

Voter Suppression by the Numbers in Franklin County, Ohio
 By Tim Lohrentz
 December 7, 2004

The Franklin County, Ohio, Board of Elections practiced widespread voter suppression in the allocation of voting machines on November 2, 2004. In an analysis of official Franklin County data on voting machines per precinct, precincts where machines were added or subtracted from 2000 to 2004, and the party affiliations of the registered voters, Democratic precincts were nearly twice as likely as Republican precincts to have voting machines subtracted from 2000 to 2004 (Table 1). The analysis shows that the distribution of voting machines to precincts was not random but rather was severely discriminating against Democratic precincts, and especially against precincts where more than 80 percent of party-affiliated voters registered Democrat. All the data used in this analysis was available several weeks before election day so the Board of Elections had time to correct or prevent the voter suppression. This analysis estimates that at least 22,000 Franklin County voters were disenfranchised due to the long lines and lack of voting machines, including over 15,000 voters from heavily Democratic (> 60%) precincts.

Nearly one out of three (31%) Democratic precincts had less voting machines in 2004 than in 2000 compared to less than one out of six (16%) Republican precincts. Looking at it a different way, of the 217 precincts where voting machines were subtracted, 184 (85%) were Democratic. Voting machines were added about equally to Democratic and Republican precincts.

	N	Precincts which added Machines		No change in Machines (or new precinct)		Precincts which subtracted Machines	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Democratic Plurality Precincts	587	82	17%	321	55%	184	31%
Republican Plurality Precincts	201	34	14%	134	67%	33	16%
Total	788	116	15%	455	58%	217	28%

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Machines added or subtracted refer to the change in number of machines comparing the 2000 general election to the 2004 general election (by close of polling).

In order to analyze the impact of subtracting or adding machines, this analysis defined a precinct as “not crowded” if it had less than 205 voters per voting machine (in the bottom quartile of precincts). Even this number is higher than most other Ohio counties. A precinct was considered “crowded” if there were from 205 to 260 voters per voting machine and a precinct was considered “extremely crowded” if there were more than 260 voters per voting machine. Of the 217 precincts where voting machines were subtracted, 12 percent were not crowded even with fewer machines, while 53 percent were crowded and 35 percent were extremely crowded. (Table 2).

However, the level of crowdedness in precincts where machines were subtracted is not equal based on the partisanship of the precinct. Forty percent of the Democratic precincts where machines were subtracted ended up being extremely crowded (more than 260 voters per machine) compared to only 12 percent of Republican precincts. A Democratic precinct was six

times more likely than a Republican precinct to have machines taken away in 2004 and end up being an extremely crowded precinct.

The highly concentrated Democratic precincts where machines were subtracted appear to have been targeted to leave them extremely crowded. Of precincts with a 60:40 to 80:20 range of ratios of registered Democrats to registered Republicans, more than two out of five (41 percent) ended up extremely crowded and another 54 percent were somewhat crowded after voting machines were subtracted. Even more troubling, of the precincts with an 80:20 to 100:0 ratio of Democrats to Republicans, nearly three out of four precincts (74 percent) ended up extremely crowded after voting machines were subtracted. Most of these latter precincts are majority African-American, if voting patterns were similar in Franklin County to the rest of the country. One can estimate that a majority African-American precinct was 12 times more likely than a Republican precinct to have voting machines taken away in 2004 and end up being extremely crowded. On the other hand, of the seven heavily Republican precincts where voting machines were subtracted, four were still not crowded (less than 205 voters per machine). Only four of the 77 precincts that were extremely crowded on election day due to voting machines being subtracted were Republican.

Table 2: Precincts with Subtracted Machines by Level of Crowdedness

	Subtracted Machines	Not Crowded		Crowded		Extremely Crowded	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Precinct DEM to REP	N						
Democrat, >80%	42	3	7%	8	19%	31	74%
Democrat, 60-80%	83	4	5%	45	54%	34	41%
Democrat, 50-60%	59	10	17%	41	69%	8	14%
Republican, 50-60%	26	5	19%	17	65%	4	15%
Republican, 60-80%	7	4	57%	3	43%	0	0%
Total	217	26	12%	114	53%	77	35%

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Democrat and Republican percents are the ratio of Democrats to Republicans (or vice versa) among registered voters who declared either Democratic or Republican party status. Not crowded means less than 204.67 active voters per voting machine (bottom quartile of precincts). Crowded means 204.67 to 260 active voters per voting machine. Extremely crowded means more than 260 active voters per voting machine, where analysis shows voter turnout dramatically decreased. Active voters refers to voters who voter in either of the two previous elections or who were newly registered.

