

## **electionlineWeekly — November 6, 2008**

*electionline.org*

### **I. In Focus This Week**

#### **Election Day in America is record-breaking and mostly smooth**

*Scattered problems reported throughout the country don't tarnish presidential outcome*

Prior to Tuesday, *electionline.org* posed the question: What happens if you have an election and everyone comes? Well, *everyone* didn't show up on Election Day and in the early voting period, but more Americans cast a ballot in this election cycle than ever before and while there were issues with machines and ballots and lines, the process went relatively smoothly for most voters.

This week we'll hear from our reporters in the field about what they saw on Tuesday. The analysis of Election Day 2008 will continue in next week's electionlineWeekly.

#### **Colorado**

After spending all day in the polls in Denver and Boulder, the major election administration story was the high number of provisional ballots that might have resulted from potentially inaccurate voter rolls.

In two polling places visited in the late afternoon and evening hours, dozens of provisional ballots were reported; almost all coming from voters who didn't appear on the voter rolls (though all said they had registered).

There appeared to be inconsistencies between polling places and poll workers as to whether voters were adequately redirected to correct polling places, and whether provisionals were only used as a last resort when a regular ballot cannot be cast.

At the Denver Indian Center, poll watchers reported that the number of provisionals was particularly high, and said poll workers were not doing an adequate job of finding voters their correct polling place.

At the Barnum Recreation Center, at least eight voters were casting provisional ballots, more than a third of the total number of voters voting during that time span.

The polling sites seemed to be well-run. Early voting seemed to have reduced wait times on Election Day. Lines were not particularly long, and despite good turnout, few if any voters were waiting longer than 30 minutes to vote.—*David Becker*

#### **Florida**

Election Day saw few major problems throughout Florida. *The Miami Herald* reported some [optical scan machines breaking and misprinted ballots in Broward County](#) and in Tampa Bay, [hundreds of voters were only given one page of a two page ballot](#). Yet the major stories in Florida were the long lines during early voting and the lack of them on Election Day.

Early voting lines in Miami-Dade and Broward counties often stretched out the door and around the buildings. The shortest wait time was at the Elections Department in downtown Miami where people waited for only about 50 minutes. At the North Miami Public Library, however the line was substantially longer. Rosta Richardson arrived at the Library at 10 am after working an 8 hour night shift and left the polls at 4:30 pm, six and a half hours later. "You never know what can happen and you have to go when you have time," she said.

The major hold-up at all of the early vote centers appeared to be at the check-in table where the voter's identification is scanned by the Electronic Voting Identification machines (EVIDs) and they receive their

printed ballot. The main early voting concern in Florida was the new ballot on demand system where individual ballots are printed on site for voters. There were, however, few reports of machines going down here. In Miami-Dade, each vote center had a manufacturer technician on site to fix any problems that arose, problems that occurred with relative infrequency.

Instead, these counties saw huge turnout on each day of early voting, severely taxing the system's limited capacity to check people in. Most poll watchers I spoke with estimated that the vote centers were processing people at the rate of about 100 to 150 voters per hour. In each of the vote centers in which I was allowed inside, I typically saw open voting booths and open or quickly available ballot scanners. The EVIDs however, were always mobbed and the printers were constantly running.

On Election Day, most polls saw long lines when the polls opened, but quickly dissipated throughout the course of the day. Rob Miolla, the assistant elections clerk at the polling place at Faith Farm Ministries, said that they had a line when the poll opened that "wrapped around the building," but was gone by 11:00 a.m. This seemed to be the case at most polling places, a line in the morning that disappeared by early morning and did not return. Even after 5:30 p.m. when most people were getting off work, the polls in Boca Raton saw no more than a trickle of new voters. — *Zachary Markovits*

## **Indiana**

Voting was generally smooth in central Indiana on Election Day as the state experienced its first presidential election under its new voter identification law and its first election as a swing state in a generation. Turnout, bolstered by high numbers of early voting, set a record as 2.7 million Hoosier voters cast a ballot in the 2008 general election.

After a disastrous 2006 general election in Marion County, during which over 200 precincts opened late, Election Day opened with long lines, but few problems on an unseasonably warm day in Indianapolis.

Elizabeth White, Marion County clerk, reported that every precinct opened on time at 6:00 a.m.

"We're getting reports of some problems," said Angie Nussmeyer, communications specialist for the Marion County Clerk's office, at midday on Tuesday, "But it's all just routine Election Day stuff."

