# ON THE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN PARTY REGISTRATION AND PRESIDENTIAL VOTE IN FLORIDA


**CALTECH/MIT**

**VOTING TECHNOLOGY PROJECT**

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**On the Discrepancy between Party Registration and Presidential Vote in Florida**

## Summary


1. Allegations have surfaced on the Internet about apparent anomalies between partisan voter registration statistics and the Bush-Kerry vote in certain Florida counties.
2. Our examination of these allegations is that they do not provide evidence for election fraud; rather they are clearly the result of political changes in Florida --- counties with the greatest apparent disparities are those that are closely aligned with the "Dixiecrat" South.
3. Other examinations by experts in the field correspond with our conclusion, as they find that the patterns observed in 2004 are not new or unique. This adds weight to our conclusion that the analyses circulating on the Internet claiming to document election fraud in Florida are without merit.


## Analysis

A story appearing on the "Common Dreams News Center"[1] alleges that the presidential election may have been hacked by the use of electronic voting machines. The core of the evidence presented notes a discrepancy between party registration figures in Florida's counties and the vote for president. In particular, there are a number of counties in which the vote for Kerry was significantly below the Democratic registration figures. Examples include Bradford County (61% Democratic registration, 30% vote for Kerry), Baker County (69% vs. 22%) and Calhoun County (82% vs. 36%).[2]

The disparities between the registration and vote figures are easily understood in the context of the changing partisan complexion of the South, and in the particular way in which political patterns have shifted in Florida. These patterns also illustrate the fact that *party registration* is often only weakly related to the idea of *party identification* that is commonly used in political science and politics more generally.

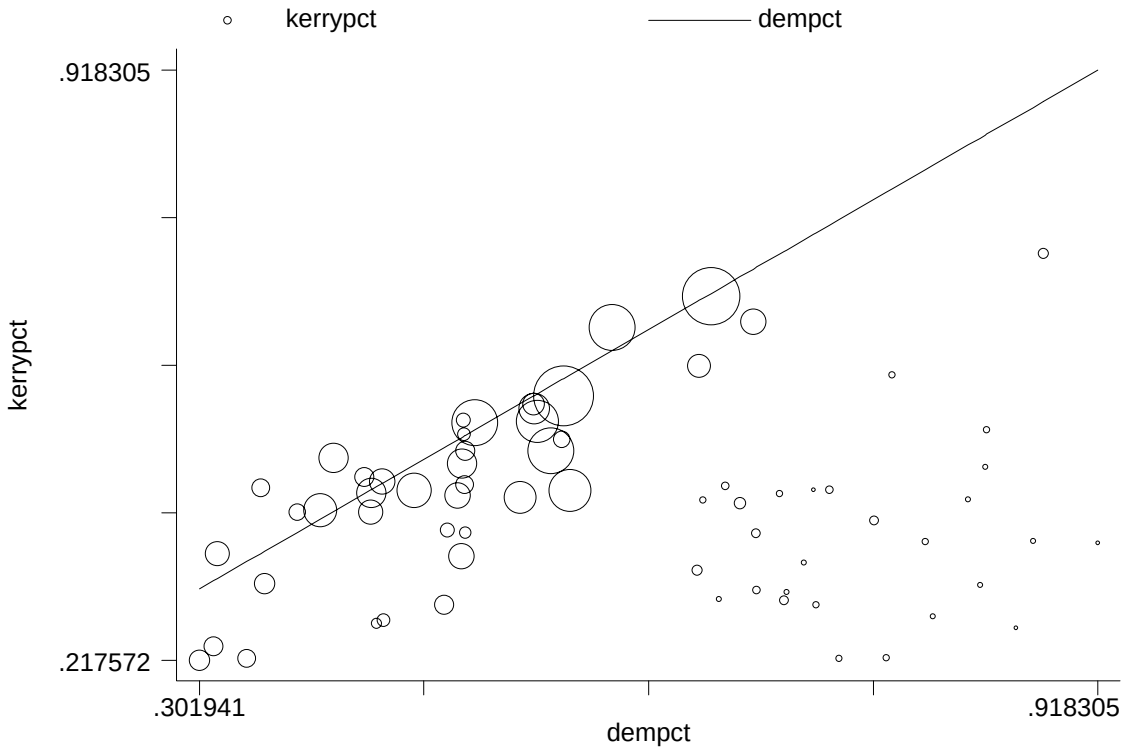
On the latter point first: Choosing which party to register in is determined in large part by state registration laws and party competition, in addition to one's longtime psychological attachment to a party --- which we call "party identification."[3] For much of the twentieth century, southern voters who sympathized with Republicans would have been foolish to register as a Republican, for instance, since all elections were effectively settled in the Democratic primary, which was restricted to registered Democrats.

