AT YOUR CONVENIENCE:
NEW PERSPECTIVES ON EARLY VOTING IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Early voting has greatly expanded in the U.S. over the past two decades. Nearly two-thirds of states now allow any registered voter to cast a ballot in the days and weeks before Election Day. In 2008, nearly one-third of voters — about forty-million citizens — did so across the U.S. This project relies on multiple methodologies to probe the implications of this notable (and rapid) change in American elections.

First, this dissertation documents the birth and development of early voting laws, utilizing state legislative archives, local media accounts, and conversations with county elections officials to identify how and why these policies emerged over the course of two decades. New data, theories, and approaches are then utilized to assess whether early voting increases voter turnout, one of its central goals. Reformers have argued that early voting lowers participation costs, which in turn should lead to more citizens choosing to cast ballots. While others have explored this question, the existing literature fails to account for important differences in early voting implementation across states and counties. Ultimately, the simple adoption of early voting is not found to produce higher turnout, though offering ample early voting
sites (at the county-level) is associated with positive and significant effects on participation.

This project delves deeper than the current literature to assess which segments of the population are taking advantage of early voting. Using Census Population Survey (CPS) data, it explores if — and under what circumstances — early voting may attract groups with historically low turnout rates. When counties offer early voting with abundant sites, participation among historically low-turnout demographics indeed increases. This offers important evidence that early voting is making participation easier for those who often abstain given the burdens of voting on Election Day.

Finally, it is well-documented that public policy changes produce unintended consequences. Several externalities of early voting laws, largely ignored by researchers, are explored. These include increased racial disparities regarding voting access, greater levels of roll-off in down-ballot races, and heightened information asymmetry among voters in a given election.
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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION

On November 4, 2008, the world watched in anticipation as Senators Barack Obama and John McCain vied to succeed George W. Bush as the forty-fourth president of the United States. Voters waited in long lines at fire halls, school gymnasiums, and civic centers to cast their respective ballots. It was Election Day, the day when the presidency and hundreds of other federal, state, and local officeholders around the nation would be democratically elected. It had been this way since at least 1845, when Congress certified the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November as the national day of selection for federal offices.¹

In reality, however, November 4th was more a culmination of a long decision process than a decisive day. Nearly one-third of the electorate awoke on this Tuesday morning having already recorded their preference for president and a series of other offices. By taking advantage of early voting in their respective states, they had nothing to do but wait for election results to be announced later in the evening. In fact, some had voted as early as September, before any of the four presidential or vice-presidential debates had been held. The final blitz of campaign advertisements and developments, as well as a severe economic downturn, would not inform their votes.

The election of 2008 was not the first to feature early voting, but it was arguably the time when many Americans recognized the national scope of the reform. The

¹ While federal law applies only to presidential and congressional elections, state and local elections have typically (though not always) been held on the same day for logistical and cost-control reasons.
Obama Campaign held early vote rallies in Florida, Ohio, and other battleground states (Lakshmanan 2008). Literature from state and county officials, as well as political candidates, filled millions of mailboxes with early voting dates and locations. News accounts focused on the huge number of citizens recording their votes at supermarkets and public libraries throughout October. Suddenly, Election Day was not what we had grown up believing it to be.

**EARLY VOTING TODAY**

Early voting has been defined in numerous ways, though the generally accepted criteria in the academic literature are threefold. First, voting must be permitted before Election Day. Second, the option must be available to all registered citizens in the relevant jurisdiction.\(^2\) Third, voters must be able to complete and submit their ballots at a physical location. Many able citizens prefer to vote in person, whether to realize feelings of civic participation or confirm that one's ballot is properly received by officials.

As of 2012, thirty-two states and the District of Columbia allow any registered citizen to vote before Election Day at a physical location somewhere in their county.\(^3\) One state, New Jersey, allows for no-excuse absentee voting by mail, but provides no physical location whereby voters can fill out and submit ballots. Two

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\(^2\) Conversely, absentee voting that requires an excuse (i.e. illness, disability, military service) has been referred to as “traditional absentee voting” (Gronke and McDonald 2008). While some traditional absentee states accept a wide range of excuses, the bureaucratic hurdle itself appears to dramatically reduce early participation. States that require an excuse consistently report lower rates of early/absentee voting than those where the option is available to all.

\(^3\) North Dakota does not have a system of voter registration. All adult citizens with a valid form of identification may vote at a polling location before or on Election Day.
states, Oregon and Washington, conduct their entire elections through the mail, distinguishing them from my definition of early voting states. Fifteen states continue to require an excuse in order for one to receive an absentee ballot and offer no early voting sites.

Figure 1: Early Voting in the U.S.

The explosion in early voting access has meant huge growths in the number of Americans participating before Election Day. According to the 1992 Current Population Survey (CPS), only 7% of voters participated before Election Day (U.S.
Census 1992). In those days, the vast majority of states still allowed pre-Election Day voting (in the form of an absentee ballot) only if a registered voter demonstrated that participating on Election Day was burdensome. Most who qualified for this exception were elderly, disabled, or deployed in the military. In the early 1990s, however, early voting entered a “new phase” (Gronke and McDonald 2008). New laws began to appear throughout the United States, predominately in the western part of the country. From 1992 to 2004, the percentage of early votes among all ballots cast increased by an average of 4.25 percentage points per presidential election, reaching 20% by 2004 (Gronke and McDonald 2008). In 2008, the figure soared to over 30% of the electorate (40.6 million voters), including a strong majority of voters in several states (ex. Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico) (McDonald 2010).

**GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

Voting lives at the core of democratic governance. Naturally, it has long commanded the attention of political scientists. Riker (1982, p. 8) summarized the views of countless others by calling voting “at the heart of both the method and the ideal of democracy.” Hanmer (2009, p. 10) offers a more mechanical assessment, commenting that “Voting, at a minimum… allows citizens the opportunity to hire and fire their representatives.” Beyond the power associated with a vote, the practice is also considered an important generator of social capital; it is one of increasingly few acts in which most members of a community collectively engage (Brehm and
Rahn 1997; Putnam 1995; 1997; 2000; Thompson 2004; Keele 2007). Further, it has been suggested that voting serves as a bridge to other forms of political involvement, leading citizens to become more informed and engaged in current events (Hanmer 2009).

The emergence of early voting since the late 1980s represents a significant change in the American electoral process. One reporter recently called it “the most radical change to American voting culture since the abolition of poll taxes” (Issenberg 2012). Indeed, early voting means new options for voters, a new set of procedures and responsibilities for election clerks, and new opportunities (and perhaps burdens) for political candidates and operatives.

I am interested in the implications of early voting’s development across the states. I do not limit my analysis to any single implication; therefore, this project is not defined by one central theory. Rather, I explore early voting from multiple perspectives, offering a series of theories and corresponding analyses along the way. My project proceeds with three central objectives. First, I seek to document the birth and development of early voting laws, identifying how and why they came to pass in nearly two-thirds of U.S. states. If we understand the reasons early voting was adopted, then we can better explore how effectively it is meeting its objectives. No such comprehensive analysis, utilizing state legislative archival data, local media accounts, and conversations with county elections officials, has yet been produced.
Second, I apply new data, theories, and methodologies to assess whether early voting increases voter turnout, one of its central goals. Reformers have argued that early voting lowers participation costs, which in turn should lead to more citizens choosing to cast ballots. While others have explored this question, the existing literature fails to account for important differences in early voting implementation across states and counties. Applying new data from the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), I offer a more refined approach. Further, I also delve deeper than the current literature to assess which segments of the population are taking advantage of early voting. Most importantly, I explore if — and when — early voting may attract segments of the population with historically low turnout rates.

Third, it is well-documented that public policy changes produce unintended consequences. It is quite possible that a law can achieve its objectives, while also creating new issues and problems in the process. Assessing the full implications of a measure requires that attention be paid to both its intended and unintended effects. I explore several externalities of early voting laws largely ignored by researchers thus far. These include increased racial disparities regarding voting access, greater levels of roll-off in down-ballot races, the emergence of new campaign considerations and strategies, and heightened information asymmetry among voters in a given election.

A TRADITION OF DECENTRALIZATION

My project is conditioned by the decentralized nature of early voting laws. Indeed, early voting has emerged and developed predominately at the state and local
levels of government. No amendment to the U.S. Constitution permitting citizens to vote before Election Day was approved. No act of Congress certified this right. No landmark Supreme Court case conferred it. Rather, early voting has diffused — and is diffusing — throughout the U.S. by virtue of mostly quiet state and county legislative activity guided by various motivations.

Decentralization has always been a central feature of voting in the U.S. The roots of local autonomy stem from the colonial days, when “virtually every substantive aspect of voting was under local control and varied considerably from one place to the next” (Ewald 2009). While many New England colonies adopted paper ballots and permitted secret voting by the 1680s, voice voting was prevalent throughout the South through the ratification of the Constitution (Morgan 1988). Voter eligibility also lacked uniformity. In South Carolina, a justice of the peace was responsible for certifying citizens as naturalized, a requirement for voting. Meanwhile, Pennsylvania had much more relaxed standards, as German immigrants were permitted to both vote and serve in government without naturalization (Ewald 2009). Religious requirements were present in many colonies, though Rhode Island was founded largely on the basis of religious freedom and had fewer restrictions (Murphy 2008). While most colonies held elections on a single day, New York and Virginia were known to hold three or five-day elections, particularly if bad weather developed (Ewald 2009). Many colonies lacked formal age, sex, or residency restrictions. These decisions were instead left to small towns and county governments, who authorized
a wide variety of standards. Some towns allowed widows with property to vote, while others even allowed Native Americans and freed blacks to participate in elections (Crews 2007).

The Constitution did little to break the federalist nature of elections. States were permitted to choose their presidential electors in any fashion they wished (a right they still technically enjoy). In the presidential election of 1789, only six of the thirteen U.S. states allowed any sort of popular vote to choose its electors to the new Electoral College ("The Papers of George Washington," 2011). In fact, it was not until 1832 that nearly all states allowed citizens to choose the electors through a "popular vote." South Carolina was the final holdout, granting this right in 1860 ("The Founders’ Constitution," 1987). States were also permitted to limit eligibility in House races to those possessing "the qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature." Therefore, if a state chose to pick its own legislature undemocratically, it could follow the same guidelines in selecting U.S. House members. Many states continued to limit suffrage to property owners; while Vermont was the first state to end this restriction in 1791, North Carolina kept it until 1856 (Schmidt, Shelley, and Bardes 2009). Finally, the Constitution left the responsibility of running and funding elections to state and local governments, allowing considerable variety in the conducting of elections. Tokaji and Hall (2007, p. 1) have referred to local election administration as "the country’s oldest unfunded mandate."

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Voting reforms at the national level have generally followed the initiative of one or many states. The Fifteenth Amendment (1869) expanded suffrage to African-Americans following the Civil War. While this right was widely denied for nearly one-hundred years across the South, the passage of the Twenty-Fourth Amendment banning the poll tax (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965) finally delivered it. Before the Civil War, however, African-Americans already voted freely in several northern states. Meanwhile, poll tax requirements following the war were largely limited to former-Confederate states. While the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed female citizens the right to vote, fifteen states had already done so by the time it took effect. Women in Wyoming had been voting since 1890 (Keyssar 2001). The Twenty-Sixth Amendment expanded suffrage to all 18-20 year-old citizens; in doing so, it followed the model of Alaska, Hawaii, Georgia, and Kentucky, which had already permitted those under twenty-one to participate in elections (Neale 1983).

Voting reforms instigated by the national political parties have also followed state initiatives. In the wake of chaos at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, a system which allowed party elites to determine presidential nominees was rapidly transformed into an open process by 1972. In what Byron Shafer has termed a “quiet revolution,” rank-and-file citizens were empowered to choose candidates through binding primaries and caucuses (1983). While these changes instigated by the national Democrats were significant, the binding contests which emerged followed the existing model of several states, whose delegates were already chosen
democratically before the reforms were initiated (Kamarck 2009; Silverleib and Mayer 2012).

In more recent times, state and local governments have remained the primary catalysts of voting reforms. In addition to early voting laws, states have continued to adopt, modify, and enforce widely different policies regarding felon disenfranchisement, voter identification at the polls, and registration requirements. Further, while the national Help America Vote Act (2002) sought to standardize voting machines, registration records, and poll-worker training across the U.S., the law offered considerable latitude to states and localities in implementing new programs.

Some believe the decentralized nature of elections and voting in the U.S. is detrimental to the democratic process. Hochschild (2003) has said that the effect of varied local election laws and practices ranges from “amusing to appalling.” Former Federal Elections Commission Chairman Michael Toner agreed, calling “the state of election administration in this country … an embarrassment” (“Interlude,” 2006). Meanwhile, a 2004 NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll found that a majority of Americans would prefer more national standardization in election and voting practices.4 Others have defended the federalist nature of elections, arguing that local autonomy provides citizens with a greater sense of civic engagement and stronger feelings of ownership of the electoral process. Supporters have also pointed out that

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state and local governments have often used their autonomy to act as effective laboratories for voting reforms, including aforementioned changes regarding women’s suffrage and youth voting (Ewald 2009).

Regardless of one’s normative views of decentralized election laws, no one can deny that state and local governments enjoy significant autonomy in conducting elections or that great variations exist between jurisdictions. Differences regarding early voting policies across and within states are a central consideration throughout this project. While these variations complicate my analysis, they also provide convenient treatment and control groups in many cases, allowing me to better pinpoint early voting’s effect on the electoral process.

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**

I address my research objectives through six empirical chapters. My studies rely on multiple methods of inquiry, including considerable quantitative analyses, media and archival research, case studies, and personal interviews. Chapter Two chronicles the process through which early voting evolved from a limited opportunity for the military, elderly, and expatriate communities to a widespread right for a vast majority of Americans. I explore state legislative archives from Texas and other western states, as early voting first appeared in these areas in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Through analyzing these records and local media accounts, I identify low voter turnout and election administration problems as the primary catalysts for early voting’s initial adoption. Regarding the latter, the infamous 2000 presidential
election led many additional states to streamline their administration efforts. Early voting served as one mechanism to make the process easier, as it would reduce lines and allow problems to be identified before a flood of voters arrived on Election Day.

Early voting has also expanded because it has been generally popular with both voters and administrators. States have demonstrated a “learning effect,” as legislators have cited programs in other states as cause for adopting early voting in their own state. Nevertheless, programs have not always been popular. While the adoption of early voting was overwhelmingly bipartisan in most states, programs have increasingly been the subject of partisan fights in recent years. In particular, Republicans have recently (since the 2008 election) sought to limit early voting efforts in numerous states. Further, early voting adoption has stalled in several states due to legislative gridlock, court battles, and in the case of several New England states, logistical concerns.

Finally, my analysis demonstrates that considerable leeway exists within states (at the county level) when it comes to administering early voting. I consult twenty county elections officials across the country to gain a better understanding of how administrators use their resources to maximize the efficacy of early voting programs. Most reference the importance of having enough sites, locating them properly, and advertising the program effectively.

In Chapter Three, I explore how well early voting laws have achieved one of their principle objectives: expanding the American electorate. Reformers have long argued
that reducing the costs of voting should lead to higher participation rates. Early voting effectively lowers costs by offering citizens the opportunity to cast ballots when it is most convenient for them. While some early studies found a positive effect on turnout (Dubin and Kalsow 1996; Oliver 1996; Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997; Stein 1998; Southwell and Burchett 2000; Berinsky, Burns, and Traugott 2001; Neeley and Richardson 2001), most newer analyses have reported that the independent effect of early voting on participation is non-existent, negligible, or even negative (Fitzgerald 2005; Highton and Mullin 2005; Primo, Jacobsmeier and Milyo 2007; Gronke et al. 2007; Scheele et al. 2008; Burden et al. 2012; Larocca and Klemanski 2011).

In measuring the effect of early voting on turnout, I break from past research and measure early voting availability at the county level, where it varies considerably within states. To account for inter-county differences, I rely on newly-released Election Assistance Commission (EAC) data from over 3,000 U.S. counties on the number of early voting sites available in 2008. Specifically, I measure the effect of early voting sites (per capita) on turnout in a respective county. My model controls for other known influences of participation, including lagged turnout, demographics, political variables, felon disenfranchisement laws, and voter identification laws. Ultimately, I find that early voting sites generally have a significant and positive relationship with voter turnout. Across many specifications, the relationship holds.
Substantively, the findings suggest that adding ten sites in a county of 10,000 voting-age residents increases turnout by several percentage points or more.

Beyond exploring early voting's ability to increase overall voter turnout, I assess the demographic breakdown of early voters in Chapter Four. As with any new public policy, it’s important to identify whether some segments of society are benefitting from early voting more than others. This is especially true in this case, as early voting reformers have championed these laws because liberalized voting rules, they argue, allow a broader segment of the population to participate in elections. If early voting lowers costs, then citizens who must normally bear high costs in order to vote should see the greatest advantage. Racial and ethnic minority groups, or those with less income, education, or flexible work hours, should be more likely to take advantage of it (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Gronke and McDonald 2008).

I utilize individual and county-level data from 2008 to determine which demographic groups are most likely to vote early. Further, I explore whether greater availability of early voting locations in a locale increases the likelihood of high-cost voters participating before Election Day. Ultimately, I find that early voting is most popular among women, non-Hispanics, the well-educated, those with high income, and older voters. However, I also report that Hispanics, African-Americans, and young voters become significantly more likely to vote early if ample sites are offered. This is an important finding, as many believe that getting high-cost voters into the
habit of voting early should increase their participation rates over the long run. If citizens vote early when it is convenient for them, then there is no risk of them failing to participate due to burdens or unforeseen circumstances on Election Day.

Political scientists have long recognized that public policies with intended outcomes almost inevitably bring unintended consequences. Examples abound in the study of American politics. The binding presidential primaries and caucuses created by Shafer’s aforementioned “quiet revolution” (1983), for example, produced numerous consequences. These included, but were not limited to, new advantages for particular candidates and their supporting factions within the respective political parties (Joslyn 1976; Lengle and Shafer 1976; Maisel and Lieberman 1977; Marshall 1979; Hammond 1980; Geer 1986; 1989; Ansolabehere and King 1990), increased party factionalism (Kamarck 1987) and disadvantages for the Democratic party (Cavala 1974; Kamarck 1987; Wattenberg 1991).

In addition to studying the effectiveness of early voting in achieving its objectives, I focus on a series of unintended consequences it may be producing. Each has been referenced as a possible effect of early voting laws by researchers, though the literature has focused little attention on them. Chapter Five tackles a challenge issued by Gronke and McDonald (2008) regarding racial inequities and early voting. The authors suggest that heavily Non-Hispanic White counties offer more early voting opportunities than those with higher percentages of minority citizens. Again utilizing EAC and Census data, I find that heavily African-American counties (though not
heavily Hispanic counties) are indeed underserved in terms of early voting sites. In this sense, early voting is creating a racial disparity in terms of access to the polls. Given that African-Americans have been found (in Chapter Four) to use early voting more when additional sites are offered, my finding suggests that early voting is not yet achieving its full potential.

Chapter Six explores the role of early voting in creating higher levels of down-ballot roll-off. Specifically, roll-off occurs when a voter submits a preference for the race at the top of the ballot (typically president or governor), but fails to do so for one or more lower offices. Many political operatives and journalists have voiced concerns that some early voters are participating before they have full information about the candidates. Indeed, candidates for down-ballot offices often do not even begin campaigning until the few weeks or month before Election Day. The logic follows that if many voters participate before campaigning for some offices has peaked or even begun, then they may be more inclined to skip those races when filling out a ballot. In particular, roll-off may occur more in non-partisan races where a voting queue is missing. I explore this potential unintended consequence through a county-level analysis of Ohio in 2008 and 2010, determining that early voting is associated with higher levels of roll-off in some circumstances, including state Supreme Court elections, statewide offices such as secretary of state, and some state legislative races.

Chapter Seven explores campaign effects and information asymmetries in the electorate caused by early voting. Those who vote before a campaign has concluded
do so without any information about the candidates or political environment that may emerge between their vote and Election Day. I believe that this effect may be most notable during presidential nomination contests, as information about candidates is often very low when early voting periods begin. In particular, I believe early voters should be more likely to support early front-runners and those with high levels of name recognition. Further, I suggest that campaigns may view early voting as an opportunity to accumulate votes in a favorable state while their candidates’ popularity is high, blunting the negative effects of momentum from later contests.

Focusing on the 2008 nomination contests, I find that Hillary Clinton’s campaign designed a strategy to take advantage of her front-runner status during the early voting period in several states. Utilizing exit poll data, which for the first time included substantial numbers of early voters, I find that Clinton indeed benefitted in several states from early voting in 2008. Further, I explore Rudy Giuliani’s campaign for the Republican nomination. Giuliani sought to secure votes in the Florida primary before other candidates entered the state or built momentum by performing well in the Iowa caucuses or New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries. I find that while his campaign ultimately sputtered, he did secure additional support in Florida by banking votes before his support declined. These findings suggest that early voting indeed has changed the competitive environment during nomination contests and created new strategic considerations for political campaigners.
Early voting is a complex, varied, and evolving institution. Identifying its full effects requires the collective effort of many scholars. I hope that this project assists this effort by offering approaches and insights currently lacking in the academic literature. Through explorations of state archives, media accounts and newly-released data, as well as the development and application of new theoretical approaches, I strive to meet this objective in the following chapters.
A clear majority of American voters now have the opportunity to vote before Election Day at their leisure, a phenomenon that seemed unimaginable just three decades ago. The option has become extremely popular, as nearly one-third of the electorate voted early in the 2008 elections. Most experts anticipate even more early participation in future elections, as additional states approve early voting and public awareness of the policies continues to expand. It is not unreasonable to suggest that a majority of votes in the 2020 presidential election will be cast before Election Day.

While early voting has grown rapidly, gradual developments over the past two centuries led to the present state of affairs. In this chapter, I probe the evolution of early voting by examining historical events, state legislative archives, public statements, media accounts, and other important documents. I find that early voting is the result of numerous motivations, including higher voter turnout, less voter fraud, and a desire for more streamlined election administration processes. Regarding the latter, I discuss the role of the contested 2000 election in motivating several states to adopt early voting.

Early voting has not been adopted in all areas of the country; I therefore also examine resistance to programs in many states. In particular, I concentrate on the failure of early voting to diffuse in the New England region due to cultural and logistical concerns. Further, I explore the evolution of early voting from a bipartisan
effort to one now widely advocated by Democrats and opposed by Republicans throughout much of the country.

Finally, I confer with several county election administrators in order to gain a better grasp of how early voting is implemented within states. In particular, I explore the considerable autonomy enjoyed by county officials in designing early voting programs. In striving to ease the voting process for both voters and administrators, officials widely stress the importance of offering abundant early voting sites, locating them in convenient places throughout the county, and aggressively promulgating their respective programs.

VOTING FROM AFAR

In 1792, the 2nd U.S. Congress permitted states to conduct their elections for federal offices at any time during a 34-day period before the first Wednesday of December, the date set by the Constitution for members of the Electoral College to choose the president and vice-president. Early November became a popular time for elections across the largely agrarian states, as harvests were typically over, but the harshness of winter had not yet hit. In 1845, Congress finally adopted a uniform election date for federal elections – the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November. Two reasons have been widely suggested for the exclusion of November 1st as a possible election date, though the matter is still debated. First, lawmakers may have wished to avoid holding Election Day on All Saints Day, a holy day for

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6 Statutes at Large, 28th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 721.
Catholics. Second, merchants in the 1800s typically did their bookkeeping on the first day of the month, and scheduling an important event on that day could interfere with business (McNamara, n.d.).

Regarding the day of the week, Tuesday was apparently chosen because Saturday was a work day for farmers, Sunday was a day of worship, and Wednesday was “market day” in many towns. Given that traveling to and from one’s town center often took planters the better part of a day, Tuesday was selected as to not interfere with other responsibilities and customs (McNamara, n.d.).

As the U.S. evolved from a largely agrarian society to a more industrial and urban one, voting traditions remained largely unchanged. Well into the twentieth-century, Americans were asked to make time on the appropriate Tuesday to gather at local precincts and select a set of governmental representatives. If voters were unable to visit their polling places during the posted times, then they simply could not vote. Those excluded were often the disabled, the elderly, persons with demanding work responsibilities, and those away from their hometowns.

Active military personnel were granted the first exceptions to rules regulating the timing of elections. Laws first appeared during the Civil War throughout the Union states. In the months preceding the 1864 presidential election, nineteen of the twenty-five Union states enacted legislation allowing absentee voting. Soldiers could vote either at polling stations established on the battlefields or by sending marked ballots to someone in their hometown. Partisan considerations were present, as Republican-
led state legislatures wished to increase the soldier vote, which they anticipated (correctly) would be favorable to President Lincoln. Absentee voting was widely popular during the war, as over 230,000 soldiers took advantage of the option (Fortier 2006). The programs were not without controversy, however, as inspectors appointed by New York Governor Horatio Seymour were accused of impersonating officers and submitting fraudulent ballots (White 2004). After the war, many of the state absentee laws expired and were not renewed; they were revived only briefly during both the Spanish-American War and World War I.

**Figure 1: Soldiers Voting at Early Voting Stations during the Civil War, 1864**

![ Soldiers Voting at Early Voting Stations during the Civil War, 1864](http://www.af.mil/shared/media/photodb/photos/080916-A-1001M-002.jpg)

*Source: United States Air Force*

During World War II, the Soldier Voting Act of 1942 guaranteed military members a vote in presidential and congressional elections during wartime. It

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extended that right regardless of registration and poll tax requirements in soldiers’
respective home states. With American troops permanently stationed around the
globe following World War II and the Korean War, Congress passed the Federal
Voting Assistance Act in 1955 to allow military members and federal employees the
opportunity to vote when away from their hometowns. More than two decades later,
in 1975, Congress expanded absentee voting rights to non-military U.S. citizens
living abroad (Coleman 2008).

Not all efforts regarding absentee voting centered on those outside of the country.
By the 1960s, each of the fifty states had approved laws allowing those with valid
excuses to vote via an absentee ballot. Acceptable excuses typically included illness
or disability, old age, or business travels that interfered with Election Day (Fortier
2006).

A NEW ERA OF CONVENIENCE VOTING

As I discussed in Chapter 1, I define early voting as meeting three criteria. Voting
must be allowed before Election Day. It must be available to all registered voters in
the relevant jurisdiction. Finally, voters must be able to complete and submit their
ballot at a physical location if they choose.

The modern early voting revolution did not begin until the late twentieth-century,
and it initially evolved slowly. In 1978, California became the first state to allow no-
excuse absentee voting. In essence, any registered voter could request a ballot
through the mail several weeks before Election Day. No longer would one need to
offer evidence of special circumstances. The percentage of Californians voting absentee increased over the next few election cycles, but it was still not a particularly high share. In 1984, about 7% of voters requested and submitted an absentee ballot, and a large chunk of these individuals presumably did so out of necessity. During the 1980s, other states followed with liberalized absentee rules, including Oregon and Washington (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2008). Initially, these states operated their programs strictly through the mail, making their efforts distinct from early voting. Nevertheless, they undoubtedly inspired expanded convenience voting in the years that followed.

While never mistaken as a haven of progressivism, Texas has been called the “pioneer” state for early voting in the United States. The label is a fair one, as Texas was the first state to adopt rules meeting all three aforementioned criteria for early voting. In 1987, House Bill (HB) 612 was enacted in the Texas House, creating what officials described as “no-excuse voting by personal appearance.” Similar to California and other states, voters would no longer need to provide a reason if they wished to vote before Election Day. The notable difference was that voters were offered physical locations whereby they could arrive during the weeks before Election Day and cast a vote. In most counties, the locations consisted of the permanent office(s) of the local elections official. HB 612 passed in the Texas Legislature without much controversy. It received a unanimous 8-0 vote in the

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House Committee on Elections and was ultimately adopted by a voice vote in both chambers. The bill’s passage was scarcely mentioned in the state’s major newspapers.⁹

A report issued by the House Committee on Elections soon after the bill’s passage suggests that increasing voter participation and convenience, as well as reducing voter fraud and intimidation, were the motives behind the legislation. The report expresses clear concerns for the state’s chronically low turnout rate, which it cites as 44th in the nation. While members of the legislature argued that the early voting reforms should improve the convenience of voting and hopefully yield higher rates of participation, the committee report acknowledges that the turnout problem in Texas was largely one of voter registration, as 40% of the eligible population was not even registered. The committee advocated a “motor voter” approach, whereby registrants could be added to the rolls when applying for a driver’s license, a provision that soon became federal law.¹⁰

Regarding voter fraud, the report notes that many cases of abuse had been reported with the vote-by-mail program. In particular, there appeared to be some degree of “preying on elderly citizens,” as many applications were “requested” by elderly citizens in nursing homes who were “unable to vote.” While most elderly citizens had no choice but to vote via absentee ballots, many in the legislature saw these issues as a red flag. In order to lessen the volume of absentee voters, they

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sought a transition to early voting, where convenience would be maintained but voting would occur in person. The new policy would also help election administrators, who had reported that increasing numbers of absentee ballots were difficult to verify in the time allotted.\textsuperscript{11}

In reviewing the law’s effectiveness following the 1988 elections, the committee judged that it was “well received by both the general public and the local election officials implementing and administering it.”\textsuperscript{12} In response to its popularity, Governor Ann Richards signed Senate Bill 1234 (SB) in May 1991, which set a minimum standard for the number of early voting locations provided within each county. In some counties, including the populous Harris County (Houston), up to twenty-five early voting sites were mandated. Similar to the 1987 law, the bill was not contentious along partisan lines. A motion to suspend debate passed 31-0 in the Texas Senate and the bill ultimately passed both chambers by a voice vote.\textsuperscript{13}

The law and its expansion quickly gained a momentum of its own, as citizens became accustomed to it. There seemed to be little suspicion that one party was benefitting from the program more than the other. Media accounts cited unnamed politicos as being uncertain about partisan consequences, though both sides actively sought to benefit from the new rules. The NAACP, Houston Area Urban League, and other Democratic-leaning groups provided free transportation to students and elderly citizens to early voting sites (Bernstein and Zuniga 1992). Republicans

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, Committee on Elections.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, Committee on Elections.
\textsuperscript{13} Texas Senate. SB 1234, 72nd Regular Session, 1991.
sought to utilize their fundraising advantage in the state by spreading mobilization efforts, including a “massive phone bank operation,” across the several weeks of early voting. Texas Democrats were typically unable to match this effort (“Texans Begin Early Voting,” 1992).

Before the 1992 elections, concerns about turnout were apparent in the state’s administration of the early vote program. Lawmakers ordered the opening of additional early voting sites in Harris County because it had demonstrated a pattern of lower turnout than other metropolitan areas (Greene and Bernstein 1992). County Republican Chairwoman Betsy Lake dismissed complaints from within her party that too many locations were in Democratic-leaning urban districts. She stated, “If they want to go vote, people are going to vote” (Bernstein and Zuniga 1992). In fact, it was Anita Rodeheaver, the county’s longtime Democratic clerk, who publicly opposed both early voting and the mandate for additional sites. She argued that low voter turnout was a “Harris County phenomenon that won’t be increased by adding polling places … People don’t want to vote until Election Day. Period. In their own precincts.” Rodeheaver also lamented the cost of the expansion, which she anticipated to be about $250,000 to cover additional temporary workers, telephone lines and other expenses at the new sites (Greene and Bernstein 1992).

In general, however, early voting was popular in Texas, and other states began to take note of the state's innovative approach. Representative Bob Holmes, the Democratic chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee in the Georgia
General Assembly, argued that Georgia should replace absentee voting with physical early voting locations, as these would be less susceptible to voter fraud. Unlike absentee ballots sent to a home, early voting occurs in the presence of election officials, he argued. Citing that early voting “has been adopted successfully” in Texas, Holmes held hearings during the 1994 legislative session, though Georgia would not adopt early voting until the 2000 election cycle (Osinski 1993).

Other states acted much more swiftly, particularly those in the West. In Nevada, a 1991 law allowing no-excuse absentee voting passed 21-0 and 39-2 in the state Assembly and Senate, respectively. Within two years, a broader early voting law — establishing physical locations throughout the state — was approved by 21-0 and 42-0 margins. That same year, the Republican-led Colorado Legislature approved an early voting law on a bipartisan basis. Republican Donetta Davidson, chief elections officer in the Colorado secretary of state’s office, was integral in motivating the legislature to approve early voting as a way of “making voting more convenient” (Anderson 1994). During the 1992 campaign, however, Democrats appeared to capitalize on the new program. In a series of rallies, Reverend Jesse Jackson led hundreds of residents to the Denver Election Commission to vote early. He stated, “Today we have this splendid opportunity in Colorado… Having 20 days to go downtown to vote makes more sense than one day… What’s going on here in Colorado now is one of the most advanced steps in the country” (Yang 1992).

Meanwhile, Kristin French, communications director for the Bush-Quayle presidential campaign in Colorado, expressed disapproval that early voting began before the first presidential debate had even been held, noting “The people haven't had a chance to look at everything yet, to hear all there is to hear.” The pessimism about early voting apparently did not extend to President Bush himself, who voted early in his native Texas (Yang 1992). 

New Mexico approved early voting in 1993 with the support of legislators from both parties. After several election cycles, Republican Party Chairman John Dendahl argued that it, “is a good way for people to cast their votes” (qtd. in Holmes 2002). Denise Lamb, chair of the state Bureau of Elections, said in 2002 that she suspects that early voting had effectively increased turnout, or at least stabilized a decrease in voters. She stated, “Making absentee an option has kind of stabilized what you might see as a kind of decline in participation that’s taken place in other states” (qtd. in Holmes 2002). Within a few years, however, some Democrats expressed concern that early voting was increasing the cost of both campaigns and election administration. Democratic State Senator John Arthur Smith sponsored a bill to shorten the early voting period from 20 to 10 days. The bill failed as most Democrats and Republicans supported expansive early voting and felt a reduction would increase voting lines (“Bill Shortening Early Voting,” 1997).

