient for ordinary purposes. The publication of election statistics in needless detail adds to the cost of elections and, in the long run, tends to cause the publication of all statistics to be discontinued.

Before discussing the essential statistics of elections which should be published, it is advisable to take up first the matter of what office, state or local, should publish them. While there is some merit in having election statistics printed locally in the various cities or counties, on the whole the considerations in favor of publication by a state office for the entire state outweigh the local considerations. We take as a matter of course the publication of census statistics for every state and city by the national government. They are more convenient, usable, and accessible in this form. The same is true of election statistics as applied to the state. Election statistics may be readily compiled and published by the secretary of state for all elections within the state each year, and, if kept within reasonable bounds, at a nominal cost. It would be highly desirable if this could be done for all of the states.

The statistics of elections may be published as a special report, in pamphlet form, or as a part of the blue book of the state, or of a state statistical book, if one is published. On the

whole, the practice of publishing the election statistics in the year book or blue book is probably more desirable, for in this form they will be more widely distributed and more accessible. It may be added that the essential election statistics, properly condensed and summarized, should occupy not more than twenty-five to fifty pages in such a report, and would not be too lengthy to be included.

With this in mind, we may outline the essential election statistics which should be included in such a state report, as follows:

1. The total number of registered voters and the total vote cast at the principal elections of the year, for the entire state, each county, each city, and for each ward in cities over, say, 50,000 population.

2. The total vote cast at other elections held during the year, but confined to the entire state and for each county.

3. The vote cast for each candidate for state office in the general state election, and for each candidate for nomination for state office at the primary elections, for the entire state and for the several counties.

4. The vote on referendum questions by counties and for the entire state.

5. For county elections, the total vote received by each candidate for county office, in the primary and general elections, and the vote upon referendum questions of the county.

6. For city or local elections of all sorts, the total vote received by each candidate in the primary and general elections, and the vote upon referendum propositions.

7. For congressional elections, the vote received by the candidates for the entire district and also by counties, including both primary and general elections.

8. For legislative districts, the vote received by each candidate, by counties where the districts include more than one county.

9. A summary of the campaign expense statements of all candidates.

10. A table showing the cost of elections, including the cost per vote cast, in each county or city.

It will be noted that in the above list it is not recommended that the vote by precincts be given in any instance. It may be desirable, however, for the returns for city elections in large cities to be given by wards within the city, and for county elections by cities and towns, or some other suitable division of the county, but not as detailed as by precincts. Such detailed local statistics, however, are usually printed in the newspaper accounts of the election, and may be omitted from the state publication if they require considerable space.

The election statistics should be printed in tabular form, and in such arrangement that they will occupy as small amount of space as is feasible. Some of the election statistics as printed at present take up a great deal of space unnecessarily because of poor arrangement. Upon each table covering a particular election should be placed as many offices as may be included without undue crowding. The statistics should contain a table of contents showing the various tables and summaries, and the items should be included in the index to the volume. It is not at all uncommon for such elementary matters as a table of contents and an index to be omitted entirely.

In addition to the above statistical data upon the election and its results, the election offices throughout the state should submit, as a part of their annual reports, certain other statistical data dealing with the detailed administration of elections. Under this heading would come the following tables or items of information:

1. A financial statement, showing in itemized detail the appropriations, expenditures, and balances on hand.
2. The number of precincts, with statement of increase or decrease.
3. The number of registered voters.
4. The total vote cast at each election and cost per vote.
5. Total vote cast throughout the year, and cost per vote.