

ALARMING FACTS ABOUT PUNCH CARD VOTING: WHAT WILL PROBABLY HAPPEN IN THE OHIO 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IF WE DO NOTHING, AND WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS

(Version 76: 9-11-04)

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1. In the national Presidential 2000 elections, 6 million votes were lost before or at polling time!

- 3 million potential voters never voted because of registration problems¹
- 1 million potential voters never voted because of polling place problems
- 2 million voters invalidated their presidential votes through omission of a vote (intentional or otherwise) or double voting for more than one candidate, so their votes were “unrecorded”²

2. In the 2000 Ohio Presidential election, 90,532 votes cast or about 2% of votes were “unrecorded” (including intentional undervotes)³, so from the above, it can be estimated⁴ that in the Ohio Presidential elections, $3 \times 90,532 = 271,586$ (less 24,000

¹ www.vote.caltech.edu/Reports/july01/fast_facts.pdf,
www.vote.caltech.edu/Reports/2001report.html

² Kimball, D.C., Owens, C.T., & Keeney, K.M., “Unrecorded votes & political representation, in press *Election Administration*. The 2 million figure cited is extrapolated from this report of 1,853,267 unrecorded votes in 92% of US counties.
www.umsl.edu/~kimball/unrep.pdf. Note that various studies estimate that perhaps 0.5-0.7 should be deducted from the percentage of unrecorded votes because these were in fact intentional.

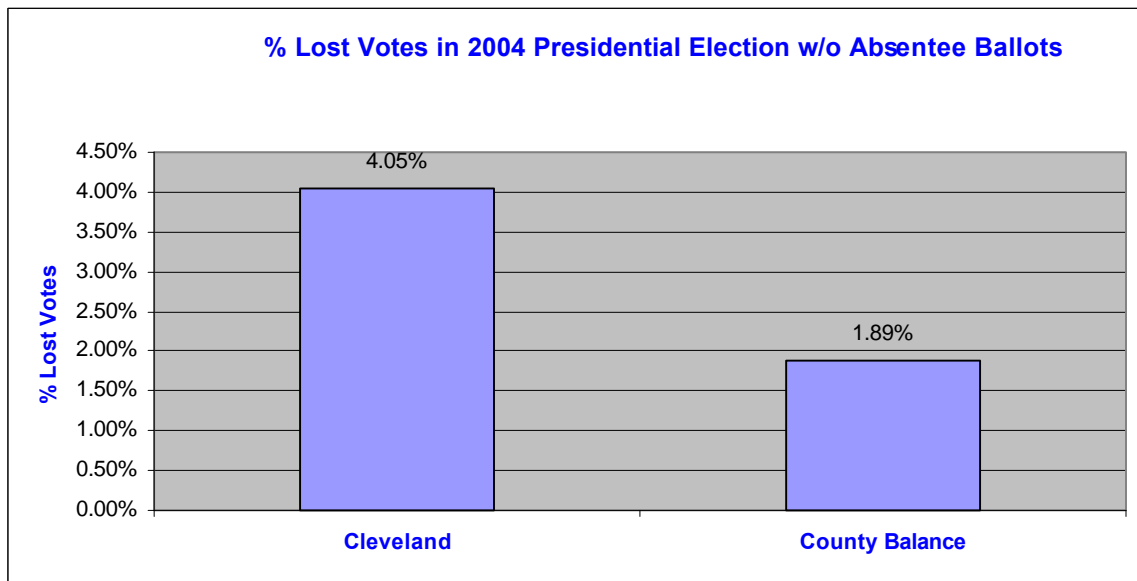
³ Calculations were made using Ohio Data from the office of the Ohio Secretary of State, and Cuyahoga County data from the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections. Dan Kozminski translated the County files into an Excel spreadsheet and tallied the totals so that the data now include all numbers supplied by the County. Dan also supplied some of the graphs included in this report. **Important note:** from national studies, we estimate that 0.5% of votes cast, or about 24,000 of Ohio’s unrecorded votes, were probably intentional “undervotes” – i.e. voters chose not to vote for any Presidential candidate. In the rest of this report, “unrecorded” votes are given without subtraction of the estimated intentional undervotes.

