

LIBERALIZING AMERICAN VOTING LAWS:
INSTITUTIONALLY INCREASING VOTER TURNOUT

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Introduction

Every election is regulated by a government. Democratic or non-democratic, local or national, government worldwide is the referee in deciding who votes, when, and under what criteria. The regulations implemented vary from case to case but nonetheless are similar in nature. All voting laws have the potential to put limitations on people's ability to vote in one way or another. Previous research has focused heavily on voter turnout and how it is affected by voting laws. Elections have increasingly provided different methods for casting a vote that have evolved from simply showing up at ones precinct on Election Day to voting on electronic ballots created on sophisticated electronic machines that register votes with the touch of a finger. Each state government is responsible for which methods they allow and what the criteria is to vote by each method. For example, some states allow anyone to vote by mail for no reason while other states require an explanation to vote by mail that varies from state to state. Additionally, states individually decide when the voter registration deadline is, what type of identification is needed to vote, and how long the polls will be open on Election Day. Each of these different laws has been examined individually over the years and most research has found support that these laws influence voter turnout.

The purpose of this paper is to study the effects of voting reform legislation on voter turnout. My findings are similar to those from previous research. I find that certain voting laws have actually decreased voter turnout in 2008 and 2010 though they presumably were meant to enable more voters to participate. This paper approaches voting laws from the perspective of state institutions and the power that each of the fifty states has to increase or decrease voter turnout. Most importantly, I provide evidence

suggesting that three often overlooked institutional reforms have a significant influence on turnout. These three factors (length of time the polls are open, laws requiring employers to allow time off work on Election Day, and fax and email voting) have received very little attention in previous research. My research indicates that some reforms meant to provide greater access to the ballot box actually have this effect, while others have unexpected negative consequences.

For example, laws requiring employers to give employees time to vote actually had a statistically significant and negative relationship to voting. Turnout was lower in these states when compared to states that had not enacted such a law. My research affirms the assertions of scholars of state institutions that policy by states legislatures does indeed have significant consequences.

In addition, this scholarship is unique in that I examining all of the relevant voting laws together in order to consider the full environment facing voters rather than examining particular voting rules on their own. I use this approach to more accurately reflect the legal structure of each state. Each voting law passed by a state is active during an election and my research more accurately reflects this phenomenon than previous research has shown. I find significant evidence that suggests when a state decides to end registration and whether a state has enacted a law requiring employers to let employees off work to vote influenced voter turnout in the 2008 Presidential Election and the 2010 Off-Year Election.

Literature Review

The literature has shown that voter turnout is affected by government administration, technology, mobilization, demographic factors, emotions, and psychological altruism. Examples include income inequality (Solt 2010), abstention penalties (Panagopoulos 2008), party contacting (Wielhouwer 1994; Parry 2008; McGee and Sides 2011; Panagopoulos 2011), closeness of an election (Matsusaka 1993; Shachar and Nalebuff 1999), whether felons are allowed to vote (Miles 2004), race (Abramson 2010), and altruism (Hahn 2008; Rotemberg 2009). All of these and many other variables show that government has the potential to impact voter turnout through voting laws. The literature also shows voter turnout is impacted by many different variables and is a very complex issue. Recently, the affective intelligence theory has been changing the way researchers study voter behavior by using emotions as the explanation why voters make the decisions they make and whether or not one decides to vote (Mackuen et al. 2007; Just et al. 2007). Emotions have recently taken the place of cognitive based theories for explaining voter behavior. Researchers have shown evidence that voters use emotions such as anger, fear, and even happiness to decide whether to vote and who to vote for. McGee and Sides (2011) show the importance of voter mobilization and voter turnout in elections. The reason mobilization influences turnout, they claim, is because it enhances the psychological benefits of voting and gives prospective voters a reason to be energized about voting.

Patterson (2002) has another take on voter turnout, one that is more centered on a decline in turnout because of campaigning. Patterson finds that voters in America have grown tired of modern campaigns because of the length of campaigns, mudslinging and

other intangibles that are considered less than desirable. This dissatisfaction leads to depressed turnout.

