

# Explaining the 2015 Aiken Mayoral Election: Partisanship and Turnout

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*Conclusions and any opinions in this report are solely those of the author and do not represent any views by the USCA, the Political Science Department, or the SSBR Lab. Any errors are entirely the responsibility of the author. Please feel free to contact the author at [bobb@usca.edu](mailto:bobb@usca.edu) for comments and corrections.*

The purpose of this report is to explain the outcome of the 2015 City of Aiken mayoral using two key variables long identified by political scientists as important in electoral behavior: partisanship and turnout. We will also discuss one key issue on which the candidates had the greatest difference, the hospitality tax, because of its probable relationship to turnout. Ideally we would have exit polling data to ascertain the identities and opinions of individual voters, but no exit poll was performed. However, precinct data combined with earlier polls of Aiken voters allow us to make reasonable inferences about the roles played by partisanship, turnout, and the hospitality tax issue.

## Partisanship

Political scientists use the term “normal vote” to describe how elections will be decided if voters vote purely on the basis of their partisan leanings. Even though most voters do not like to be seen this way, they do vote in a very reliable and predictable way on the basis of partisan leaning. For example, in the 2012 presidential election in Aiken County, over 97% of self-identified strong or moderate Republicans and Democrats reported voting for their party’s nominee. Even among those who “leaned” to one party or the other, the average was over 90%. Pure independents with no leanings (only 17% of all voters) split roughly equally—5 to 4 for Republican Romney (data from the 2012 Aiken County Exit Poll performed by USC Aiken Social Science and Business Research Lab). In 2014, 93% of strong or moderate Democrats and Republicans voted for their respective party’s candidates for governor and 92% of the leaners were also loyal to their party when voting (data from the 2014 Aiken County Exit Poll performed by USC Aiken Social Science and Business Research Lab). In short, despite many public complaints about party, party has been and remains the single more powerful predictor in voting choice.

We applied the concept of normal vote to each of the 23 precincts involved in the 2015 Aiken mayoral election. We used the 2012 presidential election vote to estimate the normal Republican vote in each precinct. We felt that because turnout was considerably higher in 2012 than in 2014, basing the normal vote on 2012 would be more representative of the entire precinct.

One possible distortion in the normal vote estimate is that not all voters registered in these precincts were eligible to vote in the mayor's election. That is because some precinct lines do not correspond to legal city limit lines and because some areas within the city are actually legally only in the county. These areas, called "donut holes," are the product of very strict annexation laws in SC that make annexation difficult in areas in which residents do not want to become part of the city that is next to them or even surrounding them. But given that precincts tend to encompass neighborhoods that are demographically similar, assuming that the subset of voters in each precinct who actually live in the city is politically similar to all in the precinct is quite reasonable.

In Table 1, the Republican normal vote are the numbers in the second numerical column (% Rep '12). The precincts are listed in declining Republican normal vote. The majority Republican precincts (the eighteen shaded in red) are from 79% in precinct #69 to 62% in precinct #35. The majority Democratic precincts (the five shaded in blue) are from 41% Republican in precinct #5 to 8% Republican in precinct #46. The rest of the table show numbers and percentages for each candidate, total numbers of votes, and the Registered Voter turnout percentage for each precinct.

**Table 1. Precinct Returns by Expected Republican Normal Vote**

Precinct	# Registered	% Rep '12	# Osbn (%)	# Price (%)	Total Vote	RV Trnot %
Andersn Pond 69	1506	79	559 (87)	86 (13)	648	43
Gem Lakes 77	793	77	249 (76)	79 (24)	329	41
Gem Lakes 60	540	77	144 (82)	31 (18)	176	33
Hollow Creek 53	1309	76	379 (82)	83 (18)	464	35
S Aiken 76	1538	73	397 (81)	93 (19)	492	32
Hitchcock 66	950	71	223 (82)	47 (17)	273	29
College Acres 13	220	71	38 (75)	13 (25)	51	23
Aiken 6	1316	70	368 (73)	135 (27)	504	38
Aiken 1	1213	70	354 (77)	102 (22)	458	38
Millbrook 20	1693	69	430 (76)	133 (24)	565	33
Sandstone 70	1526	67	241 (74)	83 (25)	325	21
Aiken 47	706	67	144 (69)	66 (31)	210	30
Montmorenci 22	636	67	55 (52)	50 (48)	105	17
Levels 72	722	65	138 (77)	42 (23)	181	25
Redds Branch 57	47	63	2 (28)	5 (71)	8	17
Levels 52	1863	62	200 (62)	122 (38)	323	17
Sandstone 79	751	62	115 (75)	39 (25)	154	21
Six Points 35	355	62	61 (68)	29 (32)	90	25
Aiken 5	1195	41	145 (48)	158 (52)	305	26
Aiken 2	906	22	43 (23)	145 (77)	188	21
Aiken 3	1731	17	47 (16)	242 (84)	291	17
Aiken 4	849	11	20 (12)	147 (88)	167	20
Six Points 46	850	8	10 (5)	185 (95)	198	23
Absentee	--	--	534 (49)	547 (51)	1084	--
<b>Totals</b>	23215		4899 (65)	2667 (35)	7596	33

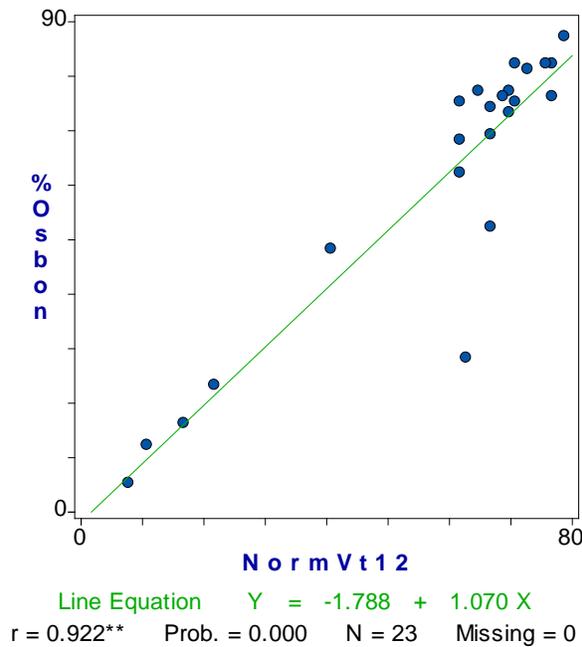
Note: The data in this table are from the 3 November printout of the election results from the Aiken County Election Commission, downloaded on 5 November at:

<http://www.aikencountysc.gov/election/ElPrecinct.htm>.