⁴ From the national figures in point 1 on the 6 million disenfranchised voters, we know that for every 2 million votes unrecorded (a pretty solid number), there are an estimated 4 million other disenfranchised voters, i.e. if we know the number of unrecorded votes in any Presidential election, we can estimate the total number of disenfranchised voters by multiplying the unrecorded votes by a factor of 3.

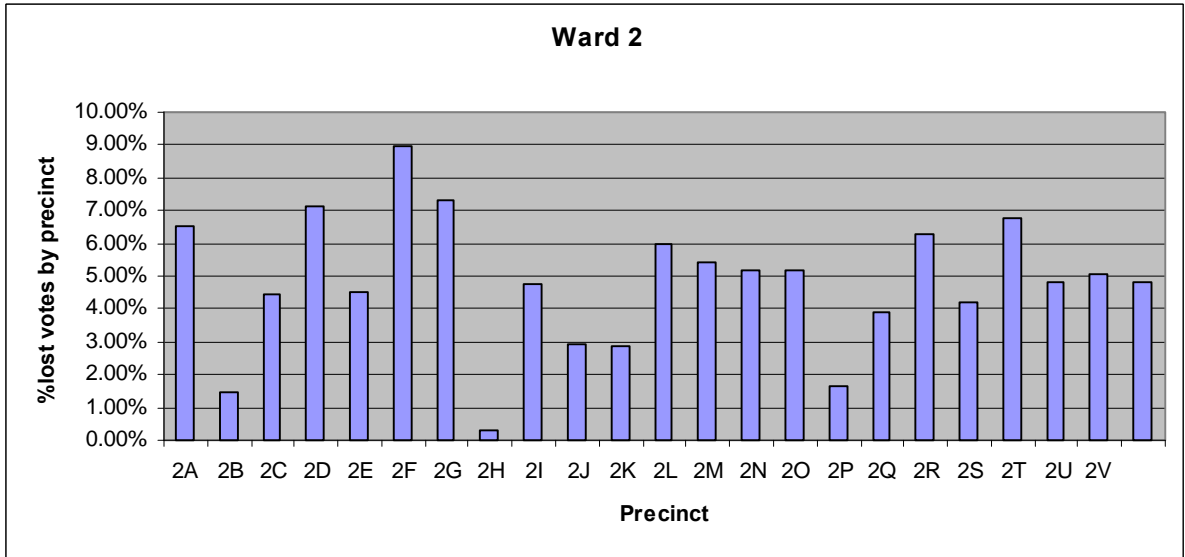
estimated intentional undervotes=247,586) or about 5.2% of the voters were effectively disenfranchised one way or the other. The margin of victory of Bush over Gore in Ohio was 165,019, far less than the number of votes lost due to the sum of problems.

Note: the rest of this report focuses ONLY on the problem of unrecorded votes after votes are cast, but it is clear that this is less than one third of the problems that disenfranchise Ohio voters. The other two thirds – registration and polling place problems -- must also be addressed ASAP.

