

The Effects and Costs of Early Voting, Election Day Registration, and Same Day Registration in the 2008 Elections

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Abstract

Election reforms are often designed with the goal of increasing voter turnout, and are implemented even when resisted by election administrators who may have other priorities. Advocates, journalists, and politicians frequently support particular election laws because they are believed to expand the share of the electorate that participates. Here we challenge the common view that any change making it easier to vote will increase turnout. We show that while some practices increase turnout, others have little effect, and the most popular single approach – early voting – actually decreases turnout. In addition, previous research has not fully considered the costs of reform, the effects of different types of reforms, and willingness of election officials to implement them. Our findings suggest that certain combinations of reforms can significantly increase turnout, but that these reforms create an administrative burden that will result in opposition from election officials.

Introduction

Election reforms are often designed around the goal of making voting more convenient for citizens, and increasing voter turnout. Adding greater convenience to the voting process is a worthwhile outcome in itself. But even as new laws generally achieve this goal, they have had quite varied effects on turnout. This report focuses on the turnout effects of election law reforms. Advocates, journalists, and politicians frequently argue in favor of particular election laws out of a belief that they make voting more convenient and will expand the share of the electorate that participates. Here we challenge the common assumption that reforms making it easier to vote will increase turnout. Using data from the 2008 presidential election we show that while some practices increase turnout, others have little effect, and the most popular single approach – early voting – actually *decreases* turnout. In addition, previous research has not devoted sufficient attention to the costs of reform and willingness of election officials to implement them. Our findings suggest that certain combinations of reforms can increase turnout, but at the expense of significant administrative burdens that will engender opposition from election officials.

This report examines the combination of two specific voting practices – non-precinct place early voting (NPPEV) and election day registration (EDR) – with the goal of understanding how these rules affect voter turnout, and how the rules are implemented by local election officials. The 2008 presidential election was the first in which this combination occurred in enough states to permit detailed analysis.

We ask two sets of questions. First, how do various combinations of NPPEV and EDR affect voter turnout? Second, how do local election officials view the administrative consequences and burdens of NPPEV? To answer the first question, we analyze county-level election data and the Current Population Survey, combined with state-level data on electoral practices. For the second, we conducted surveys and interviews with municipal clerks in Wisconsin, the local officials responsible conducting elections.

In part I, we provide background and discuss prior research. We argue that NPPEV must be disaggregated to distinguish absentee and early voting from same day registration (SDR) and that distinct combinations of EDR, SDR, and early voting need to be assessed. We also consider the interactions between the various rules. In part II, we show our empirical results, looking at the impact of reform on both aggregate turnout levels and on the probability that an individual votes. Our analysis demonstrates that reforms that include EDR increase turnout, and that early voting by itself actually lowers turnout. Early voting may increase turnout only when it is combined with EDR (or SDR). In part III, we present the results of our clerk survey and interviews showing that there is strong resistance to early voting. This resistance is philosophical, reflecting clerks' beliefs about the importance of election day as a civic ritual. Their resistance is not merely a reflection of insufficient resources. We conclude by discussing the broader implications of this research for future innovations and reforms in election administration.

I. Previous Research

Policymakers across the country have long been interested in reorganizing the voting process to foster higher turnout. One of the most common options is allowing individuals to register on the same day they vote.¹ In theory, this will increase turnout by eliminating the need for individuals to take two separate actions – registering days or weeks prior to voting, and then casting the ballot at a later date – to exercise their franchise. As Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, 61) summarized thirty years ago, “[r]egistration is usually more difficult than voting, often involving more obscure information and a longer journey at a less convenient time, to complete a more complicated procedure. Moreover, it must usually be done before interest in the campaign has reached its peak.” Indeed, a long stream of research shows that the registration closing date is the most consequential aspect of registration, in part because it disenfranchises recent movers (Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass 1987; Timpone 1998), and requires voters to take initial action as much as a month before election day.²

Election day registration permits people who wish to vote on election day, but who have not yet registered, to complete both steps in “one essentially continuous act” (Wolfinger, Highton, and Mullin 2005, 3). EDR thus appears to alleviate the barriers highlighted by Wolfinger and Rosenstone: it collapses two steps into one and permits voters to register at the last moment when interest is highest.³ Using the modified definition we employ below, 12 states had EDR in 2008.⁴

Research consistently shows that EDR boosts turnout. A sizeable number of voters take advantage of EDR when it is available: in 2008, 15.6% of voters in Minnesota, 16.5% in Wyoming, 13.5 % in Idaho, and 11.4% in Wisconsin registered to vote on election day (EAC 2009, Table 5). And this is not merely correlation. Careful analyses of the causal effects of EDR produce estimates that range from three to seven percentage points (Brians and Grofman 2001; Fenster 1994; Hanmer 2009; Knack 2001; Leighley and Nagler 2009). Highton (2009, 509) summarizes the impact of EDR on voter turnout as “about five percentage points.”

¹ This normally refers to registering on election day itself. We state the practice in more general terms to include rules that allow voters to submit ballots prior to election day, but register at the same time that they vote. As we note below, SDR is a variant of EDR that applies to early voting.

² See recent reviews by Highton (2004) and Hershey (2009) for further discussion of the importance of closing dates.

³ The EDR reform spread in three waves. See Hanmer’s (2009) comprehensive analysis of EDR for a review of the history and reasons for adoption.

⁴ The states commonly considered as having EDR are Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. After carefully reading state statutes and consulting with state election officials, we modified this list for our analysis. In 2008 we include the usual suspects along with North Dakota (although it technically has no registration). We exclude North Carolina, because while it has same day registration and early voting, there is no registration permitted on election day itself. But we also include Alaska, Connecticut, and Rhode Island because they permitted election day registrants to vote for President. Breaking with the common practice, we suggest that these states should be treated as EDR states in a presidential election year. EDR states may still have closing dates for traditional registration, but nonetheless permit last-minute registrations on election day itself.

A second innovation is permitting voting outside of the normal election day polling place. Non-precinct-place and early voting (NPPEV) encompasses a variety of practices, including absentee voting, voting-by-mail, and in-person early voting. In 2008, 30% of all votes were cast via these methods, up from 20% in 2004 and 7% in 1992. In 2008, 21 states allowed early voting, either by mail or in person.⁵ Early voting may have been the most touted reform in the 2008 elections; long-time voting scholar John Fortier pointed to the practice in arguing that “United States is in the midst of a revolution in voting” (Fortier 2006, 1).

NPPEV takes on a variety of forms across the states (Fortier 2006; Gronke et al. 2008). On a spectrum from most restrictive to least restrictive, these include traditional absentee voting, no-excuse absentee, permanent absentee, in-person early voting, and voting by mail. There is additional variation in where people vote: in-person early voting may take place either at central election offices or at voting centers in locations such as shopping malls.