The normal vote average across precincts and the normal vote for all the precincts combined was just over 60% Republican. What this means is that the expected vote split would be about 60% Republican to 40% Democrat if each campaign turns out supporters at the same rate.

How important was partisanship as estimated by the normal vote in the election? We can see the power of partisanship by plotting the Republican “normal vote” against the percentage that Osbon won in each precinct.

**Graph 1. Normal Republican Vote Almost Perfectly Predicts Osbon Vote**



The scatterplot produced a nearly perfect forty-five degree line in which an additional percentage point in the Republican normal vote produced a little over an additional percentage point in Osbon’s percentages across the precincts (see the coefficient of 1.07 for the independent variable in the regression equation). The precincts fell about as close to the regression line as one ever sees in social science. The normal Republican vote by itself explained eighty-five percent of the variation in Osbon’s precinct percentages (this is computed as  $r^2$ ). The precinct that fell farthest from the regression line was Redd’s Branch #57, a precinct in which only 47 voters fell inside city lines and in which only 8 people voted, so that point can be discounted as an “outlier.” Removing that outlier from the data increases the explanatory power to ninety-four percent, which is extremely high.

### Turnout

With a 60/40 partisan balance of power so much in Republican Osbon’s favor, how could Price have won? The answer is in turnout, which can be critically important in

election outcomes. Short of converting some Republican leaning voters and winning almost all independents—a nearly impossible task—the only way for Democrats to win is have a turnout rate half again as high as the Republican turnout rate.

For example, suppose of 1,000 registered voters live in a city with 60% of them Republican and 40% Democratic. If Republicans turn out 50% of their likely supporters, they would get 50% of 600 supporters, or 300 votes. To produce the same number of votes and make the election winnable, Democrats would have to turn out 75% of their 400 supporters to produce 300 votes. Therefore, exactly who turns out is more important than the overall level of turnout. To outperform Republicans by half again as high a turnout created a huge challenge for Democrats.

Before we look at how turnout may have affected the outcome in this election, a first order of business is understanding how turnout is measured and identify factors that affect turnout.

## **Measuring Turnout**

Turnout is generally measured in three different ways. First, it is often measured as a percentage of voting age population that voted, the VAP measurement. This generally yields the lowest numbers because it includes people in the base for the measurement who are not registered or who cannot legally register and vote. For example, when the percentage is computed for VAP turnout, those who have moved into the city or state in the last 30 days, noncitizens, or those who have had their voting rights taken away because they are imprisoned felons or on probation get counted in the population against which actual voters are compared. (Laws on voting rights of felons vary from state to state. See <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/felon-voting-rights.aspx>.) A problem in tracking turnout over time using this measure is that increasing numbers of non-citizens in recent decades have had the effect of reducing VAP turnout rates. Of course this varies greatly by where non-citizens live.

The second way to measure turnout is based on the voting eligible population (VEP), a smaller number than voting age population. The problem with this measurement is that estimating the size of the population who cannot vote in any area is difficult and must always be estimated. Moreover, because laws on eligibility vary from state to state, cross-state comparisons become less meaningful. This is probably why it is the least reported measure.

The final way that turnout is measured is as the percentage of registered voters who actually voted, the RV turnout measure. This measure is what is typically reported by state and local election commissions. It is only accurate to the extent that states maintain up to date accurate counts for state and local representational districts such as counties and municipalities. Errors usually come from the process by which people who have moved or died have their names removed. Depending on the timeliness of this process, a great deal of error can take place. If voters who have moved or have died

are not removed in a timely fashion, the number of registered voters will be inflated and will make turnout rates appear to be lower than they really are. Different states have vastly different procedures in removing ineligible names from voter registration lists. (See Appendix A for the questions concerning official registration numbers for South Carolina, Aiken County, and the City of Aiken. See Appendix B for SC law on how registration lists are maintained.) Turnout of registered voters generally yields the highest percentages of the three methods because the number of registered voters is almost always smaller than either the VAP or VEP measure. The exception would be when registered voter lists are not updated so as to remove a lot of people who have moved and no longer reside in the precinct (about 12% of all Americans move each year), which is a major problem in South Carolina (see Appendix A). It is conceivable that highly inflated voter registration lists could include more people than estimates of voter eligible population.

We can see impact of measurement on the two most frequently used measures by examining turnout rates in Aiken County and South Carolina in the 2012 and 2014 elections.

**Table 2. Turnout Rates Depend on Measure Used and Type of Election**

<b>Election Year</b>	<b>Aiken Co VAP %</b>	<b>Aiken Co RV %</b>	<b>SC VAP %</b>	<b>SC RV %</b>
<b>2012</b>	56%	69%	62%	69%
<b>2014</b>	36%	45%	41%	46%

Note on data sources for calculations: SC voting data for 2012 and 2014, Tables 4a at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2012/tables.html> and <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2014/tables.htm>; Aiken County RV %'s from SC Election Commission website, "Results and Statistics" for 2012 and 2014, "Results by County" at <http://www.scvotes.org/>; Aiken County voting age population estimated for 2012 and for 2014 at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/45/45003.html>.