It is important to note at the outset that the counties in 2004 with the greatest disparities between Democratic registration and vote for Kerry are the ones that are the most aligned with the old

[1] http://www.commondreams.org/headlines04/1106-30.htm
[2] Also see http://ustogether.org/election04/FloridaDataStats.htm and http://www.rubberbug.com/temp/Florida2004chart.htm.
[3] On this issue see Steven E. Finkel and Howard A. Scarrow, "Party Identification and Party Enrollment: The Difference and the Consequence," *Journal of Politics* 47 (1985): 620-642 and Malcolm Jewell, *Parties and Primaries*, New York, Praeger, 1984.

"Dixiecrat" South. Of the ten counties with the greatest discrepancies, eight are in the Florida panhandle --- Lafayette (26% Kerry, 86% Democratic registration), Liberty (36% vs. 92%), Holmes (22% vs. 77%), Dixie (31% vs. 84%), Calhoun (36% vs. 87%), Taylor (36% vs. 80%), Washington (28% vs. 73%) and Franklin (41% vs. 83%). The other two --- Union (27% vs. 81) and Baker (22% vs. 74%) --- are also in the far north, but closer to Jacksonville.

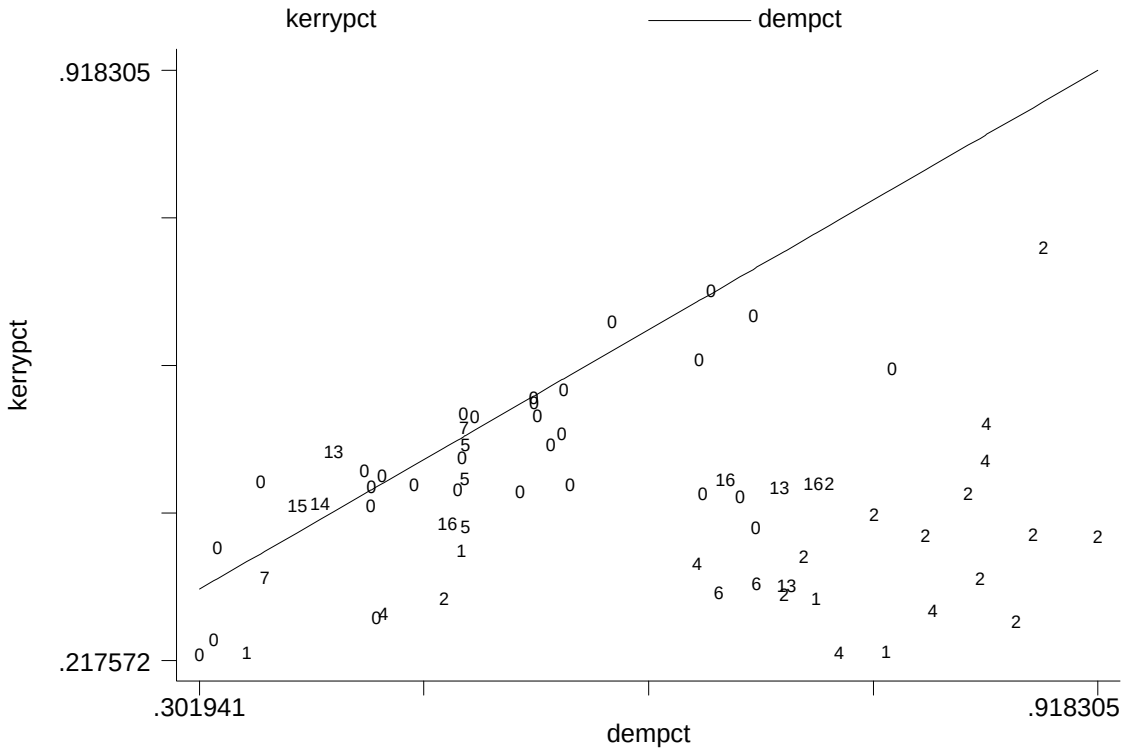
To put the disparity data in perspective, the following graph shows a scatterplot of the two-party vote for Kerry against the two-party registration percentage for Democrats.[4]




The tokens are in proportion to the size of each county's electorate. The diagonal line shows where the percentage vote for Kerry would exactly equal the Democratic registration in the county. Note that the large counties tend to run parallel to the line, but that there are huge discrepancies in small counties.