In 1997, New Mexico’s neighbor, Arizona, passed a law making early voting access mandatory across the state’s counties. It had been optional since 1993. The
new law was sponsored by Sue Grace, a Republican, and passed 29-0 in the Senate and 59-0 in the assembly, again indicating that it was not a controversial measure.\textsuperscript{15}

With early voting growing by the year, the U.S. Supreme Court in 2000 effectively defended the constitutionality of the new laws. In June, justices rejected an appeal of earlier federal court decisions (including one from the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals) upholding the Texas law. The suit had been brought by the Voting Integrity Project, which argued that federal law required congressional and presidential elections to take place only on Election Day, the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. The appeals court, however, argued that this was not necessarily true. Their February 2000 decision stated, “Because the election of federal officials in Texas is not decided until Texas voters go to the polls on federal Election Day, we conclude that the Texas early voting scheme is not inconsistent with federal election laws.” Without much fanfare, state autonomy with respect to early voting had been upheld (“High Court,” 2000).

**THE ELECTIONS OF 2000 & 2004**

While early voting was popular in that places that had adopted it, as of 2000 it remained limited to a minority of states. Ten states had approved no-excuse absentee laws, while another ten allowed in-person early voting. The circumstances of the 2000 presidential election, however, quickly led other states to consider laws allowing voting before Election Day. It is well-documented that the election was a

\textsuperscript{15} Arizona State Legislature. SB 1280, 43rd Legislature, 1st Regular Session, 1997.
disaster in the state of Florida. As George W. Bush and Al Gore fought a legal battle over recounts and spoiled ballots, the nation caught an unfortunate glimpse of a state with numerous election administration programs. By no means was Florida the only state deserving of criticism, just the one to receive the limelight. Florida’s problems included the improper disenfranchisement of voters, confusing ballots, long lines, and vast administrative inconsistencies both across and within jurisdictions. Following the election, the state considered a number of election reforms in an effort to clarify the process for voters, make voting more convenient, and ease the stress of election administrators.

In 2002, the state legislature approved early voting by a wide margin and it was signed into law by Republican Governor Jeb Bush. The law was quickly judged a success. Courteney Strickland, director of voting rights for the ACLU, stated “It took a lot of pressure off polling places and allowed for better management … Now; we have to make sure early voting is something that stays” (LaPolt 2002). Given its popularity, most considered the law a permanent fixture of campaigns. Hillsborough County Supervisor of Elections Pam Iorio commented, “It will be the way it’s done in the future… because it’s more convenient to the customer, and the customer is the voter” (Tobin 2002).

Politically, the Republican Party appeared to claim an advantage. Under new laws that allowed anyone to request an absentee ballot, the GOP sent thousands of application forms to their registered voters. Operatives then followed these mailings
with house visits and telephone calls, hoping to mobilize as many voters as possible before Election Day. Similar to Texas and New Mexico years prior, Democrats had no similar effort because they lacked the necessary financial resources. In some counties, Democrats did not even seek lists of which voters had requested but not returned absentee ballots, information that county officials willingly make available. Republicans in Escambia County retrieved the lists and “harvested those votes,” while “the Democrats didn’t ask.” In 2004, as his brother crisscrossed the state seeking a second-term as president, Jeb Bush defended the early voting law, stating “I think it's great… It's another reform we added that has helped provide access to the polls and provide a convenience. And we’re going to have a high voter turnout here, and I think that’s wonderful” (qtd. in Graham 2012).

On Election Day 2004, lines remained long during the early voting period in some Florida counties, notably in Miami-Dade and Broward, where more than 110,000 people voted before Election Day across twenty local elections offices. However, clerks from around the state commented that voters seemed rather patient and content while enduring lines. One story referred to waiting voters as “more like fans clamoring for concert tickets than citizens exercising the right to vote” (Tobin 2002).” This perhaps suggests that when voters can select the day and time that works best for them, waiting is easier to endure because voting is not being crammed into a busy schedule.
West Virginia was another state that authorized early voting in light of the 2000 election. Cindy Smith, team leader of elections for the Secretary of State’s office, said the primary reason was voter convenience. She noted that “The whole purpose of the law is to make voting more convenient… People can now vote around their schedules rather than trying to fit it in on one day” (qtd. in “Elections Officials Hope,” 2002). Legislators also felt that administration problems could be better addressed through early voting than through the mail-in absentee process. To provide incentive to voters to show up early, the state continued to require an excuse to vote absentee via the mail.

Following the 2004 election, other states explored early voting as a solution to ease congestion and long lines on Election Day. Tim Storey, a senior analyst with the National Conference of State Legislatures, summarized the atmosphere: “The enduring image in many places of the 2004 election was just the long lines that voters were waiting in, and that is probably one of the top priorities that states are going to look at … ways to effectively manage the number of voters… The population continues to grow, and so it’s a matter of resources and commitment.” Storey said that his office received calls from many states seeking information on early voting programs in other states, noting that, “they are looking for ways to make it easier for voters to cast their ballots” (qtd. in Magers 2004).

Michigan, a perennial swing state in presidential elections, saw record lines in 2004. This inspired Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land to advocate a new early
voting law. Her spokesman, Kelly Chesney, said “She sees early voting in person and no-reason absentee as a possible remedy for those longer lines… She would like to make it easier for all voters” (qtd. in Magers 2004). Under Michigan law, only those 1) 60 and older, 2) with a disability, 3) out of town on Election Day, or 4) with religious reasons could acquire an absentee ballot. While Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm supported a no-excuse early voting law, it ultimately stalled in the Republican legislature. Oakland County Clerk William Caddell, who supported expanded early voting, said lawmakers were discouraged by the fact that voters could cast their ballots and then change their minds before Election Day, when it would be too late. Some believed that Republicans were resistant because Democrats could more easily mobilize their political base, including young voters, union workers, and racial minorities, if given additional time (Eggert 2004).

Some Republicans in the legislature supported early voting. Senator Beverly Hammerstrom, a Republican from Temperance, said “Anything we can do to make it easier for people to vote, I think we should do.” She believed that the existing absentee system was dysfunctional, as it incentivized lying by voters who wished to vote before Election Day. Further, University of Michigan political science professor Michael Traugott weighed in on the partisan implications of a law, stating “Our research shows there is no partisan advantage … The most important predictors of whether a person votes or not is psychological — whether they think the election is important and whether their vote counts” (qtd. in Eggert 2004). Nevertheless,
enough Republicans in the legislature blocked the initiative and early voting was never established in Michigan.

Similar debates occurred in Missouri, as the state legislature approved a measure establishing procedures for early voting, but never actually authorized the policy. In the months leading into the 2004 election, St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay sought to implement early voting in the city to ease the burdens of Election Day. The city designated $75,000 to help pay for sites at designated locations. But Republican Secretary of State Matt Blunt refused to interpret the state’s law as allowing early voting and blocked the effort (Mannies 2004). In 2011, the state legislature passed an unambiguous early voting law, though Democratic Governor Jay Nixon vetoed it because it included provisions forcing voters to present photo identification at the polls (Lieb 2011).

Ohio was another state that was heavily scrutinized after the 2004 election. National Association of Secretaries of State communications director Meredith Imwalle singled out Ohio, noting that the state “saw lines that were eight and nine hours long” (qtd. in Magers 2004). In Gambier, Ohio, a polling place had to stay open until 4 a.m. to accommodate everyone. Rita Yarman, deputy elections director in Knox County, which includes Gambier, says early voting would have prevented this inconvenience. Ohio Secretary of State Ken Blackwell, a Republican, acknowledged momentum for early voting, stating “Because of the broad number of people who experienced this inconvenience, I don’t think the full-court press for
change is going to let up” (qtd. in Drinkard 2004). Indeed, in 2005, the Ohio House passed a law allowing early voting by a vote of 60-36, while the Senate approved the measure 21-11. Each chamber had a solid Republican majority at the time of passage and the measure was signed into law by GOP Governor Bob Taft, suggesting that partisan attitudes were different from those seen in Michigan and Missouri.16

In 2005, the Democratic-led Maryland Legislature also approved a law allowing early voting. State Republicans strongly opposed the measure, arguing that it lacked necessary safeguards to prevent abuse. Delegate Christopher Shank, the lower chamber’s minority whip, said “Given that Maryland does not require photo identification for voting, this is ripe for fraud” (qtd. in Rein 2008). Republican Governor Bob Ehrlich promptly rejected the bill, though the legislature was able to override his veto. It appeared as though Maryland would have early voting in time for the 2006 midterm elections. In June 2006, Maryland Senate President Mike Miller defended the new law, stating “The important aspect of early voting is that working men and women can actually vote on Saturday … They don’t have to take off work on Tuesday to vote” (“Maryland Early Voting,” 2006). Democrats were unapologetic about their hopes of increasing turnout among groups traditionally supportive of them. Delegate Sandy Rosenberg, a Democrat from Baltimore, said the law was necessary because, “Younger people are less likely to stand in long lines on Election Day” (qtd. in Rein 2008). In the months after passage, the heavily-

Democratic legislature established twenty-one early voting sites, mostly in urban areas where their support was concentrated (Rein 2008).

But plans were stifled in August 2006 when the law was struck down by the Maryland Court of Appeals.¹⁷ Judges, including some appointed by Democratic governors, ruled that it was illegal for Maryland elections officials to open polling stations during the week before Election Day because the state constitution strictly set the timing of elections. In addition, the new law also improperly permitted voters to cast ballots outside of their precincts. While early voting defenders cited ten other early voting states with similar provisions in their constitutions, the Maryland judges were unwilling to consider conditions outside of the state (Mosk 2006). The legislature then moved to have a referendum to amend the state’s constitution and allow early voting. The measure was placed on the 2008 ballot, where it passed with slightly over 70% of the vote (Farr 2010). When Bob Ehrlich, ousted from office in 2006, ran again in 2010, he cast his ballot early (Wagner 2010).

THE NEW ENGLAND EXCEPTION

The New England region has largely resisted the national move towards early voting. While Vermont and Maine offer early voting in the form of no excuse, in-person absentee voting, the region’s other four states — Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island — offer no options for ordinary voters to cast

¹⁷ The Maryland Court of Appeals is the highest court in the state.
their ballots before Election Day. Instead, voters must demonstrate that voting on
Election Day is burdensome in order to receive an absentee ballot.

Early voting laws were introduced in the Connecticut Legislature five times
between 1993 and 2003, though the matter never received a floor vote in either
chamber. A 2004 report by the Connecticut Chief Attorney, Sandra Norman-Eady,
found that unlike the thirty-one states that allowed early voting at the time, the
state’s “constitution fixes the qualifications of electors and the time, place, and
manner for voting in this state.” The report asserts that the constitution intends “to
place everything pertaining to the election of state officers and members of the
General Assembly beyond the reach of subsequent legislatures,” suggesting that a
constitutional amendment would be necessary to provide for early voting. The state’s
current law allowing absentee voting for some voters is legitimate, however, as
Article Six, Section Seven of the Connecticut Constitution states that advance voting
is acceptable when “qualified voters of the state … are unable to appear at the polling
place on the day of election because of absence from the city or town of which they
are inhabitants or because of sickness or physical disability or because the tenets of
their religion forbid secular activity” (Norman-Eady 2004).

It has also been suggested that New England is less suitable for early voting given
the region’s unique election administration customs. While most states have county
election management, New England conducts its elections at the town level,
reflecting the long tradition of autonomous self-government in the region’s cities and
towns. Connecticut, for example, has 169 towns, each of which has its own municipal government responsible for conducting elections for its citizens. It has been argued by groups and legislators that if early voting were adopted, sites would need to be established in each town in order for these entities to maintain control over the electoral process. Given this burden, CTVotesCount, a group committed to voter participation and integrity in the state, has argued that just three days of early voting would add about 60% to the current Election Day costs in the state, placing a highly disproportionate burden on small towns (Weeks 2009).

Maine, who also conducts elections at the town-level, allows early voting in the form of no-excuse, in-person absentee voting. Citizens may appear at a municipal clerk’s office in the thirty days before Election Day, receive an absentee ballot, and complete it onsite. Maine has considered expanding its offerings to include more expansive vote centers in the weeks before Election Day, though it has hesitated because small towns may have difficulty staffing the necessary number of workers. In 2007, the state conducted a pilot program whereby nine towns offered expanded early voting. Each municipality had to choose a single location that was of adequate size to handle estimated turnout and was accessible to people with disabilities. While the feedback was largely positive, many town clerks expressed reservations with expanding early voting. A clerk from Bar Harbor stated that “Small municipalities … cannot be running an election 14 to 30 days prior to the Election Day and maintain the daily operations of a clerk’s office.” Another official from China, Maine noted
that early voting “takes time away from our normal day to day duties to verify, fold, complete the paperwork and process these requests.” The Freeport clerk offered that “the logistics of setting up and preparing for Tuesday are large and important. To have us all totally exhausted going into Tuesday because there is too much to accomplish on Monday, has become problematic.”

Indeed, the tradition of small towns conducting elections makes early voting difficult because economies of scale cannot be realized. Rather than a single county pooling resources to offer convenience voting in the weeks before Election Day, New England states – given their current system, which few wish to change – must conduct this effort in each individual town. These burdens are great enough that most of the region’s states have shied away from the phenomenon of early voting.

**THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

The Pacific Northwest states of Oregon and Washington are also unique with regards to early voting, as both have eliminated physical voting and moved to an exclusively vote-by-mail system. In 1998, Oregon citizens approved vote-by-mail in a statewide initiative. No longer would Oregon residents appear in person to cast their votes. Rather, ballots would be mailed to all registered voters weeks before Election Day. The Secretary of State’s office claims that Oregon’s approach “raises voter participation, decreases costs and increases the overall integrity of the election

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process. It is a system that the vast majority of Oregonians love.”19 Most studies have found that the change has led to a small but measurable growth in turnout, although one study finds an effect only in presidential elections (Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2008).

Washington, after years of observing Oregon’s policy, became the second state to offer universal vote-by-mail elections. The state gradually implemented the policy on a county by county basis during the 2000s, and in 2011 finally mandated that all counties move to this system.

Other states have resisted vote-by-mail elections, largely out of concerns about the integrity of widespread absentee voting. Some worry that ballots sent through the mail might be obtained and filled out by someone other than the legal voter. Without the privacy of the ballot booth, a vote could more likely be coerced or unduly influenced. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement has even referred to absentee ballots as “the tool of choice for those inclined to commit voter fraud” (Fund 2004). The vast majority of state legislatures have therefore instead focused their attention on voter convenience programs that involve personal interactions.

A GROWING PARTISAN DIVIDE

By 2008, thirty-one states had early voting laws in effect. While partisanship had stifled approval in states such as Maryland (temporarily), Michigan, and Missouri, policies had been approved easily in many other states. Republican opposition to

early voting notably grew, however, after Barack Obama’s victory in the 2008 presidential election. Many in the GOP believed that Obama benefitted greatly from early voting laws in swing states such as Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio. Indeed, early voting had been an important part of Obama’s strategy to mobilize his electoral base. Unlike Democrats of the past, the Obama campaign had the finances to maintain a robust early vote operation throughout the weeks in which it was offered. A featured *New York Times* editorial commented that “Republican lawmakers have taken a good look at voting patterns, realized that early voting might have played a role in Mr. Obama’s 2008 victory, and now want to reduce that possibility in 2012” (“They Want to Make Voting Harder,” 2011). Matt Taylor of the *National Memo* stated that “early voting has become a symbol of the Obama era, boosting minority and youth turnout to historic levels in 2008” (Taylor 2012). Cynthia Tucker of the *Atlanta-Journal Constitution* was blunter, arguing that “I remember a time when Republicans liked early voting. They liked it because they thought it served their middle-class constituents. When did they become unhappy with early voting? After 2008. The Obama campaign was extremely well-organized. And one of the things they did was to encourage their voters to come to the polls early. They did. After Obama took advantage of early voting, Republicans said ‘oops’, we need to cut back that early voting” (Tucker 2011).

Upon taking control of many state legislatures and gubernatorial offices after the 2010 elections, Republicans in many states pursued bills to limit (but not eliminate)
convenience voting. Republicans argued that their reasons for scaling back early voting were based on a need to cut costs. In May 2011, newly-elected Florida Governor Rick Scott signed legislation that cut the early voting period from fourteen to eight days. Republicans argued that opening the polls for fewer days would aid crippled county budgets around the state. The bill made several other changes, including ending early voting on the Sunday before Election Day. Democrats and civic leaders felt that this action was politically motivated, as both argued that this made it harder to get African-Americans to the polls. The party had previously mobilized and transported voters to early voting sites as they exited church on Sunday mornings. Buses would pick up parishioners at the church door and drive them to vote; pastors even led the parade to the polls on many occasions (Man 2010). The bill also included a provision preventing voters who had changed their address since the last election from updating their status at the polls. The address change restriction was expected to hurt university students in particular—a demographic that was integral to President Barack Obama’s victory in 2008.

State Senator Mike Fasano was one of two Republican senators who voted against the final bill, arguing that Florida ought to expand early voting and encourage more voter registration activity. Fasano acknowledged that partisan considerations seemed to be behind the Republicans’ actions, noting, “I’m a Republican, but believe the only reason this bill was passed was to help one party over another” (Whittenburg 2011). Senator Gwen Margolis, a Democrat from
Aventura, said that the popularity of early voting across the state should mean more days and sites, arguing that the new law will “disenfranchise and really anger a lot of people” (“Florida Republicans Push,” 2011).

North Carolina Republicans have also acted to limit early voting options. The party was angered in 2008, believing that some county officials altered their early voting programs to accommodate Obama campaign rallies. Specifically, Cumberland County (Fayetteville) had expanded the number of early voting sites open on Sunday, October 19, the date of a large Obama rally at the Crown Center Coliseum in Fayetteville. At the rally, Obama explicitly urged supporters to vote early, stating, “If you like what you hear today, and if you’re ready for change, and if you haven't voted yet, don’t wait until Nov. 4 ... we want to get as many votes in as possible as early as possible” (qtd. in Morrill 2011). Terri Robertson, director of Cumberland County's elections, defended the county's action, saying she was worried that a flood of voters after the rally would create too much stress for her staff. She stated, “We decided that the best thing to do for our staff was to open two more sites so they weren’t up all night processing voters” (qtd. in Morrill 2011). Linda Daves, chairwoman of the state Republican Party, was not persuaded. She asserted that her party supported early voting, but that “[the county's] action makes the voting process an extension of a partisan political rally and that is clearly inappropriate” (qtd. in Morrill 2011).
Over 60% of North Carolina votes were cast early in 2008, one of the highest rates in the nation. In early 2011, the Republican-controlled state assembly voted to cut the early voting period by a week, reducing it to ten days before Election Day. The senate passed a similar bill, arguing that cost savings were necessary. Jim Davis, a Macon County Republican, argued, “We were just trying to minimize the time early voting polls were open ... so the expense is not so great for local election boards” (qtd. in Morrill 2011). But the North Carolina elections board and many county boards said the bills would actually cost more money because they would need to open more voting sites on Election Day. Michael Bitzer, a political scientist at Catawba College in Salisbury, said that if approved, the changes could have a big impact. He noted, “In today’s world, people expect flexibility. They expect options, and that’s one thing early voting gives them, being able to cast a ballot at their convenience” (qtd. in Morrill 2011). Ultimately, Democratic Governor Beverly Perdue received and vetoed a version of the law.

In Ohio, a Republican-legislature and Governor John Kasich approved a law reducing early voting from thirty days before an election to twenty-one days by mail and seventeen in person — eliminating a “golden week” when citizens could register and vote on the same day. The bill also prohibited counties and others from continuing to mail unsolicited absentee-ballot applications to all registered voters. Some counties, including Cuyahoga County, had adopted the practice because it believed that the reduced hassle of requesting a ballot may improve turnout. Further,
the legislation killed earlier efforts to expand early voting sites in Ohio, a state with relatively few sites per capita.

Democrats in the state legislature said that the Republican-backed bill was aimed at suppressing votes of poor and minority populations that tended to vote Democratic (Siegel 2011). Cuyahoga County officials also argued that pre-mailing absentee ballots to voters had effectively reduced the number of Election Day voters in 2008, thereby shortening lines and reducing administrative problems. Cuyahoga elections board member Inajo Davis said, “We’ve had great success with the mailings. We do think it increases voter participation… It also increases our ability to be efficient in tabulation and conducting all our election administration tasks” (Guillen 2011). In December 2011, Democrats effectively delayed implementation of the law by collecting enough signatures to place a repeal provision on the November 2012 ballot. Democrats have also mobilized elsewhere. Following early voting reductions in the aforementioned states, as well as in Georgia, Maine, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Tennessee, the NAACP and other civil rights groups staged a march in New York City to protest the new laws (Schouten 2011).

LOCAL AUTONOMY

While the decision to adopt early voting is made by state legislatures and governors, both state and county officials play an important role in implementing it. As evidenced by the changes debated in Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio, states typically determine the number of days early voting is available, as well as a
minimum number of locations and hours of access (each day) that each county must offer. But even in light of Republican-backed cuts to early voting in many states after 2008, autonomy remains high for local administrators. In Florida, state law mandates that early voting be offered at the office of each county’s Supervisor of Elections. Each county, however, may also choose to designate any city hall or public library within its jurisdiction as a satellite early voting site. Nevada allows county officials to determine the number and location of sites without restrictions. In Clark County (Las Vegas), sites are often established in supermarkets and other areas with heavy commercial activity. California also provides counties with considerable freedom to determine site density, leading to some notable disparities within the state. In 2008, Orange County established more than a dozen early voting sites for its citizens, including some at malls, an airport, and universities. Meanwhile, neighboring Los Angeles County (the nation’s largest county) offered only one site, the county registrar’s headquarters, to its nearly ten-million residents (Barboza 2008). Arkansas, Georgia, and New Mexico each allow counties to add additional sites beyond the required county clerk’s office, and even permit them to determine their hours of operation.  

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20 An official from the Los Angeles County Democratic Party claimed that the county offered only one site because the need to print ballots in multiple languages (at least English and Spanish) raised the cost and administrative hassle of launching new early voting locations.


Texas sets a minimum standard for counties, requiring that at least one early voting site be designated within the borders of each state assembly district. Typically, counties offer more than the minimum number of sites. Harris County (Houston), for example, was required to provide twenty-five sites in 2008, but chose to offer thirty-seven (“Early Voting Kicks off Monday,” 2008). Hours of operation for early voting may vary widely throughout the state’s 254 counties, as each is free to set them as they wish.

A small number of states limit county freedom with regards to early voting. Ohio permits only one early voting site per county, despite the fact that some have over one-million residents (Cuyahoga and Franklin) and others have less than 15,000 residents (Monroe, Noble, and Vinton). It was reported that the sites in some of the state’s larger counties became very crowded during the 2008 election (“Make Early Voting Easier,” 2011).

Similarly, Maryland state law determines how many early voting centers each county must offer based on its number of registered voters. Counties with fewer than 150,000 registered voters must have one early voting center, those with between 150,000 and 300,000 registered voters must have three, and counties with more than 300,000 registered voters must have five locations. Counties are not permitted to add additional early voting sites.
IMPLEMENTING EARLY VOTING

To better comprehend how local officials use their considerable authority and manage early voting programs, I contacted twenty across various states that have adopted convenience voting laws. Twelve clerks responded to my inquiry with thoughtful feedback. As a result of both these discussions and past media reports, I received invaluable insight into the crucial role of counties in early voting implementation. In addition to determining the number and location of early voting sites throughout the county, many local officials are also responsible for promulgating and encouraging early voting to their citizens. Much consideration goes into these decisions, including voter convenience and budgetary realities.

County officials generally report that early voting is popular with both citizens and election administrators. As a result, clerks have often sought to make programs as widely available as possible. Buncombe County, North Carolina saw a fifteen percentage point increase in turnout from 1992 to 2008 (54% to 69%). The county offered sixteen early voting sites in 2008, or about one for every 10,000 voting-age citizens. Rachel Rathbone, Deputy Director of Campaign Finance for the county, says that offering many sites is designed to please residents. She notes, “Voters love the convenience of being able to vote where they want, when they want.” Sandi Chamblin, the chief registrar of Pike County, Georgia, where turnout increased ten percentage points from 1992 to 2008, added “Most of our voters don’t like to stand in

23 Rachel Rathbone, Deputy Director of Campaign Finance, Buncombe County Election Services, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2011)
lines on Election Day... Every election, I have a few voters remark to me that they will never go back to Election Day voting because they can plan when they vote.”

In Kent County, Maryland, where early voting was both new and popular in 2010, Board of Elections director Cheemoandia Blake said, “We had a lot of voters tell us they really appreciate early voting... The accessibility appeals to voters, because if they forget to vote one day, they have other opportunities to do so” (Bond 2011).

Rathbone acknowledges that for administrators, “Early voting is like having an election every day for two and a half weeks.” But while this sounds burdensome, with “good planning, good communication with other county departments, and good outreach to the public, it is not much additional hassle and often eases the pressure on Election Day.” George Gilbert, an administrator for Guilford County, North Carolina, agrees, stating, “Once we were able to staff up for the task, the net effect has been to reduce stress on the administration of elections. Attempting to provide adequate voting opportunities on one day to all voters interested in voting in a presidential election was near impossible to execute satisfactorily. Early voting helps spread out the work load.” Another interesting observation by Gilbert is that voters, on the rare occasion that they need to wait in line during early voting, do not mind it nearly as much as on Election Day. Because voters can arrive whenever they

24 Sandi Chamblin, Chief Registrar, Pike County, Georgia (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)
25 Rachel Rathbone, Deputy Director of Campaign Finance, Buncombe County Election Services, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2011)
26 George Gilbert, Director of Elections, Guilford County, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 14, 2011)
wish over a period of several weeks, many choose times when they are not busy or rushed. The decreased anxiety of voters carries over to those who service them. Gilbert adds, “Early voting has significantly reduced the ‘stress’ generated by angry voters.”

Sandy Cherry, an administrator in Cheatham County, Tennessee, asserts that early voting creates, “Less stress. [On] Election Day you have poll workers that work the polls and only do that maybe three times a year.” In essence, having many citizens vote at elections offices for several weeks allows seasoned professionals to handle issues, such as address changes and provisional ballots. On Election Day, the nine Cheatham County precincts are often flooded with needs and questions, which then must be addressed by limited staff, including many volunteers. Officials in multiple counties added that early voting serves as an important test of their respective election processes, allowing them to address and identify problems before the large wave of voters arrives on Election Day.

Once counties opt for one or multiple early voting sites, they must decide where to locate them. Different factors influence these decisions across counties. As discussed, most states mandate that counties offer early voting at the clerk’s office, but allow local officials to establish additional sites. In Buncombe County, Rathbone believes in diversifying the sorts of sites offered. She says, “We started off using only county libraries because the technology was available through the network system,

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27 Ibid, George Gilbert (personal communication, Jan. 14, 2011)
28 Sandy Cherry, Administrator of Elections, Cheatham County, Tennessee (personal communication, Jan. 20, 2011)
and then, as early voting caught on, the State Board of Elections provided software that allowed us to use ‘hybrid’ and ‘disconnected’ sites.\textsuperscript{29} In 2008, Buncombe County utilized libraries, additional county buildings, fire departments, churches, community centers, and one shopping mall for early voting.

Rathbone cited five factors that go into the site location decisions. First, past turnout is studied. This helps the office determine which parts of the county are likely to have high demand, allowing for more sites in those areas. Second, registration records are used to identify areas that are growing in population from cycle to cycle, allowing necessary changes to be made. Third, convenience to the voters is important. Certain areas are more convenient for particularly dense neighborhoods or commuters. Sites on a main road, or those with sufficient parking, therefore take precedence. Fourth, consistency is considered. While changes are made when necessary, too much experimenting from year to year can confuse voters and instill a sense that the system is too complicated. Finally, any and all decisions must consider the county’s budget.\textsuperscript{30} Sites cost money, in terms of equipment and manpower, and the county’s budgets are often stretched.

Cheatham County, Tennessee always offers early voting at the Election Commission Office, as is required by state law. The county, however, also offers satellite locations in all of its cities. Budget issues force tough decisions, but typically

\textsuperscript{29} Rachel Rathbone, Deputy Director of Campaign Finance, Buncombe County Election Services, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2011)

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, Rachel Rathbone (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2011)
the county grants more sites to those areas that have concurrent city elections at a
given time, as they will likely have more voters. This factor, Sandy Cherry says,
“allows the scales to be tipped in their favor.”

Officials in Watauga County, North Carolina have prioritized student
convenience in determining sites. Early voting is always available at the county
board of elections office, the Agricultural Extension service building, and at the
Appalachian State University student union. Regarding the latter, the county seeks to
make it easier for all voters, but “especially college students,” as they are often
numerous. In fact, during the presidential election of 2008, the county opened up
additional sites near the campus. It is this accommodation, combined with increased
registration efforts on college campuses, which local officials believe is responsible
for the county’s increased turnout (a fourteen-point increase from 1992 to 2008).

Conversely, a lack of site density or wise site placement can have negative effects.
In 2010, Washington County recorded one of the lowest early voting percentages in
Maryland, as only 2.52% of eligible voters participated early. Elections Director
Kaye Robucci argued that this was because the only location in the county was an
empty (former PNC Bank) building. She stated, “There’s no reason to go there
except to early vote” (Bond 2011).

Also in Maryland, where the number of sites in a county are currently mandated
by the state (but do vary), Frederick County complained that the state’s inflexibility

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31 Sandy Cherry, Administrator of Elections, Cheatham County, Tennessee (personal communication, Jan. 20, 2011)
32 Jane Ann Hodges, Watauga County, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 20, 2011)
stopped early voting from reaching its full potential. The county has the eighth-highest number of registered voters in Maryland, but was allowed to have only one early voting center. The site, located in the city of Frederick, made it inconvenient for voters who lived in rural parts of the county to cast their ballots early, according to local officials. The numbers confirmed the county’s suspicions, as early turnout was just 1.2% of eligible voters in the primary election and 4.2% in the general election — the third-lowest in the state.33

Stuart Harvey, Frederick County’s elections director, defended the county’s argument with some analysis. He found that fifty-six percent of county voters who took part in early voting lived within five miles of the polling place at the Frederick Senior Center, close to downtown Frederick. Notably, only twenty-eight percent lived in the county’s northern areas such as Thurmont, Walkersville and Emmetsburg, while just sixteen percent lived south of the city in Brunswick, Adamstown or Urbana. Harvey also noted that adding more sites could save money in Frederick County, arguing that the growth of early voting could enable officials to reduce the number of Election Day polling places (Brody 2011).

Others in Maryland voiced displeasure at site location in 2010. In Charles County, the only site was the election board headquarters in La Plata, despite the fact that the biggest voter base was in Waldorf, about ten miles to the north. Early turnout in the general election was 5.7%, below the state average of 6.3%. Elections

Director Tracy Dickerson, unhappy that some of the county’s voters could not easily participate in early voting, was one of several officials who lobbied state lawmakers to provide flexibility in how many sites each county could have (Brody 2011).

Meanwhile, officials in Orange County, Florida, also expressed frustration at state restrictions in recent elections. While Florida allows its counties to decide how many sites they provide, it mandates that they meet certain criteria. They must be only 1) Supervisor of Elections (SOE) offices that have been open for at least one year, 2) city halls, or 3) public libraries. In 2010, Orange County followed this protocol by placing sites at the Supervisor of Elections Office, the Apopka Community Center & VFW (on City Hall property) and eight public libraries.

Linda Tanko, the county clerk, believes that early voting, while convenient in the sense that voters can participate whenever they have time, typically leads to longer lines in her county. This is because the sites that meet the state’s criteria are rather small, limiting the amount of equipment and workers available at them during the early voting period. If the county had freedom to place sites where it wished, Tanko believes it could find locations that were convenient to voters, but also had “enough floor space and parking … to accommodate greater numbers of voters in a more efficient manner.” Sites, Tanko believes, are more important than the number of days early voting is offered. Reflecting these feelings, she believes that the early voting period could be effective if it lasted only five days, as voters would still take
advantage of the flexibility and poll workers would remain more energized for the entire period.34

Many officials stress the importance of promulgating early voting options to the public, noting that increased sites and hours are meaningless if not advertised to voters. Those counties that fully capitalized on early voting in 2008 seem to share a common emphasis on voter education. Often without prompting, administrators in the most successful counties credit early voting advertising with their improvement in turnout. Pike County, Georgia advertises in numerous ways, putting notices in the local newspaper and on the Internet to let voters know when early voting begins. Notably, elderly and disabled citizens that are less mobile are sent letters and applications in advance, so that they can requests ballots early and learn about voting sites in their area.35 Cheatham County posts site information on their website (a common tactic) and also places ads in all three of the county’s major newspapers.36 Watauga County publishes notices in the local paper, placing a special emphasis on the college papers. In addition, it posts information in newsletters for various organizations in the county (hospitals, schools, and churches).37 Counties are also increasingly aided by candidates and political parties, who use their own funds to mobilize early voters.

34 Linda Tanko, Senior Deputy Supervisor/Voter Services, Orange County, Florida (personal communication, Jan. 26, 2011)
35 Pike County, Georgia (personal communication, April 18, 2011)
36 Sandy Cherry, Administrator of Elections, Cheatham County, Tennessee (personal communication, Jan. 20, 2011)
37 Jane Ann Hodges, Watauga County, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 20, 2011)
Karen Krauss of Sumter County, Florida claims to personally distribute an early voting schedule and relevant literature “everywhere I go.” She stresses that you must “educate, educate and educate” in order for early voting to work. Buncombe County outsources the job to the county’s public relations department, who works with the election office to promote voter education. Finally, Guilford County has conducted, prior to major elections, extensive advertising campaigns regarding the availability of early voting. This includes distributing posters throughout the community, each of which lists all voting sites and times.

