

ON THE GROUND TURNOUT IN MI FEELS LIKE IT DID IN 2008

I just finished a 7 hour voter protection shift in Grand Rapids MI. The precinct compares reasonably well with the Detroit precinct I worked in in 2008: both are low turnout predominantly African American precincts. The 2008 precinct also has a significant number of Latinos, many primarily Spanish speakers. This one is almost entirely African American. This one is probably 3 times larger by number.

Turnout this year was running just behind or equal to turnout in my own precinct, which is predominantly white working class though it includes the affluent downtown condo dwellers. My own precinct also has more voting booths and far more space to work with, to keep people out of the cold and moving as quickly as possible.

If the precinct manages to keep the flow going, can manage the post-work rush, and doesn't lose people waiting in the cold (we were squeezing about 90 people in line inside, but they won't be able to maintain that tonight), the precinct will have 20-40% more turnout than the precinct head predicted, in one of the larger precincts in the city. Immediately adjacent precincts—at which there were terrible lines in 2008—voted 96% for Obama in 2008.

We lost a few people to waiting in line today (I'd say there is a higher rate of employment than the precinct I worked in Detroit in 2008), some of whom missed their voting window before they started a 12-hour work shift. Some people will arrive at work about 20 minutes late because they waited in long lines. We struggled to juggle the number of disabled people in the precinct, though we ultimately got a system worked out so they could wait while seated.

I'm most worried about supplies. The precinct had two or three fewer voting booths than my

whiter precinct, we ran out of pens once already, and things like ink was running low.

The other biggest problem we had—and it was a problem—is the disinformation that has been spread about straight ticket. A number of people had heard incorrect rumors that a straight ticket vote doesn't register a vote for President. Some people asked and got their questions corrected before voting. Others, however, spent the time to fill in every bubble on the (presumably Democratic side) "just to be sure," they said. And there were a fair number of spoiled (which would happen if someone marked both Obama and straight ticket Democratic).

The lines in this neighborhood won't get as terrible as they were in 2008, I hope. But disinformation like the straight ticket rumor works to slow down voting too.

All that said, there was a great deal of good will about voting in general (with more than a few voters talking about the civil rights struggle). And a pretty significant number of first time and/or under 21 voters.