Oliver (1996) combined voting restrictions and mobilization strategies to explain turnout by showing that removing restrictions increases the potential for voting because the number of potential voters is increased. Many more options are available to vote early and absentee since Oliver wrote his paper in 1996 and include submitting ballots electronically through a fax machine or via an e-mail over the internet and over half the states now using “no-excuse” voting by mail.

Voter registration is significant for determining voter turnout (Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987; Nagler 1991; Teixeira 1992; McDonald 2008). McDonald (2008) found Election Day registration to be an important policy implemented by state governments that increase participation. Teixeira (1992) shows evidence that Election Day Registration (EDR) helps turnout in two ways, “First EDR lowers voting costs by tying together the act of registering and voting. Second, EDR moves registration closer to the election when prospective voters’ interest in political campaigns peaks (pg. 492).”

The research regarding identification requirements and its impact on voter turnout is more controversial than registration deadlines. Vercellotti and Anderson (2006) show evidence from the 2004 Presidential Election that an increase in identification requirements resulted in a reduction in voter turnout¹. The different requirements from each state ranged from stating one’s name to showing photo identification. Alvarez et al.

¹ The 2004 Election is, in my opinion, an outdated election because of new identification laws that has since passed in several states. New legislation has been passed since the 2008 Presidential and 2010 off year election I use, although the laws passed by these states are not to take effect until 2012. The way in which identification restrictions impact voter turnout will be more understood in the future as more states change their laws to be more stringent on identification requirements.

(2008) find similar results concluding that identification requirements do have a significant negative impact on voter turnout. Erikson and Minnite (2009) also tested identification laws and whether they are significant in determining voter turnout and found different results than Alvarez, Vercellotti, and Anderson (2006). They find that identification requirements do impact voter turnout in their data but are unable to find statistically significant results. Erikson and Minnite respond to the results of Alvarez et al. findings of significance where they “obtain estimated ‘effects’ of similar magnitude to theirs... Whereas we see our results as decidedly non-significant, Alvarez et al. report tight ranges to their coefficients that suggest otherwise (pg. 98).”

Research has shown that along with identification requirements, voting by mail also influences turnout (Magleby 1987; Hamilton 1988; Karp and Banducci 2000; Gronke et al. 2007). Voting by Mail is a newer voting convenience. It occurred in Oregon for the first time in the 1990’s when they conducted a state-wide election entirely by mail (Oregon Secretary of State 2010). Gronke et al. (2007) show that voting by mail does have an impact on voter turnout along with early voting in general, a phenomenon that is continuing to increase. Early voting, as Gronke describes it, is voting before Election Day with or without restrictions. It can take place in person at a physical site or via other media such as voting by mail. Oregon was the catalyst in what has become a transformation of the voting process to more easily cast a ballot. Over half the states now use “no excuse” voting by mail. An even more recent trend in voting reform has been from the technological side. Electronic voting machines have been shown to influence turnout by many researchers and this introduces a new aspect of human voting behavioral unpredictability (Ansolabehere and Stewart 2005; Katz, Alvarez et al. 2011). The reason

for the effect technology has on turnout is still speculative due to its novelty. However, several theories have been introduced including the idea by Allers and Kooreman (2009) that due to the new technologies and lack of information about said technologies, voters may initially be intimidated by its novelty but they may be willing to use the technology in the future once they have become familiar with this new means of voting. Roseman and Stephenson (2005) offer a similar explanation stating that because these machines are computers, certain groups of the population would be less likely to vote than other. Older people, those with lower levels of education, and minority groups might be disproportionately negatively impacted by these new technologies.

Even more science-fictionesque laws are being introduced with the creation of the internet and the world wide accessibility it allows. States like Indiana allowed military and overseas voters to cast a ballot by using e-mail or fax machines in the 2010 General Election (Indiana Secretary of State 2011). This enabled voters around the world who were registered in Indiana to cast a ballot in an instant that would have otherwise taken weeks to return via mail. Such delays in the past sometimes meant missing the ballot return deadline. The internet and smart phone technology have made the cell phone a communication tool for increasing voter participation. Dale and Strauss (2009) conducted a field experiment using new technology to send out text alerts in order to remind registered voters that Election Day was nearing. Their results were remarkable. According to their findings the text messaging “effect is estimated to have been 4.1 percentage points” on the treatment group in the 2006 General Election among potential voters.

