

Absentee Voting: A Cross State Analysis

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Abstract

Early voting is a complex process; it is important to maintain separate analysis of in-person early voting and absentee voting due to the different theoretical implications which arise from each analysis. This study limits its focus to the vote-by-mail practice, also known as absentee voting. I try to provide an aggregate level analysis of the absentee voting using the Election Assistance Commission's (EAC) 2008 and 2012 Election Administration and Voting Survey, Census Bureau data, and the United States Election Projects. The primary purpose of this study is to identify the importance of the institutional environment over the casting of absentee ballots in a given election year. The second objective is to discern that absentee voting (including both excuse and no-excuse absentee), even when implemented alone, positively impacts the general turnout. As expected, states that have liberal absentee rules have high proportion rates of absentee ballots counted, and this result is consistent for both 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. While the proportion of absentee ballots counted in the presidential elections of 2008 has increased the general turnout of the presidential elections, this effect is not visible in the 2012 elections.

Since the 1960s, concerns over the declining turnout of the American electorate, as well as the struggle to extend voting rights to minorities have led to many electoral reforms for the expansion of the franchise. The institution of voting has undergone major transformations in the last ten years. Early voting, also referred to as convenience voting, has played a major role in the transformation process of voting in United States. Election Day only voting has somewhat lost its significance, because the contemporary voting period has been stretched into an entire Election Month. These electoral reforms generally, and early voting specifically, have transformed Election Day into a historical relic (Gronke, 2008). What does this imply for the success of the electoral reforms?¹

Early voting is often used broadly by scholars and pundits to describe voter turnout before Election Day. There are two forms of early voting, namely in-person early voting and vote-by mail. This study will focus its attention on the vote-by-mail voting, also known as

¹ I revisit this question in the Analysis section of the study.

absentee voting. It is important to maintain a separate analysis of in-person early voting and absentee voting because different theoretical and practical implications arise from each analysis. Herron and Smith (2013) highlight the necessity to isolate the analysis of early in-person and absentee voting. States have different regulations applied to these voting modes. According to Herron and Smith (p. 31, 2012) “absentee voters are able to request ballots in person, by phone, and online and then return them in person or by mail at their leisure. In this way absentee voters can avoid the hassles of casting regular ballots during early voting or on Election Day”. In addition, Rosenfield (1994) identifies other distinctions between in-person early voting and absentee voting such as who is eligible to vote early, whether or not an application to vote early is necessary, when the voting takes place, and the publicity about the early voting opportunity.

The 2000 general election signaled the turning point, easing legal requirements for absentee voting. State governments have tried to ease the voting process for their voters but not the same effort was made across state governments. This paper will address the existence of these discrepancies (developing a measurement system), how they affect absentee voting turnout, and the impact that absentee voting has on the general election turnout. The existing literature pays attention to individual level explanations of absentee voting focusing on the socioeconomic status model, but less has been done to understand this issue in the aggregate.

This study provides an aggregate level analysis of the absentee voting majorly relying on data provided by Election Assistance Commission’s (EAC) 2008 and 2012 Election Administration and Voting Survey, Census Bureau, and the United States Election Projects. Using data from the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections the main purpose of this study is to identify the importance that institutional environment has over the proportion of absentee ballots cast in a given election year. Stated differently, what contributes toward having a high or low

number of absentee ballots cast? The second objective is to discern that absentee voting (including both excuse and no-excuse absentee), even when implemented alone, might slightly increase the general turnout. To account for the institutional variations within the same group (i.e. excuse and no-excuse absentee) I have developed a ranking system of the states based on their predisposition to facilitate the absentee voting for their voters relying on the absentee voting rules that states have implemented.