In contrast to the positive findings about EDR, most studies of NPPEV have found that it has no effect on voter turnout. For example, in a study of national elections from 1980-2004, Gronke et al. (2007) found that the availability of early voting does not influence turnout. Aside from the special case of voting by mail in presidential elections, none of the early or absentee voting laws they study affected turnout in either presidential or midterm elections.⁶ Several other studies have shown that none of the forms of NPPEV – other than perhaps Oregon’s unique vote-by-mail system – improves turnout (Fitzgerald 2005; Giammo and Brox Forthcoming; Gans 2008; Gronke et al. 2008; Oliver 1996; Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo 2007; Scheele et al. 2008; cf. Wolfinger, Highton, and Mullin 2005).⁷

We argue that one aspect of NPPEV – same day registration (SDR) – is underappreciated. SDR combines EDR and NPPEV by permitting people to both register and vote in a single act prior to election day. It reduces the potential inconvenience of having to vote on a specific election day, eliminates the registration closing date, and permits “one-stop shopping.” As we define it, a dozen states permitted some form of SDR in 2008, permitting voters to register and vote as far in advance as one month prior to the election, up to voting on the day before. While popular wisdom suggests that the 8% increase in turnout in North Carolina between 2004 and 2008 was partly as a result

⁵ Michael MacDonald, “(Nearly) Final 2008 Early Voting Statistics,” updated January 11, 2009, <http://elections.gmu.edu/Early_Voting_2008_Final.html>. Also see Paul Gronke’s Early Voting Information Center at <<http://www.earlyvoting.net/blog/>>.

⁶ Previous research also shows a positive effect of vote-by-mail (Magleby, 1987; Southwell and Burchett, 2000; Karp and Banducci, 2000), but these studies have largely been confined to Oregon and Washington. Kousser and Mullin (2007) find that a shift to vote-by-mail in California would result in a three-point drop in turnout. We do not study vote-by-mail directly but effectively account for it with state fixed effects.

⁷ Stein and Vonnahme (2008) find a small positive effect of non-precinct voting centers on turnout among younger, infrequent voters and those who have not yet developed the voting habit.

of the close race there, and on greater minority turnout, the state also introduced SDR for the first time in 2008 (McDonald 2008).⁸

Nevertheless, despite its widespread use, we know of no studies that have analyzed SDR's specific direct effects on turnout. Indeed, one of our messages is to urge researchers to carefully distinguish EDR, SDR, and early voting. As we document below, it is possible for a state to have one, two, or all three of these features, in various permutations. By ignoring these different combinations, previous work may have mistakenly attributed the effects of any single practice to one of the others that exist simultaneously.

Election Laws and Turnout Mechanisms

Both EDR and early voting are designed to increase turnout by lowering the costs of voting. But upon further probing, we find that the mechanisms are quite different. EDR lowers costs by providing “one-stop shopping,” eliminating one bureaucratic step in the voting process and providing voting opportunities to individuals who become interested late in the campaign. Early voting, in contrast, lowers costs by allowing balloting over an extended period rather than making the election a one-day event. SDR effectively combines these options by permitting “one-stop shopping” to occur before election day.

While any discussion of turnout must focus on the costs of voting, an exclusive focus on these costs may miss the importance of mobilization in encouraging potential voters to become actual voters.⁹ We expect EDR to be a particularly effective mechanism for raising turnout because it permits those who come late to the campaign to still become participants, even those who become engaged only in the days just before an election. In contrast, we expect early voting to matter less, because it may simply provide an outlet for those already likely to vote (and attentive enough to know that alternative voting processes even exist). The effects of SDR and one-stop shopping, we think, depend on the length and timing of the early voting window. On this point we agree with Highton, who argued:

People who are most interested in politics are very likely to make sure they are registered. Only rarely will they fail to register by the waning weeks of a national campaign. As a result, closing dates influence the turnout of these highly

⁸ McDonald (2008) suggests that while the close race argument appears persuasive, the “Obama effect” on minorities does not apply to North Carolina. He points out that this effect can really only be seen in non-battleground states. In states such as North Carolina the increase in African Americans was offset by the increases in whites.

⁹ A literal analysis of costs, for example, would show that voting is never a rational act, because the costs of voting – not only the practical costs of traveling to the voting location, waiting in line, and casting a vote, but also the opportunity costs of becoming informed enough about the issues and candidates to have preferences – are far greater than any possible concrete benefits such as determining the election outcome. See, for example, the majority opinion in *Crawford vs. Marion County Election Board* (2007), and Gelman, Edlin, Kaplan (2007), and Gelman; Silver and Edlin (Forthcoming). At the same time, intangible benefits of voting might include positive social interaction at the polling place or avoiding embarrassment for not voting (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008).

motivated people very little. Those least interested in politics are also unlikely to be influenced by closing dates. These citizens have virtually no motivation to vote; their voting benefits are nearly zero. They pay little, if any, attention to political campaigns and are therefore unlikely to be activated by them. Late closing dates, or even election day registration will not bring these people to register and vote. Between these extremes are individuals who take some interest in politics, and who may be spurred to register and vote by the increased campaign interest that attends the approach of election day. A late closing date allows for this possibility. If the deadline for registration is well before election day, however, it is unlikely that campaign interest will be translated into turnout. For this group of people, registration closing dates ought to matter more (2004, 509).

This view comports with Berinsky's (2005) distinction between reforms that *stimulate* new voters and those that merely *retain* existing voters. He contends that most voting reforms are better at retention than they are at stimulation.

We refine this argument by identifying the key differences between EDR and early voting. In particular, we expect early voting to enhance retention, and EDR to enhance stimulation.

A few studies have found tentative evidence that early voting actually *lowers* turnout.¹⁰ This is certainly counterintuitive, as it is hard to see how making voting more convenient will result in fewer voters (though we ultimately conclude that this is precisely what happens). One explanation for the apparent depressive effect of early voting is that it robs election day of the stimulating effect it would otherwise have on nonvoters. Early voting dilutes the concentrated activities of election day itself that would likely stimulate turnout, an effect not counterbalanced by the increased convenience of voting prior to the election (which, as we have noted, may only provide an alternative outlet for votes who would have voted in any case). Fortier (2006) suggests as much when he speculates that a loss of the "civic day of election" could lower turnout. At least one empirical study shows that election day social activities increase turnout (Addonizio, Green, and Glaser 2007). Traditional election day can be as much a social event as a political one. For at least some voters, it is the stimulation of the day's news, observation of activities at polling places, and conversations with friends and neighbors that gets them to the polls. When these activities are diluted, so is the stimulating effect.

Towards a Combination Model

We argue that it is crucial to isolate the independent effects of EDR, SDR, and early voting and to consider their various combinations. Because there is variation in how states design and implement each practice, there is also variation in whether states truly fall into one of the three categories we study. Studies of early voting have been careful to distinguish various forms of early, absentee, and mail balloting, but have ignored whether these features coincide with SDR. Any study of "one-stop shopping" and early voting

¹⁰ Smith and Comer (2005) find negative effects, but others (Gronke et al. 2008; Leighley and Nagler 2009; Tolbert et al. 2008) find negative effects only in particular specifications.

must consider direct effects, combinations of two features, and a three-way confluence when all options are available. These can be thought of interaction terms or different configurations of election laws. To this point the literature on election reform has largely ignored these combinations.

For example, one explanation for the relative failure of early voting policies to increase turnout is that it is the inconvenience of registration, rather than the difficulty of voting itself, that deters most citizens from participating (Erikson 1981). Early voting might make the act of voting more convenient, but without allowing registration and voting in a single step, it still requires an individual to register in advance, often several weeks before the vote is actually cast. In the absence of SDR, a person who encounters an early voting center in a shopping center or who visits an administrative building in the days preceding an election may not stop to vote because doing so demands not only an interest in voting prior to election day, but also advance registration. Early voting will not help a voter who failed to register before the closing date. In contrast, early voting with “one-stop shopping” may facilitate voting by citizens who would not have been traditional election day voters.