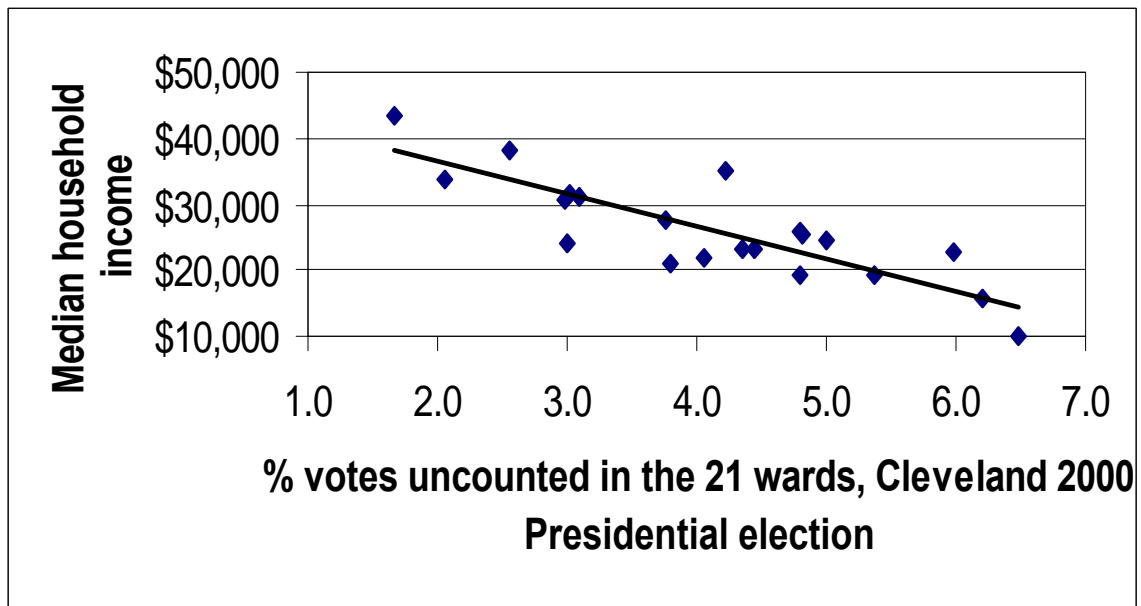
3. A closer examination of these problems in Cuyahoga County, showed that **there was a big disparity in % unrecorded votes in the City of Cleveland proper when compared to other cities in the county. In the city of Cleveland, 5518 votes, i.e. 4 % or 1 out of every 25 votes cast were “unrecorded”, while outside of Cleveland, 7230, i.e. 1.9% or one out of every 52 votes were unrecorded. In other words, the percent of unrecorded votes in the City of Cleveland was more than twice that in the rest of Cuyahoga County (see figure below).**



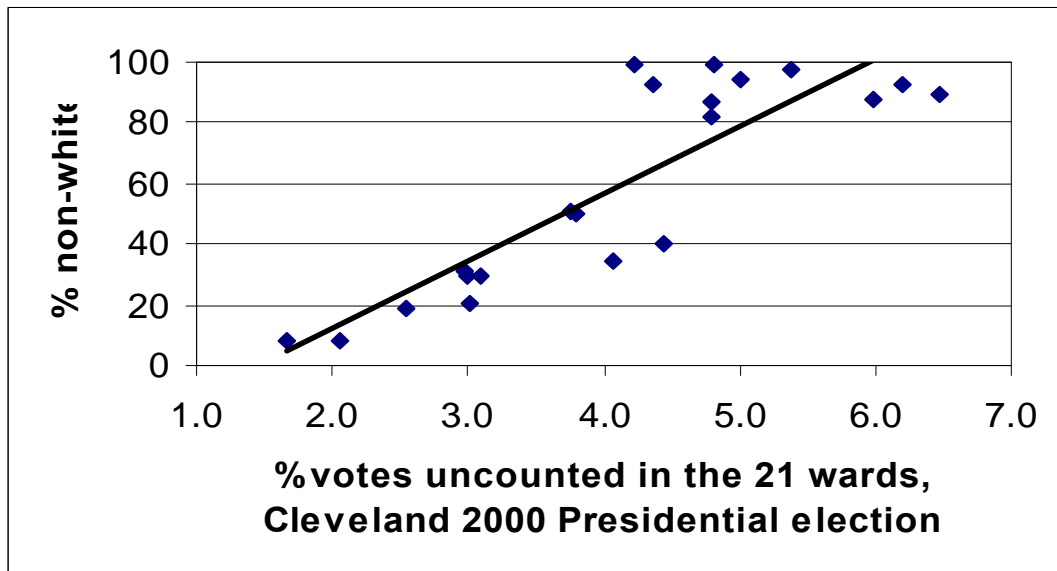
4. The data at the ward level conceal further disparities. For instance, in about 16 City of Cleveland precincts, the % unrecorded votes ranged between 8 and 13%. To illustrate the wide variation between precincts, here are the results for Ward 2:



5. Within the City of Cleveland, the % votes uncounted were clearly greater in low income than in high income wards – i.e. low income voters had more votes uncounted, about 6.5% in the worst wards.