Historical-Institutional Evolution of Absentee Voting

Through a historical perspective, absentee voting cannot be considered as a contemporary phenomenon in the American electoral system. Absentee voting was first implemented as a form of voting during the Civil War. At that time it was a right reserved only for the soldiers, who were fighting away from their homes and could not exercise their civil rights otherwise. Absentee voting started as a process to facilitate soldiers voting in the field (Benton, 1915). During the Civil War all Union states except Indiana, Illinois, Delaware, New Jersey, Oregon, and Massachusetts provided some form of absentee balloting for their soldiers. Also, all Confederacy states, excluding Texas, Arkansas, and Mississippi, extended that right to their own military personnel (Benton, 1915). It is important to note that this institutional variation regarding the absentee voting rules is still present across the states.²

In addition, the voting reform of the 1980s aimed to increase voter convenience by expanding the right to vote absentee to a wider electorate rather than only the disabled, students, travelers, or military (Gronke et al., 2007). By the 1990s no less than twenty states had

² To identify these differences I have developed a ranking system based on the absentee voting rules that each state has implemented during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.

implemented at least one form of convenience voting. The infamous Florida case during the 2000s presidential election led to the implementation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which helped to stimulate the number of early voters (Gronke et al., 2007). The main requirement of HAVA (2002) was that by 2006 all American states had to establish a statewide voter registration system and guarantee poll access to all disabled voters³. Additionally, military ballots would be counted in a timely manner and alternative language would be available to minorities. Table 1 shows the evolution of absentee voting over time. The number of states with no-excuse absentee voting has increased at the expense of states which have a traditional absentee voting system. In the 1980's only three states offered no-excuse absentee voting to their voters. In 2013 the number had increased significantly to twenty-seven states, including the District of Columbia (Gronke et al., 2007; ncls.org, 2013)

Table 1 Evolution of Absentee Voting, 1980-2013

Types of Absentee Voting	1980s	1990s	2000-06	2013
Traditional Absentee Voting	47	45	27	21
No Excuse Absentee	3	7	10	27 + DC
No Excuse Absentee & Permanent Absentee Status	0	2	5	7
Voting by Mail	0	1	1	2

*1980-2006 data received from Gronke, Rosenbaum, & Miller (2007)

*2013 data received from National Conference of State Legislatures

Karp and Banducci (2001) argue that relaxed absentee voting laws provide a greater incentive for voters to cast an early ballot if going to the polls is inconvenient for them. Table 1 show that absentee voting laws have been liberalized significantly since the 1980s. Oliver (1996, p. 498) argues that “in the 1992 presidential elections, over 7% of American voters cast their

³ This is the main reason why I focus my analysis on the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections; I am able to capture the institutional changes which occurred up to 2006 and discern how they influenced turnout.

ballots without going to the polls, more than twice the level in 1972”. In addition, Field and Dicamillo (1995) show that in 1978 only 4.4% of California’s voters voted absentee, but this percentage increased significantly in 1994 with 22% of voters. In 2004 the percentage climbed over 32% (Alvarez et al., 2008). The data clearly shows that the liberalization of absentee voting laws has increased the number of early voters. But what does this mean in terms of turnout?

Electoral Reform and Voter Profile: Who Votes Early?

The turnout rates have been in a continuous decline since 1960s (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982) and policymakers tried to find ways to overcome this concerning issue for democratic values. The primary objective of the electoral reform was to increase the pool of voters and boost the turnout rates. According to Berinsky (2005, p. 472), “reforms are designed to lower or erase the barriers to voting, making it easier for all citizens to vote, regardless of their personal circumstances”. However, the question that arises in this case is whether electoral reforms have fulfilled their objective or not. Taking into consideration the absentee institutional setting disparity across states, Gronke and Toffey (2008) argue that absentee law liberalization has not expanded the pool of voters because “the heavenly choir [still] sings with a strong upper-class accent” (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 35). The likely early voters still have the same “face and personality” as election-day voters; likely voters are better educated, wealthier, older, and more politically tuned (Verba et al., 1995; Highton, 1997; Oliver, 1996; Patterson & Caldeira, 1985; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Gronke & Toffey, 2008; Neeley & Richardson, 2001).

According to Alvarez et al. (p. 256, 2012), “the probability of early voting is greater among liberal, well-educated, older, male, and strong partisan voters.” The reason why older, more-educated, and partisan voters are willing to use a new way of voting in order to fulfill their

civic duty is because they are the likely voters and voting is an important activity for them (Alvarez et. al, 2012; Blais, 2000; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). Stein and Garcia-Monet (1997, p. 668) argue that in Texas during the presidential elections of 1992 early voting “turn out voters who would not have voted on Election Day”. In other words, relaxed absentee voting laws would not enlarge the pool of voters by appeasing infrequent voters but will make voting easier for likely voters.