The biggest story line out of Indianapolis was the crush of early voters. White estimates that approximately 105,000 Marion County voters – about one in seven voters in the county – either voted early in-person or mailed in an absentee ballot. Typically, early in-person voting occurred only at the clerk's office, but expected demand was so high, two satellite locations were opened to accommodate the voters. White's decision to expand the use of early voting sites likely proved a wise one. On the weekend before the election, all three early voting sites reported lines in excess of two hours long.

A last-minute legal battle over how to process challenged absentee ballots between White, a Democrat, and Marion County Republicans did not have as much of an Election Day impact as election officials feared, though the potential for future problems remains a top concern of the clerk's office.

The legal decision mandated that all challenged absentee ballots be treated as provisional ballots, which mean that they must go before the County Elections Board in order to determine whether or not they are valid.

Nussmeyer explained the clerk's concerns over the Court's ruling: "We have only 10 days to certify the election," she said. "If there are mass challenges, and we have to process 30,000 challenged absentee ballots, it will be a logistical nightmare."

Ultimately, the number of challenged absentee ballots was not enough to affect the outcome of any federal or state races.

Though some voters did experience problems at the polls – some failed to provide photo ID, some found their names were not on the registration rolls despite registering to vote, and others were forced to endure improper partisan challenges – those problems appeared largely to be isolated instances.

“Our hotline workers are bored,” White said of the two rooms full of workers taking voter phone calls at the Clerk’s office, “and that’s what we like to see.” – *Sam Derheimer*

### **North Carolina**

Scores of North Carolinians voted early, leading to short wait times at the polls on Tuesday except for the early morning rush. According to [absentee voting statistics](#), 2,627,056 voters cast ballots before Election Day, either in person or by mail, out of 6,233,330 registered voters in the state or 42 percent. More than 91 percent of those voting early did so at a one-stop voting location and early voters made up nearly 61 percent of all voters in the state.

Lines at one-stop voting locations varied. Voters at Cary Towne Center Mall in Cary had to wait for more than an hour in a line with hundreds of voters that snaked around the stores while voters at the Wake County Board of Elections were in and out of the polls within minutes.

"This is the best kept secret in Raleigh," Leon Barber, site supervisor said while his colleagues welcomed and processed voters.

Arthur Affleck, an attorney watching the polls said he had seen several elderly first-time voters in Durham, including Mrs. James, a 95 year-old African American woman who had picked cotton in South Carolina when she was younger.

Mrs. James, a nursing home resident, faced challenges obtaining the proper documentation to vote and then encountered a long line at the polls but volunteers helped her.

"She voted and she had tears in her eyes," Affleck said. "It was just kind of heartwarming ... I think that story is being repeated" around the state. — *Kat Zambon*

### **Ohio**

In 2004, a recount of punch-card ballots was rigged by election workers. In 2006, primary results were delayed for days due to poorly printed absentee ballots, voting system memory cards were lost and 20 percent of poll workers didn’t show up on Election Day. In 2007, problems with the touch-screen voting tabulation technology delayed results of the general election for hours. And this is just a partial accounting of what has gone wrong during Cuyahoga County’s recent elections.

The past four years have not been easy for Ohio’s largest election jurisdiction with more than 1.1 million registered voters and 1,436 precincts in 565 polling places. In that four-year span voters have moved from punch-card ballots to touch-screen voting systems to now paper ballots. The state has been in the national spotlight for its election procedures and Cuyahoga County has received much of that attention.

That is why this past Tuesday the county’s election director found it hard to hide her pleasure with how Tuesday’s’ vote was conducted.

“We have had an excellent day today. Poll workers administered an accurate and efficient election,” said Jane Platten.

In downtown Cleveland, the day began early at Trinity Commons, next door to the beautiful 100-year old Trinity Cathedral. The sun had yet to rise on what would turn out to be a nearly 70 degree and sunny day - a stark contrast to the March primary which ended with a crippling ice storm.

A little after 6 a.m., eight people were in line waiting to cast ballots. One of them was Jimmy Leslie, who had not voted for years. He arrived early in hopes of being close to the front of the line.

"I can't remember the last time I voted. This election got me excited. I hope I know I'm going to know how to use the machine," he said referring to the precinct-based optical scan paper ballots in use for the first time in the county.

A smaller polling place containing just one precinct, seven poll workers were at the ready to help voters in what was essentially a three-step voting process in the county.