Before we categorize state election reforms, we need to offer some operational definitions. These classifications often rely on technical interpretations of election law and practices that, in some cases, differ from the conventional wisdom about how states run their elections.

First, EDR permits eligible voters to both register and vote on election day. Studies of EDR have generally identified nine states with the practice.¹¹ After carefully reading state statutes and consulting with state election officials, we modify this classification. In 2008 we include the usual suspects along with North Dakota (although it technically has no registration). We exclude North Carolina, because while it has same day registration and early voting, there is no registration permitted on election day itself. But we also include Alaska, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, all of which permitted election day registrants to vote for President. Breaking with the common practice, we suggest that these later two states should be treated as EDR states in a presidential election year. EDR states may still have closing dates for traditional registration, but nonetheless permit last-minute registrations on election day itself.

Second, our criterion for defining SDR is that the practice must be widely available to eligible voters without significant administrative barriers. We thus excluded states that allowed some form of “one-stop shopping” only to limited portions of the population. For example, Colorado permits SDR only for a small set of “emergency” registrants who moved across county lines after the closing date. Nationally, 17 states reported that 3.6 million same day registration applications were filed; of those, only 963,144 new voters

¹¹ The states commonly considered as having EDR are Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. As noted earlier, we modified this list for our analysis.

were added to the registration rolls.¹² States also vary in how long the SDR window is, and when the closing date occurs.

Finally, early voting allows registrants to cast ballots without excuse before election day. Early voting does not by itself provide a registration mechanism; that would be captured by SDR. We do not distinguish between states that actually count the ballots ahead of the election, and states that merely accept the ballot for election-day tallying because the distinction is typically invisible to voters and because other research finds equivalent effects for both absentee and early voting (Leighley and Nagler 2009). For this analysis we include in-person early voting and in-person no-excuse absentee ballots, but exclude states that require voters to have an excuse to vote before traditional election day.¹³

Figure 1 is a Venn diagram that illustrates our coding for the 2008 election and shows the different combinations of voting rules. In practice, it is clear states have been experimenting with combinations of EDR, SDR, and early voting. There are 13 states that have none of the three practices (and which are excluded from the diagram). The most common approach, used by 18 states, is to allow early voting by itself, for voters who are already registered.¹⁴

Compared to states with none of these reforms, there are seven possible configurations of EDR, SDR, and early voting: (1) EDR alone, (2) SDR alone, (3) early voting alone, (4) EDR and SDR, (5) EDR and early voting, (6) SDR and early voting, (7) or all three. There are no states with just SDR, and none with the two-way combination of SDR and EDR. As a result, there are effectively five combinations relative to the baseline states that have none. In retrospect, this is obvious: “one-stop shopping” before election day is not possible if a state does not also allow early voting.

No previous study has investigated the potentially positive relationship between EDR and NPPEV because until recently no state had extensive use of both. The 2008 cycle was the first presidential election in which states that permitted EDR also had high rates of early voting.¹⁵ In the next section we investigate the effects of these different combinations using several data sources and methods to identify the precise effects of each configuration of election features.

¹² The EAC collected data on SDRs for the first time in 2008; the EAC defines SDR as “registering to vote on the same day in which a vote may be cast” (EAC 2009).

¹³ Codings are drawn from the National Conference of State Legislatures’s listing at <<http://www.ncsl.org/LegislaturesElections/ElectionsCampaigns/AbsenteeandEarlyVoting/tabid/16604/Default.aspx>> accessed in July 2009.

¹⁴ We treat Oregon and Washington separately because of those states’ heavy use of vote-by-mail.

¹⁵ In 2004 no state with EDR had over 30% of its votes cast early. By 2008 several EDR states were near or above that mark.

II. Empirical Results

Data and Methods

We use a variety of multivariate statistical techniques to determine how EDR, SDR, and early voting affect voter turnout. First, we analyze county-level turnout from the November 2008 presidential election. In this model we include county-level variables and also state fixed effects to ensure that unmeasured state-level characteristics such as state culture are not producing spurious findings. Second, we make use of the Current Population Survey's (CPS) November 2008 Voting and Registration Supplement to conduct an individual-level analysis. The large sample size permits careful comparisons among the states in each part of the Figure 1 and inclusion of wide range of individual-level control variables.

We believe our models improve upon earlier work by explicitly considering how the combinations of EDR, SDR, and early voting affect turnout. We are able to determine, for example, whether EDR's positive effects on turnout depend on the presence of early voting or are undermined by it.

Finally, we consider the question of what voting reform looks like from the perspective of election administrators. Reforms will only work if election officials are willing and able to implement them. In many states it is local election officials, not state leaders, who transform statutes into actual practices. To gain insight into how local election officials assess new voting reforms, we surveyed election clerks in Wisconsin. Wisconsin is an attractive state to study for several reasons. It has a long history of EDR but low levels of early voting (in the form of no-excuse absentee).¹⁶ It also has extremely decentralized election administration, with 1,923 local election officials (roughly one-fifth of the total number of all election officials nationwide).¹⁷ They represent a wide range of communities, ranging from a handful of residents and little racial or ethnic diversity to a heterogeneous voting age population of roughly 400,000 in Milwaukee. The large number of officials and diversity of their jurisdictions form an extraordinarily useful data source for assessing the administrative consequences of reform. In addition, the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board, the state's central election authority is currently considering proposals for true early voting.¹⁸ Thus, the results of our study are timely as the legislature considers changing state law to encourage NPPEV.

We asked local election administrators for their opinion on early voting reform. In particular, our goals were to (a) understand how they approached election administration, (b) measure their attitudes toward NPPEV, and (c) determine how their views of EDR

¹⁶ State officials are considering a move to early voting. The state election agency, the Government Accountability Board, has developed three early voting proposals. Feedback is being gathered from the public, clerks, and other interested parties. See the materials available at <http://elections.state.wi.us/section.asp?linkid=1583&locid=47>.

¹⁷ This encompasses the 1,851 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks in place for the 2008 elections.

¹⁸ See the GAB's study materials and proposals at <http://elections.state.wi.us/section.asp?linkid=1583&locid=47>.

might affect their views toward NPPEV. The response rate for the survey was excellent, with 72% of municipal clerks participating (1,386 of 1,851). We also interviewed 85 of these officials in person to gather qualitative feedback and allow clerks to speak on their own terms.

County Level Regression Analysis

We begin with aggregate analysis of turnout at the county level. The dependent variable is turnout in the November 2008 presidential elections as a percentage of the voting age population.¹⁹ The key explanatory variables are dichotomous indicators for each of the five possible election practices in Figure 1. The signs and significance levels of these coefficients will show the effect of each distinct combination on voter turnout. To avoid spurious findings, we include an array of control variables, and estimate multiple specifications to increase confidence in the robustness of the findings. We also adjust the standard errors to account for clustering of counties by state (Primo, Jacobsmeier, and Milyo 2007).