Moreover, Brody (1978) highlights the fact that individuals in the highest income quintile are more likely to perceive ideological differences between the major party presidential candidates, while individuals in the lowest quintile are least likely to see these differences. Aligning with Brody’s (1978) logic, Berinsky (2005) is skeptical about the success of the electoral reform arguing that it, instead, has “perverse outcomes”. Indeed, the electoral reform has increased the turnout, more people vote absentee, but at the same time it has increased the composition inequality of the voters (Berinsky, 2005). In other words, the reform did not change the composition of the electorate; it continued to bring the “cream of the crop” to the polls (Southwell & Burchett, 2000).

Several studies show that conservative voters are more likely to vote in-person on the Election Day and voters self-identified as liberal are more likely to vote absentee (Alvarez et al., 2012; Barreto et al., 2006). However, Oliver (1996, p. 511) disagrees arguing that, “the absentee electorate has become more upscale and Republican than the general electorate”. Furthermore, Karp and Banducci (2001) argue that absentee voters are not only more educated and active in politics but also have a low level of political uncertainty. Partisans are more likely to vote early because they already know who they will vote for and the last minute information that they may receive from the media will not change their opinion (Karp & Banducci, 2001; Gronke, 2008).

Early voters are “more politically aware, more partisan, and more ideologically extreme” (Gronke et al., 2008). Partisanship translates into political activism and that is one of the major forces that makes voters vote absentee (Karp & Banducci, 2001).

In addition, Patterson and Caldeira (1985, p. 784), emphasize that also “partisan candidates are more likely to harvest absentee votes in the very localities where their party is otherwise strong”. In other words, voters’ political partisanship and party mobilization should not be disregarded when analyzing the influence of absentee voting. Stein (1998) argues that early voters have a higher interest in politics, identify themselves with a political party, and have a strong ideology compared to the Election Day voters. However, Stein (1998) did not find any partisan advantage among early voters. Both Republican and Democrat voters are equally likely to vote early (Stein, 1998). In other words, partisanship is stronger than ideology when it comes to a voter’s decision to vote early.

Do absentee voters have distinctive characteristics different than Election Day voters? This is an important question for campaigners who are eager distinguish between early voters and Election Day voters. Barreto et al. (2006) argues that there are no major differences between the two groups. Nevertheless, the main difference is that absentee voters are older and better educated (Barreto et al., 2006; Karp & Banducci, 2001; Dubin & Kalsow, 1996). The striking result derived from the Barreto et al. (2006) study is that in California (where absentee laws are extremely liberal) voters’ socio-economic characteristics do not exert any determining impacts on voters’ choice of voting mode. This conclusion contradicts the basics of the socio-economic model characteristics of likely voters that Verba et al. (1995) and other scholars have developed to identify likely voters. Absentee voters’ biggest motivation to cast an early ballot is solely the “ease and convenience that it provides” (Barreto et al., 2006, p. 229).

Dubin and Kalsow (1996) emphasize that the liberalization of absentee regulations that took place in California in 1977 had a great impact significantly increasing the number of voters casting an absentee ballot, which means that when liberal absentee laws are enacted voters are more likely to cast an early ballot. However, Oliver (1996) asserts that voters' political mobilization is more important than a state's legal context when it comes to deciding whether to cast an absentee ballot or not. Liberal absentee laws have an impact on the turnout only when accompanied by parties' mobilization efforts and voters' self-motivation to participate in states' politics (Oliver, 1996).

On the other hand, Neeley and Richardson (2001, p. 381) find little support for the mobilization thesis in their study and they argue that early voting "merely conveniences those who would have voted anyway". Burden et al. (2014, p. 95) adds a third dimension to this debate arguing that early voting has reduced turnout because it has reduced the "civic significance of elections for individuals and altering the incentives for political campaigns to invest in mobilization". This debate is the cornerstone of the current study. I argue that liberal absentee voting laws accommodate voter's availability to cast an absentee ballot. However, on the aggregate level party mobilization may not be as effective mobilizing early voters compared to Election Day voters because the former have already decided which party they will support and who they will vote for.

