Long Lines and Suppressing The Vote

Duncan Buell
History

A frequent complaint is suppression of minority (read, Democratic) vote by under-allocation of resources

Ohio 2004
Maricopa County AZ Pres Pref Primary 2016
Georgia 2018

Several studies (Stewart, Brennan Center) show longer wait times in minority precincts

And studies show that electronic voting equipment helps to generate longer lines
An Ongoing Threat to the Right to Vote

The use of expensive DRE voting computers, or equally expensive ballot-marking-devices (BMDs), makes under-allocation easier (and more likely?)

At $3600 each (or more?) increasing capacity is expensive for counties

Having only a “minimally adequate” number of computers will invariably lead to longer lines

And will make it harder to separate happenstance from intent
Today’s Bottom Line

South Carolina has just chosen (19 June 2019) to buy expensive voting computers statewide.

The State Election Commission didn’t get its $$ request.

The purchase as planned can be shown to be an insufficient number of voting computers, leaving cash-strapped counties to make up the difference (Richland county needs an additional $365,000).

We should in South Carolina expect litigation about the deliberate decision to buy equipment that we can expect to lead to suppression of the (minority) vote.
Vote Suppression in the Opposite Direction?

Penny Sales Tax Conspiracy, Richland County SC 2012
The funds raised would support transportation and community infrastructure and likely have a greater impact on lower-income residents

Tax failed in 2010
Obama voters 2 to 1 in favor in 2012
Romney voters 3 to 1 against in 2012

Conspiracy Theory: Precincts that voted against in 2010 got fewer voting computers in 2012 as a way of suppressing the “no” vote

We are still hearing reference to a conspiracy!
The 2012 Richland County Disaster

Wait times as long as seven hours?

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<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
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<td>Pct Late</td>
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</table>
Was There a Conspiracy?

Lawsuit all the way to the SC Supreme Court

The county hired an attorney to do a report; the attorney hired me to analyze the data

I didn’t find any suggestive patterns
RICHLAND COUNTY ELECTIONS

Election data shows no evidence of bias

McBride critic: Distribution of Richland County voting machines not geared to sway election outcome

By CLIF LeBLANC - cleblanc@thestate.com

COLUMBIA, SC — Election Day data does not support suspicions that voting machines were distributed last month in a manner designed to sway the disputed penny sales tax referendum.

A preliminary analysis by a USC computer science professor found that 89 of Richland County’s 124 precincts — nearly 72 percent — received fewer machines than they did two years ago when the referendum failed by 2,200 votes. Nine precincts got more machines. The balance received the same number of machines.

But the data show the ratio of fewer machines last month is about equally divided between precincts that backed the sales tax increase in 2010 (49) compared with those that opposed it (40). The referendum won by 6,600 votes this time.

USC’s Duncan Buell said those numbers are not statistically persuasive of an intent to influence the outcome, as some critics have alleged.

“‘It does not, to me, suggest there was a statistical imbalance,’” Buell said of the distribution of machines. “‘There are more precincts that voted for the sales tax (in 2010) that got fewer machines than there were precincts against it that got fewer.”

“‘There is nothing obvious to me,’” he said, adding that it remains unclear for sure whether all votes have been counted. It was Buell who discovered a voting machine flashcard from the Lincolnshire precinct apparently had not been counted, even after the much-delayed and scrutinized balloting had been certified by the county and the State Election Commission. The Lincolnshire computer cartridge had 27 votes on it and six other precincts showed no voting
Mismanagement, Not a Conspiracy

The (new) election director had never done a major election, much less a quadrennial

The previous director had been in place for 25 years

But **someone** should have questioned leaving 1/3 of our voting computers in the warehouse in a quadrennial election!
Indirect Demographics (by pct)

91 precincts voted for Obama (73%)
And together had 142 fewer computers (75%)
24 voted 90%+ Obama and had 35 fewer

33 precincts voted for Romney (27%)
And together had 42 fewer computers (22%)

If this was a conspiracy, it was done with “surgical precision”. I don’t credit the officials with having that expertise
But whether intentional or not
The Actual Effect of Long Lines

- Greenville
- Richland
- Charleston

![Graph showing the effect of long lines over years for different regions.](image-url)
## The Effect in Lost Votes

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Takeaways

The data strongly suggest a suppressed turnout in 2012
(And this is data, not just anecdote or survey)

The ability to get the data for third party analysis is crucial for convincing voters to trust the electoral process
(South Carolina is the most transparent state in the nation with regard to election data)
And into the future...

Let us not forget the potential for masking intent by claiming lack of dollars

That probably won’t happen by design in Richland itself, but it could easily happen elsewhere

South Carolina is known to be near the worst for wait times. Is this intentional? Should this be the norm?

(I can’t remember voting in less than 90 minutes on Election Day in South Carolina.)
We Should Not Continue Past Errors

As long as voting is done on expensive computers (BMDs in this era), it becomes easier for counties simply to claim a lack of financial resources.

The planned Ballot Marking Device for SC has a built-in cost of 10-15 seconds per voter.

15 seconds per voter would almost have eliminated the lines in Richland in 2012.

What motivates continued harmful decisions?
South Carolina has just chosen (19 June 2019) to buy expensive voting computers statewide

The State Election Commission didn’t get all the money it wanted for the purchase

The purchase as planned can be shown to be an insufficient number of voting computers, leaving cash-strapped counties to make up the difference

We should in South Carolina expect litigation about the deliberate decision to buy equipment that we can expect to lead to suppression of the (minority) vote
"surgical precision?"

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The Actual Effect of Long Lines?

![Graph showing data points for Obama, Romney, and Average from 2010 to 2018.](Image)
Demographics (indirectly)

I have not checked results against census data demographics

But race, income, and political party choice correlate strongly (at least in the deep south), and Obama/FOR correlates with Romney/AGAINST

So let’s look at what happened