Orange County, Florida – which saw a fourteen-point turnout increase from 1992 to 2008 – offers informational material upon registration noting the three acceptable ways to vote: at the polls, by mail, and early voting. Prior to an election, active registered voters receive a notice from the election office reminding them of the different alternatives. Closer to Election Day, they also receive a sample ballot that lists early vote details such as dates, times and locations.

As I noted earlier, Maryland implemented early voting for the first time in 2010. During the primaries, turnout was abysmal, as only about 2% of registered voters took advantage of the option. Sites throughout the state were modest, as Baltimore city and Anne Arundel, Prince George’s and Montgomery counties each had five

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38 Karen Krauss, Supervisor of Elections, Sumter County, Florida (personal communication, Jan. 12, 2011)
39 Rachel Rathbone, Deputy Director of Campaign Finance, Buncombe County Election Services, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2011)
40 George Gilbert, Director of Elections, Guilford County, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 14, 2011)
41 Linda Tanko, Senior Deputy Supervisor/Voter Services, Orange County, Florida (personal communication, Jan. 26, 2011)
sites, Howard County had three, and all other jurisdictions had one. In Calvert County, where early turnout was only 1.2%, Elections Administrator Gail L. Hatfield acknowledged the problem was advertising, as many citizens were not yet aware of their new options. She added, “As word gets out, I’m sure we'll get more (voters)” (Cunningham 2010). Operatives who worked on high-level state campaigns noted that advertising was a problem throughout the state during both the primary and general elections, though they argued that budget constraints made doing so difficult in 2010.

Without directly acknowledging any shortcomings, Maryland State Board of Elections Deputy Administrator Ross Goldstein argued that the state’s early voting percentage should improve each year the state offers and advertises the convenience of early voting. He also noted that the Board of Elections will assess the 2010 elections and “refine the process and see where changes need to be made” (Bond 2011).

Not all Maryland counties failed with regards to advertising. Before the primaries, the Kent County Board of Elections sent early voting fliers to each household and posted reminders on its website. It urged people to vote early, even advertising through WCTR, a county radio station. Kent County had the highest early voting turnout in September’s primary, with 6.8 percent participation among active, eligible voters, according to the Maryland State Board of Elections. In the
general election, over 13% of eligible voters in Kent County voted early, the second-
highest total in the state (Talbot County was first with 14%).

Administrators across the country are generally confident that early voting has
played a central role in increasing turnout. Krauss credits Sumter County’s early
voting advertising efforts with helping it have “the number one voter turnout in the
state.” Rathbone notes that “turnout has most definitely increased for early voting,”
though she notes that other factors such as Election Day weather, last-minute
campaign strategies, the economy, and the political climate are still key variables in
given elections. At the very least, Trena Parker of Buncombe County says, “I
would feel comfortable in stating that our efforts have served to keep participation
from slipping in times where schedules are challenging and motivation is sometimes
lacking.”

George Gilbert of Guilford County believes to some extent “the availability of
early voting has made local get-out-the-vote efforts more productive in that early
voting enables a sustained effort over several weeks.” In this sense, campaigns help
achieve the county’s overall goal. Gilbert also believes that other efforts, such with
registration laws (NC adopted same-day registration in 2007), have helped. Guilford

42 “Early Voting Turnout,” Maryland State Board of Elections, available at
43 Karen Krauss, Supervisor of Elections, Sumter County, Florida (personal communication, Jan. 12,
2011)
44 Rachel Rathbone, Deputy Director of Campaign Finance, Buncombe County Election Services,
North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 18, 2011)
45 Trena Parker, Director of Election Services, Buncombe County, North Carolina (personal
communication, Jan. 24, 2011)
County also initiated participation in the Kids Voting program in 1995. Gilbert credits the program with increasing voter participation by the 18-24 year old age demographic throughout the past decade. In fact, in 2008, the turnout rate by 18-24 year olds exceeded turnout by the 25-34 age group across the county.46

Nancy Cook, a member of the Pike County, Georgia Board of Commissioners, thinks its advertising efforts have allowed early voting to help increase turnout. In fact, it has been so successful that she says, “I personally think we could almost do away with an election day, and just have 45 days of early voting, with the last day as the cutoff day.” Ultimately, she argues, turnout will increase even more once campaigns fully adapt to the new reality of early voting and advertise sooner in election cycles.47

Sandi Chamblin of Cheatham County believes “early voting does improve voter turnout,” mainly because “the most anyone had to wait was 15 minutes. Election Day people waited up to 1 and 1/2 hours.” Nevertheless, she believes the system still has not reached its potential. She notes that, “Early voting does still confuse the voters. Say I early vote in August 2010 at the Election Office. In November, I wait until Election Day and go back to the election office to vote because I voted there the last time. I will be unable to vote at the election office and will have to travel to my

46 George Gilbert, Director of Elections, Guilford County, North Carolina (personal communication, Jan. 14, 2011)
47 Nancy Cook, Pike County Board of Commissioners, Georgia (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)
voting precinct to cast my vote. This confuses a lot of voters.”48 If advertising and policy streamlining improve, she argues, the gains can be even greater.

CONCLUSIONS

Early voting is now a central feature of American elections. Hoping to make voting easier for citizens, reduce administrative stress, and in some cases, prevent voter fraud, thirty two-states and the District of Columbia adopted early voting laws between 1987 and 2010. Programs first appeared in Texas and other Western states, though the contested 2000 presidential election led to a new wave of initiatives across the nation. Momentum for early voting continued through the 2004 cycle, as long lines led to additional pressure to ease the act of participation. While many states adopted policies without much controversy, others continued to resist the national trend. Arguing that early voting would upset the tradition of small-town election administration, four of the six New England states still require a valid excuse in order to cast a ballot before Election Day. Meanwhile, Oregon and Washington have chosen to eliminate polling places altogether, instead opting for systems of universal vote-by-mail.

While early voting adoption and implementation was once supported on a bipartisan basis, it has become more divisive in recent years. Republicans once strongly backed early voting, believing in many states that their fundraising advantage would allow them to better sustain voter mobilization efforts over a long

48 Sandi Chamblin, Chief Registrar, Cheatham County, Tennessee (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)
period. Democrats also supported programs, hoping they might increase participation among groups favorable to them, namely African-Americans, Hispanics, and young voters. GOP support began to waver in the early 2000s, however, as Republicans in Maryland, Michigan and Missouri blocked (or delayed) early voting adoption. In 2008, Barack Obama used his considerable fundraising edge to effectively mobilize voters during the early voting period, helping him secure a decisive presidential victory. Since this cycle, Republican opposition to early voting has notably increased. Several GOP-controlled state legislatures have limited (but not eliminated) early voting by reducing its time window, the number of sites offered, and weekend options. While Democrats have claimed political reasons are behind these efforts, Republicans have argued that budgetary constraints require the cuts.

Despite cuts in some states, early voting remains popular and widely available in most states. Programs do, however, vary both across and within states. While states often set minimum standards for access, many decisions are made by county election administrators. Local officials often determine the number of early voting locations to be offered, where to place them, and how to advertise programs to citizens. Many administrators argue that if implemented correctly, early voting can indeed both increase voter participation and reduce problems at the polls. In particular, programs typically shorten lines and often help identify issues before a large mass of voters arrive on Election Day. Nevertheless, administrators acknowledge that budgetary concerns are a constant with regards to early voting, as both sites and advertising cost
money. The goal of pleasing voters and easing burdens is therefore constrained by the reach of local government resources.
CHAPTER 3: THE ROLE OF EARLY VOTING SITE DENSITY ON VOTER TURNOUT

It is commonly reported that the United States has one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the industrialized world. While rates vary depending on many factors, presidential turnout rarely surpasses 60% of voting-age citizens. In midterm years, 40% is the norm. These figures have long led reformers to investigate the causes of low turnout, as well as potential public policy initiatives to improve it. These prescriptions have included easier registration rules, public service announcements, and most importantly for my purposes, expanded opportunities to vote before Election Day – early voting.
Table 1: Average Voter Turnout in National Elections in Democratic States, 1945-1998

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Vote/VAP%</th>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>New Zealand</td>
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<td>77.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>77.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>74.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>74.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>74.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>70.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>69.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>68.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>67.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>52.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>United States of America</strong></td>
<td><strong>48.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

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49 Some nations in this chart did not have democratic elections during the entire 1945-1998 time span. The figures represent averages for the years in which they did.
In this chapter, I assess whether early voting indeed increases overall voter turnout by making the process more convenient. Numerous researchers have investigated this question; in fact, it has received more attention in the academic literature than any other early voting issue. Some initial research reported a significantly positive effect on turnout (Dubin and Kalsow 1996; Neeley and Richardson 2001; Oliver 1996; Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997; Stein 1998; Southwell and Burchett 2000; Berinsky, Burns, and Traugott 2001). More recent studies, however, have reported that the effect of early voting on participation is non-existent (Fitzgerald 2005; Highton and Mullin 2005; Primo, Jacobsmeier and Milyo 2007; Scheele et al. 2008), negligible (Gronke et al. 2007) or even negative (Larocca and Klemanski 2011; Burden et al. 2012).

This literature, however, has inadequately measured the effects of early voting on turnout. Throughout these studies, several important aspects of early voting have been neglected. First, major studies (Larocca and Klemanski 2011; Burden et al. 2012) fail to measure the convenience of various early voting options. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, early voting administration is largely conducted at the county level. As a result, variation is often substantial both across and within states. While some election clerks are committed to broad early voting programs, others offer the minimum services required by state law. Budgetary concerns also dictate the scope of early voting in many counties. The literature has widely failed to account for inter-county differences when studying the effects of early voting on participation.
While past research correctly posits that turnout should theoretically increase as voting becomes easier, it inadequately measures the degree to which early voting programs actually reduce participation costs.

In most early voting states, counties have the freedom to determine the total number of early voting sites they offer. In order to effectively account for the convenience offered to voters through early voting, I use new data from over 3,000 U.S. counties to assess whether those with more sites per capita record higher levels of participation. My model(s) controls for other known influences of participation often omitted in early voting models, including demographics, political variables, felon disenfranchisement laws, and voter identification requirements.

Further, early voting studies universally fail to account for lagged turnout in their models, leading to serious endogeneity concerns. Turnout may be higher in areas with broad early voting options because the people and officials of those communities care more about participation. If this is so, then early voting sites are not the catalyst for higher turnout, but rather a proxy for it. Gronke et al. (2007) curiously omit any consideration of state or year fixed effects, an important consideration with regards to voter turnout. Others run sophisticated regression analyses, but do not consider an area’s turnout before early voting was adopted (lagged turnout).

I include a lagged measure because even strong turnout predictors may ignore idiosyncratic factors which predict participation in certain counties (Brady and
Collier 2004). For example, a county may consist of small, rural communities where voting is a popular civic exercise for which nearly everyone engages. Popular predictors such as income and education may not predict high turnout in these cases. In order to account for these characteristics, I control for each county’s average turnout rate in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections.\textsuperscript{50} I use elections sixteen and twelve years prior, respectively, because they represent years when no-excuse, in-person early voting was in its infancy and the percentage of citizens taking advantage of it was very small. Therefore, this measure of lagged turnout largely precedes the treatment of my primary independent variable (sites per capita), while still capturing cultural characteristics of a county which would not likely change significantly in a decade or so.

Controlling for lagged turnout and other predictors, I find that early voting sites generally have a significant and positive relationship with voter turnout when examined at the county-level. Across many specifications, the relationship holds. Substantively, the findings suggest that adding ten sites in a county of 10,000 voting-age residents increases turnout by several percentage points or more. Contrary to the recent findings of others, early voting does increase participation. In order to do so, however, it must be widely accessible. More generally, this research suggests that more attention must be paid to the specifics of early voting implementation, rather than simply the policy’s adoption in a given state.

\textsuperscript{50} I choose an average measure to account for the fact that each election is unique and one cycle may not offer the best estimate of a county’s turnout norms.
WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE?

While the causes of low turnout receive considerable scholarly attention, rational choice theorists have long debated the issue from a different perspective. Rather, they have pondered why citizens ever vote. If citizens are truly rational and utility-maximizing, it is difficult to explain why they would. In statewide and national elections, the probability that one will cast a decisive vote is not significantly different from zero. Given that electoral outcomes are public goods that are equally felt by voters and non-voters alike, there is little incentive for citizens to devote time and energy towards driving to the polls and casting a vote. Such an activity seems to run contrary to rational behavior. It is this paradox which Morris Fiorina once stated, “ate rational choice theory” (1990).

Anthony Downs formulated the first model (1957) that sought to explain voting within the confines of rationality. Previously, voter benefits had been defined as only those received when one’s preferred candidate is victorious. In An Economic Theory of Democracy, Downs sought to expand the definition by arguing that the value one places in democracy acts as an additional benefit. It is therefore rational to vote when \( P_b + D > C \). In this model, \( P \) represents the probability that one’s vote will be decisive, in the sense that it either breaks or forces a tie. \( B \) represents the benefits a voter will receive if the outcome of the election matches his/her choice. \( D \) represents the value one places in democracy and the role one feels obliged to play in sustaining it. \( C \) represents the costs involved in voting, both in the time and energy required to
physically vote, as well as the effort required to familiar oneself with the issues and
candidates. Citizens will vote when Pb + D exceeds C, and abstain when it does not.
In this model, one is able to receive benefits even in cases where one's perceived
ability to impact the outcome of the election is zero.

Riker and Ordeshook (1968) expanded this suggestion by introducing several
additional benefits one may derive from the act of voting. They argued that
participating in elections provides citizens an opportunity to both affirm their
allegiance to the political system and demonstrate support for a particular political
party or ideology. Ashenfelter and Kelley (1975) suggested that voting is not only
satisfying, but also entertaining for some. They argued that this pleasure is the result
of traveling to a destination which may result in interaction with friends or
acquaintances, and also the psychological feeling of playing a role in the most
pertinent activity of the day. In the event that voting becomes an enjoyable activity, it
follows that it must be rational. Just as people rationally accept costs (time, energy,
money) to attend sporting events and concerts, or participate in community bingo,
costs are accepted for the sake of voting.

Aldrich (1993) argues that citizens intend to act rationally in their voting
behavior, but cannot as a result of cognitive manipulation. Many individuals and
groups have an interest in generating voter turnout among large clusters of the
population. Political parties, PACs, and other organized interests invest millions of
dollars attempting to affect the outcome of elections. In the face of these unavoidable
sources of influence, Aldrich argues that voters are often inspired to act in ways they otherwise may have considered irrational. Citizens, he claims, develop exaggerated views about the ways a candidate’s election will benefit their everyday lives, as well as irrational fears. In his view, voters seek to act on the basis of rationality, but are (mis)guided by cognitive mechanisms which skew the perceived distribution of costs and benefits from voting.

Since Downs, most scholars (at least rational-choice ones) have accepted that ultimately the decision to vote is based on a cost-benefit calculus. The costs include the effort required to register, the time required to go to a polling place and perhaps wait in line, the accommodations that must be made to go to a polling place (taking off work, etc.), and the time and concentration required to become informed about issues and candidates. It is through this lens that academics and reformers have suggested that lowering the costs of voting should increase turnout, as doing so allows the act of voting to produce a net benefit for more citizens (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Gronke and McDonald 2008).

Indeed, citizens have claimed that the inconvenience of voting has affected their decision to abstain. A 1998 Pew report found that 21% of voters failed to vote in the 1996 presidential election because they were “too busy.” A substantial percentage of others reported that long lines at the polling place or a lack of transportation was the
cause of their abstention.51 A 2005 California Voter Foundation agreed, finding that 28% of the state’s infrequent voters failed to vote because it was inconvenient.52

MAKING VOTING EASIER

Hoping to reduce the costs of voting and improve turnout, advocates and lawmakers have pursued numerous policies over the years. Nine states have officially designated Election Day as a holiday, releasing (at least) state employees from their work responsibilities.53 Efforts to pass a national law, however, have been unsuccessful. Further, many efforts have centered on voter registration, as the U.S. is one of few Western countries that requires citizens to register in advance of voting. In each state except North Dakota, citizens must initially complete two steps in order to participate in elections.54 Several states passed laws in the 1970s and 1980s designed to ease the registration process. Four states implemented “motor voter” programs, whereby eligible citizens could register when applying or renewing a drivers’ license. In 1993, President Clinton signed the National Voter Registration Act, effectively nationalizing this approach.

A handful of other states have enacted laws allowing voters to register on the day in which they vote, removing the need to take initiative in advance. Many scholars (Fenster 1994; Brians and Grofman 1999; Knack 2001; Leighley and Nagler 2009;
Burden et al. 2012) have shown that Election Day (or same-day) registration laws can boost turnout, though the degree of the effect remains a matter of debate.55

Early voting laws were (and are) championed by many who believe they can reduce the overall costs of voting. As I documented in Chapter 2, state efforts to approve early voting laws were partially inspired by hopes for higher turnout. Similar to liberalized registration rules, early voting should theoretically lower costs, as the programs expand the range of opportunities that citizens have to participate. If voting is allowed for weeks rather than one single weekday, then there is a greater chance that a voter will find a convenient enough opportunity to visit the polls. These new voters may consist of workers that are able to vote on a Saturday, but not a Tuesday. They may include those who unexpectedly pass an early voting station while running errands in their local community. Finally, they could be those who are willing to wait in a short early voting line on their day off, but not a long Election Day line on a workday.

More generally, research suggests that voting is most costly for poorer, less educated, and racial and ethnic minority voters (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Piven and Cloward 1989; Teixeira 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). While some

55 The states with EDR/SDR policies are Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Notably, Connecticut offers this option only for presidential elections. In addition, Ohio offered a one-week same-day registration option in late September/early October 2008, though this policy has been eliminated.
voters will always abstain because they simply lack an interest\textsuperscript{56}, increasing opportunities to vote should bring a measurable number of these citizens to the polls.

**DOES EARLY VOTING INCREASE TURNOUT?**

Scholars have debated the turnout question for over a decade, relying on a variety of methods and data sources along the way. While progress has been made, the literature suffers from numerous shortcomings and warrants new attention. First, much of the work was completed in the 1990s before early voting expanded considerably. Additionally, many articles focus on a single county or state, creating concerns about external validity. Further, models widely omit any consideration of lagged turnout (before early voting was adopted) in counties and states. Finally, most studies fail to account for differences in early voting implementation at the local level, instead dichotomously coding areas as simply inside or outside of an early voting state.

In an early study using Current Population Survey (CPS) data, Oliver (1996) finds that early voting and liberalized absentee laws aided turnout in 1992 only when parties actively mobilized citizens to participate in it. Dubin and Kalsow (1996) report similar modest gains from early voting in California in the early 1990s, while Lyons and Scheb (1999) find that programs helped retain infrequent voters in one Tennessee county in 1996. Given that a relatively small number of votes were cast

\textsuperscript{56} The reasons why some citizens choose not to vote are believed to be numerous. They include a lack of interest or knowledge concerning politics, a belief that one’s vote is irrelevant to an election’s outcome, and a lack of faith in the governmental system.
early in the 1992 and 1996 elections, however, these findings have limited application.

Neeley and Richardson (1996) account for county-level features in Tennessee in the 1994 elections. The authors find that county turnout increases as the percentage of citizens living in a town with an early voting site rises, concluding that “if increased participation is a goal, then the proximity and accessibility of voting sites in population centers is a must.” In a similar piece focused on early voting in Texas during the 1992 elections, Stein and Garcia-Monet (1997) reported that counties offering more non-traditional early voting stations (i.e. supermarkets) had higher levels of participation before Election Day. Further, this increase in early voting brought small, but significant turnout gains to these respective counties. While these studies were limited to single states in the early 1990s, they recognized the need to account for county-level implementation when measuring early voting and its effects. More recently, Losco, Scheele, and Hall (2010) explored county variation, finding that Indiana counties with more early voting centers saw more participation before Election Day and higher levels of overall turnout.

Generally, however, the literature has largely failed to build on this county-focused work. Instead, as the number of early voting states grew in the 2000s, larger studies turned to aggregate data. Fitzgerald (2005) examines state-level turnout data from 1972-2002 and finds that states do not experience increased participation when they adopt early voting. Turnout does increase somewhat with the adoption of
registration reforms, including Election Day Registration (EDR) laws. Similarly, Gronke et al. studies aggregate turnout trends from 1980-2004 (2007) and finds no relationship between early voting and higher turnout. He does, however, report that Oregon’s vote-by-mail (VBM) elections result in heightened participation, a finding also reported by Southwell (2004).

These aggregate-level studies are a useful contribution, but are limited. First, both Fitzgerald and Gronke et al. code early voting states in a binary fashion, denoting only whether or not each state in a given year had an active early voting program. Neither analysis accounts for differences in early voting accessibility within states, a central consideration of my project. Second, isolating the impact of voting procedures over such a long period of time (24 to 30 years) is a difficult challenge and requires the careful identification of covariates. Gronke et al. omit any consideration of state or year fixed effects, an important consideration with regards to voter turnout. Finally, as the studies cease with the 2002 and 2004 elections, respectively, neither measures the impact of early voting since its use spiked considerably in 2008.

In a more recent study, Burden et al. (2012) examine the role of various electoral reforms on 2008 turnout. Unlike Fitzgerald (2005) and Gronke et al. (2008), the authors use counties as their case units. County-level demographic data (i.e. race, income, and education) is included for each case, though the authors do not account for each county’s lagged turnout or variation with regards to early voting. Instead,
they simply code each county based on whether or not it is located in an early voting state. Going further, they create interaction terms noting if a county has one of several combinations: 1) Election Day Registration (EDR) and early voting, 2) EDR, Same Day Registration (SDR), and early voting, or 3) early voting and SDR. They control for other factors known to influence turnout, including state-level indicators for voter identification requirements, laws regarding ex-felons (an important consideration absent from Fitzgerald and Gronke et al.’s aggregate work), and campaign competitiveness. Ultimately, they find early voting alone to actually have a negative effect on turnout in 2008. It is only positively significant (in some specifications) when interacted with laws that ease registration requirements.

Burden et al. interpret their findings as evidence that early voting, while decreasing the short-term costs of voting, actually leads to interactive effects that depress turnout. The option to vote early, they argue, reduces turnout “by robbing election day of its stimulating effects.” Specifically, it leads to fewer get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts in the weeks before a campaign, and also decreases the civic energy traditionally associated with Election Day. Concerns over early voting depressing the civic nature of Election Day are also expressed by others (Thompson 2004; Fortier 2006). Giammo and Brox (2010) adopt a similar approach; assessing early voting’s effect on turnout in a sample of counties over the course of several presidential elections. The authors report that early voting tended to have a positive relationship with turnout when it was first adopted in a county’s state, but that the effect
disappeared over time. Therefore, they speculate that the brief turnout spike is due to increasing the perceived benefits of voting – *by offering a novel voting medium* – rather than lowering costs.

Larocca and Klemanski (2011) concur with Burden et al., using CPS data from 2000, 2004, and 2008 to confirm that early voting not only fails to increase turnout, but actually has a negative effect on it. The authors argue that the programs fail to improve participation because they do not reduce the total number of “trips and tasks” required of voters, the most important measures of participation costs in their model. The authors note that while early voting expands the time window for voting, it fails to improve convenience because it is typically allowed “at less numerous and often less conveniently located polling places.” While they acknowledge the importance of county variation and the geographical proximity of voting sites, Larocca and Klemanski include no variables for local early voting implementation. Instead, they adopt the generalized state-level indicators used by many aforementioned studies (Fitzgerald 2005; Gronke et al. 2007; Burden et al. 2012; Giammo and Brox 2010). As a result, they offer no insight into whether improving the number and location of early voting sites can make the programs effective at increasing turnout.

While a handful of limited (and mostly dated) studies suggest that county-level implementation may influence early voting’s ability to increase turnout, most larger and more recent analyses have paid little mind to local differences. The bulk of
recent research has instead focused on simple state-level indicators for early voting adoption. In doing so, most have found no evidence that early voting improves participation. Some have even reported that programs may have the opposite effect by devaluing the media attention and civic spirit associated with Election Day. As Giammo and Brox (2010) discuss, these findings are consequential because they provide feedback to state and local policymakers. If a consensus develops that early voting cannot improve participation, then it becomes easier and more likely for states to decrease their offerings. Therefore, it is essential that scholars continue to diligently assess this question.

A NEW THEORY OF EARLY VOTING AND TURNOUT

I offer a new theoretical framework for measuring the effects of early voting laws on voter turnout. As reducing voting costs should bring more citizens to the polls, I focus on accounting for the degree to which governments truly reduce them. Simply offering early voting does not necessarily lower the participation burden in a meaningful way. If a high-population county has one early voting site situated in a crowded, busy downtown, then this option hardly lowers costs for a marginally-interested voter. This was the case in Los Angeles County in 2008, where one early voting site was tasked with serving over four-million registered California voters. Lines are likely to be very long at stations such as this, while the single site will probably be difficult to reach for many of the county’s residents. Further, as Burden et al. (2012) and Larocca and Klemanski (2011) suggest, these programs may even
have a perverse effect on turnout if voting simultaneously fails to become easier while mobilization efforts, civic attention, and media coverage surrounding Election Day decrease.

Unlike registration laws, which are uniform throughout a given state, early voting convenience varies considerably and must be measured at the county level. If early voting sites are abundant in a locale, then citizens are less likely to be inconvenienced by participating. Clark County (Las Vegas), which has a substantially smaller population than Los Angeles, offered 87 sites in 2008. It is far more likely that one of these many sites was situated near a given individual voter’s home, workplace, or shopping area than the single Los Angeles location. County differences were notable throughout the nation. Each Ohio county offered one early voting site to its citizens. Some counties, of course, are much larger than others throughout the state. Cuyahoga County has over one-million residents, while Vinton County has slightly over 13,000 residents. In Texas, tiny Brewster County (population: 8,900) had five early voting sites, while the much larger Hamilton County (population: 307,000) had just three.

In Chapter 2, local officials supported the notion that increased sites in convenient areas encourage participation. Further, research has suggested that the closer one lives to their polling station, the more likely they are to vote (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003; Dyck and Gimpel 2005; Haspel and Knotts 2005). More expansive early voting programs are also likely to be better promulgated – by both officials and
word of mouth – in one’s respective county. As a result, I believe that counties offering more early voting sites (per capita) will produce higher levels of voter participation, even when controlling for past turnout in the county, as well as known institutional, political, and demographic predictors of turnout. Similar to past reforms designed to lower voting costs, I do not believe that additional sites can wholly solve the United States’ notorious turnout problem. The decision not to vote is rooted in both high costs and the perception of low benefits for some voters. Abundant early voting sites cannot solve the latter. Nevertheless, I expect high site density to have measurable and substantively significant effects on participation.

**OLS Models**

In designing my models, I am cognizant of potential endogeneity problems. Those counties that choose to offer additional sites may be places that value turnout and civic participation. If this is the case, then sites are more an effect of turnout, rather than its cause. My qualitative analyses in Chapter 2 suggest that while state adoption has not typically been driven by ideology, some county officials choose to make implementation a much higher priority than others. First, I account for lagged turnout in each county. Therefore, if a county had high turnout (and perhaps a culture of civic participation) before early voting was adopted and sites were designated, then my model will not attribute these high levels of participation to site adoption. Further, I include a robustness check whereby 2008 sites are asked to predict 2000 turnout. If sites are merely a product of civic-minded counties, than this
variable should significantly predict turnout in prior elections. If sites are only predictive in 2008, then I can more confidently report a one-way causal relationship between site adoption and subsequent turnout gains.

There is no national study that accounts for early voting implementation at the county-level when measuring its role in increasing turnout. In this chapter, I develop a new series of OLS models with this objective in mind. I specifically account for the number of early voting sites located in each U.S. county at the time of the 2008 election.\(^{57}\)

In 2008, for the first time, the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) collected data from nearly all U.S. counties on the number of early voting sites it employed during the election cycle. I use this data to create a “sites per capita” variable, which measures the number of sites in a county per 1,000 voting-age residents. If early voting indeed improves turnout, then we should expect this variable to have a positive relationship with the dependent variable, the 2008 county turnout rate. I code the variable in this fashion because counties vary in size. One site in Los Angeles County represents weak early voting availability, though one site in Borden County, Texas (population: 729) should serve residents quite well.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{57}\) Cases in Alaska are excluded because of data availability/consistency issues. In addition, I exclude Oregon and Washington counties from my analysis. These states do not have early voting sites or traditional Election Day sites. Since all voting is conducted by mail, I am unable to assess turnout effects in these states using my models.

\(^{58}\) Of course, my variable does not account for the physical size of particular counties, only its population. First, I believe that population is a more important factor, as more voters mean more traffic and congestion and longer lines at the polling place. It also means more stress for election officials. While the physical distance in a rural county may be considerable, travel times may not be significantly different from those travelling a relatively short distance in a more urban area.
The dependent variable in my model is a county’s 2008 turnout rate among the voting-age population (VAP). Population data comes from the Census, which provides annual population estimates for each county. As it does not break up this data by age, I estimate the voting age population in 2008 by taking the overall population growth from 2000 to 2008 and applying the growth rate to the reported 2000 VAP.

\[
2008\text{ VAP} = (1 + \text{Population growth \% from 2000-2008}) \times (2000\text{ VAP})
\]

Raw vote totals from each county are provided by multiple sources, notably McClurg (2009) and the National Atlas (2011). In addition to the aforementioned primary independent variable, sites per capita, I also account for numerous known predictors of voter turnout.

As I discussed, I control for perhaps the best predictor of a county’s voter turnout in a given election: \textit{the county’s turnout in previous elections}. A lagged turnout measure ensures that I capture county norms \textit{before} early voting was adopted. In addition, my models control for institutional, political, and demographic influences on turnout. Regarding institutions, I include a dichotomous measure for whether or not the county is in a state that allows no-excuse early voting, the primary independent variable in the Burden et al. (2012) and Giammo and Brox (2010) studies. This allows me to determine the role of site density while controlling for the effect of early voting itself. Next, I control for whether or not a state required voters to present a photo or other form of identification (ID) in order to vote in 2008. Since the early
2000s, voter ID laws have emerged across the county. The 2002 Help America Vote Act (HAVA) required that first-time voters who register via mail and do not provide ID verification must show an ID before voting. Since this time, many more have taken additional steps. By the 2008 election, twenty-two states required either a photo ID or other form of identification at the polling place in order for a registered citizen to vote. Voter ID laws were widely challenged in federal court throughout the 2000s, though a 2008 Supreme Court ruling upholding Indiana’s ID law has settled constitutional issues for the immediate future.

Research on whether voter ID laws depress turnout has been abundant in recent years. Findings are split, though most believe the effects are minimal (if they exist at all). Vercellotti and Anderson (2006) reported a small but significant negative relationship between county-level voter turnout and ID laws in 2004, while Alvarez, Bailey, and Katz (2008) use CPS data to show that having to present photo identification does depress the turnout of registered voters when compared to those living in states that required one to simply state their name. Others, however, have argued that no noticeable drop-off in turnout due to ID laws is (yet) apparent (Milyo 2007; Mycoff, Wagner, and Wilson, 2007; Erikson and Minnite 2009).

I also include a variable controlling for the percentage of a state’s voting-age population that is disenfranchised due to felon or ex-felon status. This data was

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59 This data is provided by Alvarez, Bailey, and Katz (2008) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). The twenty-two states are Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

60 *Crawford v. Marion County Election Board*, 553 U.S. 181 (2008)
collected for the 2004 election by Manza and Uggen (2006). In specifications where this variable is included, I exclude states that changed their policy between 2004 and 2008.\textsuperscript{61} It has been suggested that high-levels of disenfranchisement among the voting-age population could reasonably decrease turnout (Burden et al. 2012), as many otherwise eligible U.S. citizens are denied the ability to participate. Academics have explored this question in recent years, though the body of literature is not vast. Manza and Uggen (2006) link long-term declines in voter participation to the expansion of disenfranchised populations. Grose and Yoshinaka (2005) argue that among Southern states, voter turnout in states that permanently disenfranchise ex-felons is lower; Hirschfield (1999) reports a similar finding in a sample limited to African-American males. In contrast, Miles (2000) examined a repeated cross-section of all fifty states and found that felon disenfranchisement laws were not systematically related to state turnout rates. Miles (2004) followed this work, reporting empirical tests showing that the presence of a law permanently disenfranchising felons had no effect on the turnout rates of African-American men relative to those of whites and women. He argued that this is due to the fact that most felons belong to demographic groups that, although eligible to vote, infrequently exercise that right.

Further, I account for whether a state had either same-day registration or Election Day registration laws on the books in 2008. Many (Fenster 1994; Brians and

\textsuperscript{61} The five states that changed their policies regarding felon disenfranchisement between 2004 and 2008 were Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Nebraska, and Rhode Island.
Grofman 1999; Knack 2001; Leighley and Nagler 2009; Burden et al. 2012) have shown that eased registration requirements can boost turnout, though the degree of the effect varies among this research (see Hanmer 2009). I run tests interacting EDR/SDR laws with early voting site density to assess whether the combination of these laws has a positive effect on turnout.

Turning to political considerations, I include a measure of campaign competitiveness in the 2008 election, noting whether or not the county was in a state that hosted multiple visits by a major presidential candidate in the last week of the 2008 campaign. In order for a candidate to visit a state multiple times in the final week of a campaign, the state would need to have been considered a strong battleground state. Arguably, this higher level of intensity statewide could improve voter turnout in the respective counties within it.