Leslie was the first to complete his ballot at the polling site.

"It was easier than I thought it would be. I liked it better than voting on a machine," he said.

The long lines that were not present at the Trinity polling place were more of an issue at the Collinwood branch of the Cleveland Public Library at 8 a.m. Several voters reported wait times of one to one and a half hours and I counted approximately 60 people in line. Yet no one appeared to walk away and spirits were high.

"The line was long and my back was hurting, but it was fine. I had to make sure I filled out everything correctly," said Pamela Watkins.

Percy McDade agreed.

"Yes it was a long wait, about an hour, but no complaints. I liked voting on paper better than a computer too."

The lines dissipated within a half hour as the morning rush ended and an election day rover from the board of elections office arrived with three clipboards that voters could use to cast their ballots in addition to the privacy booths.

At the Memorial School in Cleveland, the lines were also reportedly long early in the morning but had mostly disappeared by mid-morning. There were some concerns about provisional ballots, though, 23 of which had been cast by around 9 a.m.

"It can take more than five minutes with several places to sign," said poll worker Sue Helper of the ballots. She was concerned that she or her colleagues had too much room for error in the process and might make a mistake filling them out, not the voters.

As the day wore on, several common themes emerged. There was definitely a morning rush of voters in a number of polling places, but according to the board of elections that rush was rarely seen again, even in the historically busy post-5 p.m. to polls closing time frame.

Platten and some news reports speculated that the almost 270,000 ballots cast before Election Day (either by mail or in person) out of approximately 650,000 total ballots cast may have played a role in the lack of an after-work rush.

Another was that most poll workers showed up. 123 poll workers were replaced the night before the election and 50 more were replaced on Election Day out of approximately 7,000 poll workers total, a much lower rate of no-show poll workers than the 2006 primary. Additionally, since the 2004 the average of poll workers had dropped 17 years – from 72 to 55, not including high school poll workers.

Every polling place also opened on time and none were ordered to stay open after 7:30 p.m., which has not been the case in some recent elections.

And there were few reports of problems with the voting technology at the polls. Issues that did emerge included one polling place in Shaker Heights mistakenly giving a few voters only one page of the two-page ballot. Twenty scanners had initial problems that were quickly fixed, while five others that could not be fixed were replaced.

The day was not without its interesting stories as well. A Solon man was [arrested](#) at his polling place after arguing with poll workers about whether or not his vote was counted.

And at the Parma Heights service garage a poll worker named Jim said they received an out-of-state visitor. A woman from New Jersey came to the polls with her friend she was visiting and wanted to cast a ballot. He appreciated her enthusiasm but explained she needed to vote in her home state.

All in all, though, he saw it as a very good day.

“A pretty normal day. People rolled with the punches.” — *Sean Greene*

## **Pennsylvania**

Turnout was expected to be high on Election Day in a state that does not permit no-excuse or early voting, and those predictions, while not quite on the money, prepared some in the county for lines, a smattering of registration issues and occasional machine breakdowns.

Crowds formed early in the suburbs surrounding Pittsburgh in Allegheny County with voters lined up well before 6:30 a.m. for the polls to open half an hour later. In two precincts visited, at least one [ES&S iVotronic](#) touch-screen failed to start in time and technicians were alerted. Wait times ranged from 30 minutes to an hour during the first part of the day in Upper St. Clair and Mt. Lebanon.

[Unofficial election results](#) indicate turnout was just over 68 percent – significantly short of the 75 percent of registered voters [predicted](#).

Later in the day, as many students at the University of Pittsburgh emerged from their dorm rooms – sometimes still in sweats and T-shirts that they slept in the night before – much longer lines formed at a [student center](#) and the nearby Soldier and Sailors Memorial Hall.

At least some of the problem could be attributed to the set up of the polling place. At Soldiers and Sailors, [only two lines](#) handled the large crowd of students and residents who live in the Oakland neighborhood. There were only two alphabet breaks visible as students walked in. As hundreds waited to sign in (or present ID if they were first-time voters) machines often sat idle. Volunteers handed out water and bags of chips to make sure no one walked away without voting.

But machines had some problems as well in Allegheny. According to [press reports](#), more than 250 emergency paper ballots were used in three precincts (at one polling place) because more than half of the nine machines were not functioning for an unspecified period of time.

