

## **Preface to the Reports of the Task Force on the Federal Election System**

The National Commission on Federal Election Reform charged the Task Force on the Federal Election System with two responsibilities, first to provide information about current practices in federal elections and second to analyze the effects of current practices and the possibilities for reform. With a substantive mandate that ranged from voter registration to polling hours, the work of the Task Force seemed best divided into a series of reports on discrete topics. Accordingly, the final product of the Task Force comprises nine reports. The longest address voter registration and early, mail, and unrestricted absentee voting; the shortest consider felony disfranchisement and verification of voter identity in polling places. All of the reports combine a description of current practice with an overview of the best scholarly research into election systems and voter behavior.

The Task Force enjoyed the cooperation of numerous scholars, analysts, and election officials who took our phone calls, answered our e-mails, and in some cases plied us with data. Often they did not realize that in so doing they became Task Force participants. Raymond E. Wolfinger of the University of California at Berkeley, Stephen Ansolabehere of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Tracy Warren of the Constitution Project, and Conny McCormack, the Registrar-Recorder and County Clerk of Los Angeles County, made sustained contributions to our work. We especially thank about 20 people who took time from busy schedules on short notice to participate in a critically informative conference on voter registration, conducted jointly with the Task Force on Election Administration. Nothing has been more valuable in this work than to see elections from the vantage point of the people who administer them. We have emerged with a new appreciation of their talents, and their patience.

The staff of the Task Force on the Federal Election System tracked and compiled and culled and summarized and helped to figure it all out. The chief responsibilities for implementing our inquiry fell to Michael A. Neblo, now a Robert Wood Johnson Fellow in Health at the University of Michigan and Assistant Professor at the Ohio State University. Neblo helped to shape every Task Force report with his research and his critical eye, and he authored one himself. Meredith Rolfe and Nealon Scoones provided careful and timely assistance with the research. Thad Hall and Tova Wang of the Century Foundation and Leonard Shambon of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering contributed significant help and insight.

Finally, the University of Chicago and especially its Provost, Geoffrey R. Stone, allowed us the time to contribute to an effort that will, we hope, make elections work a little better.

John Mark Hansen,  
*Coordinator*

John Mark Hansen is now Professor of Government at Harvard University. Until 2001, he was the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor in Political Science and the College at the University of Chicago, where he also served as Associate Provost for Research and Education. Hansen studies interest group politics, legislative politics, public opinion, and political participation. He is the author of two books, *Gaining access: Congress and the farm lobby, 1919-1981*, and *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America* (with Steven J. Rosenstone), and numerous articles. He is also a member of the Board of Overseers of the American National Election Studies. Hansen received his B.A. in Political Science and Economics at the University of Kansas in 1981 and his Ph.D. in Political Science from Yale University in 1987.