

Dr. George Ehrhardt, a Professor at Appalachian State University, who is responsible for teaching students research methods and statistical reasoning, has **grossly** misinterpreted data in his recent paper “2013 Boone Municipal Election Turnout: Measuring the Effects of the 2013 Board of Election Changes.” Dr. Ehrhardt reaches the following conclusions:

(1) Early voting is actually a bad thing. Contrary to what your good sense might tell you, early voting actually suppresses turnout.

(2) Cutting down on the number of polling locations and hours is a good thing. You should not think that someone who moves your polling place as far as possible away from where you live and work and cuts your voting hours in half is out to get you.

(3) Everyone in Boone needs to stop talking about "imaginary attempts at voter suppression" and focus instead on poor lighting at polling places.

Dr. Ehrhardt’s faulty premise: Dr. Ehrhardt compares the election of 2013 with the election of 2009, to which it bears little comparative resemblance. Prior to 2013, both local political parties were last engaged in actively recruiting and campaigning for full candidate municipal slates in 2007. There was *substantially* less money spent in 2009 than 2013, and although there was a similar number of candidates in 2009 and 2013, at least two of the candidates in 2009 ran no voter contact campaign whatsoever. Dr. Ehrhardt should have compared the election of 2013 to the election of 2007, to which it bears many similarities. In 2007, the campaign finance figures looked similar, there was full political party involvement, and a strong and well-heeled political action committee, “Citizens for Change,” was actively campaigning against the incumbent party, just as it was in 2013. There was a full slate of party-backed candidates who actively campaigned on both sides in 2007, very much like 2013. Also similar to 2013, in 2007 there was no early voting offered on ASU’s campus.

Even for the election of 2009, Dr. Ehrhardt did not acquire the complete and correct data to make a proper analysis or draw reasonable conclusions. The Watauga County Board of Elections has confirmed that Dr. Ehrhardt, in an effort to access data to calculate the total number of Town of Boone municipal voters in 2009, requested a voter history or ‘BERT’ report. This report is not adequate for *historical* statistical purposes. It is only a snapshot of *currently* registered voters who voted in the queried year. For instance, if John Smith voted in 2009 (the queried year) but has since moved or died or changed his registration, he would **not** be included in Dr. Ehrhardt’s requested file and is therefore not included in Dr. Ehrhardt’s analysis.

Dr. Ehrhardt’s analyzed “test precincts” where ASU students dominated, and ASU students generally move much more frequently than do other county voters. Many, if not most, ASU students who voted in Watauga County in 2009 are no longer here and therefore do not appear in Dr. Ehrhardt’s data, even though they voted and their votes were counted. The end result of Dr. Ehrhardt’s failure to request and acquire the correct data to perform his analysis: an inaccurate and misleading conclusion based on faulty data.

For example, when analyzing total votes in 2009 (Table 5), Dr. Ehrhardt calculated that the total number of voters in all precincts was 1,218 voters, but according to the Board of Election’s certified

abstract of voters from 2009, there were 1,508 votes cast for mayor (with only one candidate to choose from). **Dr. Ehrhardt’s analysis is therefore, at a minimum, 19.2% inaccurate, or 290 votes short of accuracy.** The Watauga County Board of Elections confirms that Dr. Ehrhardt only requested the voting history (‘BERT’ file) for *currently active and inactive* voters, data which would not include those who cast a ballot in 2009, but who no longer live in Watauga or have passed away since then.

In addition to the invalidity of Dr. Ehrhardt’s total voter numbers from 2009, his 2013 totals are *also* incorrect and subsequently provide evidence that is actually *contradictory* to his claim. **In Table 2, for example, Dr. Ehrhardt asserts that 119 people voted one-stop when in fact only 86 did.** Dr. Ehrhardt admits to including incorrect numbers in his footnotes, but even by his own carelessly contrived definition of “one-stop voters,” there is no way to total the **actual** numbers (86 one stop, 7 absentee by mail, and 2 transfer) to add up to 119 voters.[1]

Also incorrect are Dr. Ehrhardt’s calculations of total votes in 2013 (Table 1). The total number of 2013 voters within each individual precinct are actually as follows: Blue Ridge: 93, Boone 1: 453, Boone 2: 289, Brushy Fork: 28, Boone 3: 227, New River I: 258, New River II: 226, New River III: 403. The combined total for these precincts is 1,977 voters, which properly includes early voters, transfer voters, and absentee voters whose data was put back into their precinct counts subsequent to the election.

In this case, Dr. Ehrhardt’s error results in a miscalculation of **more than 200 voters** incorrectly attributed to the Boone 2 precinct.[2] **Using the correct total vote number for 2013, turnout matches 2009** (both are 11.9% using his 2009 computation.)

In short, **Dr. Ehrhardt’s conclusion is a classic example of “bad data in, bad data out.” He failed to request the correct data to perform his analysis and, as a result, reached grossly incorrect conclusions.**

Dr. Ehrhardt’s Scholarly Sources Do Not Support His Thesis

Dr. Ehrhardt’s misleading analysis doesn’t end with just bad data. Dr. Ehrhardt also either misreads or intentionally misrepresents political scientists he claims agree with him. Examples:

(1) Footnote # 5: Dr. Ehrhardt suggests that this source supports his contention that early voting actually depresses turnout, but that is not at all what the source says: “While one prominent study suggests that voting by mail is associated with a 10% increase in turnout, other studies find smaller—but still statistically significant—*increases* in turnout associated with other convenience voting methods.” “*Convenience voting*” refers to early voting.

(2) Footnote # 7: Dr. Ehrhardt uses this source to claim that there is little to no effect on voter turnout by moving polling places around. Here’s what the source actually says about changing polling places: “**Could changing the locations of polling places affect the outcome of an election by increasing the costs of voting for some and decreasing them for others?** The consolidation of voting precincts in Los Angeles County during California’s 2003 gubernatorial recall election provides a natural experiment for studying how changing polling places influences voter turnout. **Overall turnout decreased by a**

substantial 1.85 percentage points: A drop in polling place turnout of 3.03 percentage points was partially offset by an increase in absentee voting of 1.18 percentage points. Both transportation and search costs caused these changes. Although there is no evidence that the Los Angeles Registrar of Voters changed more polling locations for those registered with one party than for those registered with another, **the changing of polling places still had a small partisan effect** because those registered as Democrats were more sensitive to changes in costs than those registered as Republicans. The effects were small enough to allay worries about significant electoral consequences in this instance (e.g., the partisan effect might be decisive in only about one in two hundred contested House elections), but **large enough to make it possible for someone to affect outcomes by more extensive manipulation of polling place locations.”**

When all is said and done, Dr. Ehrhardt’s highly slanted, biased and misleading scholarship strains to prove a point by warping the actual research of others to “prove” a highly partisan point.

[1] Sourced from post-canvass (60 day) precinct report. Report – EL30A Page 0004- 01

[2] 2013 Municipal Elections Abstract post-canvass (60 day) report broken down by precinct (page 1 of 2)