Theory

All of the previous research in the field of voter turnout has shown significant evidence that individual voting laws affect voter turnout in various elections at the state and local level. Elections, however, do not operate with one voting law at a time. Previous research on the subject has wisely investigated individual voting laws' impact on turnout. However an account has not been made for multiple voting laws being in place simultaneously. Elections within states are not conducted through the restrictions of one voting law per election. Elections operate under multiple voting laws passed by the state legislature that intermingle with one another to determine who is eligible and when they are eligible to vote. Accounting for voting by mail and including registration deadlines is more reflective of the legal structure of the state than examining each law on its own and a law's individual impact on turnout. This paper examines up to 9 different voting laws in the same model to determine which laws are most important in predicting electoral turnout². The expectation is, once all of the voting laws are included together, some will remain significant and others will become insignificant in contrast to previous studies. Unlike the previous research that shows each individual law matters in determining voter turnout, this paper aims to show support for the notion that, once all laws are considered simultaneously, not all of the laws enacted by states will positively affect turnout as previously thought. If only one voting law was in effect per election per state, then the previous research would be correct in finding these variables to be significant. However, since this is not the case, the models used in this paper are a more accurate reflection of a state's legal make-up.

² I use 8 variables in 2008 Presidential and 9 in the 2010 General. The 9th variable is email/fax voting that was too new and under beta testing in numerous states in 2008.

Data and Methods

I use logistic regression to test for the impact voting laws had on two federal elections in the United States.

Research question: What voting laws affect voter turnout when they are all accounted for?

Hypothesis (H1): More restrictive voting laws will decrease voter turnout more than less restrictive voting laws.

Unit of analysis: 50 American states³.

Dependent variables: 2008 Presidential and the 2010 Off-Year Election voting age population (VAP) turnout percentages recorded by each state. The 2008 Presidential election was chosen because it is a recent election that has enough variation in the state laws regarding voting. The 2010 election was chosen because it is the most recent election that involves all fifty states and also provides the opportunity to compare the models in this paper in more than one election. Even though it is an off-year election, the 2010 election allows for the testing of fax and e-mail voting⁴. Fax and e-mail voting in 2010 would have included Congressional, Gubernatorial, and Municipal Elections.

Independent variables: include felony voting⁵, early voting⁶, ID requirements⁷, off work

³ Washington D.C. is excluded because it is not a state.

⁴ This variable was not readily available in 2008 and in 2010 was still beta testing among several states.

⁵ Felony voting is a three point scale I use to rank states based on how easy it is for a former felon to vote. The variable details are listed in the index.

⁶ Early voting is a more specific term for this paper. Early voting refers to in person early voting that is usually conducted in a tangible structure. For example, VBM is considered a form of early voting but is not included in this variable. I was only concerned with ballots casted at an early voting polling site.

⁷ Identification requirements are based on a scale detailed in the index. I made a distinction between states that require photo id and states that mandate photo id because provisions exist in states to vote without id in the former states, whereas the latter are not allowed to vote without id under any circumstance.

to vote⁸, length polls are open on Election Day⁹, registration deadline¹⁰, voting by mail restrictions (VBM) restrictions, machine style (direct-recording electronic machines, paper ballots, punch cards)¹¹, and internet voting in the 2010 off year election. I collected data from multiple sources for the independent variables because all of the laws are not located in the same data set¹².

Control variables: include percent of state population white, senate race, governor race, turnout difference, southern state, education, age¹³, marital status, home owners, campaign contributions, unemployment rates and volunteering. Race was included because as shown in the review of the literature evidence suggests that racial make-up influences voter turnout. Race is broken down into one category for this paper but originally included the percentage white and the percentage black of each state¹⁴. Senate and Governor Race are included because of the significance each race adds to an election.