An ethnic disparity is also evident: as the percentage of non-white population increases, so does the percentage of uncounted votes, again with some 6.5% uncounted in the worst cases.



6. **Many cities or counties in Ohio have substantial low-income and/or minority populations, and based on national studies, there is every reason to believe that income or ethnic disparities in unrecorded votes, similar to those in Cuyahoga County, exist in those cities as well.** County-level data often obscure these glaring disparities. Also, **mainly white low income counties are also affected: of the 10 “worst” counties in Ohio** with respect to unrecorded votes (excluding Holmes County where Amish don’t vote for federal offices), **nine are low income Appalachian counties.**

7. This Ohio data is entirely consistent with national data on effects of income and race on unrecorded votes⁵. Such national data, showing these and other effects on voting (e.g. county size, state policies), and also reports of improvement with change of system (see below), all argue that most “unrecorded” votes are unintentional.

8. About 4% or 1 in 25 of absentee votes in Cuyahoga County were “unrecorded”: another problem area.

⁵ For instance, Brady, H.E. et al., “Counting all the Votes”, www.electionline.org/site/docs/pdf/berkeley_countingallthevotes.pdf; Also, Kimball et al, ref. 2

9. In the upcoming Presidential elections of 2004, about 66 of Ohio's 88 counties or about 73% of votes will be cast with punch cards, with no change expected in higher percentages of "unrecorded votes" in low income populations unless something is done. Since vigorous voter registration and turnout efforts will swell the numbers of votes cast, we can forecast that perhaps as many as 100,000 votes cast in Ohio's 2004 presidential election will be lost mostly because of voting errors.

THERE ARE SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE FOR NOVEMBER 2004 IF WE ACT QUICKLY!

Voter Education and Central Ballot Checking. With vigorous voter education, low income and minority voters can greatly reduce their unrecorded votes even with a punch card system. In the Los Angeles Mayoral race of June 2001, the City Clerk's office mounted a community-wide educational campaign on how to vote, where to vote, how to check ballots for errors, etc. using the media, politicians, outreach with demonstration voting machines, plus polling place signage and reminders. Also, extremely important were the 70 people at the central collection point for punched ballots, who checked EACH ballot for hanging or incomplete chads according to California regulations, and fixed ballots with bipartisan observation, all BEFORE the ballot was counted.⁶ Whereas in Los Angeles, about 4% of votes were unrecorded in the 1997 Mayoral primary/election, about 2% were unrecorded in the 2001 Mayoral race after the voter education campaign. In fact, 90% of African American and Latino precincts showed better results than in the 2000 Presidential race.

Another example: in Gadsden County, Florida – a low income rural non-white region – there were 12% unrecorded votes in the 2000 election. After installing a precinct level optical scan system (which gives instant feedback) AND a vigorous voter education program at malls, churches, meetings, etc., the unrecorded votes dropped to about 2%.

Proposed Solutions:

A. Proactive before-election and at-election Voter and poll worker education:

In order to improve voter handling of punch card systems, a vigorous educational campaign must be waged both before and on election day. Add to that media attention, good signage and lots of pre-election and election-day voter education, and there is bound to be a sharp drop in unrecorded votes, at least reducing the disparities related to income and race with respect to unrecorded votes. Of course, the voter education campaign will cover other important issues as well, e.g. importance of voting, being sure of registration, finding proper polling place, learning about when ID's are necessary, knowing about provisional ballots, etc.

⁶ Personal communication from Los Angeles City Clerk's office; also "L.A. Story: the 2001 Election", Thad Hall, available at: www.tcf.org/Publications/ElectionReform/la_hall.pdf

B. Central ballot checking and adjustment with bipartisan oversight: As in L.A. , employ sufficient number of personnel on election eve to check every single ballot brought from the precincts for correctable punch card mistakes. Strict adherence to Ohio rules for acceptable and non-acceptable punch must be followed, with bipartisan oversight.

C. Use data from the 2000 Presidential election to target priority precincts or wards for the educational campaign. Given the limited personnel and resources for the educational campaign described above, precinct-level data from the past Presidential election can be used to target the most intensive pre-election outreach campaign to the wards with the higher percentages of unrecorded votes in 2000.