Data and Methods

My analysis begins by recognizing that there is a relationship between the states' institutional regulations and absentee voting. Both excuse and no-excuse absentee voting states are included in the analysis. Recent literature on convenience voting focuses more on the impact

that no-excuse absentee voting has on general turnout (Burden et al., 2014), excluding from the analysis excuse absentee states. Arbitrarily excluding excuse absentee voters from the equation may lead to skewed results and only a partial explanation of this process.

The main purpose of this study is to identify how the variation in absentee voting regulations has affected the number of absentee ballots cast in the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012. Data used in this study is collected from different sources, such as the Election Assistance Commission, Census Bureau, Federal Election Commission, and the United States Elections Project. The dependent variable in the first model is calculated as the proportion of the absentee ballots counted given the total number of ballots counted in a given election⁴. The data for the number of absentee ballots counted in a state at a given year is collected from the Election Assistance Commission 2008 and 2012 Election Administration and Voting Survey, and the data for the general turnout in the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012 are retrieved from the United States Elections Project.

To control for the variation of absentee voting regulations across states, across time, and within the same group (i.e. no-excuse of excuse absentee states) I have developed an index for the existent absentee voting laws across states⁵. The information used to construct the index is collected from the Long Distance Voter⁶. Long Distance Voter provides information and assistance for voters on how to get absentee ballots and if they are eligible to cast an absentee ballot in their state. The first step toward developing the index is to identify and weight the absentee voting rules that exist in the United States. Referring to Table 2, there are twenty two

⁴ EAC does not report the UOCAVA absentee votes counted for 2012 presidential elections and the regressant for 2012 is calculated as the proportion of civilian absentee votes counted given the total turnout.

⁵ Unlike other states, Oregon and Washington use an all-mail voting system. Since voters in Oregon and Washington have no other choice but to cast an all-mail vote, both states are excluded from the analysis.

⁶ This website is accessible at http://www.longdistancevoter.org/absentee_voting_rules#.U1RIAvldWSo

different absentee voting rules across states for 2008 and 2012. In addition, each rule is given a weight of one.

Table 2 Weighted Absentee Voting Rules

Absentee Voting Rules	Weight
Work at the poll	1
Work/ shifts- 10 hours or more	1
Religious justification	1
First time voter ID request	1
War veteran/ ill	1
Law enforcing officer	1
Member of the Board of Elections	1
Being part of state's confidentiality program	1
Political representative/ candidate	1
Residing outside state/ county but eligible to vote	1
Moved out the county within 30 days/ prior election	1
Death in family 3 days before the elections	1
Polling place inaccessible	1
Ill/ physical disability	1
Living outside county/ student, spouse, military	1
Incarcerated/ felon	1
Incarcerated/ not a felon	1
65 years or older	1
Student or spouse living away your county	1
Absent from your county on ED	1
Voting is inconvenient on ED	1
Permanent absentee status	1
Total	22

States with the most restrictive absentee voting rules have a value of 1, while states with the most liberal absentee voting rules have a value of 22. Furthermore, Table 3 shows the number of states that already had implemented these rules in 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.

Table 3 Number of States That Have Implemented Each Absentee Voting Rule

Absentee Voting Rules	Number of States 2008	Number of States 2012
Work at the poll	37	38
Work/ shifts- 10 hours or more *	34	40
Religious justification *	35	41
First time voter ID request	26	30
War veteran/ ill	27	32
Law enforcing officer	27	30
Member of the Board of Elections	32	34
Being part of state's confidentiality program	26	31
Political representative/ candidate	26	31
Residing outside state/ county but eligible to vote	27	31
Moved out the county within 30 days/ prior election	27	30
Death in family 3 days before the elections	26	30
Polling place inaccessible	26	30
Ill/ physical disability	48	49
Living outside county/ student, spouse, military	39	43
Incarcerated/ felon *	27	36
Incarcerated/ not a felon	37	33
65 years or older	32	37
Student or spouse living away your county	31	33
Absent	44	45
Voting is inconvenient on ED	28	30
Permanent absentee status	5	6

The main conclusion derived from the information displayed in Table 3 is that there has been a tendency across states to ease the absentee voting rules and make voting more convenient for the eligible voters. From the 2008 to 2012 presidential elections, nine states extended the right to vote absentee to felons, six states made it easier to cast an absentee ballot for voters that have to work for ten or more hours during the Election Day, and six states accommodated the religious needs of their voters and extended them the right to vote absentee if they cannot cast a ballot on the Election Day due to a religious event.

