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# Elections Board begins count of paper ballots from runoff

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Against a backdrop of fingerpointing and confusion, the Board of Elections began reviewing more than 50,000 paper ballots yesterday in the disputed Democratic mayoral runoff election.

The review began as Mark Green's winning margin in Thursday's runoff fluctuated yet again yesterday in unofficial tallies.

His edge, reported as nearly 30,000 on the night of the runoff, was shaved to about 21,000 on Saturday and then nearly 24,600 on Sunday. Yesterday, it was pegged at nearly 24,000.

With those estimates based on machine votes, supporters of Fernando Ferrer were clinging to hope that a count of paper ballots might close the gap.

"It is premature to state with certainty what the outcome of this election is," board Deputy Director Joseph Gentili said in statement yesterday.

But in a later interview, he repeated assertions that Green's victory was expected to stand after the ballots were counted. "There's nothing here that makes me believe the proportions will change," he said.

But board officials and campaign aides monitoring the process said many of the ballots were ruled invalid yesterday, diminishing Ferrer's chances of a surprise comeback.

The board did not say how many ballots were dumped for various reasons, such as an incorrect address, party registration or a write-in vote for Mayor Giuliani. But one board official in Manhattan, where 12,000 paper ballots were filed, predicted that more than half would be deemed valid.

Reports of even higher rejection rates in the Bronx were disputed by one Ferrer aide, who said, "There's no way they rejected anywhere near 80% of those affidavit ballots. They're just beginning the review of those ballots up there."

## Counting commences

The review of the paper ballots marks the beginning of the board's official vote count, which includes a review of thousands of voting machines that begins tomorrow and tabulation of affidavit and absentee ballots. By law, the vote must be certified by Oct. 23, but it may be finished by Friday, officials said.

At issue yesterday were the 51,245 affidavit ballots, which are filled out at polling places when a voter's eligibility can-

not be immediately determined. The board will begin counting 5,764 absentee ballots later this week.

The count has taken on greater urgency after Ferrer supporters threatened to take legal action after thousands of votes were double-counted in an unofficial tally after the polls closed.

Officials said the problems began when results compiled by hand at polling places also were entered into the NYPD's computer system. Those results were transmitted to The Associated Press, which tabulates the numbers and distributes them to newspapers and broadcasters.

## 'Innocent human error'

Referring to the flawed count, Green said yesterday, "In New York, we know, it was an innocent human error by police officers who had no bias one way or another."

Since then, reviews of the tally sheets from Thursday night by the Board of Elections and The Associated Press have produced varying results, though all show Green in the lead.

The AP detected errors when it compared the figures submitted from each election district with the numbers that had been recorded Thursday night. Their audit, completed yesterday, pegged Green's edge at 23,930.

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