To gain a little more insight into where these counties are, the following figure replaces the circles with the congressional district in which the county is located:

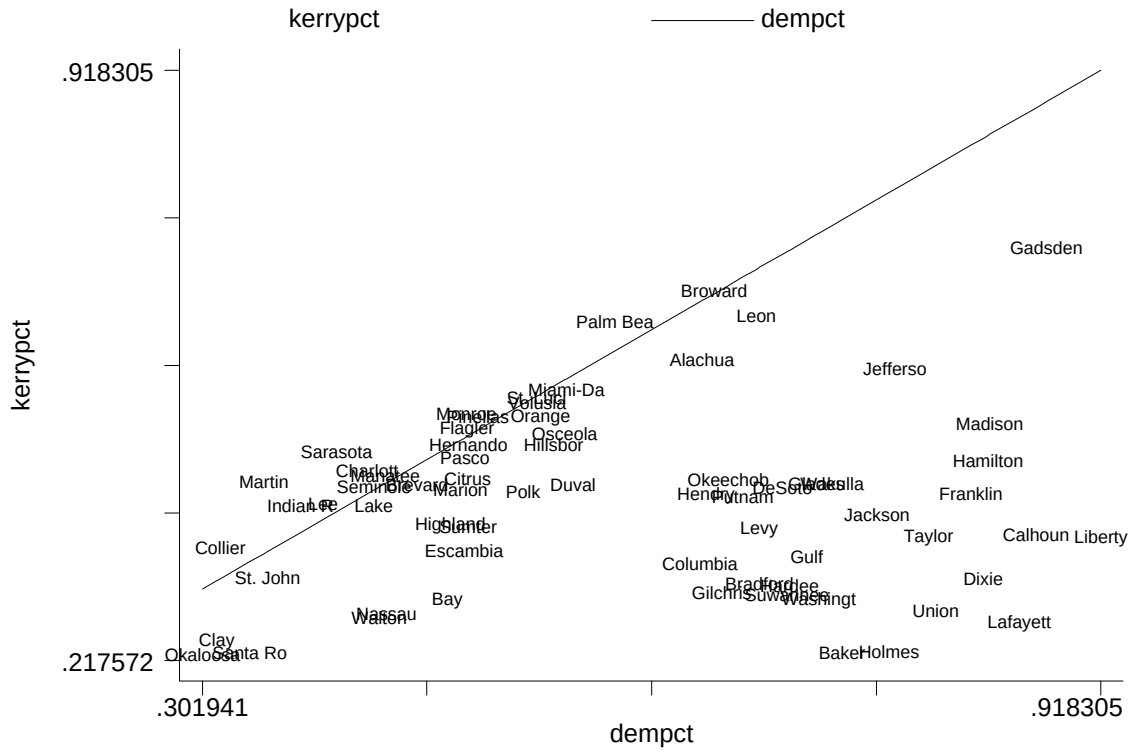
[4] The election data in this paper are taken from uselectionatlas.org.




(Zeros indicate counties that are in more than one congressional district.) The counties with the greatest discrepancies tend to be in the second congressional district, which encompasses the core of the Florida panhandle. A few are in the 6th, 13th, and 16th districts. (It is important to note that Jeff Fisher, congressional candidate in the 16th district, is credited by some for first bringing these discrepancies to the attention of the public.)[5]