I also create a dichotomous variable noting counties in states that had a favorite son or daughter on a presidential or vice-presidential ticket in 1992, 1996, or 2008. I include all three elections to account for the fact that the lagged turnout variable may also be affected in these years. In these instances, one may expect turnout to increase as a result of heightened local attention and/or enthusiasm. While this

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62 Data indicating which states had EDR or SDR in 2008 is provided by a 2009 Demos policy report. The states include Connecticut, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Notably, Connecticut offers this option only for presidential elections, while Ohio offered a one-week same-day registration option in late September/early October 2008.
63 According to CNN, those states that hosted at least two visits were Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.
64 All counties from Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Illinois, New York, and Tennessee are removed in this specification. Alaska, the home state of 2008 GOP Vice-President nominee Sarah Palin, is already excluded from all analyses.
variable is not included in my primary model, I do run a specification excluding all counties in favorite-son/daughter states as a robustness check.

Finally, numerous demographic covariates are included, controlling for whether each county is more rural than urban, as well as its' percent Black, percent Hispanic, percent below the poverty line, percent over the age of sixty-five, and percent of its citizens (over the age of twenty-five) with a college degree. All demographic information is taken from the 2000 Census. While 2008 figures would be ideal, the Census does not provide consistent estimates for each county on a yearly basis. While some counties change demographically over a period of eight years, I do not believe that this presents a significant issue in the aggregate. I expect to find both poverty rates and percent Hispanic negatively associated with county turnout, while rural counties, college education and elderly rates should have a positive relationship. Further, given the candidacy of Barack Obama in 2008, I anticipate that a county’s percent Black will be correlated with greater participation as well.

Recognizing that the effect of site density may differ depending on the geographic size of a county, I run analyses that separate rural and urban counties. The 2000 Census considers all population located within an urbanized area (UA) or an urban cluster (UC) to be urban.65 For each county, it computes the percentage of the county’s population living in an urban setting. I run some tests with only those

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65 The Census delineates UA and UC boundaries to encompass densely settled territory consisting of 1) core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and 2) surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile.
counties designated to be over 50% urban, as well as those designated to be over 50% rural. This allows me to gauge the impact of sites per capita in both small, condensed areas and large, sparse ones.\textsuperscript{66}

I also conduct some tests which examine only counties in those states that have early voting laws. This allows me to estimate the role of site density once a state has made the decision to adopt early voting. In essence, these tests remove hundreds of counties which have a “0” value for the primary independent variable. In addition, to confirm the findings that I report, I run tests with the sites variable logged to account for its somewhat exponential distribution.

For all regression analyses, I run corresponding specifications with state fixed effects to confirm my findings. However, because several of my variables are state-level indicators, they are often omitted due to collinearity when I include fixed effects; therefore, I report coefficients from tests \textit{without} fixed effects and mention any notable discrepancies. Further, I always report standard errors that are clustered by state; this takes account of the fact that many of my covariates vary by state (rather than by county).

\textbf{FINDINGS}

Across various specifications, I can report that the association between early voting sites per capita and 2008 county turnout is positive and significant across

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{U.S. Census}, available at http://www.census.gov/geo/www/ua/ua_2k.html.
many specifications. These findings lend support to the notion that while simply adopting early voting may not increase turnout, the presence of ample sites does so.

Table 2 confirms the first element of this claim, as I find that no-excuse early voting laws — without the consideration of sites — actually have a *negative* effect on 2008 county turnout, supporting the results of both Larocca and Klemanski (2011) and Burden et al. (2012). This relationship persists both with and without the lagged turnout variable included in the model. Perhaps the simple existence of early voting has depressing effects on turnout by reducing the civic nature of Election Day, as well as get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts and media attention in the days and weeks before it.
### Table 2: No-Excuse Early Voting Laws and 2008 Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1) 2008 turnout</th>
<th>(2) 2008 turnout</th>
<th>(3) 2008 turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All counties</td>
<td>All counties</td>
<td>All counties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged turnout (1992 and 1996)</td>
<td>0.657***</td>
<td>0.647***</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-excuse early voting</td>
<td>-0.0269***</td>
<td>-0.0337***</td>
<td>-0.0278***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter ID law</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
<td>-0.00783**</td>
<td>0.00202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felon disenfranchisement rate</td>
<td>0.0982</td>
<td>-0.149*</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDR/SDR</td>
<td>0.0317***</td>
<td>0.0551***</td>
<td>0.0279***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign competitiveness</td>
<td>0.0228***</td>
<td>0.0104***</td>
<td>0.0235***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.197***</td>
<td>-0.278***</td>
<td>-0.203***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.0177***</td>
<td>0.0411***</td>
<td>0.0176***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.163***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
<td>0.167***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.0415***</td>
<td>-0.0994***</td>
<td>-0.0514***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>0.0630*</td>
<td>0.542***</td>
<td>0.0813**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.530***</td>
<td>0.935***</td>
<td>0.542***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.169***</td>
<td>0.434***</td>
<td>0.176***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.485</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Meanwhile, Table 2 confirms many of my expectations about the other independent variables. Neither voter identification nor felon disenfranchisement laws have significant effects on turnout with all variables included, though both negatively
affect participation when the lagged turnout indicator is removed. I also find that being in a state with Election Day or same-day registration has a significantly positive effect on turnout. The effect is over three percentage points with lagged turnout included and 5.5 points without it. Counties in competitive presidential election states were also associated with over two additional percentage points of turnout.

The demographic variables behave as expected. A county’s poverty rate and percent Hispanic are each consistent negative predictors of turnout, while college education and a county’s percent over sixty-five are associated with higher turnout. Notably, a county’s percent Black has a significant and very positive relationship with turnout when the lagged turnout variable is included, highlighting that this group participated much more in 2008 than in the past. This is not surprising given the historic candidacy of Barack Obama. In the second specification, with the lagged turnout variable removed, percent Black remains positive and significant, but the coefficient is smaller. Finally, rural counties are associated with higher turnout than urban ones; those coded as over 50% rural enjoy turnout increases of nearly six percentage points.

I next assess the role of early voting on 2008 turnout by controlling for the density of early voting sites available in a particular county. Figure 1 is a simple depiction of county sites and turnout in 2008. Before the inclusion of any control variables, this offers a snapshot of the data. As the figure indicates, participation actually dips a bit
when sparse early voting sites are offered. As site density improves, however, turnout gradually and steadily increases. Counties with 0.1 or fewer sites per 1,000 voting-age residents (equivalent to 1 site per 10,000 residents) had a turnout rate slightly below 60% in 2008, less than the 62% rate in counties with no early voting. Meanwhile, counties that had between 0.25 and 0.5 sites per 1,000 residents saw a rate of about 65%, while those with 0.5 to 0.75 sites enjoyed a turnout rate near 70%. The few counties that had over 1 site per 1,000 residents eclipsed 70% and eventually neared 80%. While more sophisticated models will better assess whether these findings are legitimate, this figure offers a clear and useful starting point.

Table 3 confirms the raw findings reported in Figure 1, as sites are both a positive and significant predictor of 2008 county turnout across a variety of specifications.

The effect is clear when controlling for a range of institutional, political and
demographic characteristics, as well as lagged turnout in each county. This finding offers evidence that while state adoption of early voting may not automatically produce higher turnout levels, ample sites in a county can have a significant effect on participation.

The substantive effect of sites is about two percentage points in the primary specification, implying that an additional site per 1,000 voting-age residents is associated with a two percentage point increase in a county’s turnout rate.67 The effect jumps to 4.7 points when lagged turnout is not considered, while it changes very little (to 2.2 points) when only counties in early voting states are included in the model.68 With felon disenfranchisement removed from the model, adding counties from five additional states, the site effect becomes 2.7 and 5.6 points, respectively. Finally, when counties in states with presidential or vice-presidential “favorite sons” on the ballot are removed, the effect reverts to two points and remains highly significant at the 99% confidence level.69

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67 With all counties included, the distribution of sites per capita across the counties is a bit skewed. Many counties have 0 sites (if they are located in a state without early voting), a substantial number have a very small number (i.e. a county with 1 site and 500,000 residents is 0.005 sites per 1,000), and others have high numbers (counties with several sites and only a few thousand residents). As a result, I also ran identical specifications which took the natural log of “sites per 1,000 voting-age residents” to ensure that the results could withstand being normalized. Each of these analyses indeed confirm my reported results, as sites per capita remains highly significant in each specification when the natural log of “sites” is substituted.

68 This analysis removes all counties with 0 sites (about 1/3 of all counties). Here, I am able to examine the importance of sites once a state has adopted early voting. These findings are useful for policymakers designing the particulars of an early voting policy after a state has adopted the practice.

69 Across all tests, my principal findings also withstand the inclusion of state fixed-effects. In fact, in most specifications, the substantive effect of sites increases when fixed-effectsa re included.
Table 3: Early Voting Sites and 2008 Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>0.657***</td>
<td>0.647***</td>
<td>0.597***</td>
<td>0.698***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged turnout (1992 and 1996)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites per 1,000 VAP residents</td>
<td>0.0252***</td>
<td>0.0623***</td>
<td>0.0312***</td>
<td>0.0700***</td>
<td>0.0280***</td>
<td>0.0234***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-excuse early voting</td>
<td>-0.0269***</td>
<td>-0.0337***</td>
<td>-0.0278***</td>
<td>-0.0302***</td>
<td>-0.0285***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter ID law</td>
<td>0.0017</td>
<td>-0.00783**</td>
<td>0.00202</td>
<td>-0.00954***</td>
<td>-0.0009</td>
<td>0.00277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felon disenfranchisement rate</td>
<td>0.0982</td>
<td>-0.149*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0713</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDR/SDR</td>
<td>0.0317***</td>
<td>0.0551***</td>
<td>0.0279***</td>
<td>0.0518***</td>
<td>0.0314***</td>
<td>0.0272***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign competitiveness</td>
<td>0.0228***</td>
<td>0.0104***</td>
<td>0.0235***</td>
<td>0.0120***</td>
<td>0.0266***</td>
<td>0.0219***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.197***</td>
<td>-0.278***</td>
<td>-0.203***</td>
<td>-0.279***</td>
<td>-0.153***</td>
<td>-0.187***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.0177***</td>
<td>0.0411***</td>
<td>0.0176***</td>
<td>0.0397***</td>
<td>0.0191***</td>
<td>0.0198***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.163***</td>
<td>0.111***</td>
<td>0.167***</td>
<td>0.100***</td>
<td>0.146***</td>
<td>0.175***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.0415***</td>
<td>-0.0994***</td>
<td>-0.0514***</td>
<td>-0.115***</td>
<td>-0.0406***</td>
<td>-0.0302***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>0.0630*</td>
<td>0.543***</td>
<td>0.0813***</td>
<td>0.529***</td>
<td>0.141***</td>
<td>0.0534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.530***</td>
<td>0.935***</td>
<td>0.542***</td>
<td>0.940***</td>
<td>0.682***</td>
<td>0.531***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.169***</td>
<td>0.434***</td>
<td>0.176***</td>
<td>0.433***</td>
<td>0.142***</td>
<td>0.149***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,945</td>
<td>2,946</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>2,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.485</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.503</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>0.752</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
In the primary specification, a county of 10,000 voting-age residents would need to add ten sites in order to achieve a 2.5 percentage point turnout increase. While this commitment is considerable, it is also achievable. Given the United States’ chronically low turnout, a 2.5-point bump represents an important and substantively significant improvement. For some context, an additional two points nationwide would have meant slightly more than 4.25 million additional votes in 2008. The 4.7 point increase found when past turnout is not considered equates to about ten million new voters in 2008.

Again, most covariates behave as expected in Table 3. Lagged turnout is extremely predictive in each specification, confirming that much of a county’s 2008 turnout can be explained by its turnout twelve and sixteen years prior, respectively. Meanwhile, voter identification laws again have no significant relationship with turnout when all controls are included, but significantly negative, modest effects when lagged turnout is removed from the model. Felon disenfranchisement demonstrates similar attributes, becoming negatively significant only in one specification where past turnout is not considered. Counties in battleground areas and states with eased registration laws continue to have positive and significant relationships with turnout, respectively. Rural counties again demonstrate substantially and significantly higher rates than more urban ones. Finally, the demographic variables largely behave as expected. A county’s poverty rate and percent Hispanic consistently have substantively large and significantly negative
relationships with turnout. Meanwhile, its percent college-educated, percent Black, and percent over the age of sixty-five each have significantly positive effects on turnout across most specifications.

Next, I measure possible differences in the role of site density on turnout in rural and urban counties, respectively. My sites variable accounts for a county’s population, but not its physical size. By separating the two types of counties, I am now able to assess whether sites per capita affects turnout in both large, sparsely populated communities and dense, urban ones. As noted earlier, I code a county as “urban” if the Census reports that over 50% of the population lives in an urban setting. Conversely, I code a county as “rural” if over 50% live in a rural setting. Not surprisingly, many counties throughout the dataset near a 100% urban or rural rate.
Table 4: Early Voting Sites and 2008 Turnout (Rural versus Urban Counties)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural counties only</strong></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged turnout (1992 and 1996)</td>
<td>0.701***</td>
<td>0.556***</td>
<td>0.593***</td>
<td>0.644***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites per 1,000 VAP residents</td>
<td>0.0188***</td>
<td>0.0786***</td>
<td>0.0740***</td>
<td>0.170***</td>
<td>0.0760***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban counties only</strong></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.0238***</td>
<td>0.0484***</td>
<td>0.0206***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites x Rural</td>
<td>-0.0473**</td>
<td>-0.110***</td>
<td>-0.0457***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-excuse early voting</td>
<td>-0.0287***</td>
<td>-0.0275***</td>
<td>-0.0359***</td>
<td>-0.0285***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter ID law</td>
<td>0.00482</td>
<td>-0.00208</td>
<td>-0.00066</td>
<td>0.00202</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felon disenfranchisement rate</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.0418</td>
<td>-1.83**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
<td>(0.133)</td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDR/SDR</td>
<td>0.0282***</td>
<td>0.0358***</td>
<td>0.0308***</td>
<td>0.0538***</td>
<td>0.0275***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign competitiveness</td>
<td>0.0180***</td>
<td>0.0308***</td>
<td>0.0268***</td>
<td>0.0106***</td>
<td>0.0238***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.141***</td>
<td>-0.282***</td>
<td>-0.153***</td>
<td>-0.277***</td>
<td>-0.204***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.179***</td>
<td>0.133***</td>
<td>0.148***</td>
<td>0.115***</td>
<td>0.168***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.0101</td>
<td>-0.0764***</td>
<td>-0.0448***</td>
<td>-0.111***</td>
<td>-0.0565***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>0.0238***</td>
<td>0.0484***</td>
<td>0.0206***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.0466</td>
<td>0.0438</td>
<td>0.139***</td>
<td>0.534***</td>
<td>0.0819**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.043)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.047)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.132***</td>
<td>0.261***</td>
<td>0.140***</td>
<td>0.428***</td>
<td>0.174***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,651</td>
<td>1,008</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.738</td>
<td>0.735</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>0.491</td>
<td>0.731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.  
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
With only the 1,651 rural counties considered, the effect of sites remains positive and significant. An additional site per 1,000 voting-age residents is associated with a turnout spike of nearly two percentage points (1.88). The role of sites jumps considerably, however, in the 1,008 urban counties. Each added site equates to a turnout increase of 7.9 percentage points, a very substantively significant figure. The final three specifications include interaction terms for rural counties and sites per capita. With only counties in early voting states considered, the interaction coefficient is significant at the 95% level and confirms that the effect of sites is much smaller (about 4.7 percentage points lower) in rural counties than urban ones. When all counties are included, but past county turnout is removed, an additional site per 1,000 voting-age residents is associated with a whopping seventeen percentage point turnout increase in urban counties. The negative and significant interaction term suggests that it drops to about six points in rural counties.

Finally, with lagged turnout included and felon disenfranchisement removed, sites have a positive effect on turnout (7.6 percentage points) in urban counties. The interaction term is again negative and significant, implying that the effect falls to three points in rural counties. In general, Table 4 indicates that sites have a positive impact on turnout in both urban and rural settings, though the effect is notably larger in urban counties.

Next, I examine the relationship between Election Day and same-day registration laws (EDR and SDR) and early voting with regards to turnout. Burden et
al. (2012) found that early voting can only have a positive effect on turnout when implemented alongside liberal registration laws. I have indeed confirmed that EDR/SDR is a powerful predictor of turnout, though I have also reported across numerous specifications that early voting can have a positive independent effect if ample sites are provided to voters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural counties only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged turnout (1992 and 1996)</td>
<td>0.656***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.591***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites per 1,000 VAP residents</td>
<td>0.0270***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0784***</td>
<td>0.0378***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDR/SDR</td>
<td>0.0327***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0639***</td>
<td>0.0301***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites x EDR/SDR</td>
<td>-0.00412</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0387**</td>
<td>-0.0108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-excuse early voting</td>
<td>-0.0271***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0347***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter ID law</td>
<td>0.00167</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.00797**</td>
<td>0.03890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felon disenfranchisement rate</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.0176***</td>
<td>0.0404***</td>
<td>0.0186***</td>
<td>0.0390***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign competitiveness</td>
<td>0.0226***</td>
<td>0.00878***</td>
<td>0.0269***</td>
<td>0.00963***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.198***</td>
<td>-0.281***</td>
<td>-0.158***</td>
<td>-0.285***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.163***</td>
<td>0.110***</td>
<td>0.148***</td>
<td>0.101***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.0424***</td>
<td>-0.106***</td>
<td>-0.0518***</td>
<td>-0.122***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>0.0631*</td>
<td>0.535***</td>
<td>0.151***</td>
<td>0.522***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.529***</td>
<td>0.922***</td>
<td>0.690***</td>
<td>0.927***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.170***</td>
<td>0.436***</td>
<td>0.146***</td>
<td>0.436***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,002</td>
<td>2,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>0.509</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

The first specification finds that sites have a positive and significant association (about 2.7 points) with turnout when a county is not in a state that offers same-day or Election Day registration, accounting for all controls. When EDR/SDR is offered in
a county, the effect does not change in a noticeable way, as the interaction term is both insignificant and very small. The second test removes lagged turnout and finds that an additional site per 1,000 voting-age residents is associated with a 7.8 percentage point increase in turnout even when EDR/SDR is not available. The effect of sites actually drops to about four points in counties where registration is easier. When felon disenfranchisement is removed from the analysis in the final specifications, the effects are similar to those in the first two tests. In general, with all factors included, EDR/SDR and sites do not appear to effectively work together towards increased turnout at the county-level. While both independently increase participation, I cannot confirm Burden et al.’s (2012) finding that early voting is more effective when eased registration rules are in place.

**Robustness Check**

I strengthen my findings by conducting a simple robustness check. I run my primary turnout models, substituting only the dependent variable. Rather than predicting the role of sites and other variables on 2008 county turnout, I instead insert 2000 county turnout. This test acts as the equivalent of a placebo in medical trials. There is no reason to believe that sites in 2008 should increase turnout in an election held eight years before the sites were even in place. In fact, given that early voting access increased considerably after the 2000 elections, many states with sites in 2008 lacked any form of early voting in 2000. If sites fail to predict 2000 turnout,
which my theory expects, then I can be even more confident that my original findings are indeed due to sites, rather than some unidentified factor.

Table 6: Early Voting Sites and 2000 Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000 turnout</td>
<td>0.774***</td>
<td>0.764***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged turnout (1992 and 1996)</td>
<td>0.000125</td>
<td>0.00304</td>
<td>0.00651</td>
<td>0.00936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites per 1,000 VAP residents</td>
<td>-0.0201***</td>
<td>-0.0199***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No-excuse early voting</td>
<td>0.00105</td>
<td>-0.0107***</td>
<td>0.00126</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voter ID law</td>
<td>0.0276</td>
<td>-0.211***</td>
<td>-0.0514</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felon disenfranchisement rate</td>
<td>0.00524***</td>
<td>0.0397***</td>
<td>0.00623***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-0.123***</td>
<td>-0.213***</td>
<td>-0.149***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.00875</td>
<td>-0.0774***</td>
<td>-0.000658</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.0128</td>
<td>-0.0670***</td>
<td>-0.00118</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>0.0783***</td>
<td>0.705***</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>0.221***</td>
<td>0.746***</td>
<td>0.226***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.047)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.00138</td>
<td>-0.0163***</td>
<td>-0.00113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Competitiveness</td>
<td>0.0134***</td>
<td>0.0460***</td>
<td>0.0157***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDR/SDR</td>
<td>0.0853***</td>
<td>0.376***</td>
<td>0.0692***</td>
<td>0.531***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.011)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>1,744</td>
<td>2,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.448</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Across multiple specifications, sites have no significant association with 2000 county turnout. This finding is consistent both with and without the inclusion of a
lagged turnout variable. Further, there continues to be no significant relationship when only counties in early voting states are included in the model. Finally, Test #4 finds no relationship between sites and turnout when demographic, political, and institutional covariates are excluded from the model. These findings increase my confidence in the original results, as the sites variable does not appear to serve as a proxy for other (hidden) positive predictors of turnout. Rather, the variable appears to only be tapping a county’s sites per capita in 2008, as intended.

CONCLUSIONS

Across dozens of specifications, I find that site density has a significant and generally meaningful impact on voter turnout at the county level. This finding is consistent across dozens of specifications, including those that exclude various segments of states. Further, the results survive the presence of numerous covariates, including a highly-predictive lagged turnout measure omitted in past studies. Most cases report an effect of two to five points, a notable finding. Given the stubborn nature of voter turnout in the U.S., any public policy found to have a positive and substantively significant relationship with turnout should be taken seriously.

These findings challenge past studies reporting no positive turnout effects from early voting. Previous work has largely assessed early voting at the state level and failed to observe an effect on participation. The principal contribution of this chapter is demonstrating that early voting availability differs considerably within states, and research must account for this reality. In assessing whether reducing the costs of
voting brings new voters to the polls, we must properly identify how and to what
degree costs are truly being lowered. Through my research, I confirm that simply
adopting early voting at the state level fails to reduce costs sufficiently; however,
adopting early voting and providing ample sites can have this effect. I report that sites
are a particularly strong predictor under certain circumstances, notably urban
settings.
CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING THE EARLY ELECTORATE

Seeking to improve participation and ease the election administration process, a majority of U.S. states have adopted early voting laws since the late 1980s. As I documented, the offerings have generally been very popular with both citizens and administrators. In 2008, over forty-million voters (nearly one-third of the electorate) voted before Election Day. In ten states, over 40% of voters took advantage of early voting. In Colorado, the nation’s leading early voting state, nearly four of every five voters (78.9%) cast their ballots before Election Day.

Table 1: Top Early Voting States in the U.S., 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Early Voting Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>78.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>66.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>62.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>60.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>59.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>53.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>52.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>51.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>44.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>44.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Michael McDonald, George Mason University

With such a quick and dramatic increase in early voting rates taking place, it is natural to question who is driving this new behavior. In this chapter, I assess the characteristics of early voters during the 2008 U.S. elections. I focus on 2008 because 1) it featured (by far) the highest number of early voters in U.S. history, 2) it involved

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Oregon and Washington, both of whom featured full vote-by-mail elections in 2008, are excluded from this table.
unprecedented efforts by both major political parties and local governments to advertise early voting and mobilize citizens to participate through it, and 3) it has not yet been fully explored in the context of early voter characteristics.

Initially, I investigate whether certain demographic groups take advantage of early voting options more than others. As with any new public policy, it is important to identify whether some segments of society are disproportionately benefitting from early voting. This is especially true in this case, as many have argued that citizens who normally bear high costs in order to vote should experience the greatest gains from early voting. Older and retired citizens, those with better education and higher incomes, and Non-Hispanic Whites tend to have fewer costs (Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Gronke and McDonald 2008). These groups have high turnout rates regardless of whether early voting is an option. Conversely, younger (and more mobile) voters, those with less income or education, and racial and ethnic minorities often find voting more burdensome. As a result, lowering costs through early voting should bring more of these citizens into the electorate.

Reformers, parties, and candidates have argued that if early voting can mobilize high-cost voters in the weeks before Election Day, then ultimately these groups will have better overall participation rates. Early voting allows these voters to cast a ballot during one of the few times when it is convenient, rather than forcing them to find time on Election Day (often a busy weekday). If early voting is unavailable and high-cost voters must wait until Election Day, then these citizens are much more likely
than others to be absent at the polling place due to work obligations, bad weather, or other life circumstances (unforeseen or not) (McDonald and Schaller 2011). Sensing this possibility, Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign stressed early voting mobilization. At a rally in Tampa, Florida in October 2008, Obama told 8,000 supporters: “Don’t wait until Nov. 4… Your car might break down. You might have an emergency... the alarm might not go off” (Helman and Mooney 2008). Similar cries were heard at rallies across the country. Obama and his campaign staffers recognized that even those that intend to vote often abstain due to unforeseen circumstances. By voting early, citizens – particularly those who find voting on Election Day to be burdensome – remove this risk from the equation.

If early voting increases overall turnout by virtue of engaging historically low-turnout groups, then socioeconomic disparities with regards to political participation can also be reduced. Indeed, turnout in the U.S. has long varied considerably across groups, with notable cleavages centering on racial, ethnic, income, and educational backgrounds. The 2000 Census Population Survey (CPS) reported that participation among those earning at least $75,000 per year was thirty percentage points higher than those with annual incomes below $20,000. Turnout is also generally lower among those lacking a college education, African-Americans, and Hispanic-Americans. Many scholars have reported that discrepancies affect the types of candidates elected and the policies they enact, leading to inequalities for those that
vote at lower rates (Lijphart 1997; Griffin and Newman 2005; Griffin and Keane 2006; Hanmer 2009).

Past research, however, suggests that early voters largely consist of those likely to vote regardless of whether or not advance voting programs are in place (Stein 1998; Gronke, Bishin, Stevens, and Galanes-Rosenbaum 2005; Gronke and McDonald 2008; ACC 2010; Bliss Institute 2010). These citizens choose to vote early simply because it is convenient; if they lacked the option, however, each would likely cast a ballot on Election Day. But even if most early voters are low-cost participants, programs may still effectively boost turnout among high-cost voters. It could be that most early voters are wealthy, older, Non-Hispanic White, well-educated individuals who would have participated regardless, while some early voters are from historically low-turnout groups who would not have voted without the option. In this scenario, overall turnout should not only increase, but it should do so because of increased participation by historically low-turnout groups. This, many reformers have argued, is a central goal of early voting.

Beyond estimating the demographics of early voters, I also explore how early voting implementation affects participation. Past studies have failed to investigate how early voting availability influences participation by specific groups in the electorate. In Chapter 3, I reported that county turnout increases as site density grows. Similarly, I anticipate that as sites per capita increase, early voting participation by high-cost voters will improve. Specifically, I expect early voting to
become more popular with all or some of the following groups: African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, young voters, those with low incomes, and those without a college degree.

Through a series of crosstabs and Probit analyses using 2008 CPS data, I find that early voting is generally most popular among women, non-Hispanics, the well-educated, those with high income, and older voters. However, I also report that Hispanics, African-Americans, and young voters become significantly more likely to vote early if ample sites are offered. This finding, which has never previously been reported, suggests that site density not only increases overall voter turnout (as discussed in Chapter 3), but that it may do so largely by mobilizing historically low-turnout groups.

**Who Votes Early?**

Most studies have reported that early voters are more often women, older, well-educated, high-income, and Non-Hispanic White (Gronke, Bishin, Stevens, and Galanes-Rosenbaum 2005; Gronke and McDonald 2008; ACC 2010; Bliss Institute 2010). While most research has focused on identifying the early electorate in a particular state and year, Gronke and McDonald (2008) use CPS data to explore the demographic composition of the national early and Election Day electorates from 1972 through 2004. In their discussion, the authors differentiate early voters. Until the 1990s, early voters were predominately “situational,” as they participated early due to life circumstances (i.e. advanced age or attending college). Following the
liberalization of early voting laws, however, situational voters were joined by “behavioral” voters in many states, or those who choose to vote early simply because it is available and convenient. The authors find that early voters have tended to be wealthier and better educated than Election Day participants both before and after early voting expanded to include “behavioral” participants.

With regards to race, Gronke and McDonald (2008) find that in each presidential election from 1992 through 2004, Non-Hispanic Whites not only were more likely to vote early, but actually comprised a greater percentage of total voters in liberalized early voting states. This finding held even when the authors controlled for individual state demographics. They speculate that “early voting options are, for some reason, not implemented in a consistent manner across all racial communities.” They speculate that states with early voting locations may not distribute these sites equally across racial communities, or that the policies may be poorly advertised in lower-income areas.71

In terms of political engagement, Hansen (2001) notes that early voters are more interested in politics and more partisan than Election Day voters. Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, Miller and Toffey (2008) concur with this claim, calling early voters in Miami-Dade County, Florida in 2004 “more politically aware… and more ideologically extreme.” In Ohio during the 2010 elections, these claims were partially confirmed (Bliss Institute of Applied Politics 2010). There was a difference in the

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71 The claim that early voting sites are less prevalent in racially-diverse areas is directly tested in Chapter 5 of this project.
self-identified partisanship of early voters, as they were more likely to be “strong Democrats” than Election Day voters. Strong Republicans and independents, however, were no more likely to vote early.

Other studies have found few differences between early and Election Day voters. A study of Tennessee voters found few distinctions (Neeley and Richardson 2001), while Stein (1998) reports only that early voters tended to be older than Election Day voters in the 1994 Texas gubernatorial election.

METHODS

Similar to Gronke and McDonald (2008), I use CPS data to investigate the demographic characteristics of early voters. I focus on the 2008 election, which featured an early electorate nearly twice as large as any in American history (about forty-million voters). Early voting was advertised considerably more by political campaigns and state and local governments than in any previous election. These developments, along with the fact that many more states adopted liberalized early voting policies for the first time, led to a new early electorate that has yet to be thoroughly examined at the national level.

The CPS Voting and Registration Supplement provides a national sample of over 100,000 respondents. Conducted in the month of each presidential election, it is the largest national survey to ask questions pertaining to early voting. Specifically, for my purposes, the survey first asks individuals if they voted in the election. If the respondents answer in the affirmative, they are then asked if this occurred before or
on Election Day. The CPS also asks each respondent a series of demographic questions (as seen in the Gronke and McDonald study). Unfortunately, it does not ask politically-oriented questions that would be interesting to assess with regards to early voting, including those pertaining to one’s partisanship, ideology, and level of political interest.

I first present simple crosstabs displaying the rates at which various demographic groups voted early in 2008. Specifically, I am interested in the following seven characteristics:

1. Gender – Coded as woman or not a woman.
2. Age – Coded into four groups: 18-29, 30-44, 45-64, and 65 and older.
3. Education – Coded into three groups: less than a high-school graduate, high-school graduate/some college experience, and bachelor’s degree or more.
4. Income – Coded into three groups: annual household income below $50,000, between $50,000 and $100,000, and over $100,000.
5. Race/Ethnicity – Coded into three groups: Non-Hispanic White, Non-Hispanic Black, and Hispanic.
6. Marital status: Coded as currently married or not (including divorced, separated, or widowed).
7. Student status – Coded as currently enrolled as a student or not.

My principal crosstabs examine demographic characteristics in all thirty-one states that had some sort of no-excuse, early voting policy in 2008.  

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72 The 31 states are Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

73 I exclude Oregon and Washington from the analysis, as these states mandate vote-by-mail. As ballots are automatically mailed to all citizens, who have no other voting options, the system can not accurately be examined along with other U.S. states.
Next, I conduct several Probit regression tests. My goal is to determine which characteristics are most (or least) predictive of an individual voter choosing to vote early (in a state that allows it), controlling for each of the other characteristics. Each of the models accounts for both demographics and site density. In addition, I control for individuals living in states where early voting has been available for three or more election cycles. In these states, I expect more citizens to be aware of the option and therefore take advantage of it. I compute the marginal effects of each demographic or early voting trait of interest and present these findings in graph form. While I run multiple specifications, my primary model is the following:74

\[
\text{Early Vote (p) = } b_0 + b_1\text{Abundant Sites} + b_2\text{Tradition} + b_3\text{Woman} + b_4\text{Aged 18-29} + b_5\text{Aged 65 and Older} + b_6\text{College} + b_7\text{LessThanHS} + b_8\text{High Income} + b_9\text{Low Income} + b_{10}\text{Non-Hispanic White} + b_{11}\text{Non-Hispanic Black} + b_{12}\text{Married}
\]

I conduct additional Probit tests with interaction variables to assess whether site density leads particular demographic groups to vote early at a higher rate. I focus on historically low-turnout groups, namely African-Americans, Hispanics, young voters, and those with low incomes and educational backgrounds. For this section, I utilize a smaller subset of the CPS data in order to better gauge the role of site density on early voting participation. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, the number of sites per capita offered by a county often differs substantially from other counties within the same state. Los Angeles County, California, with about ten million

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74 The student variable is highly collinear with age. As a result, it is omitted from this model. Nevertheless, I include it in the 5th specification in Table 1.
residents, offered only one early voting site in 2008. Meanwhile, the much smaller San Bernardino County offered twelve. The 2008 CPS does not provide each individual’s county of residence. It does, however, provide this data for a sizable subset of the sample. Specifically, one’s county is coded if he/she resides in one of 272 selected counties (nearly 10% of U.S. counties) across 41 states. While these counties tend to have larger populations than the average county, they represent a broad and diverse (in terms of race, ethnicity, wealth, etc.) subset of the nation. In order to attain a more nuanced interpretation of the role of sites on early participation, I isolate those respondents with a county identifier and run further Probit analyses.