Two observations are apparent in Table 1. First, Registered voter turnout (RV%) is considerably higher than Voting Age Population turnout (VAP%) regardless of whether we look at the county or the state. The difference is usually about ten percentage points. Second, both measures of turnout are even higher in presidential election years, such as 2012 than in congressional election years, such as 2014. Regardless of measure used, turnout is usually about twenty points lower in nonpresidential national election years.

### **Factors that Affect Turnout**

A variety of factors affect voter turnout. Many of them are intuitively obvious. Almost all of them affect campaign strategy. Here are some of the more important ones.

**Level of election.** The lower the level of the election, the lower the turnout. So presidential elections have the highest turnout and local elections the lowest. Even at the local level, a mayoral election will generally have higher turnout than council elections.

**Timing of election.** Local and state elections that are held on the same day as national elections will have higher turnout. Turnout is higher in presidential election years than in congressional election years. Local elections held in odd numbered years, such as those in the City of Aiken, will have lower turnout. Special elections, primaries, and runoff elections held in months other than November will have lower turnout.

**Competitiveness of election.** The more competitive the campaign is perceived to be, the higher the turnout. Voters are aware that their votes are more likely to count in a close election and campaigns work harder to get people to vote in elections that are perceived to be close.

**Partisan and nonpartisan elections.** Partisan elections have higher turnout than nonpartisan elections, which are mostly found at the local level of government. Party labels can be seen as playing a similar psychological role to brands or names for sports teams. You have an easier time in deciding what to buy when items have brands. You know whom to pull for when they are part of a team that you like or dislike. Strong party identifiers are more likely to vote just as strong team supporters are more likely to attend games. So Charleston's mayoral election of 2015, which was nonpartisan for the first time, had lower turnout than Aiken's partisan mayoral election—about ten points lower. Aiken is one of only a few municipalities in South Carolina that has partisan elections.

**Weather.** The worse the weather, the lower the turnout. A number of studies and reports suggest that all other things being equal, an inch of rain reduces turnout by a percentage point.

**Methods of voting.** Allowing early voting and/or easy absentee voting with a long time frame in which to vote increases turnout. More and more campaigns try to take advantage of this.

**Campaign organizations.** Those campaigns that successfully identify supporters and get them to the polls can have a very positive effect on turnout. These efforts are called "Get Out the Vote" (GOTV) and are routinely a very important part of campaigns. Getting support from your own natural supporters is much easier than converting opponents.

**Negative advertising.** The more negative advertising by both sides, the lower the turnout as it turns voters off to all the candidates—especially independent voters. Sometimes this tactic is employed by the side that feels it will do better in a low turnout election.

**Effective use of enemies/villains.** While negative advertising can be a negative factor, identifying an enemy or villain and tying the defeat of that enemy or villain to voting can be very effective in motivating natural supporters to vote.

**Voting, emotions and rational choice.** Thinking in terms of costs and expected benefits, voting is an irrational act. Rarely can you expect that your own vote will determine the outcome of an election. In this sense we should be amazed that anyone votes rather than wonder why turnout is low. People are motivated more by emotions and psychological factors than any rational calculation in deciding whether to vote. Some vote because they were socialized to vote. Others vote because it gives them a sense of connection to their nation or state or community. Others vote because they are angry—often wanting to “throw the bums out.” In politics anger usually trumps love as a voting motivator. Those with strong emotions or identities are more likely to vote than those with mild feelings or identities. As has often be said, “the problem that moderates have is that they are moderate,” that is, their moderation extends to a relatively lower motivation to vote.

### **Trends in Turnout in Local Elections and the 2015 Aiken Mayoral Election**

Voting turnout in local elections has been in a long decline. In the 1960s and 70s Registered Voter (RV) turnout in big city mayoral elections was typically at about two-thirds. The average Voting Age Population (VAP) turnout in municipal elections was down to about 27% in 2001, and then fell to 21% 2011. We can translate these numbers to RV turnout by adding about ten percentage points, so the 2011 average turnout would be about 31% of registered voters.

While the average has been falling, we still see a lot of variation in turnout. In 2015 a special election for mayor in San Diego attracted an RV turnout of 44%, while a similar mayoral election in Ft. Worth only had an 11% RV turnout. (See <http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/gov-voter-turnout-municipal-elections.html>). However, knowing what we do about how interstate differences in purging registration lists, we must take these comparisons with a large grain of salt.

What does all this tell us about what adjectives to apply to the turnout in the 2015 Aiken mayoral election? The RV turnout was 33%. Historically this is very much lower than the reported RV turnout of 49% in the last mayoral election (see Table 3, RV Turnout % column). But that was back in 1991, and it is a sample of one with no other mayoral elections in Aiken with which to compare it. Moreover, SC law on how voter registration lists are purged of voters who have moved was changed in 1996, moving to a process that keeps people on much longer than was the case in 1991. Compared to the Charleston mayoral election held on the same day which had an RV turnout of 25%, 33% is pretty good. But the Charleston election was nonpartisan, a factor that is associated with lower turnout. Compared to the 2011 municipal election VAP turnout average across the nation of 21% or about 31% when translated into RV turnout, the 2015 Aiken RV turnout seems in the average to slightly over average range.

Given changes in practices regarding how voters are removed from registration lists (see Appendix A), we might make a more accurate comparison of the 2015 City of Aiken mayoral election with the 1991 election by translating turnout into VAP measures of turnout using census estimates of voting age population. By this measure, turnout in

the two elections was virtually identical at about 31% of the voting age population (see Table 3, VAL Turnout % column).