It is assumed that if a state has an election for a Senate or Governor seat it will raise the

⁸ States fall into two different categories of this voting law. A state can either mandate businesses to allow employees to vote during business hours or states will make no such law and allow owners/managers to decide for themselves whether one can leave work to vote.

⁹ Length Polls are open is coded in two categories instead of the number of hours the polls are open because states vary in the universal applicability to all counties or towns. Some states allow counties to decide when the polls are open and this requires a two category generalization. By categorizing as >12 hours or <12 hours it allows the majority of states to be universal.

¹⁰ In my review of the literature I found two different ways of coding registration deadlines. Some papers code deadline as the number of days out from an election that registration ends. Other researchers coded the deadline as a scale. I choose to use the scale method similar to previous papers. I coded the number of days out in my analysis and did not notice a significant difference between the two methods.

¹¹ Experience working at the Marion County Election Board in Indianapolis, Indiana showed me that voting machine type will influence vote choice. People seem to be afraid of the electronic voting machines. Now given the machines may not actually be determining whether one chooses to vote or not. Voters for whatever reason do not want to vote via DRE machines, even when lines wrap around the City County Building. This experience leads me to believe there is an order to the different types of voting machines and thus coded as a scale instead of two separate dummy variables.

¹² Most of the data coded in this paper comes from the League of Women Voters Education Fund. <http://www.vote411.org/>. Campaign finance information is pulled directly from the Federal Election Commission. Military and overseas voting was found through Verified Voting. <http://www.verifiedvoting.org>. Voter identification requirements came from the National Conference of State Legislatures. Voting age population turnout rates came from Dr. Michael McDonald and George Mason University.

¹³ This is the percentage of the population over the age of 65 in each state.

¹⁴ Percent black had multicollinearity and was removed from the models.

significance of an election creating a larger incentive to vote compared to a state that does not have a Governor or Senate seat available. Turnout difference is the turnout of the 2008 election subtracted from the 2010 election. I use this variable to test whether a state that had high turnout in 2008 will continue to have high turnout in 2010. Education, age, marital status, and home ownership are demographic characteristics that have shown previous evidence for influencing voter turnout and are used as control variables to test the strength of the independent variables. Campaign contributions¹⁵ and volunteering¹⁶ are social characteristics that this paper uses as a measure of political participation and community participation and anticipates residents who contribute more time and money for the good of the community are more likely to vote and therefore have higher turnout than states that are less likely to contribute their time and money. I used volunteering as a gauge for altruism because of its impact on voter turnout in previous research. People who volunteer are doing so without any expectation of compensation and are willing to help their community for the sole purpose of benefitting others. Unemployment rates for 2008 and 2010 are included in both models as a measure for economic distress¹⁷. Finally, southern state is used because previous research has shown, historically, southern states have lower rates of turnout than other regions of the United States and may account for the differences in turnout percentages in the models used for this paper¹⁸. All of these variables together create a more realistic composition of the framework for states and their individual characteristics.

¹⁵ Per capita campaign contribution in 2008.

¹⁶ Federal Government ranking state of volunteering hours. Mean 2004-2010.

¹⁷ The unemployment numbers are from the U.S. Census Bureau and are yearly averages for 2008 and 2010.

¹⁸ An Appendix is included at the end of this paper that shows in great detail how each variable was coded and also provide a clearer definition for each variable.

Tables and Models: The 2008 and 2010 turnout numbers are shown in two separate tables. Table-1 shows 2008 and Table-2 shows 2010 where I estimate two statistical models. Model-1 tests whether the voting laws are significant for determining voter turnout and only list the independent variables of theoretical interest. Model-2 includes these variables and also introduces all of the control variables. The purpose of these two models is to see whether the independent variables remain significant once the control variables are introduced. Both models contain the same number of cases $N = 50$ for the fifty American states. I discuss Table-1 first and then Table-2.