At most of the dozen precincts visited during Election Day, voters and campaign volunteers reported one or more voting machines out of service for at least some period of time. Machine problems did not appear to impede voting, however.

According to Kimball Brace, president of Election Data Services, the machines used in Allegheny were “taking a hit in various places” around the country as a result of machine breakdowns. — *Dan Seligson*

## **Virginia**

The polling place for many Virginia Tech students registered to vote on campus was St. Michael's Lutheran Church, a small church on an unmarked road about six miles away from campus. Despite the challenges including wait times exceeding two hours, thousands of voters, including countless first-time student voters exercised their right to vote.

Some students reported that they had registered to vote in Blacksburg only to find out that they were registered at their home addresses, which confused Trung Le, a chemical engineering major who said he had never registered at his home address.

Hundreds of voters remained in line at 7 p.m. when the polls closed and poll workers herded the voters into the church. “Two and a half hours for line a minute,” a student voter complained on her way out of the polling place. Robbie Diya, a freshman computer science student was the last voter to cast a ballot at about 8:20 p.m. after getting in line at 6:50 p.m. Diya said he got lost on his way to the polls and brought a book to read in anticipation of long wait times.

“I would say [this was a] success for youth voters,” Amanda Eckerson from Rock the Vote said. However, students were left to organize their own transportation to the polls and the polling place had significantly more registered voters than other polling places, Eckerson said. “It’s an example of how the organizational structure is stacked against us,” she said.

As of November 6 at 11:12 a.m., Tom Perriello [led](#) Republican Rep. Virgil Goode by 52 votes in possible the most tightly-contested Congressional races in the country. — *Kat Zambon*

## Wisconsin

Predictions of a record high turnout of new voters in Wisconsin didn’t quite pan out. According to estimates from the state’s Government Accountability Board (GAB), the final tally ended at just under 3 million ballots cast—or 70 percent of the eligible population.

When asked by a [local University of Wisconsin-Madison newspaper](#), the GAB’s Kevin Kennedy chalked this up to a much less contested race than in 2004. “When you’re looking at polls that show double digit leads for one of the candidates ... that really is the difference,” Kennedy said.

At the polls, the big story of the day was just how many people weren’t there—replaced by the significant numbers of early and absentee voters around the state. In the week leading up to the election, the Madison City Clerk’s office was inundated with long lines and made a first-ever decision to remain open to handle the crowds on [Sunday afternoon](#).

Meanwhile, 75 miles away in Milwaukee, early voters ringed the Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building the weekend before November 4, and waits to register and vote stretched beyond three hours. According to a preliminary review of the numbers before Election Day, absentee voting this year in Brown, Dane and Waukesha counties showed an overall increase of 50 percent or more. In Milwaukee County, the numbers had ballooned to an increase of 84 percent.

On Election Day in Madison, the only lines to be seen ended by mid-morning. At Lapham Elementary School, election observer Ryan Keegan said the wait had shrunk dramatically by as early as 7:30 a.m. “When I got here at 7:00, there must have been 150 people in line,” he reported, “But they are moving really well in there.” The same held true at polling places across the city and throughout the day.

By 11:00 a.m., chief election inspector Chuck Stertz of Kennedy Middle School looked over the mostly empty room and explained the big turnout was mostly in the morning. “I guess it’s the absentee ballots and early votes that are the most surprising. We have boxes and boxes of them.” He pointed over at the ballots that will be counted throughout the day. “Maybe that’s where everyone is who would have been here.”

Apart from the morning rush, only a handful of glitches are reported throughout the day. Several optical scan machines jammed and required visits from the City Clerk’s office, causing delays of up to an hour before ballots could be officially logged in. Yet even these snafus did not raise significant alarm. Jeannie, the chief inspector for Olbrich Gardens—where one machine broke down 15 minutes into the day—asked voters to fold their ballots and have them sealed in an official bag. “Everyone was fine about it once I explained that folding their ballots wouldn’t interfere with how they’re read. I just told people that all the absentee ballots come folded, too, and no one had any real complaints.”

The other major issue of the day came from dozens of registered voters whose names were left off the official rolls.

According to chief inspector Susan Robertson of the Madison Fire Department #1 polling station, the official roll was “woefully inadequate.” Over the course of the day dozens of students who had registered prior to Election Day arrived to find they were not listed. Behind the check in-desk, two observers worked laptops to verify the missing registrations.