**Table 3. VAP and RV Turnout in 1991 and 2015 Aiken Mayoral Elections**

<b>Election Year</b>	<b># of Voters</b>	<b>Adult Population</b>	<b>VAP Turnout %</b>	<b>RV Turnout %</b>
<b>1991</b>	4,654	14,745 <sup>1</sup>	31.6%	49.0% <sup>3</sup>
<b>2015</b>	7,583	24,327 <sup>2</sup>	31.2%	32.7% <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calculated by subtracting out 25.8% under the age of 18, (estimated from the number under 18 nationwide, 64.2 million, at <http://www.childstats.gov/AMERICASCHILDREN/tables/pop1.asp> against total national population in 1990, 248.7 million, at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1990\\_United\\_States\\_Census](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1990_United_States_Census)) from the 19,872 population according to the US Census figure found at; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiken,\\_South\\_Carolina](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiken,_South_Carolina).

<sup>2</sup> Calculated by subtracting out the 19.6% under the age of 18 (US Census estimate) as shown in table at: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45,45003,4500550>

<sup>3</sup> Computed from figures on the Aiken County Registration and Elections Commission: "Aiken Municipal Election," November 5, 1991

<sup>4</sup> From "Summary Report" of Aiken County Election Commission run on November 3, 2015 at <http://www.aikencountysc.gov/election/EleSummary.htm>

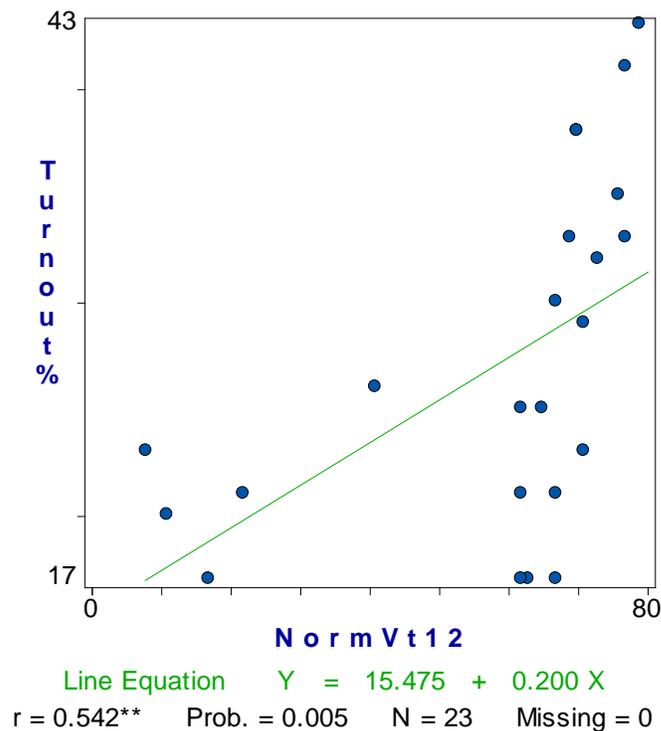
As noted earlier, exactly who turned out is more important than whether turnout was high or low. Whichever campaign is able to mobilize more of their supporters generally wins if both sides start out reasonably evenly split. In partisan elections this translates into party identifiers plus independents who lean their way. This task is always a bit harder for Democrats because Democrats are normally less likely to vote than Republicans. But in areas where Republicans have a numerical advantage, such as Aiken, the task for Democrats becomes much more difficult.

How can we tell which party did the better job in turnout? Ideally, we could tell from an exit poll of a representative sample of voters. But we have no exit poll. However, we can get an idea of how well each party did by seeing how well they did in precincts that were majority Republican and majority Democratic. If each party does equally well in mobilizing their voters, then turnout rates should be about uniform across all precincts. But if Democrats did better, then the higher the proportion of Democrats in a precinct, the higher the turnout should be in that precinct. The same would be true for Republicans and Republican majority precincts. If they do better, the greater the Republican normal vote advantage, the higher the turnout.

Turnout in the 2015 mayoral election was clearly related to the partisan balance in the precincts. One can see this by looking down the last column in the Table 1, which shows the RV turnout in each precinct. (We must assume that any errors in RV counts are relatively uniform across precincts to make this comparison.) Going down the column from the most Republican to the least Republican and most Democratic precincts, one can see a general decline in the turnout.

We empirically confirmed this visual trend by plotting the normal Republican vote against the turnout in each precinct. As Graph 2 shows, as the expected Republican percentage increase, the turnouts increase. The relationship is statistically significant and the simple regression predicts that every additional percentage point in the expected normal Republican vote added 0.2 percentage points in turnout. Put another way, an additional five points in the expected normal Republican vote added one point in voter turnout.

**Graph 2. Turnout Increased as the Republican Normal Vote Increased**



Another way to look at this relationship is to compare the average turnout in Republican majority precincts with average turnout in Democratic majority precincts. Just using precinct averages, the average RV turnout in the eighteen Republican precincts was 29% and the average turnout in the Democratic precincts was 21%.