Expectations and Predictions

I predict, based on the abundance of previous literature on voting laws, that voting by mail, id requirements, and registration deadlines will have a significant negative impact on voter turnout the more restrictive they become. I make this prediction based on the overall quantity of people who are constrained through voting by mail, id requirements, and registration deadlines. Registration deadlines and id requirements impact every voter in every state universally. Voting by mail requirements on the other hand also impact every voter in each state but on a voter by voter basis. This means that individual states have different laws concerning who can vote by mail and each state can decide whether “no excuse” voting by mail is allowed. I predict that states who allow voters “no excuse” voting by mail will see a higher turnout than states who allow only conditional voting. I also predict voting by mail to be positive and significant because it is a growing trend in early absentee voting. As voting by mail has increased in popularity and convenience amongst voters, more people are likely to use its service and states that allow anyone to vote through “no excuse” voting I expect to have higher turnout percentages. I predict these three variables to be significant in both the 2008 and 2010 elections.

I expect that the four remaining independent variables will have small effects or be insignificant because they impact a smaller percentage of the population and therefore have a lower overall impact on the total number of voters. For example, in person early voting, felony voting, e-mail/fax voting, and taking time off work to vote affect a significantly smaller percentage of the population than do the other variables. Due to the small number of felons who potentially may vote, those who are eligible to vote by e-

mail/fax¹⁹, the small number of people unable to vote because of work requirements, and the percent of the population that votes early, I predict these variables to be negligible in determining voter turnout. I also predict based on the novelty of fax/e-mail voting and its restriction to only those overseas and in the military it will not have a far enough reaching overall impact on voter turnout. I predict these three variables to be insignificant in both the 2008 and 2010 elections.

The final independent variable is the length of time the polls are open on Election Day. I found little research to support an educated prediction in my review of the literature but I predict this variable to be insignificant. I predict this variable to be insignificant because of the small differences between all fifty states laws regarding the length of time that polls are open. The difference in most states was about 1 hour and I predict this one hour will have little if any effect on overall voter turnout in 2008 and 2010.

Concerning my control variables I expect Volunteering to have the largest impact on voter turnout along with race and age. I will make a distinction between 2008 and 2010 for these three controls. I believe volunteering to be consistent between both elections whereas race and age will only be significant in 2010. Because of the large turnout overall and the above average number of minorities and young people voting in the presidential election, I expect differences in race and age to be minimal. Volunteering on the other hand is a consistent trend that is separate from a single election.

¹⁹ Currently only military and overseas voters are allowed to vote in the majority of states.

Results

The results of Table-1 are shown on page 16 and show mixed support for my predictions. In Model-1 ID requirements are not statistically significant, while registration deadlines and allowing time off work to vote on Election Day are both highly significant at $p < .00$ while having requirements to vote by mail and the type of voting machine used is also significant at $p < .05$. I find this somewhat surprising because of previous literatures' emphasis on identification requirements and its impact on voter turnout. I am surprised by the variable ID requirements because the previous research that is available has shown more restrictive ID requirements to cause a decrease in turnout and this simply is not the case for 2008 according to my results.

Once I ran Model-2 I found some rather interesting results. Once again registration deadlines and time off work to vote, additionally now the length polls were open in 2008 and whether or not felons can vote also is significant. Time off work to vote is negative and significant at $p < .05$. This is very surprising given these results indicate that a law requiring employees to be off work if they ask their respective employer suggests this policy has a negative effect on turnout compared to a state that has no such law. Registration deadlines remain significant at $p < .001$ and includes the length polls are open at $p < .01$. This Model explains ~80% of the variation with an adjusted R^2 of .79. The constant in both models is significant at $p < .001$. I ran both models with and without the difference in turnout and it did not change any of the outputs.

I am surprised that a law requiring employers to allow employees time off work to vote not only was significant in the first model but remained significant in the second model as well. States have made many provisions for early voting and vote casting in

different ways before Election Day that I felt would be more important for voting than the employee /employer relationship.