The control variables include state election laws, county demographic measures, and a measure of the competitiveness of the presidential campaign in each state. State election law variables include a measure of the closing date for voter registration, a dummy for whether votes are required to show any form of identification (photo or not) at the polls, and a dummy indicating whether ex-felons are barred from voting.²⁰ To the degree that these laws matter once our new variables are included, we expect all three to have negative effects as early closing dates, ID requirements, and felon disenfranchisement lower turnout. Demographic variables include the percent black, median income, percentage of the county with bachelor degrees, percentage 65 or older, population, and population density. Our measure of campaign intensity is the absolute value of difference between the final pollster.com survey estimates for McCain and Obama. The effect should be negative because a larger gap between the candidates ought to be reflected in lower turnout. We also include dummy variables for Oregon and Washington, whose reliance on mail-in surveys falls outside the three primary types of election laws we examine here.

Our simplest specification is model I in Table 1. Model II modifies this slightly by weighting the counties by population to minimize heteroskedasticity in the error terms. The models indicate that EDR alone or in combination with other laws has positive effects. EDR by itself has an effect of between six and seven points, just a bit larger than

¹⁹ The Voting Age Population (VAP) is an imperfect measure of the Voting Eligible Population (VEP), as Michael McDonald has demonstrated (e.g., McDonald and Popkin 2001). Unfortunately, VEP estimates are not available at the county level. To verify that this does not jeopardize our results, we calculated the gap between the VEP and VAP turnout measures on McDonald's web site and correlated it with the presence of EDR, SDR, and early voting at the state level. None of the correlations was statistically significant at $p < .05$, indicating that any disparity between the VAP measure and actual voter turnout is unlikely to produce spurious results for the key variables of interest.

²⁰ There are a variety of felon disenfranchisement and voter identification laws that cannot be fully explored here. Our dichotomous indicators are intended to capture the most basic differences between states that have provisions of these type and those that do not.

the typical estimate in the literature. In contrast, early voting on its own has a negative effect that ranges between 3.5 points to 5.6 points, and the combination of SDR and early voting has no effect. As expected, turnout is higher in counties with more African-Americans, higher incomes, more college graduates, smaller and less dense populations, and where the McCain-Obama campaign was close. We find no effects of voter ID or felon disenfranchisement laws.

The results of these county regression models suggest that voter turnout is indeed sharply influenced by state laws concerning registration and early voting. These findings are relatively robust across different specifications. Overall our two key results from the county data are that (1) early voting by itself has a negative effect and (2) EDR by itself has a positive effect. Combining early voting with SDR appears to have little effect while combining EDR with early voting results does result in a significant and positive outcome. States that have all three approaches have a significant and sizeable increase in turnout. Indeed, any combination that includes EDR increases turnout. Cumulatively, the results suggest that creating the opportunity for voters to “one-stop shop” offers a way to turn the negative of early voting into a net positive.

Figure 2 displays the key results graphically. The dots represent the five coefficient estimates for the weighted and unweighted models. Horizontal lines running through the dots show 95% confidence intervals. The divergent effects of EDR and early voting are clear.

One reason the SDR effects are insignificant may be that the models ignore the substantial variation in how SDR is implemented across the states. Particularly important is the length of time in which “one-stop shopping” is available. In 2008 this window ranged from just one day in New Mexico to over 40 days in three states. We can test whether this variation is correlated with turnout. To investigate this possibility we reestimate model II on states that have SDR. We include a new key variable: the length of time the SDR window is open. The results in Table 2 show that each additional day when voters can avail of “one-stop shopping” results in a 0.29 percentage point increase in turnout. Increasing the window length by 12 days (the standard deviation of the variable) thus increases turnout by 3.5 points. The control variables largely operate as expected. The window finding reinforces our expectation that it is not just important that states offer the ability to both register and vote early, but also demonstrates that it matters how these are implemented. Two states could both have SDR “on the books,” but the state that offers it with a longer window will see a greater positive effect.

Individual Level Regression Analysis

We now turn to estimating turnout effects at the individual level. Here we are interested in the covariates that make individuals more (or less) likely to cast a ballot. Most turnout analysis takes a standard form, using logit or probit regression with the vote (or reported vote) as the dependent variable, and a right-hand side consisting of various demographic and systemic independent variables that purport to capture the important causal factors.

Because our report includes both models of aggregate and individual turnout, we avoid the ecological fallacy (the assumption that the same factors that shape *aggregate* turnout, have a similar effect on *individual* outcomes, as measured by the estimated probability that an individual will vote).²¹ Our dual-track analysis is an effort to gain leverage on both elements of the modeling problem.

Our individual-level analysis uses the 2008 Voting and Registration Supplement File of the CPS. The CPS, a common data set in voting analysis, is a large-scale sample survey of the noninstitutionalized population normally used to collect labor force data. In November of election years, surveyors administer a short set of voting and registration items to a sample of about 130,000 people. Most questions have between 60,000 and 90,000 valid observations.

The voting item asks whether people voted in the 2008 presidential election, and has several response categories: respondents can answer “yes,” “no,” “don’t know,” refuse to answer, or have no response recorded. Following the common practice, we measure turnout by dividing the number of “yes” responses by the total number of individuals asked the question, counting as non voters those who refused to answer, did not know, or did not respond. Since the voting items are only asked of individuals 18 years or older, this gives us an estimate of turnout as a percentage of the voting age population.²² Using this method, 64.9% of respondents in the CPS reported voting in 2008 ($n = 92,360$).²³

We use a larger number of independent variables than most other models of turnout. Alvarez, Bailey, and Katz (2008, 8-9) describe the “canonical model of voter turnout using CPS data” as using age, residence in a Southern state, education, income, squared values of age and education, and non-White as independent variables (see Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). However, the CPS includes a wide range of other data that seem plausible and theoretically justifiable turnout covariates: questions provide information on length of residence, gender, marital status, multi-category racial identity, whether a

²¹ The effects need not match across the two levels of analysis. For example, a variable that significantly increases the likelihood of voting by a small amount could affect aggregate turnout even more strongly as these small individual probabilities cumulate. Kramer (1975) demonstrated that individual and aggregate effects can even run in opposite directions.

²² At the same time, the CPS excludes the institutionalized population, estimated at about four million in 2000. In other calculations of the voting age population, these individuals are counted.

²³ This is significantly higher than the actual turnout as a percentage of voting age population, estimated at 56.8% (McDonald 2009). This difference occurs for a variety of reasons. Part of the discrepancy is attributed to sampling bias (Burden 2000). Much of it is due to the desire to give socially desirable answers whereby some nonvoters falsely report that they did vote (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008). Some of these voters may *think* that they voted, possibly confusing the most recent election with earlier contests. Many studies have concluded that overreporting is most common among people otherwise most likely to vote; there is also evidence, however, that overreporting is also more likely among African Americans (Bernstein, Chadha, and Montjoy 2001). Highton (2005) found that the correlates of turnout were about the same among self-reported and proxy-reported turnout, despite the fact that self-reporters are more likely to overreport their own voting, suggesting that overreporting may not be a significant problem for inference. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to correct for overreporting or estimate the effect it might have on the inferences drawn from empirical models. Katz and Katz (2009) have developed one method, but it requires external information about the probabilities of misreporting.

respondent is a naturalized or natural born citizen, and if naturalized the year of entry into the U.S, and whether a respondent's voting status is self-reported or reported by proxy.²⁴ Given our interest in estimating the effects of different voting and registration systems, it makes sense to include this additional information about respondents. As in the aggregate model, we include variables describing the five possible combinations of early voting, SDR, and EDR.