Furthermore, Table 4 shows the ranking of states that required an excuse from their voters to in order to extend them the right to vote absentee in an election.

Table 4 Ranking of Restrictive (Excuse) Absentee Voting States, 2008-2012

Restrictive States		
<i>State</i>	<i>Index 2008</i>	<i>Index 2012</i>
Arkansas	3	3
Iowa	3	21
Massachusetts	3	4
Mississippi	3	6
New York	4	4
Texas	4	4
Alabama	5	5
Missouri	5	7
New Hampshire	5	5
Connecticut	6	5
D.C.	6	22
Delaware	6	6
Kentucky	6	6
Michigan	6	6
Minnesota	6	6
Rhode Island	6	21
Illinois	7	21
Indiana	7	7
Louisiana	7	9
Virginia	7	10
Pennsylvania	8	6
West Virginia	8	8
Tennessee	9	9
South Carolina	10	10

Table 4 shows that the states which made it more difficult for their voters to cast an absentee ballot in the presidential elections of 2008 are Arkansas, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Mississippi. These four states have the lowest value of three in the index, which means that these states, by 2008 have implemented only three out of twenty two absentee voting rules to facilitate the absentee voting process for their voters. Nevertheless, in the course of four years (2008 to 2012) many changes have come to pass in these states regarding the absentee voting process. Referring to the 2012 index ranking it is obvious that states such as Iowa, Rhode Island, Illinois and the District of Columbia have significantly eased the absentee voting rules by extending the

right to cast an absentee ballot to all the registered voters in their state. The states that have slightly liberalized their absentee voting rules in 2012 compared to 2008 presidential elections are Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Louisiana, and Virginia. In addition, states such as Arkansas, New York, Texas, Alabama, Delaware, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Indiana, West Virginia, Tennessee, and South Carolina have not made any attempts to change the absentee voting rules applied to their territories from 2008 to 2012 presidential elections. Interestingly enough, the only two states that have slightly made their absentee voting rules more restrictive from 2008 to 2012 are Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

Table 5 ranks states based on the extent to which voters are able to cast an absentee ballot.

Table 5 Ranking of the Liberal (No-Excuse) Absentee Voting States, 2008-2012

<i>State</i>	Liberal States	
	<i>Index 2008</i>	<i>Index 2012</i>
Alaska	21	21
Colorado	21	21
Florida	21	21
Georgia	21	21
Idaho	21	21
Illinois	7	21
Iowa	3	21
Kansas	21	21
Maine	21	21
Maryland	21	21
Montana	21	21
Nebraska	21	21
Nevada	21	21
New Jersey	21	21
New Mexico	21	21
North Carolina	21	21
North Dakota	21	21
Ohio	21	21
Oklahoma	21	21
Rhode Island	6	21
South Dakota	21	21
Vermont	21	21
Wisconsin	21	21
Wyoming	21	22
Arizona	21	22
California	22	22
D.C.	6	22
Hawaii	21	22
Utah	21	22

As mentioned earlier, there is not much variance among states that have liberal absentee voting rules, except for states such as Iowa, Illinois, Rhode Island and the District of Columbia. States that used no-excuse absentee voting in 2008 continued the same process for the 2012 presidential elections as well. Nonetheless, states like Wyoming, Arizona, Hawaii, and Utah in 2012 allowed their registered voters to ask for a permanent absentee ballot.

In order to better understand the importance of each absentee voting rule on the turnout rate for the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections I ran a factor analysis model. Factor analysis is a set of techniques that does an exploratory analysis to see if there are clusters of items that go together (Acock, 2010). This method is important when constructing a scale because we would expect that all items included in the scale form one principal component (Acock, 2010).