Table-2 is shown on page 17. My findings in Table-2 are similar to an extent of results to the first table with a few exceptions. Registration deadlines and voting by mail restrictions and the type of voting machine are significant once again at $p < .05$ in Model-1 and both variables show a negative relationship with the dependent variable while the type of voting machine has a positive relationship. As registration deadlines increase in length from Election Day the lower voter turnout can be expected while an increase in restrictions to voting by mail also decreases voter turnout. Model-1 suggests that the more technology a state uses the lower turnout can be expected. It seems DRE machines are causing lower turnout than optical scanners and paper ballots. I did not find this unexpected based on my literature review that showed evidence to support electronic machines to be negatively influential on a voter's decision to vote. My predictions are true once again about registration deadlines and voting by mail restrictions. Surprisingly, once again identification requirements were not significant in determining voter turnout. I also found evidence in Model-1 that the type of voting machines states used influenced voter turnout once again neither early voting restrictions, felony voting, or id requirements were significant in the first model and email/fax voting, time off work to vote, and the length polls were open were also insignificant in the first model.

For 2010, Model-2 however changes the findings again just as in the 2008 table. Registration deadline remains significant at the $p < .01$ level, however, it was the only independent variable to remain significant once the control variables were added. Very surprisingly I saw the significance of VBM restrictions and type of voting machines

becoming insignificant while time off work to vote became significant in the second model. Time off work to vote is once again negative suggesting a law requiring employees off work is decreasing voter turnout. This is very counter intuitive and hard to explain theoretically.

Table-1

Dependent Variable: 2008 VAP Turnout Percentage	Model-1	Model-2
	Coef.	Coef.
Early Voting Restrictions	.004 (1.947)	-.150 (1.292)
Felony Voting	2.227 (1.675)	2.371* (1.164)*
ID Requirements	.665 (1.069)	1.300 (.725)
Time off Work to Vote	-4.438*** (1.602)***	-2.558* (1.166)*
Length Polls are Open	2.312 (1.693)	2.911** (1.152)**
Registration Deadline	-1.467*** (.509)***	-1.376*** (.359)***
VBM Restrictions	-3.397* (1.745)*	-2.350 (1.206)
Type of Voting Machines	2.533* (1.207)*	.964 (.962)
Campaign Contributions		-.920 (.490)
Percent w/College Degree		.372 (.202)
Turnout Differential		.268 (.151)
Owner Occupied Housing		.493** (.179)**
Senate Race in 2008		1.859 (1.253)
Marital Status		-1.184*** (.246)***
Population 65 and older		-.539

		(.415)
Percentage White		.029
		(.058)
Southern State		-1.986
		(1.361)
Volunteer		-.152**
		(.061)**
Unemployment 2008		.057
		(.561)
Governor Race 2008		-.853
		(1.381)
Constant	58.687***	79.328***
R2	.49	.88
Adjusted R2	.39	.79
N	50	50

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001
(Standard coefficients in parentheses)

The constant in both models of Table-2 is significant at $p < .001$ and Model-2 explains 69% of the variation with an adjusted R^2 of .69.

My findings for the control variables were surprising given that neither race nor education seemed to have an impact on voter turnout in 2008 or 2010. Volunteering on the other hand was significant in both elections as I predicted it would be. Volunteering and community involvement seem to have an influence as a whole on state citizen's willingness to vote.

	Model-1	Model-2
Dependent Variable: 2010 VAP Turnout Percentage	Coefficient	Coefficient
Early Voting Restrictions	-.160 (1.905)	-.146 (1.651)
Felony Voting	.460 (1.646)	1.958 (1.369)
ID Requirements	1.331	1.016

	(1.044)	(.886)
Email/Fax Voting	-.800	-.951
	(1.730)	(1.352)
Time off Work to Vote	-1.240	-2.975*
	(1.594)	(1.445)*
Length Polls are Open	2.222	2.083
	(1.658)	(1.317)
Registration Deadline	-1.299*	-1.090**
	(.537)*	(.429)**
VBM Restrictions	-3.794*	-2.000
	(1.740)*	(1.532)
Type of Voting Machines	3.159*	1.044
	(1.180)*	(1.064)
Percent w/College Degree		.049
		(.161)
Turnout Differential		-.720***
		(.188)***
Owner Occupied Housing		.511
		(.212)
Marital Status		-1.124***
		(.275)***
Population 65 and older		-.602
		(.493)
Percentage White		.015
		(.068)
Southern State		-1.938
		(1.643)
Volunteer		-.187**
		(.075)**
Senate Race 2010		-.282
		(1.396)
Governor Race 2010		-.150
		(1.521)
Unemployment		-.084
		(.389)
Constant	40.513***	87.265***
R2	.49	.82
Adjusted R2	.37	.69
N	50	50