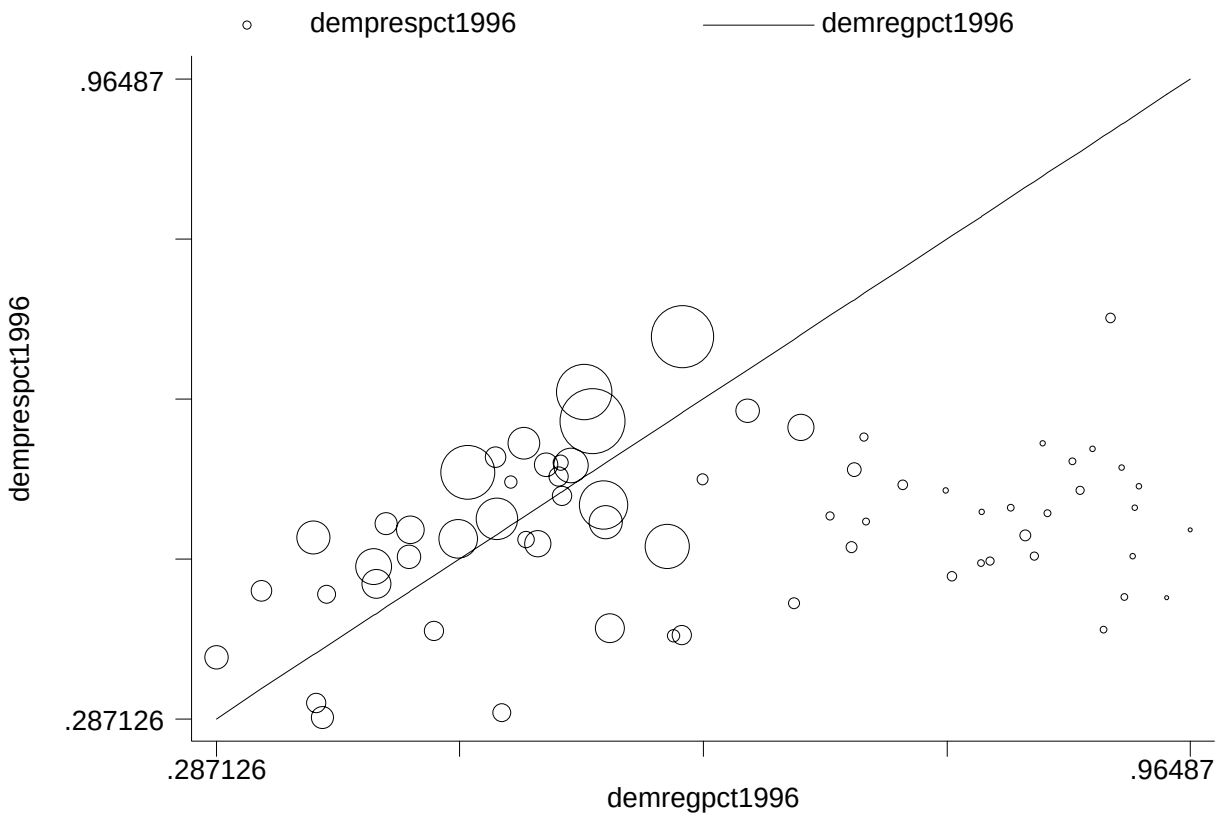
Finally, to help with identification of these counties, the following graph repeats the previous two, now with the county names for tokens.

[5] See http://www.jefffisherforcongress.com/.




With county names on the graph, it is possible to point out one county that is an exception to the overall pattern. Leon County (Tallahassee) is the exception that proves the rule. Unlike much of the panhandle area, Leon County experiences in-migration rates that compare with counties further south, on the peninsula. Leon County, which much more participates in the politics of the "New South," has voters whose party registration matches their vote for president.