We would note that these RV percentages are lower than the overall turnout because absentee votes were not included. Because Price won a narrow majority in the absentee votes, we went back and added these votes into each precinct total (though the report on absentee voting did not include how the absentee votes in each precinct split) to get total RV turnout in each precinct including the absentee votes. Adding in these votes did not change the conclusions. The normal vote was still significantly related to turnout. Every additional percentage point in the expected Republican vote

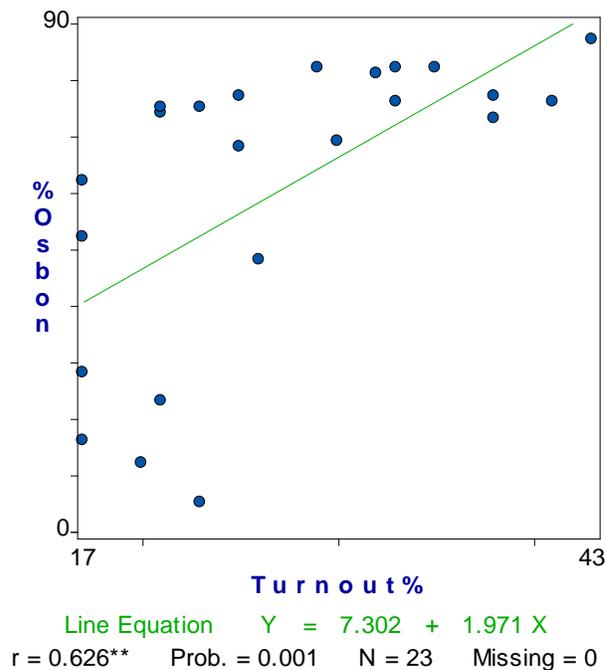
added just under 0.2 percentage points in turnout. The average turnout in Republican precincts was still higher than in Democratic precincts, 34% and 26% respectively.

Comparing precinct RV turnout averages does not account for precinct size. So we made an additional comparison by adding up the total number of all registered voters and all actual voters in the Republican and then in the Democratic precincts. The difference became slightly larger. The turnout in the eighteen Republican precincts combined was 30% and in five Democratic precincts combined was 20%. This strongly suggests that Osbon was far more successful in turning out supporters in his areas of strength than Price in her areas of strength.

For Price to have had any chance to be competitive, she needed precisely the opposite relationship from what we found. As we showed earlier, facing an election with a normal vote of about 60/40 in the Republican direction, she needed turnout that was half again higher than that of her opponent. Instead, Osbon was able to mobilize the vote in his areas to produce turnout that was about half again as high as that of Price. This produced a landslide for Republican Rick Osbon.

We can estimate how much this higher turnout helped Osbon by examining a scatterplot between turnout and Osbon percentages across the twenty-three precincts. Turnout made a fairly large and statistically significant difference. Every additional percentage point in turnout produced an average of nearly two more percentage points for Osbon.

**Graph 3. Additional Turnout Boosted Osbon Vote**



## **Explaining the turnout difference**

Why was Osbon able to do so well? From all reports both campaigns worked hard to mobilize supporters. Weather may have hurt overall turnout a point or so, and that may have had a greater negative impact on Democrats, given their lower likelihood of voting.

Democrats attempted to compensate by making a relatively greater effort in stimulating absentee votes, which they did narrowly win. On election morning the author of this report happened to see Mr. Osbon and asked him about his efforts to encourage his supporters to vote absentee. He said that they did not make much of an effort on that and that he expected to lose the absentee votes. That he nearly won the absentee vote suggests that his supporters were more self-motivated to vote early than those of his opponent.

Issues play a role in turnout as they give people reasons beyond candidate personality and personal connections to vote. While a detailed discussion of issues is beyond the scope of this report, one issue, the hospitality tax, almost certainly played a role in stimulating turnout to the advantage of the Republican side.

As noted earlier, providing a villain or enemy is important in motivating supporters to turn out and vote. The civility of the campaign and obvious respect that each candidate showed for each other in the debates suggests that neither attempted to portray their opponent as an enemy/villain. Rather, the hospitality tax may have served in that role to help Mr. Osbon.

Mr. Osbon had two groups of Republicans who he needed to turn out and vote for him. He needed both the more moderate Republicans and the much more conservative "Tea Party" Republicans.

In Aiken County self-identified Tea Party Republicans comprise about half of all self-identified Republican voters (2012 Aiken County Exit Poll). In lower turnout elections such as a mayoral election, more passionate partisans such as Tea Party supporters are likely to be an even larger percentage of Republican voters.

Tea Party Republicans tend to be much more anti-tax. Tea Party Republican voters in 2012 were almost twice as likely to support extending income tax cuts for everyone as non-Tea Party Republicans (64% to 34%). Among 2014 voters, 61% of Tea Party Republicans opposed the proposed sales tax increase for school facilities while 68% of the non-Tea Party Republicans supported the sales tax increase. As a subset of Aiken County, the same difference is likely to be true for Republican voters in the City of Aiken.

This created something of a problem for Mr. Osbon. He had supported the sales tax for school facilities. He was on record as favoring the 1% Local Option Capital Project sales tax. These taxes had been supported by moderate Republicans. The

hospitality tax also had support from a significant portion of moderate Republicans, especially those looking for money for economic development such as the Chamber of Commerce.

Would supporting the hospitality tax, like Council member Price had done in voting for and defending the tax as a "good tax," have hurt Osbon with Tea Party Republicans? We cannot say for sure because we do not have exit polling data. But given their stance on previous tax measures, we can be fairly confident that many Tea Party Republicans would have been less motivated to vote if they saw no difference between the two candidates on this issue.

Osbon chose to oppose the hospitality tax and highlighted it as a major difference with his opponent. He gave consistent principled reasons for opposing the tax that distinguished this tax from both the Capital Project and sales tax to help schools. For example, he argued that the hospitality tax was passed without a popular referendum. He complained that the proceeds were not clearly dedicated to specific projects. He feared that anger aimed at the new tax might endanger renewal of the Capital Projects tax by voters.

Opposing the hospitality tax that the City Council passed a few months before the election provided a highly salient "enemy/villain" for the anti-tax Tea Party wing of the Republican Party for Mr. Osbon. Moreover, opposition to the tax did not have a significant downside with the rest of his Republican base. Because the mayor cannot unilaterally repeal the tax, opposition to the tax was not a deal buster for moderate Republicans who supported the tax. Moreover, as a small businessperson, Osbon had strong support from the small business community as one of their own regardless of how they felt about the hospitality tax.