* p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001 (Standard Coefficients in Parentheses)

Conclusion

This paper shows evidence that when studying voter turnout attention must be paid to the laws passed by each state's legislature. They are important because they have the ability to change the voting landscape. So often voter turnout is treated as a complex phenomenon with varying levels difficult to understand and predict. Why does Oregon or Iowa have much higher turnout rates than Alabama or West Virginia? Although this is indeed a complicated question to try and answer, an important first step is to look to the state legal framework. Laws have the power to decrease or increase freedom and the same can be said of voting laws. When the state legislature involves itself in voting reforms there are consequences on voter turnout. This paper shows evidence that each individual state has the power to increase or decrease turnout through institutional voting reforms. The rules determine the outcome and as shown in this paper the rules can have powerful effects.

The general trend in the states in the last forty years has been to open up voting and make it more accessible. Whereas states once required potential voters to register many months prior to an election, the registration deadline can now be no more than 30 days prior to an election. Many states have moved to relax this requirement, some even allowing same day registration. I conclude that having a registration deadline prior to Election Day impacts turnout. The closer to the election that registration ends, the higher turnout a state can expect. Therefore, states that allow for Election Day registration can expect higher turnout than the states that end registration a month before the election. In all models employed in this paper, registration deadlines consistently and significantly decreased turnout in. It will be interesting to see if such trends continue into the 2012

Presidential Election and beyond and I speculate that it will. I predict it will remain important because early registration deadlines require voters to engage in the political process long before their interest in it has reached its full potential.

The three newer variables with little to no prior research I tested in my paper acted mainly as I predicted. The one anomaly was states passing a law requiring employees time off work to vote on Election Day. States with laws requiring employers to give employees time off work to vote saw a decrease in turnout in 2008 and in 2010. This is unexpected and contrary to the clear goals of the law. This unexpected and counterintuitive result is difficult to explain. This law does not appear to have the impact that lawmakers intended.

States that allowed polling sites to be open greater than 12 hours had a higher voter turnout in 2008 and 2010. This variable acted exactly as predicted and showed significance in both elections. I would recommend states allow voters more than the allotted traditional 12 hours to vote. As American work patterns have changed, states need to adapt accordingly and allow more than the 6 am-6pm polling hours found in numerous states around the country.

Fax and email voting did not significantly affect turnout. Though this is also unexpected, it is not particularly surprising given the very low number of voters who have access to this form of voting and its novelty. Fax and email balloting is very new and may take a few election cycles to show significance. Several states are still beta testing this technology and may not have a statewide system in place until the 2012 Presidential Election. It may also be insignificant for affecting turnout because of the small percentage of voters who are allowed to use its convenience. Only members of the

military and overseas voters have the option to vote by fax or e-mail and this could explain why fax/e-mail voting was insignificant in 2010 for increasing voter turnout.

The two most surprising findings based on the literature were early voting restrictions and identification requirements. Identification requirements vary from state to state in the United States in terms of leniency and previous research has found evidence suggesting identification requirements does influence turnout, however I found no statistical evidence to support those findings.²⁰ Several states have passed laws that will require photo id in order to vote in the future and it will be interesting to see if this has an impact in upcoming elections (National Conference 2011). Many advocates for the poor fear that such rules will make it more difficult for disadvantaged groups to participate in elections. Early voting restrictions did not have an impact on turnout similar to id requirements. Putting restrictions on who can vote in person early proved to have no effect on voter turnout.

This paper successfully shows evidence that some voting laws do significantly affect voter turnout. Lawmakers should carefully consider the collection of voting rules they choose to establish in their states since my research shows that not all “reforms” actually achieve their stated goals. This paper sheds new light on previous research that found individual voting laws to be significant. It also finds evidence that voter registration restrictions should be reduced in order to encourage voter turnout.