Table 6 Factor Analysis: Loading of Absentee Voting Rules

Variable	Loading 2008	Loading 2012
Absent from your county on ED	0.5997	
Living outside county/ student, spouse, military		0.891
Work at the poll	0.5811	0.3417
Work/ shifts- 10 hours or more		0.8424
Religious justification	0.6166	
First time voter ID request	0.7957	0.8178
War veteran/ ill	0.6648	0.8408
Incarcerated/ felon	0.6767	0.5677
Incarcerated/ not a felon	0.3612	0.881
65 years or older	0.4829	0.7528
Law enforcing officer	0.754	0.8686
Member of the Board of Elections	0.4377	0.7209
Political representative/ candidate	0.7143	0.8533
Being part of state's confidentiality program	0.7613	0.8253
Residing outside state/ county but eligible to vote	0.682	0.9083
Moved out the county within 30 days/ prior election	0.7685	0.7933
Student or spouse living away your county	0.3243	0.8981
Death in family 3 days before the elections	0.6487	0.8992
Polling place inaccessible	0.7957	0.9319
Voting is inconvenient on ED	0.5538	0.9319

Referring to the results presented in Table 6, the variable having the highest loading in 2008 is being absent from the county on Election Day. This variable loads at 0.599. In other words, in 2008 states that accommodated voters for being absent from the county on Election Day had the tendency to accommodate for other rules also. However, in 2008 states did not accommodate voters for living outside the county and working long hours during the Election Day. Moreover, in 2012 the most important variable that loads higher (0.891) is working at the poll. In 2012 states that had the motivation to accommodate voters for voting at the poll tried to accommodate for other rules too. In 2012 the variable's loading is comparatively higher compared to their loading in 2008.

Data for the socio-economic variables used in this study are collected from the Census Bureau data source. State level data is reported which led to the decision to use census data, as it is helpful for the scope of this study. The socio-economic regressors used in this study are the state GDP per capita, the percentage of Hispanic, African-American, and Asian population in a given state, the percentage of people having a college degree or more, percentage of people being 20 to 34 years old, the percentage of people being 65 years old and older, and party mobilization⁷.

The second objective of this study is to identify the impact that the proportion of absentee ballots counted have on the general turnout. The regressant for the second model is calculated as

⁷ I used Holbrook and McClurg's (2005) measurement of party mobilization in a given state, calculated as the per capita (voting age population) Republican National Committee (RNC) and Democratic National Committee (DNC) transfers to state and local party committees. The party's transfer data represents the amount of money transferred during the calendar year. I collected this data from the Federal Election Commission. Data is only available for transfers during 2008 presidential elections. Data for 2012 presidential elections are not available yet and this fact limits my analysis for the year 2012.

the total turnout given the number of the voting eligible people in a state. I also control for the importance that the SES variables and party mobilization have on the turnout rates.

The following section provides a detailed description of the statistical analysis using the ordinary least square analysis in order to discern the validity of the theory that I have described in the previous sections.

Analysis

Does it matter when we vote? Does it matter that we do not vote all together on the same day? How does the opportunity to vote prior to the Election Day affect turnout? Burden et al. (2014) would say, yes, it absolutely matters when we vote and above everything it matters most that we do not vote all together on the same day. These two factors have lead to the *unanticipated* negative impact of early voting on the voter turnout (Burden et al., 2014). Burden et al.(2014) along with Fortier (2006) and Thompson (2004) believe that the vanishing “civic day of election” has decreased voter turnout because there is no more face-to-face interaction during the Election Day that may indirectly mobilize voters. In other words, extending the Election Day to an Election Month has diminished the mobilization or stimulating effect that Election Day voters could exert over infrequent voters.

What does this imply for the success of the electoral reform? Burden et al. (2014) argues that early voting reform has failed its’ primary objective, which is increasing turnout, if implemented by itself and not accompanied by Election Day and same-day registration. Referring to Burden et al. (2014), during the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections the early voting (when implemented alone) was associated with low turnout. However, Burden et al. (2014) only include in the analysis states that have Election Day registration, same-day

registration, and no-excuse absentee voting only, leaving the excuse absentee states outside of the equation. Omitting excuse absentee voting states Burden et al. (2014) automatically excludes from their calculation the 6,064,857 absentee ballots counted in these states in the 2008 presidential elections and 4,283,513⁸ absentee ballots cast in the presidential elections of 2012.

The first assumption that I test in this study claims that states with relaxed absentee voting laws will have a higher proportion of absentee ballots counted. I use the ordinary least squares method to test this hypothesis using data from 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.