This issue almost certainly helped stimulate higher turnout among Republican voters. Without enthusiastic support from Republicans who support the Tea Party, the levels of turnout we saw in Republican majority districts would have been almost impossible.

## **Conclusion**

This report attempted to explain the outcome of the 2015 City of Aiken mayoral election in terms of the normal partisan vote and turnout. The normal partisan vote by itself explained the outcome of the election with a high degree of certainty. Relative turnout by supporters of the two parties added to Osbon's normal vote advantage. The hospitality tax issue difference almost certainly played a significant role in motivating Republicans to turn out at higher rates than Democrats.

Separating out the influence of these factors is difficult because they are highly correlated with each other. Being Republican helped Osbon in two ways. First he had a natural and almost insurmountable advantage in normal voting patterns. But second, his

normal supporters are more likely to vote and his campaign did a better job in mobilizing them and using issue differences, specifically the hospitality tax, to motivate conservative Tea Party Republicans to vote. But even if Osbon had only matched Democratic turnout rates, he would have won rather easily.

We might reasonably conclude that in this particular election, the normal vote was by far the most important factor. Only if Price had been able to dramatically boost turnout among her normal supporters relative to Osbon's normal supporters would turnout have made a big difference in the final outcome. She did not, and Osbon exercised his normal 60/40 advantage with a five point boost due to turnout.

## Appendix A. The Mystery of Measuring the Turnout Rate of Registered Voters Among Adults in the City of Aiken

(WORKING DRAFT – Promised answers to questions to the State Election Commission and to the Aiken County Election Commission about details of how voter registration lists are reported and some details about how the state removes ineligible voters have not yet been received. When they are received, this appendix will be updated.)

Bob Botsch  
December 10, 2015

As I was trying to look at turnout data for the 2015 City of Aiken mayoral, I came across a rate that really did not make sense, a 95% rate of registration for adults in the city (see Table 1A). I remembered what my professors taught me a long time ago and what I attempted to teach my students at USC Aiken for nearly four decades. Do not accept numbers that do not make sense. Check the derivation as many times as necessary and ask a lot of questions. This appendix is about how the state arrives at the number of people on voter registration lists.

The national registration rate for adults using 2014 Census data was 59% (see Table 1A). South Carolina's 2014 rate based on census figures and SC Election Commission data was 77%. That is quite high compared to national data. Then I computed Aiken County's 2014 rate based on census figures and SC Election Commission data. The rate was a little higher at 80%, a similar rate to that of the state and not unreasonable given that Aiken is one of the more affluent counties with higher rates of education. But when I looked at the City of Aiken for the 2015 mayoral election, again using census data (for 2014, the most recent data available on population estimates), the registration rate was a whopping 95%, a rate that seems not at all reasonable. It was time to check my computations and ask a lot of questions.

**Table 1A. Registration Rates of Adults**

Area	Population	Adult Pop	# Reg Voters	% Registered
<b>US (2014)</b>	318,857,056 <sup>1</sup>	239,874,000 <sup>2</sup>	142,166,000 <sup>2</sup>	59% <sup>2</sup>
<b>SC (2014)</b>	4,832,482 <sup>3</sup>	3,750,006 <sup>4</sup>	2,881,052 <sup>5</sup>	?77%?
<b>Aik Co (2104)</b>	164,753 <sup>6</sup>	128,343 <sup>7</sup>	102,481 <sup>8</sup>	?80%?
<b>Aik City (2015)</b>	30,258 <sup>9</sup>	24,327 <sup>10</sup>	23,215 <sup>11</sup>	???95%???

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> At: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00>

<sup>2</sup> From Table 4a at:

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2014/tables.htm>

<sup>3</sup> At: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45>

<sup>4</sup> Calculated by subtracting out the 22.4% under 18 years of age as shown in table at:

<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45>

<sup>5</sup> From SC Election Commission Report on 2104 Election at: <http://www.enr-scvotes.org/SC/53424/149816/en/summary.html>

<sup>6</sup> At: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45,45003>

<sup>7</sup> Calculated by subtracting out the 22.1% under the age of 18 as shown in table at: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45,45003>

<sup>8</sup> From SC Election Commission Report County Results on 2014 Election at: <http://www.enr-scvotes.org/SC/Aiken/53426/149676/en/summary.html>

<sup>9</sup> At: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45,45003,4500550>

<sup>10</sup> Calculated by subtracting out the 19.6% under the age of 18 as shown in table at: <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/00,45,45003,4500550>

<sup>11</sup> From Summary Report of Aiken County Election Commission run on 11/3/15

After checking my computations and reports from the Census Bureau several times, I considered several possible explanations for these seemingly high rates of registration.

Perhaps the population estimates for the municipality of Aiken from census somehow left out some neighborhoods, so the actual adult population was higher, which would produce a lower registration rate. If the real rate was the same as Aiken County, 80%, then the adult population should have been would have to have been 29,019, not 24,327. That would make the total 2015 population about 36,093, quite a bit higher than the official census estimate for 2014. Given the care that the census puts into its estimates and the importance of population figure for the municipal government, this is highly unlikely.

A second possibility rests on the possibility that the state does not regularly purge the registration roles for people who have moved. Perhaps the number of people who moved or died but were still on the registration lists had increased since 2014, so the number registered was inflated more than was the 2014 number for Aiken County as a whole. We can do a mental mathematical experiment to see how well this possibility fits the reported data.

If the city's registration rate in 2014 was the same as Aiken County, 80%, then the number of registered voters would have been 19,461. On November 3, 2015 the County Election Commission reported 23,215 registered voters. This is 3,754 more people than our 2014 estimate based on the county registration rate. Did this number of people move or die between the 2014 and 2015 yet remain on the books?

