

ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE ADDRESS ERRORS ON THE FLORIDA VOTER REGISTRATION FILE

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This analysis shows that African-Americans are more frequently affected by easily detectable address errors on the Florida voter registration file. The information should be carefully evaluated by the Department of Justice or District Court of Washington, DC when considering approval, as required under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, of any proposed all-mail balloting election in the state of Florida.

The Feb. 15, 2005 Florida voter registration file is analyzed here. This is the most recent file that I purchased from the Florida Secretary of State's office for my own research.

Among the information recorded on the Florida voter registration file is a registered voter's race. The analysis includes tabulations by race of the registered voter. The overall statistics are:

Total number of records on the Florida voter registration file:	11,428,946
Total number of African-Americans:	1,353,272
Percentage of African-Americans:	11.8%

The analysis that follows examines residence addresses of registered voters. In addition to resident addresses, some registered voters provide a separate mailing address. For the purposes of this analysis, any registered voter with a mailing address is considered to have a valid address. This assumption is made for the expediency that many foreign and military mailing addresses have unusual formatting that is difficult to automatically scan for errors without knowledge of proper address formats for the target country.

MISSING APARTMENT NUMBERS

Florida counties record apartment numbers by two methods.

- In the first method, apartment numbers are embedded in the first field of the address, such as "123 Main St. APT 1".
- In the second, apartment numbers are located in a field separate from the address, such as "123 Main St." and "APT 1".

I identify apartment addresses by two procedures.

- In the first, all records are scanned for "APT" or "#" and all text to the left of these strings are identified as a street address of an apartment building. I truncate apartment numbers from all addresses where such apartment numbers are embedded in the address field.

- In the second, I identify the street address where apartment numbers are provided in a separate field.

The resulting list of apartment building addresses is compared against all addresses in the voter registration file. Any matching street address without an apartment number and without a separate mailing address is identified as a registered voter with an address at an apartment building that lacks an apartment number. This likely underestimates the number of records with such missing apartment numbers since there may be some apartments where all addresses in the voter registration file lack an apartment number. Such addresses would be not identified by these procedures.

Total number of potential records lacking an apartment number:	189,186
Total number of African-Americans:	36,193
Percentage of African-Americans:	19.1%

The percentage of addresses of African-Americans potentially lacking an apartment number is 19.1%, which is greater than 11.8%, the overall percentage of African-Americans on the Florida voter registration file.

MISSING AND ERRONEOUS ZIP CODES

An easily detectable error on the Florida voter registration file is missing or obviously erroneous zip codes.

An examination of the zip code fields reveals that some Florida counties identify missing zip codes with an entry of “000000000”. These are identified as a potential error if there is no separate mailing address.

Extraneous symbols, such as dashes, are removed from the zip codes. For the purposes of analysis here, 5-digit zip codes are considered valid, as are 9-digit zip+4 zip codes. Other cases of 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8-digit zip codes are identified as impossible zip codes and are identified as potential errors if there is no separate mailing address.

Total number of records with missing or erroneous zip codes:	1,708
Total number of African-Americans:	432
Percentage of African-Americans:	25.3%

The percentage of African-Americans with missing or erroneous zip codes is 25.3%, which is greater than 11.8%, the overall percentage of African-Americans on the Florida voter registration file.

RECOMMENDATION

It is my opinion based on an examination of easily identifiable address errors on the Florida voter registration file that such errors more frequently occur among African-American Florida registered voters than registered voters of other races. These errors will

cause disproportionate problems with the delivery of mail ballots to African-Americans, as proposed by the Florida Democratic Party as a means to conduct a second 2008 presidential primary within the state.

I further emphasize that these are easily detectable errors. Misspellings and similar numeric data entry errors are more difficult to detect. Given the disproportionate percentage of African-Americans with potentially missing apartment numbers and problematic zip codes, unobserved data entry errors should be assumed to also disproportionately affect African-Americans, lacking further evidence to the contrary. The evidence presented here should be carefully weighed as a part of any decision to provide Voting Rights Act Section 5 pre-clearance for a second 2008 Florida presidential primary conducted by mail.

BRIEF BIO SKETCH OF DR. MICHAEL P. McDONALD WITH REGARDS TO VOTER REGISTRATION DATABASES

I am an Associate Professor at George Mason University and a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution. I received my PhD in political science in 1999 from University of California, San Diego.

I first worked with voter registration files in the early 1990s for Pactech Data and Research, a California consulting firm that maintains the reapportionment database for the state's legislature. I analyzed election administration performance for the United States Election Assistance Commission, produced an expert report for a lawsuit successfully challenging voter registration matching procedures by the State of Washington (*Washington Association of Churches v Reed*, CV06-0726), and published academic research on voter registration files specifically in the scholarly journals of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Behavior*, and the *Election Law Journal*.

I worked on redistricting in Alaska, Arizona, California, Michigan, and New York. In Arizona, California, and New York litigation I provided expert witness testimony or consulting witness advice on Voting Rights Act Section 2 and Section 5 issues.

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