²⁰ The most lenient states require no form of identification. Other states require some form of non-photo identification in order to vote such as a water bill or piece of mail. More restrictive states require photo identification, however, these states allow for the signing of an affidavit as a legal binding contract that states the voter is who they claim to be and are then allowed to vote even without proper photo identification. The most restrictive states, Indiana and Georgia, require photo identification in order to vote without any exceptions to the law. Numerous states passed laws in 2010 and 2011 that will require prospective voters to show photo identification or they will not be allowed to vote. It seems the issue of id requirements and its impact on voter turnout may have just begun.

Appendix

Variable Descriptions:

Registration Deadline. 0 = Election Day, 1 = within 7 days, 2 = within 14 days, 3 = within 21 days, 4 = within 28 days, 5 = 29+

VBM. 1 = no requirements to vote by mail, 0 = requirement to vote by mail.

Early Voting. 1 = early voting site with no requirement, 0 = early voting site with requirements.

Length Polls Are Open. 1 = >12 hours, 0 = 12hours.

Off Work to Vote. 1 = required by law, 0 = not required by law.

Voting Machine Type. 1 = DRE Only, 2 = DRE and Optical Scanner, 3 = Optical Scanner/Paper ballot only.

Email/Fax Voting. 1 = yes, 0 = no.

Felony Voting. 1 = vote while incarcerated, 2 = vote after time is served, 3 = indefinitely disenfranchised.

ID Requirements. 1 = no id needed, 2 = non-photo id required, 3 = photo id required, 4 = very strict photo id requirements.

Race. Percent white and percent black of each state.

Senate Race. 1 = yes, 0 = no

Turnout Difference. Turnout of 2008 election subtracted from the turnout in 2010 General.

Southern State. 1 = yes, 0 = no.

College. Percent of state with a college degree.

Age. Percentage of state population over the age of 65.

Home Owners. Percent of occupied homes that are owned.

Campaign Contributions. Per capita amount of contributions made by each state.

Volunteering. Volunteering is the ranking by the federal government of all fifty states in order of most likely to volunteer to least likely to volunteer.

Governor Race. 1 = yes, 0 = no.

Unemployment. Percentage of state residents unemployed. It is reported as the average for each year by the Census Bureau.

Marital Status. Percentage of state residents who are married.

Multicollinearity Tables:

2008 Presidential Election	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Senate Race	.486	2.058
Governor Race	.560	1.786
Turnout Differential	.477	2.098
Southern State	.421	2.376

Education	.191	5.248
Age	.367	2.723
Race	.333	3.001
Marital Status	.442	2.262
Home Owners	.322	3.106
Unemployment	.373	2.679
Campaign Contributions	.205	4.886
Volunteering	.221	4.524
Felony Voting	.517	1.933
Early Voting	.444	2.251
ID Requirements	.458	2.183
Off Work to Vote	.525	1.905
Length Polls are Open	.550	1.817
Registration Deadline	.452	2.211
VBM Restrictions	.476	2.101
Machine Style	.434	2.303

2010 Presidential Election	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Senate Race	.717	1.394
Governor Race	.531	1.882
Turnout Differential	.427	2.343
Southern State	.414	2.414
Education	.430	2.324
Age	.389	2.572
Race	.319	3.137
Marital Status	.529	1.892
Home Owners	.327	3.056
Unemployment	.367	2.726
Volunteering	.205	4.879
Felony Voting	.540	1.854
Early Voting	.391	2.559
ID Requirements	.468	2.135
Off Work to Vote	.477	2.098
Length Polls are Open	.579	1.727
Registration Deadline	.451	2.217
VBM Restrictions	.396	2.525
Machine Style	.483	2.069
E-Mail/Fax Voting	.599	1.668

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Working Papers: Liberalizing American Voting Laws: Institutionally Increasing Voter Turnout. This paper analyzes institutional reforms by each state and its apparent effect on voter turnout. Simple institutional reforms have the ability to increase turnout in both Presidential and Off-year elections.

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