It is important to note that the type of discrepancy between registration figures and vote counts is nothing new. The following two graphs show the relationship between the vote for the Democratic presidential candidate and party registration, for 1996 and 2000. We suspect that if one were to collect this data going back to the 1964 election, the same pattern would hold.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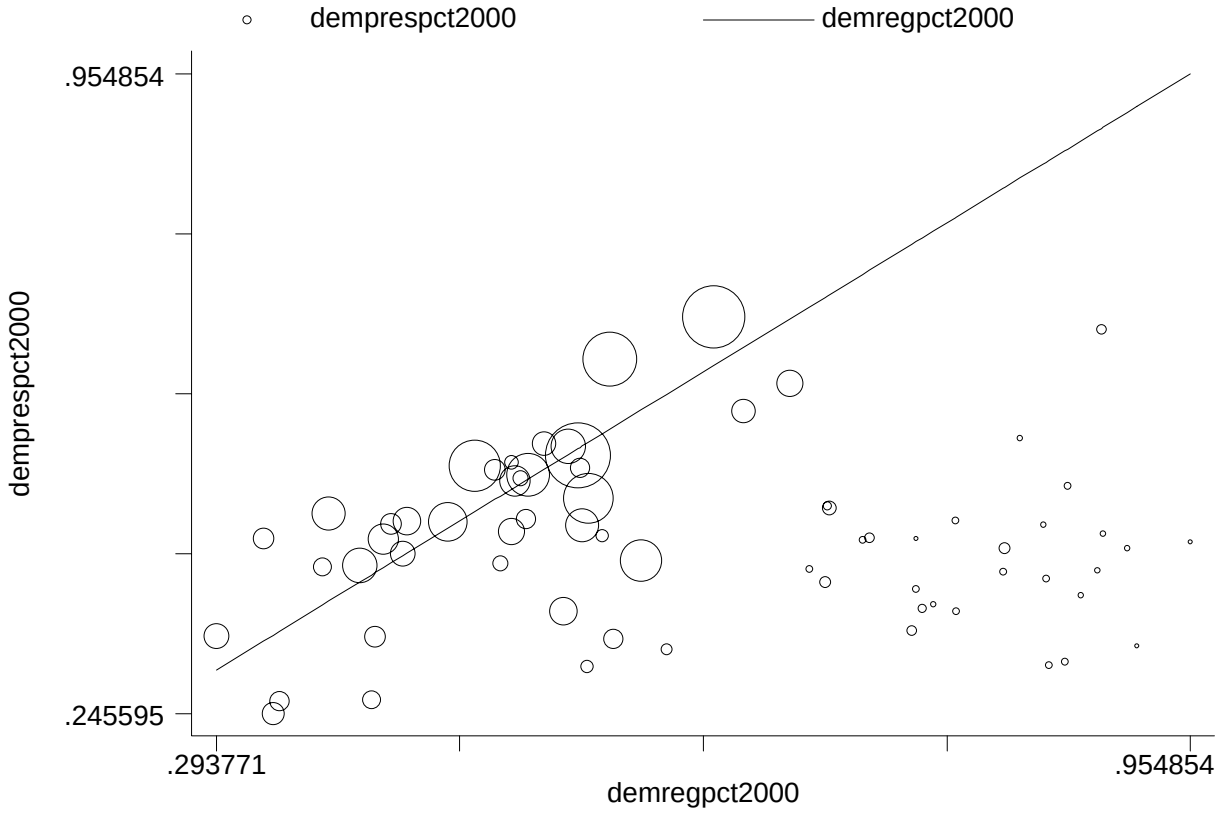
dempreſpct2000
demregpct2000
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.245595
dempreſpct2000
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.954854
demregpct2000

Two simple regressions drive home the fact that there is no relationship between the use of electronic voting machines in Florida in 2004 and the loss of votes by Kerry. The typical regression analysis that is run to get a quick assessment would use Kerry's vote in 2004 as the dependent variable and Gore's vote in 2000 as the primary independent variable. We would then add a dummy variable indicating whether a county used DRE (direct register electronic) voting machines in 2004. However, because some may wonder about the veracity of the 2000 election returns, it is possible to run this analysis with Clinton's 1996 vote as the dependent variable. The following table reports the results:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gore vote 2000 | --- | 0.99<br>(0.02) |
| Clinton vote 1996 | 1.05<br>(0.05) | --- |
| DRE use in 2004 | -0.003<br>(0.009) | 0.005<br>(0.005) |
| Intercept | -0.079<br>(0.025) | -0.021<br>(0.011) |
| N | 67 | 67 |
| $R^2$ | .89 | .97 |

(Each observation is weighted by total turnout in 2004. Numbers in parentheses are the standard errors.) In each case, the standard error on the DRE variable is so large, and the coefficient is so small, that we cannot confidently conclude the coefficient is anything but zero.