The basic individual turnout model is reported in Table 3. The results are roughly consistent with the aggregate county-level model. EDR has a significant positive effect on the individual likelihood of voting, while early voting has a significant negative effect. The combination of EDR, SDR and early voting (which offers the maximum of voter convenience) has a small positive effect. Most of the control variables show expected effects. For example, voting is more likely among the highly educated, African-Americans, the married, higher income earners, and those in swing states. Although our primary interest is in the combinations of election laws and not these covariates, it is reassuring that most of them affect voter turnout in a fashion that fits with existing research. The key coefficient effects are plotted in Figure 3. Again, the divergent effects of EDR and early voting are evident. EDR alone raises the individual likelihood of voting by about three points whereas early voting lowers it by about four points.

The individual model produces one result that differs sharply from the aggregate results. At the aggregate level, the EDR and early voting combination significantly increases turnout while it has a significant negative effect on the likelihood of an individual voting. The most likely cause is the small subsample size of this category: in our classification, only Alaska and Idaho combine early voting with EDR, and Alaska is excluded from the aggregate analysis as it does not have county-level jurisdictions. As such, we are cautious about making inferences with so little data.

Robustness Checks

There are several ways in which the results here may be checked for robustness. One way in which we are already reassured is the consistency of findings between the aggregate and individual models, despite the fact that logic does not dictate that they be the same.

Matching techniques offer another way of testing the relationships we study. Matching permits sharper comparisons of treatment and control groups, in a manner that makes efficient use of the data and is less sensitive to specification error (Ho et al, 2007). In this case, the various voting administration practices are analogous to a "treatment" effect applied to counties (and individuals, below): for example, a county in a state with EDR experiences a treatment distinct from a county in a state without EDR (which we can consider as analogous to a control group). Matching in this case, roughly speaking,

²⁴ This latter information is an unusual feature of the CPS survey: respondents can self-report their vote, or have their vote status given by another member of the household (by proxy). Previous research has found that reported turnout among "self reporters" is consistently higher than reported turnout among proxy reporters, by about four percentage points (Highton 2005).

creates two balanced groups, one consisting of “treated” observations, the other of “control” observations.

There are three steps to the matching method. First, we separate the data into treatment and control groups for each of the five categories of voting and registration system types. In each case, the “treated” group consists of individuals in a state with EDR, early voting, or the different combinations of EDR, SDR, and early voting. For each treated group, we construct a control consisting of respondents in states that have none of the practices in the treatment group. The early voting/EDR group, for example, is matched with a control group of counties in states that do not have early voting, EDR, or the combination. Similarly, counties in early voting states are matched with counties in states without early voting. In this way, we are able to test for the specific effect of each individual practice, or combination of practices. Second, we use a propensity score matching process (Ho et al. 2009) to balance the treatment and control groups, insuring that each group is comprised of individuals with similar demographic characteristics.²⁵ Finally, we used the resulting pre-processed and balanced data set in a logistic regression model equivalent to the basic individual level model of voter turnout.

The result of the matched analyses produces almost identical results to the standard county and individual level analyses. We do not report the cumbersome matched models here, but note that the general findings about EDR and early voting hold with remarkable consistency.²⁶

Finally, it is notable that the negative effects of early voting on turnout are evident whether using traditional multivariate regression methods or using matching techniques, or aggregate versus individual level data. In fact, the connection between early voting and overall turnout is sufficiently strong that it is even appears in the raw data. In Figure 4, we present a scatter plot of early voting and total turnout by state.²⁷ The figure clearly shows that overall turnout is lower in states that permit early voting. This relationship holds whether we include all states (the dotted regression line) or we omit the vote-by-mail states of Oregon and Washington (the solid regression line).

We thus have several different approaches that produce a consistent result: early voting has a strong negative effect on turnout. If the motivation for election reform is increasing turnout, states should not look to early voting, especially on its own. EDR, in contrast, provides a substantial boost in turnout. In all three, the tripartite combination of EDR, SDR and early voting also increases turnout. Of course, turnout is not the only

²⁵ We used the “MatchIT” module written for the R statistical package (Ho, et al. 2009), using nearest-neighbor propensity score matching with replacement. We balanced on a subset of demographic variables, including education, income, sex, age categories, and political competitiveness. The efficiency of the matching process increases with better balance on these covariates between the treatment and control groups. The crucial element of preprocessing is that matching may not be conditioned on the treatment variables used in any subsequent analysis.

²⁶ These full results are available from the authors upon request.

²⁷ Early voting percentages are taken from the CPS while total turnout is taken from Michael McDonald’s data available at <<http://elections.gmu.edu>>. Using other sources for these data does not alter the fundamental relationship.

consideration when states consider changes to election practices. In particular, implementation of new laws requires consideration of both the costs and the ability and willingness of local election officials to comply.

III. Balancing Benefits with Costs: The Administrative Perspective

Election laws such as EDR, SDR, and early voting are a patchwork of different systems and combinations of systems across the states. Some states have them and others do not, and among those that do the implementation varies. We have already seen that variation in the length of the SDR window has a sharp effect on turnout. Whether a state adopts one of these practices is probably endogenous to some degree in that it may reflect or codify existing processes or norms. For example, EDR was first adopted in states that already exhibited high levels of voter participation (Hanmer 2009). Adoption can be endogenous in another way: state lawmakers might anticipate the degree to which local election officials are willing and able to implement innovations that they pass into law. Some state legislatures have been reluctant to adopt EDR, for example, because county and municipal officials expressed concern about that administrative burdens and security risks it would entail.

To accompany our analysis of the effects of various registration and voting policies in the states, we investigate in more depth how local election officials in one state have reacted to proposals for new reforms. As in other states, absentee voting has become increasingly popular in Wisconsin, rising from a mere 6% of the total vote in 2000 to 21% in 2008.²⁸ The majority of these absentee ballots were cast in-person in a municipal clerk's office. For many voters, this is effectively early voting. Because Wisconsinites may also register at the clerk's office, this combination allows for "one-stop shopping" before the election. But for clerks there are significant administrative differences between absentee votes, which are delivered to polling places and counted on election day, and early votes, which might need to be counted immediately after voters complete their ballots and could require additional expense for new voting equipment.

Little research has attempted to ascertain the preferences of election administration officials on the different approaches to voting we study here, and the possible costs and benefits of employing a combination of approaches, or even whether election officials see these reforms as competing or complementary. These views are important because such officials are the ones who must implement these approaches, are influential stakeholders in state election policy, and are likely to be best-placed to estimate the administrative costs that will be incurred to facilitate voter convenience. Adoption of policies should consider both direct effects and interactions. Early voting on its own might face financial and administrative hurdles that are too severe to overcome in a decentralized state such as Wisconsin, but combining it with EDR might provide a synergy that compensates for these challenges.

²⁸ See the Wisconsin Government Accountability Board's report, "An Examination of Early Voting in Wisconsin," at <<http://elections.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=16760&locid=47>>.

There is reason to believe that the administrative costs associated with early voting may be lower in states that permit SDR because election duties would be distributed over a longer period of time. The current practice in Wisconsin requires that EDR applications are hand-entered by staff on election day. With 400,000 to process for the 2004 presidential election (83,000 in Milwaukee County alone), this creates a tremendous administrative burden that often requires hiring additional staff just for this purpose. If SDRs could be submitted and processed during an extended early voting period, the additional staff resources required to support early voting might be offset by the administrative savings of receiving far fewer SDRs on election day itself, which would also increase the efficiency of the process for voters (lines would almost certainly be shorter if the process was combined with early voting). This would allow clerks, poll workers, and election board staff to focus on other tasks on election day. Because no state has combined SDR, significant levels of early voting, and EDR before 2008, these tradeoffs have yet to be examined. Wisconsin might well serve as a “difficult case” test for finding opposition to early voting. While clerks in many states without EDR may resist the adoption of early voting because of the time and resources needed to prepare earlier, hire poll workers for many days of work, clerks in EDR states may be more likely to support early voting with SDR by dispersing those duties over days or weeks. Thus, if Wisconsin clerks are opposed to adding early voting and SDR, it is unlikely that clerks in states without EDR would be supportive.