Given practices employed by the State Election Commission in complying with state election law (See Appendix B), this is quite possible. According to Chris Whitmire, Director of Public Information and Training at the SC State Election Commission, the state periodically identifies voters who have not voted for two general elections and sends them a confirmation card to determine if they are still living at that address. If the card is returned as undeliverable, they are classified as "inactive" but their names are kept on registration lists for two years. This is called I-M status. If the mail is delivered but the voter fails to send back the card, the voter is given a different inactive status, I-F. In this case the voter is normally not included in registration statistics, but is kept on the

roles sent to precincts on election day for four years. Both the I-F and I-M inactive voters might be reported in statistics released on election day (December 3, 2015 email from Chris Whitmire). An inquiry to Ms. Cynthia Holland, Director of the Aiken County Election Commission, as to whether these inactive voters were counted in the official number of registered voters has not yet been answered at this writing.

An additional source of error in registration numbers is the schedule at which this process takes place. These confirmation cards are sent out by the State Election Commission on odd years every four years, but sometimes because of expenses an odd year is missed (December 3, 2015 email from Chris Whitmire). As of this writing, the question of the last time this process was done has not been answered.

The bottom line is that a voter who moves and does not contact the local registration office to move the registration address may be listed as an active voter for as much as four or even six years before anything is done to identify the voter as inactive. And even after being tagged as inactive, the voter will continue to be on the registration lists that go to polling places for two to four more years depending on whether the voter is tagged as I-M or I-F (December 3, 2015 email from Chris Whitmire).

So let us make some estimates of how many people might have disappeared but were still on the books between 2014 and 2015. Given that the national mover rate between 2013 and 2014 was 11.5% (U.S. Census Report at: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-47.html?cssp=SERP> ), we should not be surprised that the number of registered voters is highly inflated in South Carolina. And one extra year of inflation for the City of Aiken could account for most of the 3,754 difference with the 2014 city estimate we made based on the 2014 county registration rate. If 11.5% of the voters counted in 2015 had moved since 2014, then that would account for  $0.115 \times 23,215 = 2,669$  voters. Deaths of people who had not yet been removed might account for some more. (As of this writing, Mr. Whitmire has not yet responded to an inquiry as to how often they get data on deaths from SC DHEC on deaths. When they do get these data, these people are immediately removed from all lists and data.) The national death rate in 2013 was 0.00821 (Center of Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm> ). Using that rate we would have expected about  $.00821 \times 23,216 = 191$  of the registered voters to have passed away between 2014 and 2015. Adding those two numbers together, the city would have lost about 2,860. This accounts for most of the 3,754 that might have been lost between 2014 and 2015.

An additional factor is whether the number of registered voters reported on election day included only active voters or included both kinds of inactive voters. (An inquiry about this to Ms. Cynthia Holland has not been answered as of this writing.) Within a period of six weeks three rather different numbers of registered voters were reported for the city.

Table 2A shows these changes broken down by precinct. For the city as a whole, the reported numbers increased by a little over 7% between October 8 and what was reported on November 3. Then the numbers on November 15 in a report sent to me by Mr. Chris Whitmire showed a decrease of about 6% from the November 15 county report. Mr. Whitmire's guess is that the election day county report included inactive voters as compared to the November 15 report, which did not include inactive voters (December 3, 2015 email from Chris Whitmire).

**Table 2A. Changes in City of Aiken Registration Numbers: Oct 8, Nov 3, and Nov 15, 2015**

Precinct	# Registered Oct 8	# Registered Nov 3	# Registered Nov 15	Net Change (% Change)
Andersn Pond 69	1443	1506 (+63)	1456 (-50)	+13 (0.9%)
Gem Lakes 77	738	793 (+55)	782 (-11)	+44 (5.6%)
Gem Lakes 60	505	540 (+35)	501 (-39)	-4 (-0.8%)
Hollow Creek 53	1252	1309 (+57)	1263 (-46)	+11 (+0.9%)
S Aiken 76	1472	1538 (+66)	1483 (-55)	+11 (+0.7%)
Hitchcock 66	819	950 (+131)	824 (-126)	+5 (+0.6%)
College Acres 13	204	220 (+16)	211 (-9)	+7 (+3.4%)
Aiken 6	1245	1316 (+71)	1258 (-58)	+13 (1.0%)
Aiken 1	1160	1213 (+53)	1170 (-43)	+10 (0.9%)
Millbrook 20	1586	1693 (+107)	1601 (-92)	+15 (+0.9%)
Sandstone 70	1401	1526 (+125)	1456 (-70)	+55 (+3.9%)
Aiken 47	645	706 (+61)	643 (-63)	-2 (-0.3%)
Montmorenci 22	616	636 (+20)	627 (-9)	+11 (+1.8%)
Levels 72	658	722 (+64)	673 (-49)	+15 (+2.3%)
Redds Branch 57	46	47 (+1)	45 (-2)	-1 (-2.2%)
Levels 52	1660	1863 (+203)	1685 (-178)	+25 (+1.5%)
Sandstone 79	671	751 (+80)	674 (-77)	+3 (+0.4%)
Six Points 35	311	355 (+44)	314 (-41)	+3 (+1.0%)
Aiken 5	1101	1195 (+94)	1112 (-83)	+11 (+1.0%)
Aiken 2	861	906 (+45)	864 (-42)	+3 (+0.3%)
Aiken 3	1636	1731 (+95)	1648 (-83)	+12 (+0.7%)
Aiken 4	780	849 (+69)	798 (-51)	+18 (2.3%)
Six Points 46	821	850 (+29)	821 (-29)	0 (0%)
Absentee	--	--	--	
<b>Totals</b>	21631	23215 (+1584) (+7.3%)	21850 (-1365) (-5.9%)	+219 (+1.0%)

If this is true, then the difference we were trying to account for in our mental math exercise is different. The estimated number of registered voters for Aiken in 2014 was 19,461. Comparing this to 21,850 (the number in the November 15 report that did not include inactive voters) yields a difference of 2,389. This is less than the 2,669 we estimated had moved between 201 and 2015. It should be less because certainly some of those who moved to another local address did contact the county Election Commission and change their address.