The CPS provides nearly 11,000 respondents who 1) voted in 2008, 2) live in an early voting state, and 3) have a county identifier. Rather than measure whether a voter resides in a state with ample sites, I code respondents by whether they live in a county with at least one early voting site per 100,000 voting-age residents. As noted, counties often differ in their site availability even within an early voting state. I chose this cut-off because about half of respondents in early voting states meet these criteria, while the other half do not. In addition, given that this subset of respondents tends to live in larger counties (in terms of population), one site per 100,000 residents often suggests multiple sites in a county and a relatively small ‘site per square mile’ ratio. Finally, it accurately separates those places where early voting is convenient.
for most residents from those where a single site is expected to service an entire metropolis.

**CROSSTABS**

Figure 1 demonstrates that the elderly, those with higher levels of education, and the wealthy voted early at higher rates than their counterparts in 2008. Women were also more likely than men to participate early. Interestingly, Non-Hispanic Whites were considerably *less* active during the early voting period than African-Americans.
Women out-voted men both before and on Election Day in 2008, owing to their greater numbers in society and slightly higher propensity to vote. Notably, women were also more likely to vote early than men in states that provided all citizens the ability to choose either option. While 38.6% of women chose to participate early in these states, only 35.1% of men did so.
My findings regarding age are generally consistent with those reported in past studies, as older demographics tended to vote early at higher rates. Only 30.8% of young (18-29 year olds) voted early, while the figure was slightly lower (29.7%) for early middle-age (30-44 year olds) voters. By contrast, 37.9% of those aged 45-64 participated before Election Day, eclipsed only by the majority (51%) of those 65 and older that chose to do so. In fact, the elderly cast nearly one-third of all early votes by mail (32.81%) in the U.S. in 2008.

The highly educated were more likely to vote early in 2008. While about one-third (33.3%) of those without even a high-school diploma voted early, the figure jumped to 41.3% for college graduates. Those with a high-school degree were more similar to high-school dropouts than college graduates, as their early voting rate was just 34.9%. I also find that higher-income citizens were more likely to vote early, though by slightly slimmer margins than those reported regarding education. Nearly 36% of low-income and middle-income voters participated early, while 41.1% of high-income voters did so.\textsuperscript{75}

Past studies have found that early voters tend to be Non-Hispanic Whites (Gronke and McDonald 2008; ACC Report, 2010). I find that this was not always the case in 2008. Non-Hispanic Whites did participate early at a notably higher rate (36.6%) than Hispanics (31.7%). However, Blacks voted early at a higher frequency, as 44% did so. In fact, across early voting states, Non-Hispanic Blacks represented a

\textsuperscript{75} About 15% to 20% of respondents declined to answer the CPS’s income questions. These proportions are generated from those who chose to respond.
modest 9.8% of Election Day turnout, but a much higher 13.25% of the early electorate.

Similar to various media accounts (Gustafson 2008; Roth 2011), I theorize that the surge in Non-Hispanic Black early participation was likely a consequence of Barack Obama’s presidential candidacy, an event which mobilized and excited African-American voters around the nation. In addition, the Obama Campaign and the Democratic Party actively sought to mobilize base voters during the early voting period, meaning that traditionally-loyal African-Americans were more likely to receive phone calls, mailers, and knocks on their doors urging them to vote early (Magleby 2011). Nevertheless, this finding does not necessarily reflect an anomalous reality, as many introduced to early voting in 2008 became familiar with the opportunities and conveniences that it offers. While Obama’s candidacy may have been the catalyst that introduced many African-Americans to early voting, it may have spurred a more permanent change in the racial characteristics of early voters. This, of course, cannot yet be assessed.

The surge of early Non-Hispanic Black voters was a product of very high in-person turnout during the early voting period. Non-Hispanic Blacks represented 13.25% of the early electorate, though this number was much greater (20%) among those who voted early in-person, and much lower among those who participated early through the mail (6%). This finding may suggest that Non-Hispanic Blacks tend to distrust the vote-by-mail process, perhaps out of a fear that their votes will not be counted
In addition, given the excitement of Obama's candidacy, voting by mail may have been seen by Blacks as a somewhat anti-climactic and anti-social way of casting a historical vote.

Notably, the crosstab analysis suggests that married voters were not more or less likely to vote early than unmarried voters. In fact, a nearly identical (37% and 36.9%, respectively) share of these groups cast early ballots in 2008. Lastly, I assess the degree to which students voted early compared to non-students. In doing so, I considered only those aged 18-29 at the time of the 2008 election. I assume that the vast majority of students belong to this age group. Also, my precise goal is to examine whether being a student affects a young person's propensity to take advantage of early options. I report that students were much more likely to vote early than young non-students, as 35.7% of students did so compared to just 27.5% of their counterparts. Not surprisingly, the gap was even larger – over ten percentage points – when only early, vote-by-mail participants were considered. Many students vote in their home states, and therefore request absentee ballots while away at college. A more modest gap still exists, however, when examining only early in-person voters, indicating that something more than a student’s distance from home is causing this discrepancy. It is conceivable that students, who are typically more politically-engaged and targeted by political campaigns, are made more aware of (and have more interest in exploring) early voting opportunities.
PROBIT ANALYSIS

My Probit tests are designed to identify the characteristics most predictive of one's choice to vote early, controlling for each of the other characteristics. Further, I am able to estimate the marginal effects on the dependent variable for each of the significant predictors. The first and principal specification measures the effects of 1) residing in a state where the average county had at least three early voting sites in 2008\(^76\), 2) residing in a state where early voting has been available since the 1990s, 3) being a woman, 4) being aged 18-29, 5) being aged 65 or older, 6) having a college degree, 7) having less than a high-school diploma, 8) earning over $100,000 per year, 9) earning less than $50,000 per year, 10) being Non-Hispanic Black, 11) being Non-Hispanic White, and 12) being married.

The second specification is similar to the first, differing only as it removes Non-Hispanic Black and substitutes “Hispanic” as an explanatory variable. The third returns “Non-Hispanic Black” to the model, but removes those aged sixty-five and older. Elderly voters are much more likely to vote early, often out of necessity. Test #3 allows me to assess the predictors of early voting among only those age groups that are not (in large numbers) faced with this necessity. The fourth specification returns the elderly, though it also removes Non-Hispanic Black respondents entirely. As previous crosstabs established, Non-Hispanic Blacks voted heavily during the

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\(^{76}\) This is an admittedly imperfect measure, as the average number of sites in a state's counties does not truly capture 'sites per capita' in that respective state. Nevertheless, I believe it offers some assessment of the relationship between sites and early voting rates. The next set of Probit analyses, focusing on a smaller subset of the CPS data, offer an improved site density measure.
early voting period in 2008. Given the special circumstances regarding race, I exclude this group in order to better assess the drivers of early voting among those whose behavior is arguably less affected by a short-term consideration. Finally, the fifth specification examines only those aged 18-29. It is designed to measure the effect of demographic characteristics and most importantly, being a student, on a young voter's decision to vote early.
Table 2: The Effect of Situational and Demographic Characteristics on Early Voting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1) EV</th>
<th>(2) EV</th>
<th>(3) EV</th>
<th>(4) EV</th>
<th>(5) EV</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State with Abundant Sites</td>
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<td>0.350***</td>
<td>0.368***</td>
<td>0.333***</td>
<td>0.356***</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
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<td>State with EV Tradition</td>
<td>0.377***</td>
<td>0.358***</td>
<td>0.351***</td>
<td>0.426***</td>
<td>0.117*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.064)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.0990***</td>
<td>0.0985***</td>
<td>0.101***</td>
<td>0.0997***</td>
<td>0.182***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 18-29</td>
<td>-0.0844***</td>
<td>-0.0882***</td>
<td>0.0613**</td>
<td>-0.0663**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 65 and Older</td>
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<td>0.454***</td>
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<td>0.473***</td>
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<td>(0.024)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 45-64</td>
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<td>0.252***</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College or More</td>
<td>0.163***</td>
<td>0.150***</td>
<td>0.202***</td>
<td>0.148***</td>
<td>0.305***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a High-School Degree</td>
<td>-0.129***</td>
<td>-0.121***</td>
<td>-0.151***</td>
<td>-0.134***</td>
<td>-0.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.049)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.111)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income over $100,000</td>
<td>0.130***</td>
<td>0.122***</td>
<td>0.152***</td>
<td>0.128***</td>
<td>0.148*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income less than $50,000</td>
<td>-0.0656***</td>
<td>-0.0544**</td>
<td>-0.0301</td>
<td>-0.0555**</td>
<td>0.132*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.024)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>0.517***</td>
<td>0.512***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.267**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>0.123***</td>
<td>0.0843***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.438***</td>
<td>-0.191***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.064)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.0186</td>
<td>-0.0283</td>
<td>-0.0361</td>
<td>-0.0193</td>
<td>-0.223**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.102)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.231***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.956***</td>
<td>-0.555***</td>
<td>-1.103***</td>
<td>-0.865***</td>
<td>-1.090***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>30,358</td>
<td>30,358</td>
<td>24,532</td>
<td>28,163</td>
<td>2,598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are Probit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
Notably, in all five tests, there is a very strong, positive association (p<.01) between living in a state with abundant sites or an early voting tradition and choosing to vote early. Citizens residing in states that have invested in additional locations clearly have many more early voters. In terms of tradition, the longer a state has had early voting, the more likely an individual voter is likely to learn about and take advantage of it.

In each specification, I find that women are significantly more likely than males to vote early. Not surprisingly, age is highly associated with the decision to vote early, as those aged sixty-five and older are always very positively and significantly more likely to do so in each of the first two tests. When the elderly are excluded, the coefficient on those aged 18-29 flips, going from negative to positive. Here, I find that the young are significantly more likely to vote early (p<.05). The same holds true for those aged 45-64 (p<.01), indicating that each group is more inclined to vote early than 30-44 year-olds, the excluded age group.

As expected, in each of the five tests, having a college education has a positive and significant relationship with voting early, while having less than a high-school degree has a negative relationship in each case. The effect is significant in the first four tests, while it is negative but insignificant among only 18-29 year-olds. The same inverse relationship exists with regards to income, as those earning $100,000 and above are always significantly more likely to vote early (p<.01), while those earning $50,000 or less are typically less likely to do. In Test #5, with only young voters
considered, low income actually has a positive and weakly significant relationship (p<.10) with early voting. In fact, the effect is not much different from that of high-income voters. Income, however, is a complicated variable for young voters. College students and recent graduates may have low-income despite coming from high-income families.

Across all specifications, Non-Hispanic Blacks have a strong, positive relationship with voting early. In the first and third specification, Non-Hispanic Whites have a positive and significant relationship as well, though no significant relationship is detected among young voters in Test #5. In Tests #2 and #4, Hispanics are also significantly less likely (p<.01) to vote early.

I only report a significant (and negative) relationship regarding married respondents in the final specification, where only those aged 18 to 29 are included in the model. Among young voters, those who are single are more likely to vote before Election Day. Students are also positively and significantly associated with early voting when only 18-29 year-olds are considered. In addition, while young Non-Hispanic Whites lack a significant relationship with voting early, young Non-Hispanic Blacks are positively and significantly more likely to choose the option (p<.05). Further, young women are much more likely to vote early than young males (p<.01).

In a multivariate Probit analysis, one of the most effective ways of interpreting the magnitude of a single variable's impact is to calculate its marginal effects on the
dependent variable. These models effectively measure the independent effect of each characteristic on one’s decision to vote early, holding all other variables in the model at their respective means.

Below, I report a marginal effect chart for the initial Probit specification. Error bars denote the confidence intervals associated with each variable, indicating whether or not the effect is significant. In the model (Figure 2), the characteristic with the largest effect is Non-Hispanic Black (.2034), demonstrating how well African-Americans mobilized during the early voting period in 2008. Non-Hispanic Blacks were over twenty percentage points more likely to vote early in 2008 than other races, holding all other variables at their means. The second largest effect is being aged sixty-five or older (.1815). Further, both residing in a county with abundant sites per capita and a state with a long early voting tradition made one nearly fifteen percentage points more likely to vote early in 2008 (.1282 and .1485, respectively). The largest negative effect belongs to those without a high-school degree, as this status alone made one nearly five percentage points (-.0486) less likely to vote early.
Both the above crosstabs and Probit analyses have identified that certain voters take advantage of early voting options more than others. Women, the wealthy, and the well-educated not only vote at higher rates than their counterparts (not tested in this chapter), but when they vote, they are more likely to do so early. In addition, those living in states with abundant sites and long early voting traditions are also much more likely to participate early.

I next run multiple Probit analyses with interaction terms to measure the role of abundant sites on the probability that low-income, low-education, young, Hispanic, and African-American voters will participate early. I chose these five groups because each has traditionally demonstrated lower turnout rates than their counterparts. Getting these groups to the polls during the early voting period is widely seen as an
effective way to improve their respective turnout rates over time (McDonald and Schaller 2011). Table 2 reports my findings regarding the interactive effects of abundant early voting sites in one’s county and the selected demographics. Unlike the previous Probit tests, this analysis includes only those respondents for which a county was reported by the CPS. Despite this limitation, the analyses still include nearly 11,000 voters across nearly 300 counties in forty-one states.

I find that several historically low-turnout groups become significantly more likely to vote early when their county of residence offers abundant sites per capita (at least one site per 100,000 residents). Specifically, Hispanics (p<.01), African-Americans (p<.01), and young voters (p<.10) vote early at a significantly higher rate than their counterparts (Non-Hispanic Whites and older voters) when ample locations to do so are offered. Conversely, Non-Hispanic Whites, when compared to these groups, become less likely to vote early under these circumstances. Low-income voters as a whole do not have a greater chance of voting early with abundant sites (p<.05), while the results for those without a high-school degree are not significant.
Table 3: The Interactive Effects of Demographics and Early Voting Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County with Abundant EV Sites per Capita</td>
<td>0.364***</td>
<td>0.327***</td>
<td>0.338***</td>
<td>0.337***</td>
<td>0.412***</td>
<td>0.364***</td>
<td>0.539***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites x Hispanic</td>
<td>0.253***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites x Aged 18-29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.141*</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites x Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.124**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.099)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sites x Low Income</td>
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<td>-0.0122</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sites x Non-Hispanic White</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.262**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State with EV Tradition</td>
<td>0.407***</td>
<td>0.405***</td>
<td>0.408***</td>
<td>0.405***</td>
<td>0.407***</td>
<td>0.344***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td>0.101***</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td>0.102***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 65 and Older</td>
<td>0.430***</td>
<td>0.429***</td>
<td>0.431***</td>
<td>0.431***</td>
<td>0.430***</td>
<td>0.437***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 18-29</td>
<td>-0.0859**</td>
<td>-0.0855**</td>
<td>-0.157**</td>
<td>-0.0880**</td>
<td>-0.0858**</td>
<td>-0.0962**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.055)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Degree or More</td>
<td>0.117***</td>
<td>0.112***</td>
<td>0.116***</td>
<td>0.116***</td>
<td>0.117***</td>
<td>0.119***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than a High-School Degree</td>
<td>-0.0884</td>
<td>-0.0903</td>
<td>-0.0916</td>
<td>-0.0903</td>
<td>-0.0904</td>
<td>-0.0818</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.085)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income $100,000 and Over</td>
<td>0.0826**</td>
<td>0.0820**</td>
<td>0.0836**</td>
<td>0.0815**</td>
<td>0.0854**</td>
<td>0.0827**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income less than $50,000/year</td>
<td>-0.0227</td>
<td>-0.0247</td>
<td>-0.0214</td>
<td>-0.0231</td>
<td>0.0426</td>
<td>-0.0227</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Black</td>
<td>0.206***</td>
<td>0.207***</td>
<td>0.204***</td>
<td>0.0714</td>
<td>0.206***</td>
<td>0.206***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.173***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.294***</td>
<td>-0.425***</td>
<td>-0.294***</td>
<td>-0.293***</td>
<td>-0.293***</td>
<td>-0.294***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.0261</td>
<td>0.0223</td>
<td>0.0236</td>
<td>0.0237</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td>(0.031)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.878***</td>
<td>-0.856***</td>
<td>-0.864***</td>
<td>-0.861***</td>
<td>-0.902***</td>
<td>-0.879***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.051)</td>
<td>(0.059)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are Probit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
As I did with the initial Probit tests, I again report marginal effects to help identify the scope of the significant interaction effects. The effect of being aged 18-29 has a positive effect of 4.83 points, suggesting that when at least one early voting site is offered per 100,000 residents, a young voter becomes nearly five percentage points more likely to vote early (compared to members of other age groups). Meanwhile, the effect of being Hispanic (6.03) or African-American (10.43) is even larger, suggesting that these groups are much easier to mobilize towards early voting when enough physical locations are made available.

As noted, those with low-income generally remain significantly less likely to vote early despite abundant sites, though the effect is the smallest of the five significant indicators (4.59 points). While not all historically low-turnout groups are inspired by
more early voting sites to participate through this medium, my findings generally suggest that county investments in sites may achieve one of early voting’s stated objectives – *making voting easier for many who tend not to vote*.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In Chapter 3, I asserted that early voting site density increases overall voter participation by several percentage points, though I did not speculate which segments of the electorate were driving these spikes. My findings in Chapter 4 address this secondary question, reporting that additional sites mobilize historically low-turnout groups, namely African-Americans, Hispanics, and young voters. This observation is consistent with my conclusions in the previous chapter. When few sites per capita are offered in a locale, early participants tend to consist of those who would vote regardless of whether early voting is offered. While early voting is a convenience that some of these citizens will appreciate and utilize, it is not an integral factor in their decision to vote. If forced to vote on Election Day, these voters will still comply. As a result, meager site offerings fail to produce higher turnout, a finding I confirmed in Chapter 3.

If sites per capita are ample, however, the early electorate appears to diversify. High-cost voters, or those for whom voting is more burdensome, appear at the polls in the days and weeks before Election Day. Unlike the early voters in the lower site density areas, these voters are *dependent* on voter convenience options and would not
necessarily participate if options were more limited. Sites effectively mobilize them to participate in early voting, expanding the overall electorate in the process.

My findings hinge on early voting mobilization among African-American, Hispanic, and young voters in 2008. Naturally, this raises criticism that this particular election year was unique in many ways. Without question, certain constituencies were mobilized more in 2008 than in past years (Todd 2009; Kenski, Hardy, and Jamieson 2010; Magleby 2011). Nevertheless, it is important that we investigate early voting in recent elections, as the phenomenon has changed dramatically even since 2004. Further, while I feel my study will be improved by follow-up work from 2010, 2012, and beyond, I do not believe my current analysis is particularly compromised by the unique nature of 2008. This chapter seeks to identify the causes of a voter choosing to participate early versus on Election Day. The particular features of 2008 may affect the turnout of particular groups; they should not, however, effect whether young voters and minority groups are more likely to vote early when abundant sites are offered. The year is effectively controlled in my study, as the circumstances of this historic election apply to all voters, whether their respective state (or county) had abundant early voting sites or not.

Finally, my findings invite further investigation into the activities of political campaigns with regard to early voting. It is naïve to believe that voters are independently sorting themselves into early and Election Day groupings. Instead, campaigns meticulously target individuals during the early voting period. It is
possible, for example, that we find more Non-Hispanic Blacks, well-educated, and high-income voters in the early electorate because either the Obama or McCain campaign sought to mobilize them in the weeks before the 2008 election. My analysis of campaign activity in light of early voting policies (Chapter 7) begins to address these issues.
CHAPTER 5: EARLY VOTING SITE INEQUALITY

Site density appears to be an important catalyst in early voting’s success. Chapter 3 found that counties with ample sites saw notable increases in turnout, while Chapter 4 suggested that sites effectively mobilize high-cost voting groups. Given its importance, it is worthwhile to examine site distribution with additional scrutiny. Sites are not assigned randomly, but rather result from decisions by state and local officials. In this chapter, I am interested in identifying factors that predict high (or low) levels of site density in a given county. This chapter is motivated in part by a specific research challenge issued by Gronke and McDonald (2008). The authors observed that states with permissive early voting laws (before 2008) tended to have electorates with a higher proportion of Non-Hispanic Whites than those with “traditional” absentee ballot laws. They speculate that early voting options may not “be implemented in a consistent manner across all racial communities.” Gronke and McDonald do not directly test their hypothesis, but instead challenge the field to address the question.

If they indeed exist, racial and ethnic site disparities have important ramifications. Given that African-Americans and Hispanics appear to respond positively to site density (see Chapter 4), sites may be failing to achieve their full potential. Further, as Gronke and McDonald discuss, Sections Two and Five of the Voting Rights Act (1965) declare that electoral laws cannot be altered in a way that
dilutes minority voting strength. These provisions apply even if the policies leading to a disparity were unintentional. If heavily Non-Hispanic White counties are enjoying a reform that is largely denied in heavily non-white counties, then such a dilution may be present and a case for federal intervention becomes plausible. Federal courts have already demonstrated a willingness to intervene in early voting matters; in 2012, a Florida district court ruled that the state could not enforce a law reducing early voting days in five heavily African-American counties covered by the Voting Rights Act. The reduction, the court argued, could negatively affect the influence of African-Americans in the 2012 election (Henderson 2012).

In this short chapter, I accept Gronke and McDonald’s (2008) challenge by conducting OLS regression analyses designed to gauge whether early voting sites were distributed evenly in 2008. Again, I rely on both Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and Census data. Ultimately, I find that site density indeed is consistently lower in heavily Black counties, even when controlling for other demographic factors. Further, this relationship holds in both urban and rural settings, as well as with the inclusion of state-level fixed effects. Conversely, heavily-Hispanic counties experience no such disparity; in fact, these counties are often positively and significantly correlated with site density.

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Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act applies to all states, while Section 5 requires that all or part of 16 states receive “pre-clearance” from the Justice Department before implementing changes to voting procedures. The U.S. Supreme Court plans to hear a challenge to the “pre-clearance” requirement in 2013.
UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Innovative public policies invariably produce unintended consequences. While early voting was created to increase participation, ease the election administration process, and reduce fraud, it is unrealistic to expect these outcomes (even if achieved) to be exhaustive. Rather, fundamentally altering the electoral process via early voting may bring unforeseen, and perhaps undesirable, effects as well.

Merton (1936) originally coined the term “unintended consequences,” arguing that several factors limit an actor’s ability to anticipate all outcomes of “purposive action.” Not only are human assumptions about the future naturally imperfect, but often the desire for beneficial consequences, or “the impervious immediacy of interest,” blinds reformers to other potential outcomes of an action. Excitement over reducing the costs of voting may, for example, prevent lawmakers from recognizing new problems introduced by early voting policies.

Political scientists have studied unintended consequences across a vast array of public policies. As noted in Chapter 1, changes to the presidential nomination system created advantages for particular candidates and their supporting factions (Joslyn 1976; Lengle and Shafer 1976; Maisel and Lieberman 1977; Marshall 1979; Hammond 1980; Geer 1986; 1989; Ansolabehere and King 1990), increased party factionalism (Kamarck 1987) and disadvantaged the Democratic party (Cavala 1974; Kamarck 1987; Wattenberg 1991).
Meanwhile, congressional and judicial actions regarding the Voting Rights Act in the 1980s also led to unintended consequences. The 1982 extension of the law and subsequent Supreme Court rulings mandated that when a racial or ethnic minority group was heavily concentrated in a geographic area, lawmakers had to respect this when redistricting the state’s congressional seats. Gerrymandering could not deny a minority group the opportunity to elect its own members to the House. While this effectively increased the descriptive representation of the House, it brought the unintended consequence of hurting Democratic competition in the chamber by inefficiently “packing” Democratic support into single districts (Canon 1999).

Unintended consequences have also stemmed from recent congressional reforms. The 2002 McCain-Feingold reform (or BCRA) banned “soft-money” contributions, resulting in the rise of 527 groups, or tax-exempt organizations able to raise and spend unlimited sums for political advocacy purposes (Valdemoro 2005). The decentralization of welfare programs across the industrialized world has had unfavorable effects on single mothers’ health and well-being (Bitler et al. 2002 and 2005; Francesconi and van der Klaauw 2007; Baker et al. 2008; Grogger and Karoly 2005; Brewer et al. 2009), while there is some evidence that the 1996 U.S. measure led to a “race to the bottom” in benefits among individual states (Rom, Peterson and Scheve 1998; Figlio, Kolpin and Reid 1999, Volden 2002; Bailey and Rom 2004). Finally, research has suggested that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has led to
a narrowed curriculum, an overemphasis on test-taking skills, and the removal of important areas of focus in the classroom (Granowsky 2008).

With regards to voting reforms, Carrier (2012) found that the adoption of direct recording electronic devices (voting machines) created new problems at polling places. While these machines were popularized in the early 2000s to simplify the voting process, some municipalities found that the lack of a paper trail led to new headaches. In fact, malfunctions led to the loss of thousands of votes in a 2006 Florida congressional election.

As I noted, Gronke and McDonald (2008) suggest that early voting may bring a particular unintended consequence of its own. Specifically, they argue that early voting laws tend to have electorates with a higher proportion of Non-Hispanic Whites than those with only “traditional” absentee ballot laws. This trend survives even after individual state demographics are considered. The authors suggest that early voting access (such as site density) may be very high for Non-Hispanic Whites, but not other racial or ethnic groups. Being that site density is shown to produce both higher turnout and a more diversified early electorate, this claim deserves attention.

METHODS

Given the latitude provided to counties by early voting programs, offerings range considerably within states. As I noted earlier, Los Angeles County is woefully underserved, as it offered only one site in 2008 for its four-million registered voters. Meanwhile, other southern California counties such as Riverside (4), Orange (12),
and San Bernardino (12) had notably more. Similar discrepancies can be found throughout the country.

I measure whether a county’s percent Black or Hispanic were negatively associated with early voting sites (per capita) in 2008. My dependent variable is the number of sites in a county per 1,000 voting-age residents. This data is again provided by the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and the Census. I include numerous other potential predictors of sites, including a county’s percent college-educated, percent over sixty-five, and percent below poverty. Further, I include a measure indicating if a county voted for the Democratic presidential candidate (John Kerry) in 2004, allowing me to assess if Democratic-leaning counties tend to offer more sites. Similar to my earlier tests, I exclude cases from Alaska, Oregon, and Washington states. I perform tests that include all other U.S. counties, as well as specifications that examine only counties in early voting states. The former allows me to assess whether the simple adoption of early voting (and therefore sites) is more prevalent in states and counties with heavily Non-Hispanic White populations. The latter speaks to potential site disparities across those places that have adopted early voting programs. Within each set of models, I include tests that assess only urban and rural counties, respectively. Doing so accounts for the possibility that site discrepancies are more determined by the geographical nature of an area, rather than its racial and ethnic breakdown. Finally, I include tests that account for state-level fixed effects. Across all specifications, none of the noted demographic variables
should be overwhelmingly significant if sites are distributed evenly across demographic lines.

**FINDINGS**

Before addressing my models, I first display Figures 1 and 2, which present the relationship between a county’s number of early voting sites per capita and its percent Black and Hispanic, respectively. While the figures lack any consideration of covariates, they offer some notable depictions of the data. Very few heavily-Black counties appear to have a single site per 2,000 voting-age residents, while literally zero counties with at least 20% of citizens identifying as Black have at least one site per 1,000 residents. Meanwhile, many counties with at least 20% of citizens identifying as Hispanic live in counties with at least one site per 2,000 residents, while several have a site per 1,000 residents. Further, a comparatively small number of heavily-Hispanic counties have very low site density levels. Early indications indeed suggest that heavily-Black counties have notably less site density than heavily-Hispanic ones.78

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78 Given the large number of observations represented in both figures, the very high concentration of data points near the (0, 0) axis point is not fully represented. With regards to Figure 2, this obscures the generally positive relationship between a county’s percent Hispanic and its site per 1,000 voting-age residents.
Table 1 displays my results from the first four specifications. Each test examines site predictors across counties in all states, including those with and without early
voting programs. As a result, many counties with zero sites per capita are included in the analyses. Across all tests, I report that Gronke and McDonald’s suspicions appear to have some merit with regards to African-Americans, but not Hispanics.

In the first test, I find that a county’s percent Black has a significantly negative relationship with its sites per capita when all counties are included. The coefficient of -0.380 implies that in a county of about 13,000 voting-age citizens, a twenty percentage point increase in percent Black is associated with one fewer early voting site. A county of about 40,000 is correlated with three fewer sites. Given that many counties have less than five sites within their borders, this finding has considerable substantive significance.

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79 The coefficient suggests that as a county goes from 0% Black to 100% Black, sites per 1,000 voting-age residents decrease by .38. Therefore, a twenty percentage point increase in Percent Black should decrease sites by about .076 per 1,000 voting-age residents. As (1/.076) = slightly over 13, a population of about 13,000 voting-age residents is necessary in order for a twenty-point increase in Percent Black to result in one fewer site.
Table 1: Demographics and County Site Density

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1) 2008 turnout</th>
<th>(2) 2008 turnout</th>
<th>(3) 2008 turnout</th>
<th>(4) 2008 turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All counties</td>
<td>All urban counties</td>
<td>All rural counties</td>
<td>All counties (with state fixed effects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.380***</td>
<td>-0.123***</td>
<td>-0.386***</td>
<td>-0.156**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.077)</td>
<td>(0.064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>0.203***</td>
<td>0.147***</td>
<td>0.926***</td>
<td>-0.0316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.137)</td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.606***</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.745***</td>
<td>0.692***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.134)</td>
<td>(0.075)</td>
<td>(0.192)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.603***</td>
<td>-0.242***</td>
<td>2.861***</td>
<td>0.000243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.192)</td>
<td>(0.084)</td>
<td>(0.369)</td>
<td>(0.187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>1.924***</td>
<td>0.214**</td>
<td>2.174***</td>
<td>1.400***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.176)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td>(0.268)</td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic in 2004</td>
<td>0.0072</td>
<td>-0.0104</td>
<td>0.0583*</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.019)</td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.260***</td>
<td>0.0484**</td>
<td>-0.529***</td>
<td>-0.127***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.071)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2,949</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>1,831</td>
<td>2,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Conversely, a county’s percent Hispanic has a significantly positive association with sites. A county of about 24,000 voting-age residents can expect to have one additional site as its percent Hispanic increases by twenty percentage points.

Meanwhile, poverty, college education, and percent over sixty-five are also positively associated with sites per capita. While I am unsurprised by the site advantage enjoyed by highly-educated and elderly counties, the positive poverty finding is a bit counter-intuitive. Dissecting the data more carefully, it appears that poverty has a very positive relationship with sites in heavily Non-Hispanic White counties, though
the same cannot be said of heavily-Hispanic or African-American counties. In fact, in counties where the proportion of Non-Hispanic Whites is 90% or higher, there is a strong positive correlation between poverty and sites. In counties where the Black or Hispanic proportion surpasses a modest 10%, the effect disappears. Race therefore appears to be better correlated with sites than economic status (as measured by the poverty rate).

**Table 2: Demographics and County Site Density, by Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1) Sites</th>
<th>(2) Sites</th>
<th>(3) Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All counties with 90% or higher Non-Hispanic White proportion</td>
<td>0.901***</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>(0.240)</td>
<td>(0.076)</td>
<td>(0.475)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,548</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

The second and third specifications in Table 1 examine site predictors in urban and rural counties, respectively. A county's percent Black remains negatively associated with site density in each case, though the effect is about three times smaller in urban counties. This negates the possibility that the original finding is driven by the tendency of African-Americans to live in highly-populated urban areas (where high site density is difficult to achieve). In reality, site distribution is more equitable on the basis of race in urban areas. A county's percent Hispanic is also
significant in both cases, though the effect is over *six times stronger* in rural counties. In these areas, a twenty percentage point increase in Hispanic identifiers predicts one additional site in a county of only 5,400 voting-age residents (a relatively small county). This finding may reflect the large percentage of Hispanics in rural parts of the southwest, a region (including states such as Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico) which pioneered early voting laws in the early 1990s and continues to offer abundant sites per capita. The fourth specification in Table 1 includes state fixed-effects; while Percent Black continues to be negatively correlated with site density, the Hispanic variable becomes insignificant. This lends further evidence to the idea that most of the heavily-Hispanic counties with ample sites are clustered in a handful of states.

Both poverty and college education rates are significantly associated with sites *only* in rural areas, while a county’s percent over sixty-five is positively significant in both cases. Finally, Democratic-leaning counties are also only found to positively predict site density in rural counties, though the relationship is not particularly strong.

Table 3 presents my findings for counties in early voting states only. Each of the four specifications exclude all counties located in the non-early voting states, reducing sample sizes by about one-third. In all four tests, a county’s percent Black is again significantly and negatively associated with sites per capita. In fact, the effect is a bit stronger than with all counties included. A county of only 9,500 is expected to
have one fewer early voting site when its percent Black increases by twenty percentage points. Similar to the first round of tests, the effect is about three times stronger in rural counties than urban ones. In addition, a county’s percent Hispanic is associated with higher site density in both urban and rural counties, though the inclusion of state fixed effects again eliminates this relationship.