Previous literature has provided the basis for expecting both positive and negative responses from election administrators about the potential for combining SDR, EDR and early voting. Gronke (2008, 43) and co-authors write, “Convenience voting reduces the need to staff polling places on election days, provides more time to process ballots, and may give election administrators more time to respond to voter problems (such as an invalid or incorrect registration).” For these reasons, election officials might be expected to support some early voting reforms. At the same time, administrators are not likely to support the expansion of early voting if they see this as a burden. In a different context, Moynihan (2003) argues that there is often zero-sum battle between administrators and the public when it comes to citizen participation. Administrators are more sensitive to administrative burdens than to public benefits when considering new forms of participation. If administrators cannot see a benefit for themselves in presenting new opportunities to participate, they will be reluctant to offer them. Extending this argument to the electoral context, local election officials may see changes that offer greater convenience to voters in terms of costs. Moynihan and Silva (2008) suggest a related reason for expecting resistance to voter convenience: simple status quo bias. Election officials build up a capacity to operate a certain technology over time. Switching to a new approach creates transition costs that might be viewed as increasing long-term workload. The existence of a status quo bias has been found to explain election official attitudes toward voting technologies, as well as their perception of efforts to change the election system, in the form of the Help American Vote Act (HAVA) (Moynihan and Silva 2008). Proposals for NPPEV, SDR or EDR promise to further disrupt the status quo.

To determine the attitudes of election officials to changes in the *status quo*, we administered a comprehensive survey of all 1,850 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks in Wisconsin and achieved a 72% response rate. We also conducted personal interviews with 100 select municipal and county clerks. For the in-person interviews, we developed a semi-structured interview protocol. The material for this protocol came from the themes in the survey, discussions with clerks at GAB meetings, and an open-ended comments section at the end of the survey. A sampling procedure assured representation of the state's 15 largest municipalities and then randomly select the remaining 85 in a manner that mimics the distribution of the state's voting age population.

The two questions we will focus on here are those asking about the administrative burden of EDR and early voting. Clerks generally associated voter convenience with higher administrative burdens. Clerks were asked to agree or disagree (on a seven point scale) with the statement that "Election day registrations increases the administrative burden on election officials like me." Nearly 55% of clerks were above the neutral position in agreeing with the statement and 25% strongly agreed. Only 30% disagreed. An even larger proportion, nearly 85%, said that "early voting would make my job more difficult" and only 5% thought it would make their job easier when prompted with a two-sided question about the change in administrative burdens that would come if Wisconsin were to adopt early voting. In contrast, 67% thought that in-person absentee voting makes their job more difficult, while only 3% thought it made their job easier.

Despite the view that EDR increased administrative burdens, the survey revealed that clerks were quite supportive of the practice. Nearly 60% of clerks agreed that "the benefits of election day registration outweigh the costs," while only 20% disagreed. The interviews and open-ended survey responses provide some illuminating examples of how clerks think about voting procedures. One clerk said,

I don't think there is any question that it [the state's status as the second highest in the nation in terms of voter turnout] is attributable to the fact that the state offers election day registration.

Other clerks were more specific about the tradeoffs:

I think it's [EDR] a good thing for the voters because they don't have to plan ahead. And it probably does increase the number of people voting, coming out to vote. On the administrative side, it's difficult to manage hundreds and hundreds of registrations very close to an election day. Yeah it is a little time consuming, but it's all for a good cause, I understand that.

One was critical of fellow clerks who may not see positive benefits of EDR:

They can't see out of their roles as administrators into a philosophical democracy role. They see it very black and white. So if you ask them 'should we do away with election day registration?' they'll say 'yes,' because they think about how much easier it would make their jobs.

However, some clerks were critical of the practice. One noted the increased administrative burden caused by voters who wait until the last minute to register:

I believe EDR just adds so much stress to the election workers. Because even though people have known for four years that there's going to be another presidential election, if you give people to the last minute, they'll take to the last minute. And even if it was 60 days, they would wait until 5 o'clock on the 60th day.

With early voting, the responses were much more negative. While some clerks thought that early voting would be a manageable burden and even increase turnout, the following comments were much more typical:

Early voting could be a nightmare to find enough poll workers to handle the additional days/hours that would be required. There must be a lot of coordination of every aspect of the election process to handle early voting.

And another emphasized the competing demands on a clerk's time.

Early voting would be a hardship for the numerous part-time clerks that do not maintain regular office hours and work additional jobs. We neither have the manpower, resources, or security needed to do the job over multiple days/weeks.

Clerks in small municipalities are more likely to make the case that the burdens of early voting (in terms of costs, time, and personnel) are too onerous. These comments are often framed in the context of the growing burden that elections have created for administrators since the passage of HAVA. They often point out that election administration is only one of their duties, but that it takes up too much of their time and would take up even more with alternative forms of voting. Some clerks suggest that if this pattern continues, and in particular if there are additional requirements such as early voting, it will make it increasingly hard to find people to fill the clerk position. A few clerks were broad-ranging in their criticisms of EDR and in-person-absentee voting, such as the following emphatic response to an open-ended survey question:

Election Day registration should be STOPPED. There is no way to verify completely or through HAVA that this person is legal, felon, etc. Letting people vote absentee for no reason should be STOPPED!!!! It was originally meant for people who were disabled, etc. Go back to that!!!! Letting people come in for no reason was a nightmare for the municipalities up to the day of election. There was no way to have time to process the absentee apps, including registrations, before the day of election. That was ridiculous.

Others were specifically concerned about the potential administrative burden of early voting:

Early voting could be a nightmare to find enough poll workers to handle the additional days/hours that would be required. There must be a lot of coordination of every aspect of the election process to handle early voting.

A small-town clerk made a similar observation:

Early voting would be a hardship for the numerous part-time clerks that do not maintain regular office hours and work additional jobs. We neither have the manpower, resources, or security needed to do the job over multiple days/weeks.

Finally, quite a few clerks blame voters rather than the practice itself for the increased administrative burden:

I do not feel that early election, promoting absentee voting will increase voter turnout. If folks do not vote when the scheduled voting is set up they are not interested or perhaps they should not be voting. If a person is not responsible enough to be prepared and have the knowledge to know when or how or who to ask about the voting process how can they possibly have the knowledge to make a responsible decision to vote?

Another echoed that:

Election Day Registration is being abused by people who have begun to presume that it is their right. I think there should be a provision to allow for only certain limited EDR. There is no reason that the vast majority of the voters can not register at least 30 days prior to the election. I believe that voting is both a privilege and a right and more people need to act responsibly and try to be better prepared. There is enough information available that people can easily find out where to register and what proof of residency they need to bring with them.