Table 7 shows the regression output for the model in 2008 and 2012⁹.

⁸The amount of absentee votes counted in 2012 seems relatively low compared to 2008 presidential election because EAC has not reported the UOCAVA absentee votes counted in the 2012 presidential elections. The number of absentee ballots represented for the 2012 presidential elections only includes the civilian absentee ballots counted.

⁹ Testing for the Gauss-Markov assumptions for the first model (2008 presidential election), there are no correlation issues among the variables. Florida is an influential point so I dropped this observation from the analysis. The data does not suffer from multicollinearity issues. Residuals and standardized residuals are normally distributed. However, the dataset has heteroskedasticity issues. To account for this problem I report the robust regression coefficients.

In addition, referring to the 2012 model, there are no correlation issues among the variables. Colorado is an influential point, so I dropped this observation from the analysis. The data does not suffer from multicollinearity issues. Residuals and standardized residuals are normally distributed. However, the dataset has heteroskedasticity issues. To account for this problem I report the robust regression coefficients.

Table 7 OLS Estimates of the Proportion of Absentee Turnout on the Index, SES Model, and Party Mobilization

Variable	Robust Coefficient			
	β (2008)	s.e	β (2012)	s.e
Index	0.01**	0.002	0.01***	0.003
GDP per capita	0.000000771	0.0000016	-0.00000391***	0.00000119
Percentage Hispanic	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.003
Percentage African-America	-0.003**	0.001	-0.002	0.002
Percentage Asian	-0.001	0.002	0.002	0.002
College degree or more	0.01	0.005	0.003	0.003
Age (20-34 years old)	1.45	2.27	2.3***	0.69
Age (65 or older)	1.5	1.57	2.2*	1.38
Party mobilization	0.04	0.04		
Model Summary				
R-square (2008)	0.38		R-square (2012)	0.38
N	48		N	48
p-value	0.000		p-value	0.000

* $p < 0.100$. ** $p < 0.050$. *** $p < 0.001$.

The regression coefficients, reported in Table 7, show that *ceteris paribus* states with liberal absentee voting rules are more likely to have a higher proportion of absentee ballots counted in both presidential elections of 2008 and 2012. In other words, the institutional rules matter. This result indicates that relaxed absentee rules make early voting more convenient and therefore provide a higher incentive for voters to cast an absentee ballot compared to states with excuse absentee voting. Therefore, the less restrictive absentee laws are, the more voters will prefer to vote absentee than in-person on the Election Day (Alvarez et al., 2012). Also, states with a higher percentage of African-Americans are more likely to have a lower proportion of absentee ballots counted. These results confirm Gronke and Toffey's (2008) and Karp and Banducci's (2001) argument that liberal absentee laws would not motivate minorities to vote because they are less politically active and less politically knowledgeable. In 2012 states that had a higher percentage of young and old people were more likely to have a high rate of absentee ballots counted. Even though the state's GDP per capita is statistically significant and negatively

correlated with the proportion of the absentee ballots counted in the 2012 presidential election, the coefficient is significantly small and it does not imply any real impact on the proportion of absentee ballots.

The second hypothesis that I test argues that the proportion of absentee ballots counted in a given election year positively influence the proportion of total turnout¹⁰. In this model I also control for the SES variables and party mobilization for 2008 while I drop the party mobilization variable from the 2012 analysis due to data unavailability. The regression output is reported in Table 8¹¹.

Table 8 OLS Estimates of the General Turnout on the Absentee Ballots, SES Model, and Party Mobilization

Variable	Robust Coefficient			
	β (2008)	s.e	β (2012)	s.e
Proportion Absentee Ballots	0.071**	0.035	0.07	0.45
GDP per capita	0.000000831***	0.000000304	0.000000164	0.000000649
Percentage Hispanic	-0.0021***	0.0005	-0.002**	0.001
Percentage African-America	-0.0005	0.0005	-0.002***	0.001
Percentage Asian	-0.003***	0.0006	-0.005	0.001
College degree or more	0.006***	0.001	0.007***	0.002
Age (20-34 years old)	-1.32***	0.48	0.22	0.57
Age (65 or older)	-0.76	0.48	0.26	0.53
Party mobilization	0.03***	0.007		
Model Summary				
R-square (2008)	0.71		R-square (2012)	0.46
N	48		N	48
p-value	0.000		p-value	0.000

*p<0.100. **p<0.050. ***p<0.001.