## Conclusion

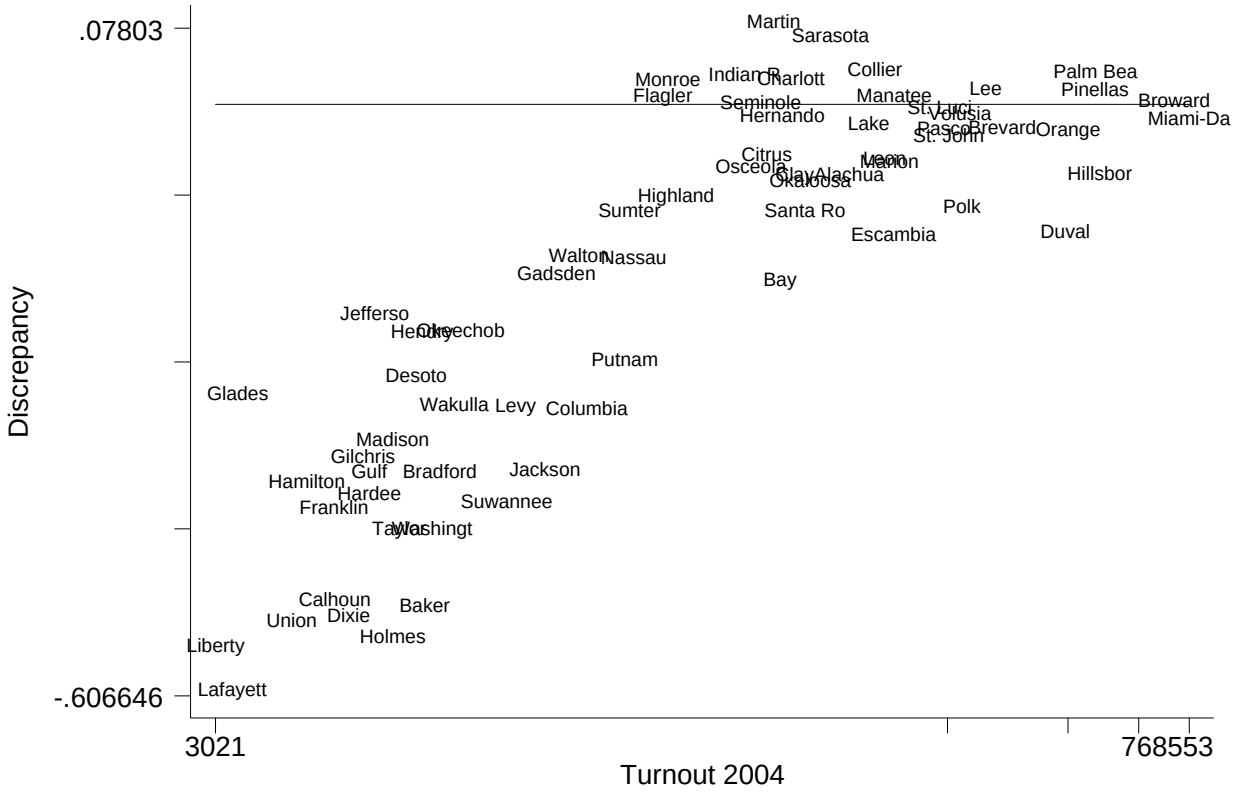
To conclude, there are two things that may be at work explaining the discrepancy between registration figures in Florida and vote for Kerry in 2004.

(1) Some panhandle counties are caught in the 1950s. Democratic registrations in this area are, in part, a vestige of the old Solid South Democratic Party. This area gave large majorities to Goldwater in 1964, and has continued to support Republican presidential candidates ever since. The old South lives here.
(2) Tiny counties have a hard time running elections. Research by the Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project has consistently found that residual vote rates (i.e., "lost votes") tend to be much higher in smaller counties.[6] As the final figure below shows, the "deficit" of Kerry votes, given Democratic registrations, occurred in small counties. Nationwide, we have generally attributed problems with running elections in small counties to the difficulties in organizing an exceptionally complex process with a part-time (or non-existent), non-professional staff. It is possible that the registration figures in these small Florida counties reflect some inattention to the registration rolls.

[6] See Stephen Ansolabehere and Charles Stewart III, "Residual Votes Attributable to Technology," *Journal of Politics*, forthcoming, available at http://web.mit.edu/cstewart/www/papers/residual_vote.pdf until publication.

Our analysis of these allegations is very much in line with the study produced by Mebane, Sekhon and Wand.[7] They examine data on presidential voting and party registration in Florida counties from 1992 through 2004 and demonstrate that "counties that have high Democratic registration had high percentage increase in the vote for Bush (reflecting) the fact that all those counties had trended strongly Republican over the past twelve years." Thus when we examine these allegations through the context of decades of data, we see that these apparent anomalies in the 2004 election returns in Florida are not new, and are best explained not as election malfeasance but as a known political phenomenon.

[7] See http://macht.arts.cornell.edu/wrm1/commondreams/commondreams.html.


.07803
-.606646
Discrepancy
3021
768553
Turnout 2004
Martin
Sarasota
Monroe
Flagler
Collier
Manatee
Lee
Palm Bea
Pinellas
Broward
Miami-Da
Seminole
Hernando
Lake
Brevard
Orange
Citrus
Osceola
Hillsbor
Highland
Sumter
Santa Ro
Polk
Escambia
Duval
Walton
Nassau
Gadsden
Bay
Jefferso
Putnam
Desoto
Glades
Wakulla
Levy
Columbia
Madison
Gilchris
Gulf
Bradford
Jackson
Hamilton
Hardee
Franklin
Suwannee
Calhoun
Baker
Union
Dixie
Holmes
Liberty
Lafayett