One clerk was blunt about “lazy” voters:

It only takes 5 minutes every four years to walk into an election booth and cast a ballot so why do we have to make so many accommodations to make it easier? We have become very lazy if we can't do this once every 4 years! As far as absentee voting, I also believe that Wisconsin should make a person need a reason not to be able to vote in person on election day. Again, we are letting people take the lazy way out. The paperwork alone makes this type of voting a nightmare and I don't think these votes are as confidential since most people are using the machines now to vote, leaving their ballots the only ones in the ballot boxes.

This clerk expressed skepticism that early voting would increase turnout because of the type of voter who would be likely to take advantage of the practice:

I do not feel that early election, promoting absentee voting will increase voter turnout. If folks do not vote when the scheduled voting is set up they are not interested or perhaps they should not be voting. If a person is not responsible enough to be prepared and have the knowledge to know when or how or who to ask about the voting process how can they possibly have the knowledge to make a responsible decision to vote?

Finally, another clerk spoke for many of colleagues in small communities, contending that:

Absentee voting should only be allowed for those unable to come to the polls because of age or disability, or if they are gone the day of election or during election hours. Too many voted absentee because they did not want to stand in line at the last November election. This is your right. The elderly did not complain, only the younger ones.

One conclusion that could be drawn from the clerk interviews is that opposition to early voting is partly a resource problem. One clerk made this explicit:

My community is basically 2,000 in population, but I do NOT have a government office - everything is done out of my home. I would LOVE to have Early Voting, but I do not

see how I can do this. The security at the Hall would be very minimal and as it is now; in-person absentee voting is done in my home (which is horrific for presidential and big General Elections). People expect me to be available 24 hours a day for their convenience to vote. Early Voting then might require me to be available at my house 24/7. I currently pre-test and public test at the Hall and use all of the security measures for the equipment. If we went to Early Voting, I would have to drag the equipment back and forth between all of these events - a greater chance for equipment failure, security failure, etc. If there were funds available for an office, I would totally support Early Voting.

If clerks had more poll workers and more paid staff or even an office, then the concern that early voting would lead to a greater administrative burden might not be as strong. However, the survey reveals that large majorities of clerks still would not support early voting even with an increases in paid staff, funds to pay poll workers, security protections, office space, and funds for voter education. As shown in Table 4, only about a fifth of clerks said that increases in these resources would increase their support for early voting (and about another fifth said it would make them “somewhat more likely to support early voting”). For many clerks opposition to NPPEV is philosophical and not merely a matter of resource constraints.

Opposition to EDR, SDR, and early voting is sometimes based on concern about ballot security and voter fraud. Some clerks echoed this concern:

Election Day Registration creates such a large post election burden. If WI wants to make changes to elections in WI this should be eliminated. By doing so I think it could reduce voter fraud and potential errors by poll workers. The day before the election should be the last day to register in the clerk’s office.

Another said:

I do NOT agree with Election Day Registration because there is no way to catch voter fraud until weeks AFTER the fact. I also think registration requirements are too lax. Photo ID should always be required. The current rules were fine when we were not such a mobile society. Today a person could easily vote in multiple places just by traveling by car, let alone air travel. A responsible citizen can and should register at least 2 weeks prior to the election. It should be a requirement, along with photo ID and proof of address.

However, most clerks did not see ballot security as a serious issue for EDR or in-person absentee voting. Clerks were asked to agree or disagree (on a seven-point scale) whether “Election Day Registration makes it more difficult to protect the security of the voting process.” Only 26% agreed (11% strongly agreeing), while 60% disagreed (21% strongly disagreeing). Clerks were even more confident that in-person absentee voting did not undermine the security of the voting process, with 73% disagreeing (and 29% strongly disagreeing) and 14% agreeing (and 5% strongly agreeing).

One final observation is that clerks who are less likely to see EDR and early voting as an administrative burden are more likely to think that those practices increase turnout. Overall, 65% of clerks believe (as the empirical evidence shows) that EDR increases

turnout, while 20% think it decreases turnout and the rest are unsure. Of those who strongly disagree that EDR is an administrative burden, 81% think that EDR increases turnout compared to 51% of those who strongly agree that it is a burden. The differences are even more dramatic for early voting, where only 23% of clerks think it will increase turnout and 48% think turnout would fall if early voting were implemented. Of the relatively small group who thought that early voting would make their job easier by spreading out the administrative burden, 89% thought it would increase turnout compared to only 16% of those who thought it would make their job more difficult.

To explain the patterns in the clerks' views of their administrative burdens, we specified two multivariate models: an ordinal logistic regression model in which the dependent variable is the seven-level disagree/agree question about EDR, and a logit model in which the dependent variable is whether or not the clerk thinks that early voting will make his or her job more difficult. We included controls for the percentage of high school graduates, the percentage of African Americans, and the per capita income of the municipality. We also included the number of votes cast in the municipality to control for the actual burden on the clerk. The variables that are of more substantive interest are related to the clerk's job, their perceptions of their jobs, and their level of experience.

Table 5 reports the estimates of the model explaining clerks' attitudes about the administrative costs imposed by EDR. The percentage of a clerk's job that is related to election activities is positively related to perceived burden. More experienced clerks (as measured by the number of presidential elections in which they have worked) are also more likely to complain, as are full-time clerks relative to part-time clerks. These findings may suggest that the more specialized and experienced clerks, who are likely to have a more in-depth knowledge of the burden created by alternative forms of voting, are more likely to see EDR as a burden. The findings also suggest that elected officials are less likely than appointed officials to believe that popular voting alternatives that increase voter convenience represent an administrative burden. In addition, the results show that clerks who view EDR as a right are significantly less likely to see it as a burden.

The key variable examines the combination of NPPEV and EDR. Given that Wisconsin does not have true early voting, we attempted to assess the tradeoffs by asking the clerks about an expansion of in-person-absentee voting. Specifically we asked,

“Some people think that more in-person absentee voting would make it easier to process EDRs by spreading them out over a longer voting period. Other things it would only make processing them more difficult. How about you – do you think more in-person-absentee voting would make it easier to process EDRs, more difficult to process EDRs, or would there be no change?”

Overall, clerks were three times as likely to think it would make it harder to process EDRs (36% to 12%). Clerks who thought more in-person-absentees would make it more difficult to process EDRs also were much more likely to see EDRs as an administrative burden.

We also asked the clerks whether they thought a “bill to allow for early voting in Wisconsin” would make their job more difficult. As reported above, a large majority of clerks thought that it would. In seeking to explain the variation in attitudes across clerks, we included all of the same explanatory variables as in the model reported in Table 5 with one modification: we replaced the clerk’s view of whether or not EDR is a right with their opinion about whether “most voters should be required to vote at a polling place on election day.” This view was held by a plurality of clerks (45.3%), while 32.2% preferred that absentee voting should be allowed for “any voter who wants to use it,” if cost were not an issue (the other 22% did not have a strong opinion either way). Table 6 provides the results. As with the variable asking whether EDR is a right, perceptions concerning the sanctity of election day was highly significant. Unlike the previous model, the control variables for percent African-American and the percent of high school graduates in the municipality are not significant. Whether the clerk is appointed or elected or has experience in presidential elections are also unrelated to perceptions of early voting. However, full-time clerks and those who devote more time to election-related matters are less likely to see early voting as making their jobs more difficult. As in the previous model, the central variable of interest, the combination of in-person-absentee voting and EDRs is highly significant.