Table 3: Demographics and County Site Density in Early Voting States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All counties</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
<td>2008 turnout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All counties</td>
<td>All urban counties</td>
<td>All rural counties</td>
<td>All counties (with state fixed effects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.529***</td>
<td>-0.146***</td>
<td>-0.465***</td>
<td>-0.257**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0858)</td>
<td>(0.0456)</td>
<td>(0.125)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic</td>
<td>0.00445</td>
<td>0.108***</td>
<td>0.592***</td>
<td>-0.0832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0764)</td>
<td>(0.0343)</td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
<td>(0.0941)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.861***</td>
<td>0.0955</td>
<td>0.928***</td>
<td>1.081***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.191)</td>
<td>(0.106)</td>
<td>(0.271)</td>
<td>(0.192)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.849***</td>
<td>-0.239*</td>
<td>3.609***</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.280)</td>
<td>(0.125)</td>
<td>(0.508)</td>
<td>(0.282)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over 65</td>
<td>2.142***</td>
<td>0.271**</td>
<td>2.282***</td>
<td>1.830***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.234)</td>
<td>(0.119)</td>
<td>(0.353)</td>
<td>(0.240)</td>
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<td>Democratic in 2004</td>
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<td>-0.0139</td>
<td>0.0321</td>
<td>-0.0197</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.0257)</td>
<td>(0.0115)</td>
<td>(0.0405)</td>
<td>(0.0248)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.267***</td>
<td>0.0653**</td>
<td>-0.544***</td>
<td>-0.148**</td>
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<tr>
<td>(0.0643)</td>
<td>(0.0311)</td>
<td>(0.0963)</td>
<td>(0.0668)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>2,006</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>2,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.090</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05. 
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Counties with high levels of poverty, college education, and elderly persons are also more likely to have ample site offerings. Similar to Table 1, the poverty and education effects are found only in rural counties, while elderly counties have
significantly more sites in both environments. Regarding poverty, I again find that
the positive effect is limited to heavily Non-Hispanic White counties, as poverty does
not predict high site density in counties where either Blacks or Hispanics exceed 10%
of the voting-age population. Lastly, Democratic-leaning counties are not found to
predict high site density in either rural or urban settings.

CONCLUSIONS

Unintended consequences are an inevitable feature of public policy reforms. Seeking particular results, lawmakers seldom anticipate the full consequences of altering rules and traditions. When offered through abundant sites, early voting both effectively increases participation and mobilizes historically low-turnout groups in the electorate. In this chapter, however, I find that sites are not distributed equitably throughout the country, or even across early voting states. Rather, heavily-Black counties have significantly fewer sites per capita, both in urban and rural environments. Conversely, heavily-Hispanic, poor Non-Hispanic White, well-educated, and elderly counties often have disproportionately more sites.

Site inequality deserves scholarly attention for several reasons. First, the Voting Rights Act (VRA) is rather clear in affirming that electoral reforms cannot dilute the voting strength of minority groups. Given that a federal court has already struck down a Florida effort to limit early voting days, it is quite reasonable that site inequality (on the basis of race) could receive judicial attention. Second, given that site density appears to mobilize African-Americans to participate early (see Chapter
4), inadequate sites in their communities implies that early voting has not yet achieved its potential. If the observed trends hold, more sites in African-American counties should lead to more early participation. In turn, more early votes may produce higher overall participation rates for African-Americans, as the possibility of high-costs and unforeseen circumstances preventing one’s vote on Election Day are removed.

In addition, while I do not directly test the effect of heavily-young (aged 18-29) counties on site density, my positive finding regarding elderly counties and sites implies that there is room for improvement in younger locales. Given my observation in Chapter 4 that young persons are also mobilized by site density, this suggests additional unrealized potential. If each of these site inequities can be resolved in the future, through federal intervention or other means, then early voting site density may become a more powerful turnout catalyst then I previously observed.
Chapter 3 examined the effect of early voting (and site density) on overall voter turnout. This chapter assesses turnout for less-publicized, but often powerful, political offices. It has been speculated by some that the rapid growth of early voting may decrease participation for down-ballot races, or those found after presidential, gubernatorial, or senatorial contests on a ballot. Early voters, the theory suggests, are making their choices weeks before Election Day, often before down-ballot campaigning has commenced. As a result, some voters have little knowledge of these races and choose not to cast a vote in them – creating “roll-off.” While roll-off has been studied in the academic literature, no research has yet considered the possibility that early voting may have the unintended consequence of increasing it. I shed light on this question through several OLS regression analyses. In the interest of conducting a focused analysis, I concentrate solely on Ohio, a state that adopted early voting after the 2004 election and has seen it explode in popularity in recent years. Ultimately, I find that early voting is associated with modestly higher levels of roll-off in some circumstances, including non-partisan Supreme Court elections, statewide offices, and some state legislative races.

Ballot Roll-Off

Down-ballot roll-off occurs when citizens cast a vote for offices listed at the top of their respective ballots, but fail to vote for offices (one or many) further down the ballot. Some degree of roll-off is relatively common in the U.S., as campaigns for
offices such as president and governor typically generate more citizen interest than less highlighted offices such as state treasurer or county commissioner. Nationally, roughly fifteen percent of voters typically fail to complete their respective ballots in a given election cycle (“Why People Don’t Vote,” 2009).

Researchers have studied ballot roll-off for several decades, though the literature is not particularly dense. Roll-off has been attributed to a number of predictable factors, including the information environment regarding respective political races (Nicholson 2003; 2005) and the media coverage devoted to campaigns (Bowler and Donovan 1994). Simply put, the more information voters have about campaigns, often from the news media or candidates themselves via ads, the more likely they are to vote in a down-ballot race.

Further, the racial composition of an electorate has been found to influence roll-off, with African-Americans traditionally more likely to roll-off than Non-Hispanic Whites (Magleby 1985; Vanderleeuw and Engstrom 1987; Darcy and Schneider 1989). A study commissioned by Emily’s List, a group committed to helping elect Democratic women, also found that younger, lower-income, and less-educated voters roll off at higher rates (“Why People Don’t Vote,” 2009). In addition, the length of a ballot in a particular jurisdiction can increase roll-off (Walker 1966; Taebel 1975; Brockington 2003), as longer ballots may cause voters to skip races (intentionally or not). Further, improvements in ballot technology (such as electronic voting machines) have been found to decrease roll-off because machines often alert
voters as to whether or not a ballot is complete (Nichols and Strizek 1995; Nichols 1998; Kimball and Kropf 2006). I caution, however, that some reject this finding, including analysts at Verified Voting, a prominent organization that advocates reforms to make voting easier (2011). Specifically, the group argues that voting machines often feature confusing interfaces that serve to boost roll-off.

Partisan identification has been found to affect roll-off, as non-partisan elections (such as referenda and judicial elections) typically have a higher percentage of it (Hall 1999; Schaffner Streb, and Wright 2001). Scholars have attributed this effect to the removal of a partisan cue, which often guides voters when they know little about candidates on the ballot. Similarly, an option to vote a straight-party ticket (available in sixteen states) also reduces roll-off in partisan contests (Robinson and Standing 1960; Walker 1966; Kimball, Owens, and McAndrew, 1996; Nichols 1998). Lastly, researchers have found that the complexity of referenda language can have an impact on roll-off, as more complicated descriptions lead to greater levels of it (Bowler and Donovan 1994; Reilly and Richey 2011).

Early voting research has not yet examined implications for ballot roll-off. As millions more Americans are now voting long before Election Day (sometimes as early as September), however, many political operatives and journalists have voiced concerns that some voters are participating before they have full information about candidates. Indeed, candidates for down-ballot offices often do not even begin campaigning until the few weeks or month before Election Day. The logic follows
that if many voters participate before campaigning for some offices has peaked or even begun, then they may be more inclined to skip those races when filling out a ballot. In particular, roll-off may occur more for non-partisan races where a partisan voting cue is missing.

A high-level Democratic Party operative who worked in Ohio during the 2010 midterm cycle reported that increased levels of early voting in the state led to concerns about down-ballot roll-off. In response, the party emphasized the inclusion of down-ballot races on campaign mailers that it sent to prospective voters. In addition, party-sponsored phone calls often reminded people to “vote for Democrats all the way down the ballot.” For many candidates for these offices, this was indeed the only exposure that they would receive before the early voting period, as their campaigns had not yet begun advertising a month before Election Day. Anticipating roll-off problems in light of increased early voting across the nation, the AFL-CIO, the nation’s largest labor union, also launched additional efforts to inform early voters about candidates in down-ballot races in 2010. They feared that those participating early would “skip casting a vote in those contests because they don't know anything about them” (“Early Bird Gets the Vote,” 2010).

Concerns were particularly high for Supreme Court races, a non-partisan office in Ohio. In August 2010, a federal district court upheld Ohio’s ban on listing political party labels for judicial candidates. Ohio Democratic Party chairman Chris Redfern acknowledged that Supreme Court races are always difficult to mobilize due to the
lack of a party label. Responding to a comment that Democratic-oriented judges did poorly in Ohio despite Barack’s Obama’s victory there in 2008, Redfern responded, “That’s what we are trying to prevent (in 2010).” In light of early voting expansion, he authorized three million pieces of mail to be sent to voters referencing Supreme Court candidates backed by the party (Wilkinson 2010). The majority were sent before the early voting period began or at least reached its peak participation.

The possibility of down-ballot roll-off has important implications for the success of early voting. If the practice increases turnout for top-ticket offices, but reduces or fails to improve participation in down-ballot races, then its positive effects for democracy are potentially more suspect. It has long been argued in both theoretical (Tocqueville 1835; 1840) and empirical (Karpowitz and Macedo 2006; Swanstrom 2008) works that down-ballot offices in the U.S. are often those closest to voters, as they are specific to local communities and the day-to-day issues that people face.

**Methods**

I examine the effects of a new early voting policy on ballot roll-off. Specifically, I am interested in determining whether the adoption and expansion of early voting leads more voters to ignore races that appear towards the bottom of their ballots. I focus on the state of Ohio for several reasons. First, Ohio had never allowed no-excuse early voting prior to 2006. Absentee ballots were available to those with an accepted excuse, but others were forced to vote on Election Day. As I documented in Chapter 2, Ohio chose to adopt early voting in 2005 (it took effect in 2006) in the
wake of long lines and heavy participation in 2004. Early voting, many believed, would limit wait times, offer more convenience to voters, and increase flexibility for those who worked on Election Day (“Absentee Ballots on Way,” 2010). 80

Second, Ohio, like most states (34), does not offer voters the option to cast a “straight-ticket” ballot, or one whereby votes are automatically cast for all candidates on the ballot from a particular party. As a result, voters must choose to vote for each office on the ballot. In Ohio, some offices feature candidates with party labels, while a few do not. Therefore, I am able to assess not only the prevalence of ballot roll-off, but also whether this varies depending on the type of race. Third, early voting in Ohio has increased quickly since its adoption. While 2006 was the first year in which early voting was legal in the state, about 25% of the electorate voted early in 2008 and 2010, respectively. 81 Therefore, since the policies have led to immediate and significant changes in the way citizens participate, Ohio is a convenient place to assess a potential effect.

Finally, Ohio is eminently testable because it featured numerous down-ballot offices up for election in 2004 and 2008, as well as 2002 and 2010, allowing for convenient pre and post-treatment comparisons of roll-off in both national midterm and presidential years. Many states have fewer offices up for election every four

81 In both 2008 and 2010, early voting has been available in Ohio for the five weeks proceeding Election Day.
years. Some have fewer elected offices in general (i.e. states with more gubernatorial appointments); others have less consistent offices across counties (i.e. county auditors are elected in some counties, but not others). While I only study effects in Ohio, I have reason to believe that the state is a good microcosm of the nation as a whole.\footnote{Ohio, a bellwether state in presidential elections, has well-chronicled demographic and political diversity (Diemer 2010).}

I utilize relatively straightforward OLS regression techniques to assess whether early voting has led to heightened roll-off in Ohio. While an individual-level analysis would be ideal, the Ohio state voter file does not indicate whether a citizen voted in each individual race. Ohio is not unique in this regard, as this information is rarely, if ever, made available to researchers. In addition, the Ohio file fails to note whether one votes early. Recent research (Masket 2010; Reilly and Richey 2011) has acknowledged the methodological limits of studying roll-off and accepted that aggregate-level regression analyses remain the best approach. Given my limitations, I am forced to heed this guidance and rely on aggregate figures for both county early voting and county roll-off rates.

Treating Ohio’s eighty-eight counties as the unit of analysis, my principal independent variable is the percentage of voters participating before Election Day in a particular county. Variation on county early voting rates is considerable across Ohio counties both in 2008 (12\% to 45\%) and 2010 (10\% to 50\%). The dependent variable is the level of ballot roll-off in that county. Roll-off is measured as the
percentage decrease in total votes in a given office when compared to the top office on the ballot. I run two sets of tests — one in presidential election years and one in national midterm years. In 2004 and 2008, the presidential election is the top office; in national midterm years, the Ohio gubernatorial race is considered the top office.

In the presidential models, I seek to predict 2008 roll-off in down-ballot races. In addition to my primary independent variable (early voting rate), I control for the roll-off rate for the county and office in 2004, the final presidential race before early voting was adopted. I anticipate that 2004 roll-off will be highly predictive of 2008 roll-off, as the former should capture a county's idiosyncratic features that may affect roll-off across election cycles. Nevertheless, I also present models that include demographic covariates as well. In the midterm models, I seek to predict 2010 roll-off levels using 2010 early voting rates in the counties, controlling for 2002 roll-off in each particular place. Because 2006 was the first year of early voting in Ohio, I use 2002 as the lagged variable. Again, I include models that control for conventional demographic indicators.
I obtain election results and early voting statistics from the Ohio Secretary of State’s webpage, while data on county demographics is collected from the 2000 Census. For my presidential year analysis, I examine the following down-ballot offices in Ohio:

1. Supreme Court Justice
2. State Assembly
3. State Senate
4. Ballot Referendum

There are more offices on Ohio ballots during national midterm cycles. Therefore, for my midterm year analysis, I examine down-ballot roll-off across a greater number of races. Specifically, I concentrate on the following offices in Ohio:

1. Supreme Court Justice
2. State Assembly
3. State Senate
4. State Auditor
5. Secretary of State
6. State Treasurer
7. County Auditor
8. County Commissioner

In statewide races, counties are always comparable within an election cycle because they are choosing from the same set of candidates. Other circumstances, however, are more difficult to navigate. I believe that whether an election is

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83 In Ohio, voters select the justices on the state supreme court. The office is non-partisan. In some years, more than one race is on the ballot. I average the total votes from all contested races in a given year to arrive at a total vote figure for each county.

84 In both 2004 and 2008, Ohio voters were asked to vote directly on several propositions. I compare turnout using only one question per year. I chose them based on the high-profile nature of the issues and the extensive advertising that was conducted both in support and in opposition to the measure. In 2004, Ohioans voted to ban gay marriage in their state constitution, while in 2008 they voted on whether or not to allow casinos in the state.
contested or competitive should affect the number of voters participating in it. As a result, I only compare counties across election cycles if the competitive environment of an office remained the same (or changed only slightly). For example, I drop county commissioner and county auditor cases where a race was contested in 2004, but not 2008 (or vice versa). Further, even if a county is contested in both relevant years, I drop the case if it was competitive in one year, but not another. I consider a race competitive if the top vote-getter received less than 60% of the total votes awarded to the top two candidates.

The process becomes more complicated when dealing with state assembly and state senate cases. As I noted, counties are my unit of analysis in each test. In Ohio, however, counties often include multiple assembly and senate districts within them. Therefore, in a given year, some districts in a county may be contested or competitive, while some are not. I include only cases where all districts in a county are contested in either relevant years, or where all districts are non-contested in both relevant years. Further, I include only cases that have a similar competitive environment. If there is a twenty-five percentage point or greater difference in the percent of a county’s districts (with regards to assembly or senate races) that are competitive in the lagged year and the observation year, I drop the case. For example, if 80% of assembly districts in a county are competitive in 2004 and 75% are competitive in 2008, I consider the case similarly competitive and include it. If 80% of assembly districts in a county are competitive in 2004 and only 50% are
competitive in 2008, I consider the case insufficiently comparable and drop it from
the analysis.

Throughout many of my tests, I include county demographics for race, age,
income and education to see if these variables are independently predictive of roll-off
(as past research suggests it may be). Further, in some specifications, I control for the
possibility that new voting equipment in some Ohio counties may have led to
decreased roll-off. During the 2000s, in the wake of the 2000 presidential election
and the 2002 Help America Voter Act, Ohio counties gradually adopted DRE
(direct-recording electronic) voting machines. While only seven counties had DREs
in 2004, 53 had them by 2008. Some have disputed whether DREs affect turnout or
roll-off (Verified Voting 2011), but others have found an effect (Nichols and Strizek
1995; Nichols 1998; Kimball and Kropf 2006). Therefore, I include a dichotomous
variable indicating whether a county had DRE voting in time for the election in
question (2008 or 2010). My primary model (though I include other specifications) is:

\[
\text{Ballot Roll-off Rate (y) = } b_0 + b_1 \text{County EV\%} + b_2 \text{Black} + b_3 \text{College Grad} +
\]
\[
+ b_4 \text{Poverty} + b_5 \text{Percent over 65} + b_6 \text{DRE}
\]

I include models that examine only partisan or non-partisan races, as research
has found (and I have reason to believe) that non-partisan races should be more
susceptible to roll-off than partisan ones. I also separate offices at the state and
county level, as their dynamics could conceivably differ. State parties, as evidenced
in my above examples, are typically active on behalf of all statewide candidates,
reminding voters to support all of a party’s candidates. Local parties often lack these resources. Building on this point, it is possible that voters hear about state candidates via television ads before local ones, an effect which could minimize roll-off.

FINDINGS

Before conducting regression analyses, I first display snapshots of roll-off rates across Ohio counties in 2008 and 2010, respectively. Similar to the more sophisticated analyses I present later, I sort cases by the respective offices examined. However, these displays consider no county-specific data, such as demographics, competitiveness, or most importantly, early voting rates.

Each Ohio office recorded a positive roll-off rate in both 2008 and 2010, suggesting that the presidential and gubernatorial elections of those years, respectively, received more total votes than down-ballot races. In 2008, non-partisan Supreme Court contests had a nearly 23% roll-off rate, as almost one in four Ohio
presidential voters skipped the races. The lowest rate of the four presidential year offices considered was for ballot referenda, at just 1.5%. This is not particularly surprising, as the referenda (casino gaming) was highly-publicized before the election. Supporters and opponents of the measure advertised heavily before the election.

In 2010, many of the same trends continued. Supreme Court races again had high (17%) roll-off. Interestingly, partisan senate races also experienced a high roll-off rate of 17%, very similar to 2008. This is quite possibly due to the fact that many senate races throughout the state were not competitive in these elections.

In 2010, unlike 2008, I also consider two county offices – county auditor and county commissioner. I find that county commissioner races have a roll-off rate of only about 5%, while county auditor contests were three times higher, at 15%.

Finally, 2010 featured several partisan statewide races, including state auditor,
secretary of state, and state treasurer. For each of these races – which are typically well-publicized – roll-off was very low (less than 3%). Parties are often able to include these offices on mailers, phone calls, and other mobilization efforts, providing an important cue for many voters.

Figures 3 and 4 indicate that in both 2008 and 2010, notable increases in roll-off rates (compared to 2004 and 2002, respectively) were absent for some down-ballot races in Ohio counties. In fact, in state senate races, roll-off decreased in both 2008 and 2010 after early voting had been adopted and widely used. The one notable exception in both years is Ohio Supreme Court elections.

From 2004 to 2008, roll-off increased by about thirteen percentage points in Supreme Court races. Between 2002 and 2010, the increase was slightly over eight percentage points. Again, these races are non-partisan and therefore offer no immediate cue to voters who know little about the candidates. It is true that most
candidates for the court are typically endorsed or even nominated by a major political party. However, given the lower salience of these contests, the fact that no party label appears on the ballot could arguably affect roll-off. In addition, those who seek these offices typically do not campaign until the few weeks before Election Day, as their resources are limited.

![Figure 4: Average Change in Roll-Off Rates in Ohio Counties, 2002 to 2010](image)

The following analyses will help identify whether these increased levels of Supreme Court roll-off are indeed associated with higher early voting rates. Further, they will assess whether other races experience higher levels of roll-off due to early voting; even though total levels have not spiked for many offices, we cannot be sure that levels would not have been even lower in the absence of early voting.

My first regressions focus solely on 2008, a presidential election year. Table 1 examines the relationship between early voting rates in a county and its corresponding roll-off rate in Supreme Court races only.

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### Table 1: Supreme Court Races and Ballot Roll-Off in Ohio Counties, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<th>(2)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
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<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
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<td>2004 Roll-off Rate</td>
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<td>0.169***</td>
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<td>0.167***</td>
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<td>(0.06)</td>
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<td>Percent voting early</td>
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<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
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<td>Percent Black</td>
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<td>(0.22)</td>
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<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
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<td>-0.567***</td>
<td>-0.573***</td>
<td>-0.577***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent with college degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.586</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.30)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent Black</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.681</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.67)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.189***</td>
<td>0.196***</td>
<td>0.210***</td>
<td>0.178***</td>
<td>0.204***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.064</td>
<td>0.469</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

In these contests, where candidates lack official partisan affiliations and roll-off was 17% in 2008, I find early voting to have a positive and significant effect on roll-off (p<.05) with no controls included in the model. The coefficient indicates that as early voting increases by one percentage point in Ohio counties, roll-off increases by .13 points. Therefore, a county that goes from having 5% to 25% of its voters...
participate early could expect to see a 2.6 percentage point increase in ballot roll-off. In a county of 50,000 top-ticket voters, this is equivalent to about 1,300 fewer voters.

In the second specification, however, with all controls included, the effect remains positive, but is no longer significant. Not surprisingly, the 2004 roll-off rate is extremely significant and positive, as a county’s past roll-off predicts its roll-off in 2008. In addition, the percent of a community that is elderly reduces roll-off, as these voters are often more civic-minded. In addition, poverty leads to greater levels of roll-off. The model also reports an association between higher college graduation rates and increased roll-off. Interestingly, this counter-intuitive finding has been reported in the past. Nichols and Strizek (1995) discover the same significant, positive relationship regarding education and roll-off as I do, while Strebb, Frederick and LaFrance (2008) report a similar trend in an extensive study of U.S. judicial races. While these studies each acknowledge that more work is needed to understand this finding, Nichols and Strizek suggest that educated voters may be less willing to cast uninformed votes in down-ballot races.

The final three tests in Table 1 each contain interaction terms for early voting rates and poverty, higher education, and race, respectively. Ultimately, they each produce no significant findings, suggesting that early voting and these characteristics did not work together to increase or decrease roll-off in Ohio Supreme Court races.
### Table 2: Supreme Court Races and Ballot Roll-Off in Ohio Counties, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>0.629*** (0.14)</td>
<td>0.528*** (0.14)</td>
<td>0.529*** (0.14)</td>
<td>0.516*** (0.14)</td>
<td>0.527*** (0.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early</td>
<td>0.120** (0.05)</td>
<td>0.144*** (0.05)</td>
<td>0.161 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.260* (0.15)</td>
<td>0.160** (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.0937 (0.06)</td>
<td>-0.094 (0.07)</td>
<td>-0.0703 (0.07)</td>
<td>-0.0433 (0.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
<td>-0.282* (0.15)</td>
<td>-0.280* (0.15)</td>
<td>-0.294* (0.15)</td>
<td>-0.284* (0.15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.139* (0.08)</td>
<td>0.173 (0.34)</td>
<td>0.137* (0.08)</td>
<td>0.136* (0.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.135 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.135 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.369 (0.31)</td>
<td>0.137 (0.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRE county</td>
<td>0.0187*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.0187*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.0188*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.0185*** (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.15 (1.50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent with college degree</td>
<td>-1.046 (1.30)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.182 (0.48)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0884*** (0.01)</td>
<td>0.0934*** (0.03)</td>
<td>0.0894* (0.05)</td>
<td>0.0695* (0.04)</td>
<td>0.0904*** (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.299</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>0.464</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>0.465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.  
*Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.*

Similar to 2008, I find a modest but significant and positive relationship between early voting and roll-off in Ohio Supreme Court races in 2010. As Table 2 details, this finding survives the inclusion of both the lagged roll-off measure (Test #1) and all control measures (Test #2). In the latter test, a twenty percentage point increase is associated with a nearly three percentage point hike in roll-off, slightly higher than in 2008. As was the case in 2008, I again find no significant interaction effects, as the
effect of early voting on roll-off in Supreme Court races is not conditioned by poverty, education, or race. Across several tests, I report a significantly negative relationship between a county’s elderly population and ballot roll-off, while poverty is again seen to increase it across most specifications. In each test for which it is included, DREs have a positive effect on roll-off.

Table 3: State Legislative Races and Ballot Roll-Off in Ohio Counties, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>0.934***</td>
<td>0.932***</td>
<td>0.932***</td>
<td>0.936***</td>
<td>0.936***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.045)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early</td>
<td>0.295**</td>
<td>0.250**</td>
<td>0.3780</td>
<td>0.5180</td>
<td>0.298*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.117)</td>
<td>(0.121)</td>
<td>(0.330)</td>
<td>(0.403)</td>
<td>(0.166)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.0322</td>
<td>-0.0301</td>
<td>-0.0458</td>
<td>0.3740</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
<td>(0.143)</td>
<td>(0.144)</td>
<td>(0.963)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
<td>-0.0618</td>
<td>-0.0701</td>
<td>-0.0652</td>
<td>-0.0587</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.320)</td>
<td>(0.323)</td>
<td>(0.321)</td>
<td>(0.322)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.0365</td>
<td>0.3310</td>
<td>0.0459</td>
<td>0.0357</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td>(0.720)</td>
<td>(0.133)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.2560</td>
<td>0.2490</td>
<td>0.9810</td>
<td>0.2520</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.228)</td>
<td>(0.230)</td>
<td>(1.065)</td>
<td>(0.230)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRE county</td>
<td>0.0178</td>
<td>0.0180</td>
<td>0.0174</td>
<td>0.0175</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-1.1340</td>
<td>(2.726)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent with college degree</td>
<td>-2.5330</td>
<td>(3.631)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent Black</td>
<td>-1.4990</td>
<td>(3.518)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.0739**</td>
<td>-0.0944</td>
<td>-0.1260</td>
<td>-0.1710</td>
<td>-0.1070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
<td>(0.101)</td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
In comparable assembly and senate races in 2008 (Table 3), I again find a positive and significant relationship between early voting and roll-off with no controls other than 2004 roll-off considered. Here, an additional percentage point of early voting leads to nearly .3 percentage points of additional roll-off. A twenty percentage point increase in the early voting rate is associated with a six percentage point increase in roll-off, a relatively significant finding in substantive terms. The finding remains significant with a slightly smaller coefficient (.25) when all controls are included in the model. Again, the final three specifications suggest that interactive effects are non-existent in Ohio assembly and senate races.

The significant findings I report for state legislative races in 2008 are not seen in 2010 (Table 4). In fact, with the exception of lagged roll-off, which is always highly positive and significant, no variables in these tests record significant coefficients. To the extent that differences would exist, I expected to find more roll-off effects in 2008 than 2010, as the electorate is larger given the mobilization of a presidential election. In a midterm cycle, many voters who have interest only in top-ticket races disappear, leaving an electorate less likely to roll-off in local races.
Table 4: State Legislative Races and Ballot Roll-Off in Ohio Counties, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1) 2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>(2) 2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>(3) 2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>(4) 2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
<th>(5) 2010 Roll-off Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>0.949***</td>
<td>0.943***</td>
<td>0.943***</td>
<td>0.944***</td>
<td>0.945***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>-0.00478</td>
<td>-0.00951</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td>(0.17)</td>
<td>(0.57)</td>
<td>(0.49)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.285</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td>(0.16)</td>
<td>(0.56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.40)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td>(0.41)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.0363</td>
<td>-0.0431</td>
<td>-0.0416</td>
<td>-0.0385</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.81)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.00626</td>
<td>0.00648</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>0.00222</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
<td>(0.76)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRE county</td>
<td>0.0016</td>
<td>0.00158</td>
<td>0.00227</td>
<td>0.0015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.0462</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(5.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent with college degree</td>
<td>-1.342</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(4.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.891</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.00248</td>
<td>-0.0257</td>
<td>-0.0249</td>
<td>-0.0439</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>0.937</td>
<td>0.937</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

In Table 5, I examine prominent referenda in 2004 and 2008, as two highly-publicized and widely-advocated questions were on the ballot. In 2004, Ohio voters were asked to decide on adding a gay marriage ban to the state constitution. In 2008, they were asked to legalize gaming. As Figures 1 and 2 noted, roll-off was low in each race (less than three percentage points). Ultimately, I find that early voting rates
did not affect roll-off on this question. This finding does not come as a surprise, as the high profile nature of the questions is distinct from Supreme Court and even state legislative races.

Table 5: Ballot Referenda and Roll-Off in Ohio Counties, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>2008 Roll-off Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>0.383***</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.0553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early</td>
<td>0.00704</td>
<td>-0.0201</td>
<td>-0.100*</td>
<td>-0.0133</td>
<td>-0.0412*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>0.0401</td>
<td>0.0363</td>
<td>0.0404</td>
<td>-0.0945</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
<td>0.108*</td>
<td>0.104*</td>
<td>0.107*</td>
<td>0.110*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.0578**</td>
<td>-0.145</td>
<td>0.0579**</td>
<td>0.0608**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.210***</td>
<td>0.216***</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.217***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRE county</td>
<td>0.00761***</td>
<td>0.00768***</td>
<td>0.00761***</td>
<td>0.00814***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent below poverty</td>
<td>0.780*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.47)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent with college degree</td>
<td>-0.0621</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent Black</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.00232</td>
<td>-0.0318***</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.0336*</td>
<td>-0.0263**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.00581</td>
<td>-0.0112</td>
<td>-0.0166</td>
<td>-0.0192</td>
<td>-0.0115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>0.502</td>
<td>0.518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
Table 6 examines partisan statewide offices in Ohio in 2010. These races, which had very low roll-off rates in general, did exhibit a strong relationship between early voting rates and ballot roll-off. In the original specification, with no controls included, increasing early voting by twenty percentage points is associated with about one additional point of ballot roll-off. With controls included in the second specification, a twenty-five point increase in early voting is needed to reach this level of roll-off. These substantive effects are much smaller than those found in Supreme Court or state legislative races (in 2008), but are notable nonetheless. The findings are a bit surprising; I anticipated that partisan, statewide races would be insulated from roll-off effects, as party efforts regarding mobilization and voter persuasion often include candidates for these offices on mailers and other advertisements.
Further, while I find that both poverty and percent Black do not interact with early voting to increase roll-off, I do report that early voting affects roll-off at a significantly smaller rate as education in a county increases. Therefore, while higher education often increases roll-off on its own, the effect of early voting on roll-off falls as college graduates comprise a greater percentage of the population. Lastly, in each test for which it is included, DREs are again significantly associated with higher levels of roll-off.
**Table 7: County Races and Ballot Roll-Off in Ohio Counties, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002 Roll-off Rate</td>
<td>0.370***</td>
<td>0.390***</td>
<td>0.400***</td>
<td>0.389***</td>
<td>0.389***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td>0.195</td>
<td>0.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.50)</td>
<td>(0.45)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.772***</td>
<td>-0.787***</td>
<td>-0.763***</td>
<td>-0.746</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
<td>(0.49)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and Older</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.518</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.469</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td>(0.42)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-0.205</td>
<td>0.581</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td>(1.01)</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with college degree</td>
<td>0.684**</td>
<td>0.686**</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.684**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td>(0.94)</td>
<td>(0.29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRE county</td>
<td>-0.0079</td>
<td>-0.00844</td>
<td>-0.00781</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent below poverty</td>
<td>-3.503</td>
<td>(4.39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent with college degree</td>
<td>-0.389</td>
<td>(4.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent voting early x Percent Black</td>
<td>-0.0962</td>
<td>(1.66)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0935***</td>
<td>-0.0537</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
<td>-0.0623</td>
<td>-0.0549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.14)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Finally, in Table 7, I report that heightened roll-off is not determined by early voting in county races. This analysis considered both county auditor and county commissioner races, each of which is held in individual Ohio counties in national midterm years. In Figure 2, I reported that roll-off was high (15%) in county auditor races, but much lower in county commissioner ones (5%). Notably, heavily Black counties have a significant and negative relationship with roll-off across various specifications, perhaps indicating higher levels of interest in these local races.
Consistent with statewide analyses, higher education again has a positive association with roll-off. Lastly, as it has been in each set of tests, the lagged roll-off rate is highly significant in each specification. Therefore, past roll-off, even before early voting existed, remains very predictive of roll-off behavior in 2010.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on early voting has yet to focus on the possibility that the practice increases down-ballot roll-off. Through my work in this chapter, I hope to initiate further action on the subject. Across a variety of models, I find evidence that in Ohio, the quick development of early voting led to slightly heightened levels of ballot roll-off in some cases. This is true in non-partisan Supreme Court races, some state legislative contests, and statewide offices (such as Secretary of State). Notably, effects are absent with regards to prominent ballot referenda and county offices.

I also report several other findings via my covariates which contribute to existing literatures. My research supports previous work showing positive associations between poverty and roll-off, as well as evidence that DREs not only fail to decrease roll-off, but rather increase it. I caution, however, that I studied many counties that had recently switched to DREs. It is therefore quite possible that the change was a shock to voters and will cause fewer problems in the future. Nevertheless, my findings support those of analysts at Verified Voting (2011), but oppose those of Nichols and Strizek (1995), Nichols (1998), and Kimball and Kropf (2006).
While I believe my research approach regarding roll-off was sensible given the challenges of this analysis, I encourage further attention and innovation in this area. Future studies should examine states beyond Ohio, including those with higher early voting rates (i.e. Colorado). It would also be useful to examine a state that has allowed early voting for decades (i.e. Texas). Eventually, should the data become available, an individual-analysis would be most ideal.