Our best guess is that the mystery of the high adult registration rate in the City of Aiken is solved by accounting for people moving who have not been identified as inactive but are still on the registration books. And the high rates for the county and

state relative to the national rate of 59% (see Table 1A) are accounted for by the process by which the state updates the registration lists.

I am reminded of the Chicago rock hit, “Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is” rock song. Does anyone really know what the registration rate of adults really is? Comparisons across states are greatly affected by different practices in purging the roles for people who have moved or passed away. And rates are very time sensitive because even one year in which those who have moved or died are not removed from the registration lists can make a great deal of difference. Once we account for these factors, what is unreasonable becomes almost reasonable.

One final note. This appendix should not be taken as criticism of either the state or county election commissions. Both are implementing the 1996 revisions in South Carolina law designed to meet national standards required in the early 1990s, standards aimed at maximizing the number of people who can vote, not aimed at maintaining the most up to date registration records. Election commissions almost certainly would need more resources to do more frequent updates. One way to maximize the number of people who can vote is to allow someone who votes infrequently to be kept on the books for a long time. This makes life a little more difficult for those of us studying things like turnout rates and candidates using registration lists to send out mailings to voters.

## **Appendix B. SC Code on Maintaining Accurate Registration Lists**

Available at: <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t07c005.php>

### **Title 7 - Elections**

#### **CHAPTER 5**

#### **Qualifications and Registration of Electors**

#### **ARTICLE 4**

**SECTION 7-5-330.** Completion, receipt, and disposition of voter registration application; discretionary removal of elector.

(A) In the case of registration with a motor vehicle application under Section 7-5-320, the valid voter registration form of the applicant must be completed at the Department of Motor Vehicles no later than thirty days before the date of the election.

(B) In the case of registration by mail under Section 7-5-155, the valid voter registration form of the applicant must be postmarked no later than thirty days before the date of the election.

(C) In the case of registration at a voter registration agency, the valid voter registration form of the applicant must be completed at the voter registration agency no later than thirty days before the date of the election.

(D) In any other case, the valid voter registration form of the applicant must be received by the county board of voter registration and elections no later than thirty days before the date of the election.

(E)(1) The county board of voter registration and elections shall:

(a) send notice to each applicant of the disposition of the application; and

(b) ensure that the identity of the voter registration agency through which a particular voter is registered is not disclosed to the public.

(2) If the notice sent pursuant to the provisions of subitem (a) of this item is returned to the county board of voter registration and elections as undeliverable, the elector to whom it was sent must be reported by the board to the State Election Commission. The State Election Commission must place the elector in an inactive status on the master file and may remove this elector upon compliance with the provisions of Section 7-5-330(F).

(F)(1) The State Election Commission may not remove the name of a qualified elector from the official list of eligible voters on the ground that the qualified elector has changed residence unless the qualified elector:

(a) confirms in writing that the qualified elector has changed residence to a place outside the county in which the qualified elector is registered; or

(b)(i) has failed to respond to a notice described in item (2); and

(ii) has not voted or appeared to vote and, if necessary, correct the county board of voter registration and elections record of the qualified elector's address, in an election during the period beginning on the date of the notice and ending on the day after the date of the second general election that occurs after the date of the notice.

(2) "Notice", as used in this item, means a postage prepaid and preaddressed return card, sent by forwardable mail, on which the qualified elector may state his current address, together with a statement to the following effect:

(a) if the qualified elector did not change his residence, or changed residence but remained in the same county, the qualified elector shall return the card no later than thirty days before the date of the election. If the card is not returned, affirmation or confirmation of the qualified elector's address may be required before the qualified elector is permitted to vote during the period beginning on the date of the notice and ending on the day after the date of the second general election that occurs after the date of the notice, and if the qualified elector does not vote in an election during that period, the qualified elector's name must be removed from the list of eligible voters;

(b) if the qualified elector has changed residence to a place outside the county in which the qualified elector is registered, information as to how the qualified elector can re-register to vote.

(3) The county board of voter registration and elections shall correct an official list of eligible voters in accordance with change of residence information obtained pursuant to the provisions of this subsection.

(4) The program required pursuant to the provisions of subsection (F) of this section must be completed no later than ninety days before the date of a statewide primary or general election.

HISTORY: 1996 Act No. 466, Section 1, eff August 21, 1996.

SECTION 7-5-340. Duties of State Election Commission respecting removal of elector from official list.

The State Election Commission shall:

(1) ensure that the name of a qualified elector may not be removed from the official list of eligible voters except:

(a) at the request of the qualified elector;

(b) if the elector is adjudicated mentally incompetent by a court of competent jurisdiction; or

(c) as provided under item (2);

(2) conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove the names of ineligible voters from the official lists of eligible voters by reason of:

(a) the death of the qualified elector; or

(b) a change in the residence of the qualified elector;

(3) inform applicants under Sections 7-5-155, 7-5-310, and 7-5-320 of:

(a) voter eligibility requirements; and

(b) penalties provided by law for submission of a false voter registration application;

(4) complete, no later than ninety days before the date of a statewide primary or general election, a program to systematically remove the names of ineligible voters from the official lists of eligible voters in compliance with the provisions of Section 7-5-330(F); this subitem may not be construed to preclude:

(a) the removal of names from official lists of voters on a basis described in items (1) and (2); or

(b) correction of registration records pursuant to this article.

HISTORY: 1996 Act No. 466, Section 1, eff August 21, 1996.