In precincts where there was no change in the number of machines, heavily Democratic precincts were again much more likely to be extremely crowded – 20 percent of very Democratic precincts (80:20 to 100:0 ratio of Democrats to Republicans) and 16 percent of precincts that were 60:40 to 80:20 Democratic (Table 3). This compares to only six percent of precincts that were moderately Republican (50:50 to 60:40) and three percent of precincts that were heavily Republican, when looking at precincts with no change in number of voting machines.

	No change in Machines	Not Crowded		Crowded		Extremely Crowded	
		N	n	%	n	%	n
Precinct DEM to REP							
Democrat, >80%	71	14	20%	43	61%	14	20%
Democrat, 60-80%	141	32	23%	86	61%	23	16%
Democrat, 50-60%	109	41	38%	61	56%	7	6%
Republican, 50-60%	104	31	30%	67	64%	6	6%
Republican, 60-80%	30	14	47%	15	50%	1	3%
Total	455	132	29%	272	60%	51	11%

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Includes both precincts where there was no change in the number of voting machines as well as a handful of new precincts. Democrat and Republican percents are the ratio of Democrats to Republicans (or vice versa) among registered voters who declared either Democratic or Republican party status. Not crowded means less than 204.67 active voters per voting machine (bottom quartile of precincts). Crowded means 204.67 to 260 active voters per voting machine. Extremely crowded means more than 260 active voters per voting machine, where analysis shows voter turnout dramatically decreased. Active voters refers to voters who voter in either of the two previous elections or who were newly registered.

The County appears to have used a more normal or random distribution for precincts where voting machines were added and the level of crowdedness after adding voting machines (see Table 4). Even so, nearly four out of five (78%) heavily concentrated Democratic precincts (80:20 to 100:0) where voting machines were added were still somewhat or extremely crowded compared to 66 percent of Republican precincts.

	Added Machines	Not Crowded		Still Crowded		Still Extremely Crowded	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Precinct DEM to REP	N						
Democrat, >80%	23	5	22%	12	52%	6	26%
Democrat, 60-80%	30	9	30%	16	53%	5	17%
Democrat, 50-60%	29	10	34%	12	41%	7	24%
Republican, 50-60%	26	8	31%	13	50%	5	19%
Republican, 60-80%	8	2	25%	4	50%	2	25%
Total	116	34	29%	57	49%	25	22%

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Democrat and Republican percents are the ratio of Democrats to Republicans (or vice versa) among registered voters who declared either Democratic or Republican party status. Not crowded means less than 204.67 active voters per voting machine (bottom quartile of precincts). Crowded means 204.67 to 260 active voters per voting machine. Extremely crowded means more than 260 active voters per voting machine, where analysis shows voter turnout dramatically decreased. Active voters refers to voters who voter in either of the two previous elections or who were newly registered.

Overall, 19 percent of Franklin County precincts were extremely crowded on election day. But Democratic precincts were two and a half times more likely to be extremely crowded than Republican precincts (Table 5). Nearly one out of four Democratic precincts (23 percent) was extremely crowded compared to less than one out of ten Republican precincts (9 percent).

Table 5: All Precincts by Level of Crowdedness

	N	Not Crowded		Crowded		Extremely Crowded	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Democrat Plurality	587	128	22%	324	55%	135	23%
Republican Plurality	201	64	32%	119	59%	18	9%
Total	788	192	24%	443	56%	153	19%

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Not crowded means less than 204.67 active voters per voting machine (bottom quartile of precincts). “Crowded” means 204.67 to 260 active voters per voting machine. Extremely crowded means more than 260 active voters per voting machine, where analysis shows voter turnout dramatically decreased. Active voters refers to voters who voter in either of the two previous elections or who were newly registered.

The Democrat – Republican difference in crowded polling stations would be enough, but it was even more extreme when looking at heavily Democratic precincts compared to heavily Republican precincts. Of the 136 precincts that had at least 80 percent Democratic registration, only 16 percent were not crowded while 38 percent were extremely crowded. As mentioned before, these are likely majority African-American precincts. On the other hand, of the 45 heavily Republican precincts, 44 percent were not crowded and only 7 percent were extremely crowded. The likely African-American precincts were over five times more likely than the heavily Republican precincts to be extremely crowded on November 2.