Finally, my findings should not necessarily suggest that participation gains generated by early voting are diminished. Any radical institutional change produces a multitude of consequences – both intended and unintended. While roll-off is not a new concern for parties and campaigns, my analysis suggests that stakeholders must take greater action to prevent roll-off in light of early voting. As more make their choices weeks before Election Day, down-ballot candidates must adjust to a new equilibrium by campaigning sooner. Resources may need to be shifted from the end of campaigns towards the beginning. Finally, parties will continue to struggle to include down-ballot races in their mobilization and persuasion efforts in the weeks and months before Election Day. But until stakeholders adjust to the fluid realities of early voting, increased roll-off may continue to be an undesired consequence.
CHAPTER 7: EARLY VOTING, INFORMATION ASYMMETRIES, AND CAMPAIGN EFFECTS

When voters submit ballots before Election Day, they complete their civic duties ahead of schedule. With votes already cast, political campaigns essentially conclude as soon as late September for millions of voters. There is no mechanism by which one can change a submitted vote; early voters can only wait and observe whether election outcomes (reported on Election Night) match their preferences. Of course, campaigns themselves do not end early. Candidates continue to fund television ads, participate in debates, and grant interviews and news conferences. The news media investigates voting records and past associations. Parties and outside groups remain active as well. Lacking any knowledge of late campaign developments, those who choose to vote early ultimately do so without the same information as Election Day voters.

Late information comes in many forms during political campaigns. The term “October Surprise” has become synonymous with a news event holding the potential to influence an election’s outcome. Examples abound throughout American political history. In the days leading up to the 1968 presidential election, the Lyndon Johnson Administration (for whom Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic candidate, was vice-president) announced a halt of the bombing campaign in North Vietnam; Humphrey quickly gained in the polls, though Republican Richard Nixon ultimately prevailed. Some have speculated that in 1992, President George Herbert Walker Bush was hurt in the final days of his reelection campaign when Ronald Reagan’s defense secretary,
Caspar Weinberger, was implicated in the Iran-Contra affair. Eight years later, George W. Bush faced the revelation of a 1976 drunken driving arrest just days before the 2000 election.

In late September 2008, as Americans were beginning to vote early in the presidential campaign, the country watched closely as Barack Obama and John McCain navigated the collapse of Lehman Brothers and an ensuing financial panic. Obama was widely credited for his response, even by Republican President George W. Bush (2010). McCain, however, was criticized for seeming erratic and reactionary (Will 2008). Many became concerned about his ability to respond to crises if elected president.

In each aforementioned example, early voters were (or would have been) ignorant to these late developments at their respective polling booths. Indeed, early voting is risky; one may feel differently about a candidate(s) during the early voting period than they will on Election Day. In this chapter, I posit that information asymmetries resulting from early voting can affect both the outcomes of political contests and the strategies that campaigns pursue in their quest to win elections. I believe that these effects and considerations may be particularly notable during presidential nomination contests, when state elections are sequential, candidate momentum is essential to success, and many voters are still collecting important information about the prospective nominees.
In particular, I believe that early voters should be more likely than primary day voters to support early front-runners and those with high levels of name recognition. Those who wait until primary day will have more exposure to less known candidates, thereby increasing the odds that their preferences will shift away from an established party figure(s). Further, I suggest that candidates (and their campaigns) may view early voting as an opportunity to target and accumulate votes in favorable states while their popularity is high, thereby blunting the effects of negative momentum that may develop later in the nomination season.

A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

A number of concerns have been raised regarding early voting and information asymmetries. Political analyst Craig Wilson believes early voting can easily produce voter regret, stating, “One downside to early voting is that once you cast that vote, there’s still two weeks or a month to go and what happens if something eventful happens with a campaign or a candidate during that period and you change your mind” (qtd. in Domurat 2008). As I discussed in Chapter 2, voter regret fears also led to criticism of early voting by the 1992 Bush presidential campaign, while they stifled adoption of a program in Michigan after the 2004 elections.

Further, early voters may be at a disadvantage because many campaign institutions that historically serve to inform masses of voters have not adjusted to early voting. For example, vice-presidential nominees continue to be introduced in late August of presidential election years, allowing voters only several weeks to
evaluate them before the early voting period begins in some states. Political debates have also not adapted to early voting. While nearly one-third of the electorate voted early in 2008, each of the three presidential debates and the vice-presidential debate were held after many voters had cast their ballots. In the case of the third debate, held on October 15, many millions of Americans had already voted by the time Barack Obama and John McCain took to the stage. Debates have long been considered an important factor in vote selection and a major conveyor of candidate differences (Schroeder 2001; Shenkman 2004; Lehrer 2011). The loss of this resource, so long as it fails to conform to the new reality of early voting, is very notable.

In Ohio, a system of political debates essentially dissolved due to early voting. The City Club of Cleveland, a non-partisan, non-profit organization committed to encouraging political dialogue, had long held a series of debates featuring candidates for state and local offices in the weeks before Election Day. According to the club’s program director, Carrie Miller, the club “is what people anticipated and relied on…” (qtd. in Schleis 2010). In 2010, the group scheduled a series of debates in October. But early voting created new problems for the City Club. By the time debates were to be held, many Ohio citizens had already voted. The City Club tried to change course, scheduling some debates early to accommodate the new system. Problems emerged, however, as in at least three cases, candidates declined to participate. According to Miller, candidates simply had less interest debating when many voters had already made their selections. Further, campaigns would rather —
and felt as though they must — allocate their resources to voter mobilization efforts during the long early voting period.

Further, candidate resource disparities — particularly in down-ballot races — often make it impossible for campaigns to adapt to the long persuasion and mobilization efforts demanded by early voting. As I stressed in Chapter 6, candidates for county commissioner and Supreme Court races simply lack the funds to campaign months before Election Day. As a result, early voters may make selections in these races before information has even been disseminated about the respective candidates. Hawaii Republican Party Executive Director Dylan Nonaka recognized this challenge, noting, “Instead of peaking on Election Day as was the case ten years ago, you really have to peak three weeks out and sustain the excitement and volunteer activity over the course of three weeks to make sure you are touching people throughout” (Nonaka 2008).

Finally, I contend that information asymmetries are potentially important for an additional reason. The widespread notion of equal rights with regards to voting is potentially challenged when some citizens are able to weigh more information before making a vote choice than others. Much like the right to vote, we assert that the ability to speak one’s mind through democratic participation is vital, regardless of whether all citizens actually exercise it. Similarly, while not all voters will weigh the same information when voting, there is value in providing all citizens the opportunity to learn as much about candidates as a campaign can offer.
PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS & EARLY VOTING

Due to their structure, I believe that early voting may particularly affect presidential nomination contests. Modern nomination races feature over fifty state primaries and caucuses held sequentially between January and June of presidential election years.\(^85\) States with early voting in their general elections generally offer the same option before primary elections.\(^86\) Candidate fields are typically large in the early stages of a contest and gradually “winnow” after the first few state contests (Matthews 1978; Brams 1978; Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1988; Shafer 1988; Norrander 1996). As a result, those who vote early may often choose from a slate of candidates that will change once their state’s primary date rolls around.

Further, asymmetries may affect candidates who remain in the race. Unlike the case in general election campaigns, some candidates for presidential nominations are relatively unknown to large chunks of voters until the final days and weeks before a state’s primary or caucus. With the exception of Iowa and New Hampshire, where campaigning begins as much as one year before the contests, most states see high levels of campaign activity only in the week or so before their respective primary or caucus. Candidates can only be in one place at a time, while other campaign resources (i.e. money, staffers) are also limited. Traditionally, winning (or exceeding

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\(^{85}\) Each state holds a contest for both parties, while U.S. territories (i.e. District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, U.S. Virgin Islands, Northern Mariana Islands) also hold primaries or caucuses.

\(^{86}\) Caucuses, held in about \(\frac{1}{4}\) of states, offer no early voting option. The exception is Texas, which held both a primary and a caucus in 2008. The primary did indeed make early voting sites available to voters.
expectations) in “the next” primary or caucus produces momentum in the form of positive media coverage and perhaps most importantly, financial contributions (Aldrich 1980; Bartels 1985, 1988; Lichter, Amundson, and Noyes 1988; Geer 1989; Abramowitz 1989). The ability to win a state contest and slowly generate momentum and resources is seen to benefit poorly-funded, low name-recognition candidates, as they are able to slowly build credible campaigns via retail politics in a single state.

Arguably, early voting compromises the above approach. Consider a hypothetical primary between two candidates; Candidate A is a well-known party figure and Candidate B is a small-state governor with less name recognition. Given the demands of the primary season, with contests closely following one another, each is only able to devote significant resources to a state in the few days or week before an election. Several states, including many large ones, allow early voting and as many as one-third of voters opt to participate this way. A notable percentage of voters in these states have a favorable opinion of Candidate A, owed largely to his past service to the party. These individuals, however, know very little about Candidate B, particularly because they have no past relationship and she has yet to begin airing ads or making phone calls throughout the state. Many of these voters therefore submit an early vote for Candidate A.

In the above scenario, many voters who choose Candidate A may later realize that they actually prefer Candidate B. As the latter visits the state, makes speeches,
airs commercials, and increases ground operations, her support naturally could increase. Bartels (1985; 1988) indeed finds that this sort of momentum is more likely to help less-known candidates. With early voting, however, it is too late for many converts to express their views in the voting booth, as many have already cast their respective votes for Candidate A.

Research indicates that nomination front-runners already enjoy numerous advantages throughout the process, including disproportionate media coverage (King 1990), the matching funds program (Wilcox 1991),87 and the increased front-loading of primaries and caucuses (Mayer and Busch 2004). Arguably, early voting should also assist those with early name-recognition, as these candidates may benefit from winning support before their competition has promulgated themselves.

Early voting may affect nomination outcomes in other ways. Traditionally, performing poorly (or below expectations) in a primary or caucus produces negative momentum for a candidate. This often produces a domino effect, as sagging fund-raising and poor (or little) media coverage follows, leading to additional lackluster performances at the polls. Early voting, however, allows candidates to collect votes in later primaries before their momentum turns negative. If candidates realize that they will likely perform poorly in an impending contest, they are incentivized to mobilize early voters in later states, securing support before it inevitably evaporates. Suppose that by January 15, Candidate A recognizes that he will likely perform poorly in the upcoming contest, he is incentivized to mobilize early voters in later states, securing support before it inevitably evaporates.

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87 The matching funds program has become increasingly obsolete since the early 2000s, as fewer candidates have found the spending caps worth the benefit of federal funds.
poorly in the New Hampshire primary — held on January 20. Given that early voting for the Arizona primary (held on February 3) began on January 8, he can mobilize early voters in Arizona before any negative fallout emerges from New Hampshire. Similar to selling a stock before its value falls, candidates may be able to mollify the long-feared effects of negative momentum by urging supporters to “cash-out” at the ballot box when their popularity remains high.

**The Hillary Clinton Early Vote Strategy**

Political campaigns are acutely aware of the possibilities raised above and actively seek to achieve maximum advantage under the changing strategic environment. In the context of presidential nominations, 2008 provides examples on both the Republican and Democratic side. Hillary Clinton was the early front-runner for the Democratic Party’s nomination. As a former First Lady and sitting two-term senator from New York, few people (let alone politicians) rivaled her name recognition in the United States. Anticipation about a presidential run was present for years, even before her 2006 re-election to the Senate. Clinton announced her candidacy in January 2007, declaring “I’m in it to win it” (qtd. in Roberts 2007). She led a field of eight challengers by double-digits throughout 2007 and at times looked like the inevitable nominee.

Despite her strong position, Clinton never felt confident about the Iowa Caucus and even considered withdrawing her campaign from the state in May 2007. Unlike many other states, her husband (former President Bill Clinton) had never run a
caucus campaign in Iowa. Further, John Edwards, the 2004 Democratic vice-presidential nominee, had an established base in the state from his 32% vote share in the 2004 caucuses. Lastly, Barack Obama, at the time a first-term senator from Illinois, polled better in the state than in some later primary and caucus states. Numerous November 2007 polls showed Obama trailing Clinton by only a handful of points, a sharp contrast from the nearly twenty-point lead she held in national polls. By skipping the caucus, she could delegitimize it and force New Hampshire (a state where she appeared stronger) to be the first true Democratic battlefield.

In May 2007, Clinton’s deputy campaign manager, Mike Henry, issued a memo urging the campaign to ignore Iowa and instead focus the candidate’s limited time and resources to contests in larger states such as Florida, Arizona, California, Georgia and Texas. Henry noted that all of those states, along with several others whose primaries were to be held in early February, would be allowing early voting in the weeks before Iowans gathered for their caucuses, potentially diminishing Iowa’s importance. Henry wrote, “Iowans will not be the first to vote … Hundreds of thousands of voters will be voting in California, Florida and Texas. We must fund an expensive paid communications and vote by mail/early vote program in these mega-states.”

While Henry’s memo did not convince Clinton to ignore Iowa, the campaign did launch an aggressive early voting campaign. Aware that Iowa may produce negative momentum for Clinton, the campaign hoped to secure tens of thousands of votes
before that event occurred. It targeted voters in early voting states with direct mail, radio advertisements, and door-to-door canvassing. Figuring that Iowa “would come out, at best, a muddle,” Clinton’s New Hampshire state director, Nick Clemons, planned for this contingency, actively mobilizing her supporters to vote via absentee ballots beginning in December. The idea was, “to get their votes in before Iowa even happened” (qtd. in Tumulty 2008). Clemons sought to mitigate the effects of Obama’s post-Iowa momentum by securing Clinton votes before people could change their minds. As New Hampshire is not a no-excuse early voting state, the pool of individuals for which this was possible was limited, but nonetheless potentially decisive. Clemons focused his absentee mobilization efforts on both college students committed to Clinton and Boston commuters (Tumulty 2008). Both were sizable groups that had legitimate excuses to receive absentee ballots in New Hampshire. Both, the campaign believed, could conceivably shift from Clinton to Obama supporters after the Iowa Caucus.

In the end, Clinton defeated Obama 39%-36%, a margin of only 7,500 votes. It is unclear whether Clemons’ early voting strategy made the difference between winning and losing, but the campaign believed it helped.

Clinton employed this strategy in other states during the 2008 campaign. In the weeks before Super Tuesday (February 5), her campaign worked to secure early votes before Obama’s expected victory in the South Carolina primary. “Absentee and early voting are votes in the bank. The more votes we can get in the bank before
Election Day, the better off we are,” said spokeswoman Ana Cruz (qtd. in “Early Voting Key to Victory,” 2008). In California, more than one-million of the nearly five-million votes cast occurred before Obama gained new momentum after winning in South Carolina (on January 26) by almost thirty percentage points. By then, Clinton had successfully mobilized many of her supporters, particularly women and Hispanics, to vote early. This effort, aimed to “take advantage of her name recognition,” seemingly worked. In Long Beach, California, where Clinton had mobilized many elderly Latinas, some Clinton voters later admitted to reporters that they would have voted for Obama if they had waited until Election Day (Newton-Small 2008).

Clinton ultimately lost the Democratic nomination contest to Obama in a historic battle that lasted until June 2008. Obama’s campaign employed a strategy focused on mobilizing new voters, winning large delegate victories in low-turnout caucus states, and financially planning for a long race (Kenski, Hardy and Jamieson 2010; McDonald and Schaller 2011). Nevertheless, Clinton’s efforts during the early months of the primaries serve as an example of how early voting has encouraged campaigns (particularly those of early front-runners) to seek protection from negative momentum. Candidates, sensing a loss, can actively mobilize voters in later states where they are popular, thus securing votes before an opponents’ momentum allows citizens to reconsider their preferences.
HILLARY CLINTON’S EARLY VOTING ADVANTAGE

In one of the only academic pieces to address the possibilities of early voting and information asymmetries, Meredith and Malhotra (2012) analyze the 2008 California presidential primaries, held on February 5. Specifically, the authors take advantage of a natural experiment. In California, counties with precincts consisting of less than 250 people can choose to only offer the vote-by-mail (VBM) option to voters. In these counties, essentially all voters therefore become early voters. The authors assess whether voters in these counties were more likely to support candidates who ultimately dropped out of the 2008 presidential race before the state’s primary date (February 5). Ultimately, they find that the all-VBM precincts gave a greater share of their vote to John Edwards, Rudy Giuliani, and Fred Thompson, three candidates who were actively seeking the nomination when the early voting period began (on January 7), but dropped out before February 5. Further, they find that candidates who polled better during the early voting period, such as Hillary Clinton on the Democratic side, performed better before Election Day than on it.

Building on my case study, I seek to both confirm and extend Meredith and Malhotra’s findings through newly-released individual-level data from the 2008 Democratic and Republican primaries. While the authors’ findings are useful, they examine only a very small population that is essentially forced to vote early via the mail. More interesting perhaps is the possibility that voters may choose to vote early, believing that their minds are set, when in reality they could be altered with new
information. While such a phenomenon is difficult to prove, I build a model which seeks to do so with some confidence.

As noted, Barack Obama began the 2008 contest as a relative unknown and gradually built support in the days and weeks before voters went to the polls across various states. This was particularly true in many “Super Tuesday” states, as well as in Florida, which held a non-binding primary on January 29. On February 5 (Super Tuesday), twenty-three states held their primary or caucus on the Democratic side, including California, Illinois, and New York. In many of these states, Clinton polled very well several weeks before the election. Obama, however, improved his position in surveys as the Florida race and Super Tuesday drew nearer. This was owed to new national momentum through wins in the Iowa Caucus and South Carolina primary, as well as his campaign’s increased presence — via television ads, phone calls, mail and volunteers — in states with upcoming contests.

Table 1 demonstrates the degree to which Clinton held strong support early in the campaign in Florida and three Super Tuesday states. In each case, as the primary date drew closer and Obama became better-known and campaigned in the states, his relative position improved.
Table 1: Hillary Clinton’s Declining Advantage as Primary Dates Drew Nearer, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Primary Date</th>
<th>Early Voting Start Date</th>
<th>Percent of voters who voted early</th>
<th>Average Clinton advantage in polls taken up through one week before primary.</th>
<th>Average Clinton advantage in polls taken 7 days or less before primary.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1/29/2008</td>
<td>12/25/2007</td>
<td>15.07%</td>
<td>23.10%</td>
<td>18.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>2/5/2008</td>
<td>1/3/2008</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>15.50%</td>
<td>4.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>2/5/2008</td>
<td>1/7/2008</td>
<td>41.65%</td>
<td>12.55%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>2/5/2008</td>
<td>1/16/2008</td>
<td>30.06%</td>
<td>14.00%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I seek to determine whether Clinton’s early support in Florida and the three noted Super Tuesday states provided her with an advantage in the final vote tallies. I use individual data acquired through the National Election Pool’s official exit polls, which were released to researchers (through the Roper Center) in January 2012. In selected states, the 2008 polls adapted to the new realities of early voting by supplementing Election Day surveys with phone calls to early voters in the weeks before primary dates. Eight states with high levels of early voting were identified as requiring supplemental phone calls to early voters, though many more easily could have been selected. Florida was treated in this fashion, as were three Super Tuesday states — Arizona, California, and Tennessee. I examine all four of these states to assess whether Clinton, the early front-runner with more name recognition, benefitted from the early voting environment.

88 These averages include all polls taken one-month before early voting began in the state up until one week before the state’s respective primary date.
Table 2: Early Voters in National Election Pool Exit Polls (Democratic Party primaries), 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Early voters in sample</th>
<th>Total voters in sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>1525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>1226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>1351</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simply measuring whether or not more early voters in these four states preferred Clinton to Obama would be inadequate. It may be that more voters inclined towards Clinton chose to vote early for other reasons, such as work requirements, sheer convenience, or age. It could also be the case that the Clinton campaign identified their supporters more effectively during the early voting period and better mobilized them. Therefore, I use the exit poll data, which asked each respondent a series of personal and demographic questions, to control for the independent effect of voting early on supporting a particular candidate. While the 2008 primary was tightly contested, both Obama and Clinton had clear demographic coalitions behind them. By controlling for these and other demographic traits in my model, I can estimate whether early voting itself, independent of these other characteristics, helped bring voters into the Clinton column that otherwise may have chosen Obama had early voting not been an option.

I develop two principal Probit models, each with various specifications representing different states. In each model, the dependent variable is a dichotomous measure signifying a Clinton vote in the relevant contest. Voters who support Obama
are coded as 0s. The principle independent variable is a dichotomous measure for voting early, as signified by having been called by the exit pollster in the weeks before the respective state’s primary. In primaries that excluded Republicans from voting (closed or semi-closed primary states), I exclude self-identified Republicans due to the distinct possibility that they participated in the contest as “raiders.”

The first model simply measures the effect of voting early on Clinton support without any other explanatory variables included. The second model includes controls for numerous demographic and political characteristics, each of which is expected to have a positive relationship with Clinton support. These characteristics account for several vital Clinton constituencies. Gender is an important consideration in the model, as women favored Clinton’s bid to become the first female president in 2008 (though only by a slight majority) (Sullivan 2008). I also expect voters self-identifying as Democrats, rather than independents (or even Republicans in Tennessee, an open primary state), to be more likely to support Clinton, as she was more popular with party’s base. Obama, conversely, was

---

89 By the time these four contests occurred, only Clinton and Obama remained as active, campaigning candidates for the Democratic nomination. John Edwards, who dropped out during the early voting period, did receive a notable number of early votes in many states, as Malhotra and Meredith (2011) report. My analysis, however, is interested in how voters evaluated the candidacies of Clinton and Obama. The inclusion of Edwards's voters would skew the findings by suggesting that both Obama and Clinton performed much better among primary date voters than early voters. This is the case only because each faced only one major opponent on primary day rather than two during the early voting period. In order to best assess the performance of Clinton and Obama across the electorates, I include only voters in my analysis that chose one of them, regardless of when they voted.

90 Raiding occurs when members of a political party vote in another party’s primary or caucus for the purpose of selecting a candidate they interpret to be a “weak” general election candidate. In doing so, raiders hope to increase the likelihood that their party’s nominee will prevail in the forthcoming general election.
stronger with independents and disgruntled Republicans. In fact, self-identified Democrats gave Clinton over 800,000 more votes than Obama during the nomination fight (Beam 2008).

Race played a very important role in the 2008 Democratic primaries, as black voters supported Obama overwhelmingly (typically with 80-90% support), while whites and Hispanics backed Clinton by solid margins. In fact, on Super Tuesday, Clinton won the support of over 60% of Hispanic voters (“Behind the Obama-Clinton Draw,” 2009). With regards to income and education, Clinton tended to be stronger among the working class and those without a college education, while Obama performed well with high-earners and the well-educated. Finally, Clinton earned more support from the elderly, or those aged 65 and older (Harwood 2008). Finally, I suspect that married voters may support Clinton in greater numbers given that Obama’s base consisted of younger, urban voters. With these considerations in mind, I generated the following model:

\[
\text{Clinton Vote (y)} = b_0 + b_1 \text{EarlyVoter} + b_2 \text{Woman} + b_3 \text{Democrat} + b_4 \text{Married} + b_5 \text{White} + b_6 \text{Hispanic} + b_7 \text{LowIncome} + b_8 \text{NoCollege} + b_9 65\text{andOlder}
\]

The various controls are each expected to have positive effects on the dependent variable and (in most cases) demonstrate statistical significance at conventional levels. If the effect of simply voting early survives the inclusion of these covariates, then I can confident in my hypothesis that Clinton benefitted from her front-runner status during the early voting period.
For each of the two models, I include five specifications – one that includes respondents from all four states examined and one for each of the four states. This allows me to assess not only the overall effect of voting early on Clinton support, but to what extent the relationship varies across states.

**Table 3: Probit Analysis – The Effect of Voting Early on Support for Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Presidential Primaries (Florida, Arizona, California and Tennessee)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early voter</td>
<td>0.316***</td>
<td>0.215***</td>
<td>0.442***</td>
<td>0.280***</td>
<td>0.427***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.080)</td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0408**</td>
<td>0.0218</td>
<td>0.0685</td>
<td>-0.164***</td>
<td>0.201***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,993</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>1,156</td>
<td>1,065</td>
<td>1,186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.
Cell entries are Probit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

With no controls included, all five specifications suggest that Hillary Clinton performed significantly better among early voters in the Florida, Arizona, California, and Tennessee primaries. The findings are universally significant at the 1% confidence level. This finding is not surprising, as Clinton led an aforementioned early mobilization effort urging voters to participate early. Figure 1 showcases the marginal effects of voting early on supporting Clinton across each of the five specifications.
As Figure 1 demonstrates, voting early significantly raised the likelihood of a primary participant choosing Hillary Clinton over Barack Obama. Across all four examined states, a voter was 12.3 percentage points more likely to support Clinton if he or she chose to vote during the early voting period. The effect was largest in Tennessee, where early voters were 16.8 points more likely to back Clinton. Tennessee was followed by Florida (15.5), Arizona (11.1), and California (8.5).

These figures meet the criteria for substantive significance, as they represent a considerable shift in preferences on the basis of when one chooses to vote. However, the models do not account for the makeup of the early electorate. It is quite possible that Clinton’s expensive early voting mobilization efforts led groups that typically supported her (women, the elderly, Latinos) to participate early. These voters may have swelled Clinton’s margin among the early electorate, but in fact may have voted for her had they chosen to wait until primary day.
The second model accounts for the many characteristics predictive of Clinton support in 2008. If voting early remains a positive and significant force when pooled with these known predictors, then I can be more confident that Clinton performed better during the early voting period even when controlling for the makeup of the voters.

This raises the possibility that some early-voting Clinton supporters may have shifted their allegiance to Barack Obama had they waited until primary day to vote.

Table 4: Probit Analysis – The Effect of Voting Early on Support for Hillary Clinton during the 2008 Presidential Primaries (controls included)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early voter</td>
<td>0.184***</td>
<td>0.158</td>
<td>0.286**</td>
<td>0.112*</td>
<td>0.328***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td>(0.121)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>0.286***</td>
<td>0.235***</td>
<td>0.340***</td>
<td>0.248***</td>
<td>0.405***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
<td>(0.088)</td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.354***</td>
<td>0.567***</td>
<td>0.607***</td>
<td>0.202*</td>
<td>0.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.054)</td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
<td>(0.109)</td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
<td>(0.122)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.0961**</td>
<td>-0.00978</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td>0.165*</td>
<td>0.0467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
<td>(0.072)</td>
<td>(0.097)</td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>0.859***</td>
<td>0.232**</td>
<td>1.541***</td>
<td>0.632***</td>
<td>1.196***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.095)</td>
<td>(0.106)</td>
<td>(0.138)</td>
<td>(0.107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.928***</td>
<td>0.611***</td>
<td>1.416***</td>
<td>0.788***</td>
<td>1.020***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.066)</td>
<td>(0.106)</td>
<td>(0.308)</td>
<td>(0.164)</td>
<td>(0.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No college degree</td>
<td>0.371***</td>
<td>0.240**</td>
<td>0.431***</td>
<td>0.510***</td>
<td>0.310***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
<td>(0.098)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td>(0.113)</td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income below $50,000/yr.</td>
<td>0.112**</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.161*</td>
<td>-0.0198</td>
<td>0.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.044)</td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.098)</td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 65 or older</td>
<td>0.256***</td>
<td>0.222**</td>
<td>0.234*</td>
<td>0.423***</td>
<td>0.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.053)</td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
<td>(0.130)</td>
<td>(0.108)</td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.344***</td>
<td>-1.013***</td>
<td>-2.055***</td>
<td>-1.321***</td>
<td>-1.182***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.079)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
<td>(0.190)</td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>4,434</td>
<td>1,440</td>
<td>1,024</td>
<td>961</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.

Cell entries are Probit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

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Table 4 reports the findings of my five multivariate Probit specifications. Across all five tests, the expected predictors of Clinton support mostly behave as expected. Women, self-identified Democrats, whites, Hispanics, those without a college education, and the elderly consistently act as positive and significant predictors of Clinton support. Married voters and those with low-incomes are significantly more likely to vote for Clinton in some, but not all, cases. With the inclusion of these highly-significant and powerful covariates, the effect of a voter simply casting a ballot before the primary date has a positive and significant relationship with Clinton support in four of five specifications. The effect meets these criteria with all four states considered, as well as in the individual analyses of Arizona, Florida, and Tennessee. Only in California is the effect insignificant, though it remains positive. I can therefore report with confidence that Clinton experienced an advantage with early voters beyond that associated with the characteristics of the voters choosing to participate before their respective primary day.

Figure 2 presents the marginal effects of Clinton support in the primary specification, which has a sample of over 4,000 respondents and includes all four states. Each covariate in this model was statistically significant at either the 1% or 5% level.
The marginal effects of being Hispanic (.332) or white (.332) are easily the best predictors of Clinton support. Each, holding the effects of the other factors constant, raises the likelihood that a voter will support Clinton over Obama by a whopping thirty-three percentage points. The next highest predictors are voters without a college degree (.144) and self-identified Democrats (.141), followed by women (.114) and the elderly (.101). One’s identification as an early voter is the next predictive characteristic, as it makes a voter over seven-percentage points (.0726) more likely to support Clinton over Obama, independent of all other covariates in the model. The lower bound of the confidence interval is over five percentage points, suggesting that a meaningful effect exists even when considering the model’s standard error.
This finding suggests with strong credibility that Clinton benefitted from early voting during the 2008 presidential primaries; this edge was likely a result of her early front-runner status, early voting mobilization program, and name-recognition advantage. Had voters waited until their respective primary dates to vote, some may have converted to Obama supporters by this time, increasing his overall vote share and delegate haul. More broadly, these findings represent an important potential unintended consequence of early voting. During nomination campaigns, programs may serve to further assist certain types of candidates, namely early front-runners and those with high levels of name-recognition and campaign funds.

**The Rudy Giuliani Early Vote Strategy**

The 2008 Republican presidential nomination campaign offers further observations on the interaction between early voting, campaign strategy, and candidate support. Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani began 2007 as the front-runner for the party’s nomination. He led in nearly all national polls, often by large margins. In March 2007, 34% of voters expressed a preference for him, while no other candidate had the support of more than 18% of the likely electorate. (“Poll,” 2007). Indeed, he had become quite popular with the Republican base following his response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Many saw him as someone who could help the party keep the White House, as he was liked by conservatives, but also moderate on a number of social issues including abortion and gay rights. Others, however, refused to believe that Giuliani could ever truly win the nomination. After
all, his moderate strengths would inevitably be liabilities in a GOP primary. By late 2007, it appeared that voters in Iowa and New Hampshire were not receptive to a Giuliani nomination, as he routinely polled in single digits and the low-teens in these states, respectively.

It was at this stage that Giuliani’s campaign chose to do something radically different than the conventional wisdom. Rather than expend their limited resources in Iowa and New Hampshire and watch their campaign die where so many others had in the past, they abandoned the early states and instead focused on Florida. The Sunshine State was large, had 57 delegates, and appealed to Giuliani. Many New Yorkers and other northeasterners favorable towards him were now voting residents of Florida. Giuliani himself said, “The reasoning was that this was the state where we would have the chance to do the best, given my positions, given the pros and cons, given the resources we had, it would be better to apply them to a state this size.” Early polls indicated that Giuliani was quite popular in Florida. In May 2007, a *St. Petersburg Times/Bay News* poll showed Giuliani leading the Republican field. He had the support of 29 percent of Republicans polled, compared to 15 percent for McCain and 14 percent for Romney (Smith 2007).

Not only was Florida attractive for its size and demographics, but it also had early voting. As I chronicled in Chapter 2, the state adopted the policy after the 2000 elections in order to ease the burdens of both voting and election administration. By 2008, it had become very popular with residents. In the 2004 general election, many
counties had over a dozen sites and 36% of voters cast their ballots before Election Day (McDonald 2008). While Mitt Romney, John McCain, Mike Huckabee, and Fred Thompson battled in Iowa, New Hampshire and other early states, Giuliani stayed in Florida, mobilizing early voters and building an organization that could win the state. He hoped to secure enough early votes to secure the state before his competitors even entered the state before the January 29 contest. If he could do so, he believed his own momentum would help him in his home state of New York and New Jersey, non-early voting states whose contests were to be held on Super Tuesday.

On January 3, the day of the Iowa Caucus (won by Huckabee), Giuliani stayed in Florida. He addressed supporters in Hialeah, Florida about early voting, reminding them, “We came here today in particular to remind everyone that voting is now going on.” Giuliani backed the statements with a mobilization program to get early voters to the polls (“Early Voting Key to Victory,” 2008). He held rallies outside early voting locations. Jean Alexander, a retired teacher who voted early for Giuliani after attending a rally for him at a library (and early voting site) in Coral Springs, stated, “He got a lot of people to root for him and then people just walked into the library when it was over and voted for him … It was very convenient” (Bousquet 2008). Giuliani and his team believed that these efforts represented his greatest chance to blunt his opponents’ momentum and defeat the GOP field. When asked about his strategy, he declared, “We’ll have to find out how it went on (January)
29th… But we campaigned more vigorously during that period than anyone else and I think we will get our fair share of that vote… We know we have a very good organization here, we’ve been putting this organization together for quite some time” (Simmonds 2008).

In the week following the Iowa Caucuses, Giuliani increased his television advertising in Florida, launching two new television spots and spending about $700,000 a week on commercials. At this point, he was the only GOP candidate on television in Florida, using his air time to propose a significant tax cut. He also announced a three-day bus tour across Florida with four or five appearances daily, an increased pace from his usual campaign schedule. To persuade Floridians to support his candidacy, he became the only Republican to support a national catastrophic insurance fund important to many living in the path of hurricanes (Saltonstall 2008).