¹⁰ The dependent variable in this model is the proportion of general turnout given the number of voting eligible population (VEP) at a given year.

¹¹ There are no correlation issues among the variables in testing for the Gauss-Markov assumptions for the first model (2008 presidential election). Mississippi is an influential point, so I dropped this observation from the analysis. The data does not suffer from multicollinearity issues. Residuals and standardized residuals are normally distributed. However, the dataset has heteroskedasticity issues. To account for this problem I report the robust regression coefficients.

Regarding the second model of the 2008 presidential election, there are no correlation issues among the variables. Alabama is an influential point, so I dropped this observation from the analysis. The data does not suffer from multicollinearity issues. Residuals and standardized residuals are normally distributed. However, the dataset has heteroskedasticity issues. To account for this problem I report the robust regression coefficients

Unlike Burden's et al. (2014) conclusion that early voting, standing alone, decreases turnout, results reported in Table 8 tell a different story for 2008 presidential election turnout. *Ceteris paribus*, a proportion increase in the absentee ballots counted will cause a 0.071 proportion increase in the proportion of general turnout for the presidential elections of 2008. State's GDP per capita is statistically significant as well, but the impact that it has over the turnout is almost unidentifiable. In addition, the higher the percentage of Hispanics and Asians in a state the lower the turnout is going to be. This is not a surprising outcome because, as I have explained above, minorities are less likely to vote and this result supports Karp and Banducci's (2001) argument. Also, the younger the population of a state is the lower the turnout is going to be. Young people tend to vote less (Verba et al., 1995). Moreover, party mobilization is statistically significant, which means that the more money the state parties receive from the National Party Committees and the more they spend on the campaign, greater the turnout will be.

Different from the 2008 model, the 2012 regression analysis shows that the proportion of absentee ballots counted did not affect the proportion of the general turnout. There might be two possible explanations for this result. The first explanation might be a measurement issue because the UOCAVA absentee ballots cast in 2012 are not included in the analysis because the data is not available yet. And the second possible explanation might be what Giammo and Brox (2010) argue, that early voting produces a "short-lived increase in turnout that disappears by the second presidential election" (p. 295). However, this is a question that require careful consideration in future research. The same as in 2008, the higher the percentage of minorities in a state the lower the turnout is going to be. As Verba et al. (1995) claim, education matters when it comes to turnout rates. Table 8 shows that an increase in the percentage of the people holding a college

degree is positively correlated with the general turnout. The positive impact of high education on the proportion of the general turnout has been consistent on both the 2008 and 2012 models shown in Table 8.

Conclusion

This analysis aimed to provide a better understanding of absentee voting, specifically, in the early voting literature, while also trying to theorize outside of a single case-study context by using aggregate level data. As expected, the states' institutional laws and regulations regarding absentee voting are very important in understanding the percentage of absentee ballots cast across states. The statistical analysis provided in this study confirms the importance that the institutional environment has on the elections. States that have liberal absentee rules have proportionally higher rates of absentee ballots counted, and this result is consistent for the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections. It is interesting that education does not matter when it comes to predicting the rate of absentee ballots counted, but it is a highly significant factor affecting the total turnout. States that have a high percentage of young and old voters are more likely to have a high proportion of absentee ballots counted. Moreover, state's GDP per capita is a significant factor explaining the rates of absentee ballots counted but in this analysis the impact of it is minuscule.

The proportion of absentee ballots counted in the presidential elections of 2008 has increased the general turnout of the presidential elections. However, this result applies only to the 2008 elections because in 2012 the impact of absentee ballots counted on the election turnout disappears. This is an issue that needs further consideration. In addition, states that have a higher percentage of minorities (Hispanic and Asians) and younger voters will have a low turnout rate.

States with a high percentage of college graduates are more likely to have a higher contribution towards increasing the turnout rate. Party mobilization is also important when it comes to increasing the general turnout rates but it does not appear to be significant on the absentee voting rates.

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