But not everyone showed up on the state’s computerized list. “If the voter has the right verification, they can re-register here,” said Robertson. “But some of them have had to go back home to get it.”

In this student-dominated precinct, poll workers reported this wasn’t too much of a problem; with most living nearby, it wasn’t that hard to make it home and back.

According to the *The Capital Times*, the errors are due to the large numbers – especially students – who registered with third-party groups rather than in person at a municipal office. Some groups collected registrations and then mailed them in bulk, but those filed after the official mail-in deadline on October 15<sup>th</sup> may not have made it onto the official rolls in time.

By the day’s end, poll workers outnumbered voters at several polling places around the city. Several expressed relief that they had been over-prepared for turnout. Throughout the day, not a single voter reported anything but good attitudes and helpful information from the poll workers they encountered. By 7:55 p.m., as the final stragglers made their way to the banks of empty privacy booths, workers turned their attention to the sacks of waiting absentee ballots. In person or on paper, there was still a lot of counting to do before the end of the night. — *Beth Jacob*

## II. Election Reform News This Week

- Voters in Maryland overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment this week that would allow the state legislature to enact an [early-voting law](#). With more than half of precincts reporting, voters were approving Question 1 by a margin of more than two to one according to *The Baltimore Sun*. Specifically, the change approved to Maryland's constitution allows the General Assembly to enact an early-voting law. The Maryland Democratic Party has pushed the idea for years, arguing that opening the polls sooner would afford more people an opportunity to participate in elections. "We've seen this early voting is a legitimate way to expand the franchise," Del. Samuel I. Rosenberg, a Baltimore Democrat told the paper. He predicted the legislature would pass an early-voting law next year that is fair to both parties.
- While overall [voting in Florida went smoothly](#) throughout the early voting period and on Election Day, there were some issues including a vote-counting problem in [Hillsborough County](#). Voting will continue until about 60,000 early votes are tallied, as well as provisional ballots and overseas ballots. Adding to the mix of the ballot-counting is that current Supervisor of Elections Buddy Johnson is only leading his opponent by about 4,000 votes at this reporting time. According to the *Tampa Tribune*, Johnson has been absent from the counting process and does not return phone calls to his office. The blame for why the votes could not be tabulated Tuesday night was spread around, but election officials laid most of the blame on Premier Elections Solutions, the company hired by Johnson to provide and operate the optical scan voting equipment. County Judge James Dominguez said the software was responsible for the glitches. "It was all technical," he said. "It was a frustration."
- The election in Minnesota isn't over quite yet and could stretch into December as the state embarks on a [mandatory recount](#) in the Senate race between incumbent Sen. Norm Coleman (R) and Democratic challenger Al Franken. In Minnesota, recounts are required in races with a winning margin of less than one-half of 1 percent, although a losing candidate may request that it not go forward. As of Thursday morning, Coleman was leading Franken by only 438 votes. Secretary of State [Mark Ritchie](#) (D) told Minnesota Public Radio that the hand recount will include hundreds of people and cost up to \$90,000 to conduct. The recount will not take place in St. Paul

at the capitol. Instead, it will be done at the county level. That's where the ballots are right now. The ballots are stored in secure rooms in each of the state's 87 county courthouses and in the election offices of larger cities. The people doing the recounting will be county election officials and election judges, citizens. The recount begins in mid-November.

### **III. Opinion This Week**

National: [Election Day](#); [Early voting](#); [Voting problems](#); [ACORN](#)

California: [Instant-runoff voting](#)

Connecticut: [Registrar of voters](#); [Secretary of State](#)

Florida: [Election Day](#)

Georgia: [Early voting](#)

Kentucky: [Voting system](#)

Maine: [Voter turnout](#)

Minnesota: [Voting process](#)

Mississippi: [Early voting](#)

Montana: [Electoral College](#)

New Hampshire: [Poll workers](#)

New York: [New York City](#); [Election Day](#)

Ohio: [Secretary of state](#); [Voting system](#)

Pennsylvania: [Election Day, II](#)

Vermont: [Election-day registration, II](#)

West Virginia: [Clean elections](#); [Voting system](#)

*\*\*some sites require registration*

### **IV. Job Postings This Week**

*All job listings must be received by 12 p.m. Eastern on Wednesday for publication in our Thursday newsletter. Job listings are free but may be edited for length. Whenever possible, include Internet information. Please email job postings to [mmoretti@electionline.org](mailto:mmoretti@electionline.org)*