During this time, Giuliani Campaign Manager Michael DuHaime expressed confidence, saying that “The field is still wide open, which is what we wanted… You want to avoid a whole lot of momentum for one candidate.” As Huckabee had won Iowa, McCain had won New Hampshire and South Carolina, and Romney had won Michigan, there was no one candidate endowed with significant momentum. As a result, if Giuliani could secure early votes in Florida, he could ultimately win the state and perhaps enter Super Tuesday stronger than his opponents. Outside observers also began to commend the apparent wisdom of Giuliani’s strategy. Brett
Doster, a Republican consultant in Florida who was not working for any of the candidates, said “Early on in the campaign, when you saw the possibility that only one person was going to take all the early primaries, I thought it looked like a very stupid strategy… He was in a position of standing back and letting this wave of momentum wash over him… But with the dice-and-slice situation, where it looks like you have multiple candidates winning different states, it looks like it might turn out to be a smart strategy” (Shear 2008). Several weeks into the strategy, Giuliani remained confident, stating “I believe we’re going to win. I believe that our early voting strategy was a very good one.”

No-excuse absentee voting began on December 26 in Florida, while full early voting sites were manned beginning on January 14, a full fifteen days before the primary date and nearly one week before the important South Carolina primary. By mid-January, more than 225,000 Republicans had requested absentee ballots in Florida (Bousquet 2008). Thousands more had voted at early voting sites. A Survey USA poll taken on January 13 showed Giuliani with the support of 23% of likely voters in Florida, placing him in a statistical tie for first with John McCain.

Despite his efforts, Giuliani ultimately lost the Florida primary, earning about 15% of the total vote. It is easy to claim that his loss discredits his early voting strategy, though doing so is misleading. In hindsight, Giuliani’s weaknesses as a candidate were substantial. First, Giuliani was uncomfortable engaging in retail politics. Reviews of his town hall performances were poor, while others noted that he
seemed uninterested in engaging directly with voters (Halperin and Heilemann 2010). Second, his socially liberal positions were unacceptable to many Republican primary voters, who ultimately preferred John McCain, Mitt Romney, or Mike Huckabee. Finally, a number of scandals emerged late in the campaign, serving to stunt Giuliani’s progress. Bernard Kerik, Giuliani’s former police chief in New York, was indicted on corruption and tax evasion charges. Also, Giuliani was charged with using “murky accounting practices” to cover-up government funding of his security during secret visits to his then-mistress Judith Nathan’s condo (Halperin and Heilemann 2010).

Giuliani also came up short in his efforts to secure the endorsement of popular Florida Governor Charlie Crist, who was personally close with John McCain. In late 2007, Crist had become skeptical that McCain could rebound from his campaign’s struggles. Giuliani invited Crist to fly to New Hampshire and spend the weekend with him. Crist told Giuliani that he wanted to support him. Months later, however, he switched allegiances again and ultimately supported John McCain. The loss of Crist’s endorsement proved impossible for Giuliani to overcome (Halperin and Heilemann 2010).

It is possible that Giuliani’s absence in early states such as Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina led to doubt among donors, which caused his fundraising to decline. Further, it may have generated more skeptical coverage of his campaign in the news media. If accurate, this would suggest that Giuliani’s early
voting strategy was a costly one. But again, Giuliani’s other weaknesses may be more at fault. His contributions may have ceased because he was a lackluster fundraiser, or simply because he did poor job maintaining media focus on his Florida campaign.

Polling indicated that Giuliani did indeed have success with early voters. A *SurveyUSA* poll indicated that 25% of early voters in Florida voted for Giuliani. This was good for second in the poll, behind only John McCain (31%). This suggests that while Giuliani successfully wooed early voters, he was unable to run a strong enough Election Day campaign (when a majority of participants voted) to win the state or finish a close second.\(^9^1\)

Nevertheless, as the percentage of early voters increases in years to come, the ability of voters to secure voters early in the process will become increasingly important. In this environment, it is not difficult to imagine how a more skilled candidate than Giuliani could effectively bypass early states such as Iowa and New Hampshire and mobilize early voters to secure a victory in a later, larger state such as Florida, New York, or California. If so, this will represent a major shift in the competitive environment of the nomination process and perhaps the first mechanism to weaken early states in the post-reform period (1972-present).

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RUDY GIULIANI’S EARLY VOTING ADVANTAGE

To better gauge Giuliani’s effectiveness with early voters in Florida, I use the 2008 Florida exit polls to generate two models predicting support for his candidacy. The first is a simple model, assessing whether early voters were more likely to back Giuliani in Florida, considering no other demographic or political characteristics. In a sense, these models act as a confirmation of the Survey USA poll noted earlier. My independent variable is dichotomous – noting whether or not a respondent voted early in the Florida primary. If Giuliani’s strategy was effective, then those participating early – when he was dominating the campaign trail and his prospects were higher – should be more likely to support him than those voting on the primary date.

The second model includes a series of indicators that I believe may predict support for Giuliani. The constituencies associated with the candidates in the 2008 GOP field were not as apparent or well-established as in the concurrent Democratic race. Nevertheless, the exit polls offer several justifiable inclusions. Self-identified “moderates” should be more likely to support Giuliani given his centrist positions on social issues. As a former pro-choice mayor of New York City, Giuliani may appeal more to those supporting abortion rights and by association, women. Conversely, self-identified born-again Christians should be less-likely to vote for Giuliani over alternatives such as Mike Huckabee, a Southern minister. Further, I speculate that Hispanics may be more likely to back Giuliani than other Republicans, as he
displayed some willingness to support comprehensive immigration reform during his term as mayor and beyond.

Giuliani may have also found support from the elderly in Florida, many of whom originally resided in the Northeast, where he left office very popular. Those without a college degree could be inclined to support his candidacy as well, as his appeal to working-class voters was buoyed by his response to the September 11th attacks. Finally, veterans may support him as a result of his anti-terrorism persona, though this association is less certain given the candidacy of John McCain, a former POW in the Vietnam War.

Table 5: Probit Analysis – The Effect of Voting Early on Support for Rudy Giuliani during the 2008 Florida Primary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early voter</td>
<td>0.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.078***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are Probit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

With no controls included in the model, early voters were not significantly more likely to vote for Giuliani in the Florida, though the variable misses acceptable thresholds very narrowly (p=.112). It appears as though Giuliani did have notably more voters during the early voting period, though I cannot make this claim with any statistical certainty. The marginal effect of voting early, accepting the narrow lack of
significance, is .042, suggesting that an early voter was slightly over four percentage points more likely to support Giuliani than a primary date voter. Table 2 assesses the relationship with a more complex model.

Giuliani Vote (y) = b₀ + b₁EarlyVoter + b₂Woman + b₃Moderate + b₄ProChoice + b₅BornAgain + b₆Elderly + b₇Veteran + b₈NoCollege + b₉Hispanic

Table 6: Probit Analysis – The Effect of Voting Early on Support for Rudy Giuliani during the 2008 Florida Primary (controls included)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early voter</td>
<td>0.222*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>0.148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.372***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-Choice</td>
<td>0.192*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born-Again</td>
<td>-0.663***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>-0.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 65 or older</td>
<td>0.187*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No college degree</td>
<td>0.193**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0958)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>-0.338***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.140***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05.
Cell entries are Probit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Table 6 reports that Giuliani’s support with early voters withstands the inclusion of numerous covariates (p<.10), most of which have a significant effect on backing
his candidacy. Giuliani did indeed perform significantly better with Hispanics, pro-choice voters, the elderly, and those without a college degree. Born-again Christians, as expected, have a very strong, negative relationship with a voting for Giuliani. While there is a positive association between self-identified moderates and Giuliani support, the relationship is not significant. Veterans were significantly less likely to back Giuliani, likely owing to John McCain’s candidacy (and strong performance in Florida overall). Controlling for the above factors, early voters were indeed more likely to support Giuliani than those choosing to vote on the primary date.

Figure 3 offers the marginal effects for Giuliani support in the Florida primary. The strongest predictors were born-again Christians (-.125) and Hispanic identifiers.

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(.088), though this group was followed by early voters (.049). This suggests that early voters, controlling for all characteristics in the model, were nearly five percentage points more likely to vote for Giuliani than primary date voters. Other notable marginal effects were reported for those without a college degree (.039), those aged 65 or older (.040), pro-choice voters (.040), and moderates (.031).

These findings suggest that Giuliani’s Florida strategy likely did succeed to some extent in not only mobilizing his backers, but perhaps generating support from the sorts of voters that did not ultimately support him on the primary date. In other words, he was able to convert his early support and efforts in the state into votes. Had he been able to multiply his efforts, or build and maintain a stronger lead in Florida during the early voting period, his strategy may have been more successful. In the end, his campaign was not strongly run and his candidacy was not a fit for a modern Republican primary electorate. Nevertheless, the fact that his efforts generated visible utility in Florida is telling. More broadly, these findings do suggest that some nomination candidates may be wise to place less emphasis on Iowa and New Hampshire and perhaps target larger, more delegate-rich states holding contests later on the calendar. A strong early voting program may blunt momentum from the traditional early states and allow a candidate to record votes while other candidates are preoccupied elsewhere.
CONCLUSIONS

Changes in institutional rule structures have long been known to affect presidential nomination campaigns. The adoption of major reforms in the early 1970s led to less party influence, more divisive contests, and the proliferation of more ideological candidates (Lengle 1987). It is therefore not surprising that early voting, called “the most radical change to American voting culture since the abolition of poll taxes,” alters the nomination landscape as well (Issenberg 2012).

I report evidence that early voting is changing the competitive nature of nominating races, as well as the strategy adopted by campaign operatives. In 2008, Hillary Clinton effectively exploited her early name-recognition and lead in the polls, actively mobilizing Democrats to vote early in states where the option existed. By securing votes before Barack Obama gained momentum by winning the Iowa Caucuses and South Carolina primary, she may have won the support of some who would have backed Obama had they been forced to wait until their state’s respective primary date. On the Republican side, Rudy Giuliani effectively mobilized early voters in Florida; this helped him offset the negative momentum he received by performing poorly in the Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina contests. Ultimately, neither Clinton nor Giuliani won their respective party nominations. Nevertheless, each built (and seemingly benefitted from) a strategy considering the new realities of early voting. As these programs continue to expand in the coming years, campaigns may better harness their efforts and enjoy more success.
More recently, Mitt Romney sought to benefit from early voting during the 2012 Republican nomination race. Romney, an early front-runner with both ample resources and high name-recognition, launched an aggressive operation to secure votes during the early period before the first contests (i.e. Iowa, New Hampshire, and South Carolina) could alter his momentum. Once early voting for the Florida primary (whose primary date was January 31) began in late December, Romney’s staff acquired a daily list from Florida election officials and compared names of those who had requested early ballots against those that the campaign’s microtargeting models had identified as probable supporters. Those who matched up were called frequently and had campaign mail delivered to their doors. Campaign officials then compiled daily updates of voters who submitted their ballots early, allowing Romney to focus exclusively on those yet to vote.

Romney also launched an aggressive six-week advertising campaign aimed at persuading those his models labeled as undecided. By the time Newt Gingrich, his leading rival in the state, established a Florida operation, a significant portion of the electorate had already voted. As a result, Gingrich was unable to fully capitalize on the positive momentum he received after winning the South Carolina primary. Preliminary data suggest that Romney collected a much larger share of his votes in Florida from early ballots than his opponents. Observing Romney’s success at utilizing early voting, former Democratic campaign consultant Christopher Mann noted that, “It looks like the better organized campaign does better … If you look at
the primaries, [early voting] is largely to Romney’s advantage because he has the
funding, the infrastructure, and the sophistication to take advantage [of it] …
Romney was much better prepared going into 2012 for how people vote today”
(Issenberg 2012).

Once official exit poll data is released from the 2012 contests, scholars can more
carefully examine whether Romney early voting efforts were indeed successful. If so,
then officials may wish to consider the normative implications of early voting during
nomination contests, as many believe that early front-runners and those with deep
campaign coffers need no additional advantage in their quest to secure presidential
nominations. Rather, the process is healthier when voting occurs in fewer locales at
once, allowing lesser-known candidates to compete and generate momentum for
later contests. Indeed, it has been said that the sequencing of state contests “embraces
the little guy” (Delahayeal 2009). Whether early voting’s implications for candidate
competitiveness is troubling is a matter of debate; some may suggest that front-
runners with ample cash gain their advantage through meaningful experience and
strong managerial skills, attributes we tend to seek in presidents. Nevertheless, it is
important to comprehend the effects — *both intended and unintended* — of early voting
in order to properly debate its full role in our democracy.
CHAPTER 8: FINAL THOUGHTS

On the final week of October 2012, I drove about ten minutes to the Chevy Chase Community Center in Washington, D.C. For the first time, I prepared to cast an early ballot for president and various other offices (though as my license plate reminded me, I did not vote for Congress). The District had adopted early voting in 2009 as part of a larger package designed to ease the voting process. The center was one of eight sites the city established for the 2012 election cycle.

I reached the site around 2 p.m. to find about fifty prospective voters waiting in line before me. Before I entered the “no-politicking” zone, I was handed stickers and pamphlets by representatives of various local candidates. While standing in line, I bumped into two neighbors. We chatted about the weather, a new grocery store opening near our building, and their infant son. About twenty minutes later, I entered the polling place and provided my name to one of several voting clerks. The elderly woman found my name in the directory, asked me to confirm my address, and directed me to the city’s new electronic voting machines. I cast my vote, was handed an “I Voted” sticker, and headed home. Given the flexibility and shorter lines, I left the community center wondering if I would ever again vote on Election Day.

After spending thousands of hours researching and writing about early voting, I had finally participated in the revolution. As I performed my civic duty on that

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92 The District of Columbia does not have voting representation in either chamber of the U.S. Congress.
Saturday afternoon, I thought of the many lessons I had learned exploring this new phenomenon in American elections. In this final chapter, I will briefly review my findings from the preceding chapters, offer some additional observations, and advise scholars regarding future research.

**WHAT WE’VE LEARNED**

My analyses relied on multiple methods of inquiry, including quantitative models, media and archival research, case studies, and over a dozen personal interviews. Through my research, I reached numerous conclusions regarding early voting’s implications in the United States. The following are ten of my most notable findings.

1. **Early voting adoption was non-controversial when it first appeared, but has become a more partisan issue in recent years.**

   Until the late twentieth-century, early voting was largely restricted to military, elderly, and expatriate citizens. The first modern early voting law appeared in Texas in 1987, when the state’s legislature approved sites whereby any registered voter could cast a ballot in the weeks preceding Election Day. State legislative records and local media accounts suggest that low voter turnout and election administration problems were the primary catalysts for early voting’s adoption. The program was established with overwhelmingly support from both Democrats and Republicans, a trend also seen in other states throughout the 1990s. After the infamous 2000 presidential election, many additional states began early voting in an effort to reduce
lines and allow administration problems to be identified before large waves of voters arrived on Election Day.

Partisan cleavages surrounding early voting gradually emerged in the 2000s. As Democrats improved their fundraising efforts, the party increasingly sought (and had the resources) to mobilize its historically low-turnout, base voters — African-Americans, Hispanics, and young voters — during early voting periods. In 2008, doing so was a major goal of Barack Obama’s successful presidential campaign. As early voting came to be seen as a Democratic mobilization tool, Republicans began to shy away from policies they once championed. Bills stalled in the Maryland, Michigan, and Missouri legislatures. In fact, Maryland is the only state to adopt an early voting law since 2008, and it was ultimately enacted through a ballot initiative. Despite Republican opposition, there is no strong push to eliminate early voting in GOP-dominated states such as Arizona and Texas, where it has thrived for many years. In these states and others, early voting is considered untouchable because voters have grown accustomed to and appreciate its conveniences.

2. Early voting has not been adopted in some states due to traditions and logistical concerns.

Early voting has not been adopted in four of the six New England states, while Maine has a fairly limited program. The states have shied away from early voting largely for logistical reasons, as New England states traditionally administer elections at the town level of government. Because these municipalities are often small, local
officials have concerns about the cost of instituting sites in each. Further, in some states, it is constitutionally mandated that citizens vote on Election Day unless doing so is especially burdensome. In these cases, states would need to amend their respective constitutions (a tall order) before early voting could begin.

3. **Counties have considerable autonomy with regards to early voting implementation.**

   While early voting is authorized by states, counties often enjoy flexibility when implementing their programs. Local officials usually determine the number of early voting locations to be offered, where to place them, and how to advertise programs to citizens. As a result, access can vary widely *within* early voting states. I spoke with a dozen county administrators from around the U.S. Most believe that if implemented correctly, early voting can indeed both increase voter participation and reduce problems at the polls. In particular, they report that programs typically shorten lines and help identify issues before a large mass of voters arrive on Election Day.

4. **In 2008, county voter turnout increased as more early voting sites per capita were offered to voters.**

   Unlike past research, I measured early voting availability at the county level, where it varies considerably. I utilized Election Assistance Commission (EAC) data from over 3,000 U.S. counties on the number of early voting sites available in 2008. My model controlled for other known influences of participation, including lagged
turnout (omitted in all previous major studies), demographics, political variables, felon disenfranchisement laws, and voter identification laws. I report that early voting increased overall voter turnout in 2008 when more sites (per capita) were established in a county. This significant relationship existed in both rural and urban settings. Substantively, my findings suggest that adding ten sites in a county of 10,000 voting-age residents increases turnout by several percentage points or more. Recent major studies had reported no positive association between early voting and turnout (Gronke et al. 2007; Larocca and Klemanski 2011; Burden et al. 2012), though each failed to consider both local implementation and lagged turnout.

5. **In 2008, early voters were more often women, wealthy, well-educated, non-Hispanic, and elderly.**

Using CPS data, I demonstrated that women, those earning over $100,000 (annually), those with a college-education, Non-Hispanic Whites, African-Americans, and those 65 or older were more likely to participate early in 2008. Most of these results confirm past research, though the finding regarding African-Americans is new. I suspect that Barack Obama’s 2008 candidacy led to greater early engagement by this group.

6. **When counties offered more sites per capita in 2008, African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and young voters became more likely to vote early.**

African-Americans, Hispanics, and those aged 18-29 were significantly more likely to vote early in 2008 if they resided in counties that offered at least one early
voting site per 100,000 voting-age residents. The effects are notable, as members of these groups were between five and ten percentage points more likely to vote early under these circumstances, controlling for other predictors. Given that these groups typically have relatively low turnout rates, increasing their early participation should increase their overall participation rates in the long run. If high-cost voters habitually vote early when it is convenient for them, then there is no risk of them failing to participate due to burdens or unforeseen circumstances on Election Day.

7. In 2008, early voting access was lower in heavily Black counties. This was true in both rural and urban settings.

Using EAC and Census data, I find that heavily Black counties (though not heavily Hispanic counties) tended to have fewer early voting sites per capita than other counties in 2008. In a county of about 13,000 voting-age citizens, a twenty percentage point increase in percent Black was associated with one less early voting site. Early voting is therefore creating a racial disparity in terms of access to the polls. As African-Americans were found to use early voting more when additional sites are offered, my finding suggests that programs may be underachieving their potential. Further, these disparities suggest that federal intervention may be necessary, as the Voting Rights Act forbids election laws that have a disproportionately negative effect (intentional or not) on racial minorities.
8. Early voting led to higher levels of down-ballot roll-off in certain Ohio races.

Ballot roll-off occurs when a voter submits a preference for the race at the top of the ballot, but fails to do so for one or more lower offices. I find that as higher percentages of Ohio residents voted early in 2008 and 2010, county roll-off rates were indeed higher for several offices. The largest effect was found in Ohio Supreme Court elections, which are non-partisan races. As a county’s early voting rate increased by twenty percentage points, roll-off rose by between two and three points (typically thousands of voters). I suspect that because early voting begins before many down-ballot candidates begin campaigning, some early voters are more ignorant about these races and choose not to submit a preference.

9. Early voting is altering political campaigns in notable ways.

Predictably, campaign operatives are adjusting to the new realities of early voting. More money is being spent on mobilization efforts during the several weeks before Election Day, while candidates now commonly hold “early vote” rallies near voting sites. Further, candidate debates, which have long been an important information source for voters, are increasingly held after large percentages of votes have been cast. In Ohio, some long-held debates were even canceled in 2010 because campaigns felt as though they had to instead focus their attention on mobilizing early voters.
10. Early voting is affecting candidate strategies during the presidential nomination season.

As they sought their party’s respective presidential nominations in 2008, both Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani employed strategies that sought to take advantage of early voting. Both campaigns recognized that their candidate’s popularity may decline after early caucuses and primaries. As a result, both sought to mobilize and secure early votes before negative momentum could take hold. Utilizing exit poll data, I report that Clinton indeed benefitted in several states from early voting. Further, I find that Rudy Giuliani did secure additional support in Florida by courting and receiving early votes in Florida before his support declined. As early voting rates continue to increase, the ability of candidates to target supporters in later states may reduce the long-held and much-maligned influence of Iowa and New Hampshire in the nomination process.

HERE TO STAY

Early voting offers unprecedented opportunities to millions who were once relegated to voting on a single Tuesday. For decades, reformers have called for Election Day to be treated as a national holiday. Others have argued that it should simply be moved to a weekend, when more Americans have time to vote. Ultimately, the state-by-state expansion of early voting has made these calls nearly obsolete, for most American citizens can now choose from a plethora of days (including weekends) when they can vote.
While some continue to debate the efficacy of early voting, I am confident that it is a permanent development. Early voting programs are quite popular with voters in states that offer them. In recent years, there have typically been loud outcries whenever states and counties have sought to reduce their early vote times or locations. I can only imagine the reaction if an elected official sought to completely repeal a state’s program.

Further, I believe early voting is permanent because it is consistent with broader societal trends. As years pass, citizens become accustomed to more and more conveniences. Ailments that required uncomfortable treatments now come with fewer side effects, better tasting formulas, or less doses. Nearly all administrative tasks can now be completed on a computer or, increasingly, a phone. Banking and shopping are routinely completed online, while tickets to sporting events can now be purchased, downloaded, and scanned without any trace of paper.

In addition to becoming easier, citizens also expect tasks to be completed more quickly. The ability to research anything with a few clicks on one’s phone makes waiting in line seem more burdensome. In short, voting must get easier simply to keep pace with convenience gains in other walks of life. Arguably, the relative costs of voting actually grow over time if the system remains exactly the same. When costs are reduced, Americans are accustomed to keeping these gains. Once we shop online, we expect to be able to do it again. After we renew our license remotely, we have little interest in returning to the DMV to do it in the future. And once we are told we
can vote early, at our convenience, we expect the opportunity the following
November. Yes, *early voting is here to stay.*

Early voting has not expanded to every corner of the U.S., as fifteen states
continue to lack a no-excuse program. Republican-led legislatures have increased
their opposition to early voting in recent years, slowing the pace of program
adoptions. While no state legislature has ever terminated an existing early voting
program, it is easier for opponents to prevent an initiative from ever being adopted.
In these states, citizen expectations of convenience have not yet expanded to include
no-excuse, early voting.

My sense, however, is that more states will ultimately adopt early voting for one
of several reasons. First, our population is mobile. As citizens move from early to
non-early voting states, they are likely to expect the same opportunities to vote. This
should offer some momentum for adoption. Second, many of the non-early voting
states will eventually be led by Democratic legislatures, which are likely to advocate
new programs. And as I discussed earlier, once they are adopted (and enjoyed), they
are not likely to be repealed. Finally, as Republicans seek to broaden their appeal to
an increasingly diverse electorate, early voting may represent an olive branch that
does not force the party to compromise its ideological principles.

Whether the number of early voting states increases or not, I expect that the
percentage of the population voting before Election Day will continue to increase in
the coming years. Nearly all states have seen their early voting rates gradually
increase with time, while many early-adopting states now see a majority of their votes cast early. I fully expect this trend to continue.

**ADDRESSING UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES**

As early voting continues to grow, many of the unintended consequences I explored could become more apparent. While some are alarming, most can be reasonably addressed with simple reforms. The decentralized nature of American elections virtually ensures that early voting access will never be equal throughout the country, but the federal government could offer incentives to encourage adoption. Matching grants could be offered to states or counties to establish or expand early voting sites, while poorer communities could receive additional subsidies. While the current budgetary environment makes these initiatives less likely in the short term, history suggests that austerity does not last forever. Finally, the Justice Department should continue to enforce the Voting Rights Act, requiring that election laws not be altered in a discriminatory way. This is the federal government’s best weapon for combating the current racial disparity with regards to early voting sites per capita.

While ballot roll-off is a legitimate concern with early voting, political parties are aware of it and have begun to take action. Parties now routinely urge their early supporters to support candidates “down the ballot” in their mailers and phone calls. These efforts will need to expand, though non-partisan offices may continue to present the biggest problems. States with early voting may be wise to allow party
endorsements of these candidates and initiatives to appear on ballots, a proposal recently defeated in Ohio (“Useful Information,” 2012).

As it becomes clear that a large portion of the electorate is voting before Election Day, debates should be held earlier to accommodate this trend. This is especially important for local offices, as debates are often a major source of exposure for candidates. If debates and other mobilization efforts occur earlier, information asymmetries between early and Election Day voters could be reduced and voter regret may become less likely.

Finally, in presidential nomination contests, states may consider limiting their early voting period to one week. This would better protect voters from the possibility of supporting a candidate about to withdraw from the race, or from voting before many candidates have actively campaigned in the state. Then again, states may be incentivized to continue offering long early voting periods, as doing so may allow them to finally reduce the relative influence of Iowa and New Hampshire during the nomination process. In fact, as early voting rates continue to grow, these two contests may generate less and less momentum for candidates in the coming years. Most political observers, me included, would see this as a welcome development.

THE FUTURE OF CONVENIENCE VOTING

Despite the added convenience provided by early voting, the popular wisdom is that voting in the U.S. remains laborious. Every year, media accounts focus on registration errors, long lines, malfunctioning machines, and confusing ballots. In his
Election Night victory speech on November 6, 2012, Barack Obama raised the issue. As he spoke in Chicago, he thanked those who “waited in line for a very long time,” adding “by the way, we have to fix that” (Bunch 2012). At his State of the Union address in February 2013, Obama announced the formation of a bipartisan commission designed to make recommendations to ease the voting process (Heil 2013). The announcement was met with skepticism, as the federal government is ill-positioned to force major changes to state election administration. Changes, if they occur, will likely continue to be initiated by states and counties. So what reforms may follow early voting? Some believe that the universal vote-by-mail (VBM) system used in Oregon and Washington is the obvious next step, as it removes the need to physically travel to a polling place. But momentum for these policies has stalled across the country, as many state officials fear increased voter intimidation and fraud.

Experts are even more skeptical of Internet voting, variants of which have emerged in several countries, including Canada, Estonia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (Stern 2012). Major obstacles make adoption unlikely in the U.S. in the foreseeable future. In Estonia, a country of only 1.3 million persons, Internet voting has been successful because all citizens have digital identity cards. A similar card is unlikely in the U.S. given its size, federalized nature, and privacy concerns. Avi

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93 Essentially a digital signature, the ID card is also used for checking out library books, paying bus fares, and even keeping track of medical data. While voting via the Internet, the ID is inserted into a card reader that is plugged into a computer. Identification — but not the actual voting — can be also done through a mobile device via a special SIM card.
Rubin, a professor of computer science at John Hopkins and an expert in network security, recently argued that Internet voting in the U.S. is highly unsecure, stating, “The fact is that right now the security threats on the Internet are getting worse, not better. Before we can allow people to vote on computers we have to make sure people are in control of their own computers” (qtd. in Stern 2012).

In 2010, the District of Columbia invited hackers to try to infiltrate a pilot online voting system. Students were able to hack into the system in 36 hours, revealing the names and passwords of over 900 voters (Wheaton 2010). Similar concerns abound with regards to email voting. Andrew Appel, a Princeton University computer science professor, recently noted that, “It’s quite easy to fake an e-mail return address” (qtd. in Fessler 2012). When Hurricane Sandy hit on the eve of the 2012 elections, New Jersey officials allowed displaced residents to vote by e-mail, but required that paper copies of their ballots be mailed as well (Griggs 2012).

I believe that early voting is a reasonable compromise between added convenience and traditional voting. Programs allow voters to choose from a slate of time options, while maintaining the civic nature of voting in one’s community.

While I do not suspect that civic concerns would prevent either VBM or Internet voting from expanding, I do feel as though voter fraud and security concerns will have this effect in the coming years. Rather, I believe that early voting and traditional absentee ballots will continue to be the primary non-Election Day options for voters in the foreseeable future. Voting costs could, however, be reduced in other ways,
including easier registration processes and more efficient voting machines (which could reduce lines).

A STUBBORN REALITY

While my findings suggest that early voting has a meaningful positive effect on turnout, participation rates in the U.S. remain low. Even with nearly one-third of the electorate voting early, turnout was barely over 60% in 2008, meaning that two of five citizens failed to vote. In 2012, the overall rate was even lower, as about 59% of eligible citizens cast a ballot (McDonald 2012). The U.S. continues to have a very low participation rate by Western standards. Much like same-day registration (SDR), early voting can treat this ailment to some extent, but it is not a cure-all. As Downs (1957) first postulated, the choice to vote is based on perceived costs and benefits. Early voting, when implemented effectively, has the ability to reduce costs. But if some citizens have no desire to participate, then making the process easier is irrelevant to them.

Increasing motivation in the electorate is easier said than done. Hanmer (2009) synthesizes these feelings, calling it a “Herculean task.” Nevertheless, researchers have argued that various steps could lead to more “demand” for voting by increasing its perceived benefits. Most ideas focus on institutional reform, arguing that our political system drives some citizens away. Suggestions include campaign finance reform to help level the playing field between candidates (Teixiera 1992), eliminating winner-take-all elections (Dahl 2003), or at least the Electoral College (Edwards 227)
2011), and presidential nomination reform that offers all states equal influence in the process (Patterson 2003). In reality, however, most of these changes are unlikely. The Supreme Court has made aggressive campaign finance regulation essentially impossible, while a sufficient number of states continue to oppose replacing the Electoral College. Those who underestimate its durability are perpetually disappointed when reform efforts fail. Finally, changing the nomination process may be wise and achievable, but turnout rates are not exactly high in states that hold competitive and meaningful primaries. More generally, the causes of political disengagement run deeper than a lack of close contests. Many feel marginalized by the political system and have disengaged from the process entirely; when one has no faith in government or any of those seeking to run it, the prospect of a decisive vote does not encourage participation (Blais 2000; Piven and Cloward 2000; Hanmer 2009).

Increasingly, scholars have argued that education is the most promising route to generating interest in voting. By focusing on citizens before they become jaded, some hope that durable voting habits can develop. Niemi and Junn (1998) believe that high school curriculums can better foster engagement among young voters, while Campbell (2006) has reported evidence that the civic environment of a high school can lead to higher turnout among students once they reach voting age. Early research suggests that civic programs aimed at young citizens may have a positive effect on participation. Addonizio (2006) conducted an experiment designed to test the effects
of early voter education and mobilization programs among first-time voters attending high schools in Connecticut, Kentucky and New Jersey. Students assigned to treatment groups attended a First-Time Voter Program, while those assigned to a control group did not. The program consisted of informational sessions which highlighted issues of voting that pertain to young people and educated students on how to register and vote. Ultimately, she found that those assigned to participate in the program were nineteen percentage points more likely to vote than those in the control group. Andolina et. al (2003) offer a similar finding, reporting that those who participated in political organizations while in school ultimately vote more frequently, are more attentive to news, and volunteer at twice the rate of those without experience in these organizations. Additional studies will be useful to confirm (or refute) the effectiveness of these programs.

**Future Research**

While early voting cannot single-handedly solve the United States’ turnout problem, it remains a fundamental reform to the American electoral process. I encourage scholars to keep improving the existing literature. Research should continue to focus on the relationship between early voting and participation. As I demonstrated, it is imperative that early voting access be measured accurately. Future work should build on my approach by accounting for other facets of early voting convenience. For example, while I observed that some county officials advertise early voting more aggressively than others, I did not explicitly measure
whether these efforts are effective. Further, studies may be wise to investigate whether sites in specific areas – such as college campuses or near minority housing developments – can lead to greater turnout increases. Finally, I am eager to extend my own analyses regarding site density and early participation once data from the 2012 elections is released (probably in late 2013).

Methodologically, I encourage scholars to explore the relationship between sites and voting at the individual level. Geocoding represents a promising field for this research, as programs can map the physical location of all registered voters in a particular jurisdiction. This has become easier in recent years, as more states have lowered the cost of their official voter files or, in some cases, made them free to download. A geocoding analysis could specifically measure whether one’s physical distance to a new early voting site is associated with an increased likelihood of voting, controlling for one’s turnout history and other individual factors.

Research must also continue to focus on unintended consequences stemming from early voting. I am curious as to whether racial disparities continued in 2012 regarding site access. Given that few areas increased their site density during this cycle, my suspicion is that they did. Further, I encourage others to extend my down-ballot roll-off analysis to states beyond Ohio, particularly those with high early voting rates. Studies should also further analyze the effectiveness of party efforts on behalf of down-ballot candidates (in reducing roll-off).
Political campaigns have been dramatically affected by early voting, a trend I believe will continue. My research offered insights into changing campaign strategy, particularly during the presidential nomination season. I plan to soon extend my analysis to the 2012 cycle, focusing on the effectiveness of Mitt Romney’s early voting mobilization efforts in several primary states. I also encourage others to more broadly examine the ways in which campaigns are both challenged and motivated to adjust their behavior in light of early voting’s new demands. Interviews with political operatives, as well as campaign case studies, should help shed light on these issues.

Early voting has already altered the electoral process for voters, administrators, candidates, and campaigners. But as the institution remains in flux, I expect that it will present additional opportunities and pitfalls that cannot yet be anticipated. Such is the law of unintended consequences (Merton 1936). In the coming years, scholars must continue to monitor and appropriately measure these effects using new data and innovative approaches. The study of voting, which Riker (1982, p. 8) once said represents “the heart of both the method and the ideal of democracy,” deserves nothing less.
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