Table 6: All Precincts Level of Partisanship and by Level of Crowdedness

Precinct DEM to REP	N	Not Crowded		Crowded		Extremely Crowded	
		n	%	n	N	n	%
Democrat, >80%	136	22	16%	63	46%	51	38%
Democrat, 60-80%	254	45	18%	147	58%	62	24%
Democrat, 50-60%	197	61	31%	114	58%	22	11%
Republican, 50-60%	156	44	28%	97	62%	15	10%
Republican, 60-80%	45	20	44%	22	49%	3	7%

The level of crowdedness did make a difference. Overall, voter turnout (percent voting of active voters) was 12.5 percentiles higher in precincts that were not crowded compared to precincts that were extremely crowded (Table 7). Only in the heavily Republican precincts did the voter turnout not drop off in more crowded precincts, including in three extremely crowded precincts. This suggests that Republican voters are less likely to be deterred from voting due to long lines as Democrats, as anecdotal evidence points out. In the four remaining groups, the drop in turnout between not crowded precincts and somewhat crowded precincts ranged from 1.2 to 3.8 percentiles and the drop in turnout between not crowded precincts and extremely crowded precincts ranged from 7.4 to 11.3 percentiles.

Using these differences, the analysis calculated an estimate of the number of disenfranchised voters, assuming that each precinct had sufficient voting machines, i.e. was not crowded. All told, over 22,000 voters were likely kept from voting due to long lines at the polling stations. Of these, about 70 percent or over 15,000 were in heavily Democratic precincts. Because Democratic voters are more vulnerable to long lines than Republican voters, an even higher percentage of these 22,000 votes would likely have been cast for John Kerry.

Table 7: Percent of Active Voters who Voted by Level of Partisanship and by Level of Crowdedness

Precinct DEM to REP	Percent of Active Voters Who Voted				Estimated Disenfranchised Voters
	All Precincts	Not Crowded Precincts	Crowded Precincts	Extremely Crowded Precincts	
Democrat, >80%	65.5%	69.1%	67.2%	61.7%	4,683
Democrat, 60-80%	73.3%	78.0%	74.6%	66.7%	10,616
Democrat, 50-60%	77.6%	80.5%	76.7%	72.3%	4,934
Republican, 50-60%	79.8%	81.0%	79.8%	73.4%	1,720
Republican, 60-80%	80.8%	81.2%	80.3%	81.7%	155
Total	74.0%	78.9%	75.4%	66.4%	22,108

Note: Average voter turnout for this table is the total number of ballots cast divided by the number of active voters (not registered voters). Active voters refers to voters who voter in either of the two previous elections or who were newly registered. It was necessary to use active voters rather than registered voters because the Franklin County voter rolls contain a lot of people who have passed away or moved. (Voter rolls = 108% of potential eligible voters.). Estimated disenfranchised voters is the number of additional votes in each precinct if it were not crowded, using the difference in participation rates between not crowded and crowded and between not crowded and extremely crowded.

Finally, it appears that in most precincts the Board of Elections did properly target precincts with lower voter participation rates. Overall, the precincts where voting machines were subtracted had a 5.5 percentile lower participation rate in the 2000 general election than precincts where no voting machines were subtracted. There is one exception, among the most heavily Democratic precincts; those precincts where voting machines were taken away actually had a slightly higher participation in 2000 than precincts that were not targeted. This is one more indicator that heavily Democratic precincts were targeted for voter suppression through the placement or redeployment of voting machines.

Table 8: Average Votes by Registered Voters in 2000 by Precincts Where Voting Machines Were Subtracted

Precinct DEM to REP	Average Voter Turnout, 2000	
	No Machines Subtracted	Voting Machines Subtracted
Democrat, >80%	47.9%	48.1%
Democrat, 60-80%	49.8%	45.5%
Democrat, 50-60%	57.1%	52.2%
Republican, 50-60%	60.4%	56.2%
Republican, 60-80%	66.2%	61.3%
Total	57.5%	52.0%

Sources: "Franklin County Ohio Unofficial Election Data," November 3, 2004 (<http://www.co.franklin.oh.us/boe/04UnofficialResults/Unofficial%20Abstract%20of%20Votes%20General%202004.pdf>) and "Post Election Voting Machine Assignment Evaluation", November 11, 2004, Franklin County, Ohio.

Tim Lohrentz is a Mathematician (graduate of Bethel College KS) and Urban Planner (graduate of Illinois-Chicago). He is also Senior Program Specialist at National Economic Development & Law Center and on the national board of US El Salvador Sister Cities. He can be reached at plan-act@juno.com.