IV. Conclusion

We have argued that election reforms should not be considered in isolation, as is standard practice in the multivariate models estimated by researchers but also in the arguments made by advocates and policy makers. If reformers do want to improve turnout, the only consistent way to achieve this is to permit EDR. SDR itself can raise turnout if the window for registration and voting is sufficiently long. It appears that early voting on its own robs election day of its stimulating effects on marginal voters unless EDR provides a vehicle for their mobilization at the last moment. The most common practice in the states is to offer early voting in isolation. If the goal is higher turnout, our findings show that it should be supplemented with SDR or, even better, EDR. It is only by being combined with “one-stop shopping” that early voting yields positive effects. An important caveat is that our analysis focused only on the 2008 election. As with analysis anchored in a specific time, generalizations must be made with caution. That said, 2008 is the first election when the current combination array of election laws is in place, and offers the best basis upon which to guide policy for the future. We have applied a variety of methodological approaches that suggests the same basic results, and so we have high confidence in the validity of the findings for the 2008 presidential election.

At the same time, policymakers should be aware that convenience for voters imposes significant burdens on the election officials charged with administering new approaches, especially in smaller towns that have limited resources. Our study of Wisconsin election officials found strong opposition to the additional administrative responsibilities resulting from efforts to enhance voter convenience. Such reforms are not costless, and may even be counterproductive, if the effect is to encumber election officials while producing little real benefit to the electorate.

Figure 1: Combinations of EDR, SDR, and Early Voting in 2008

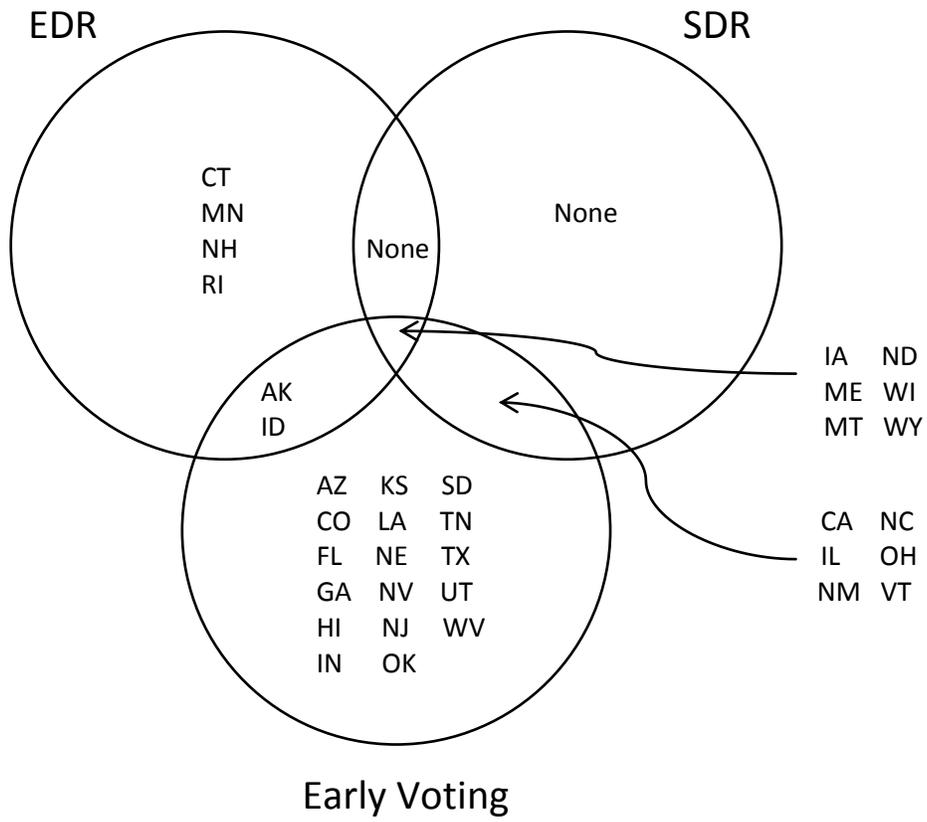
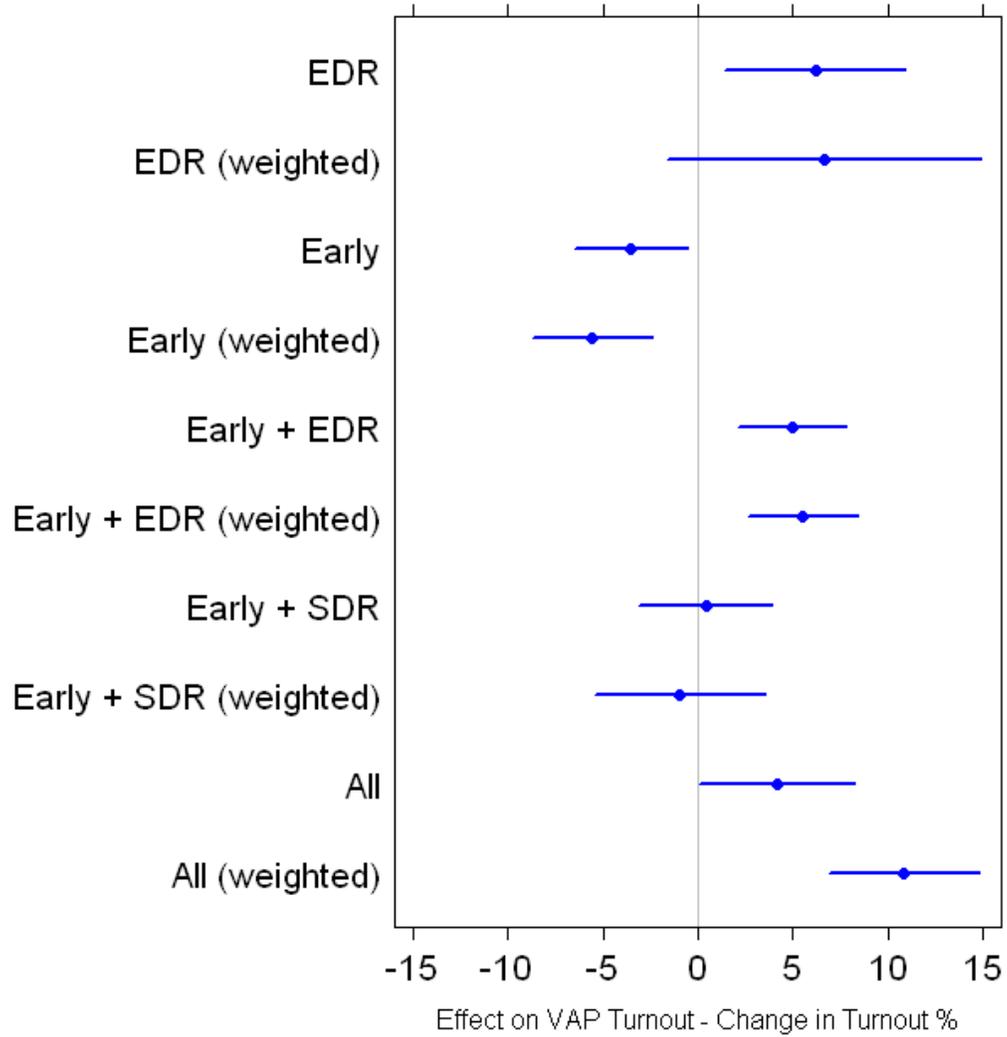
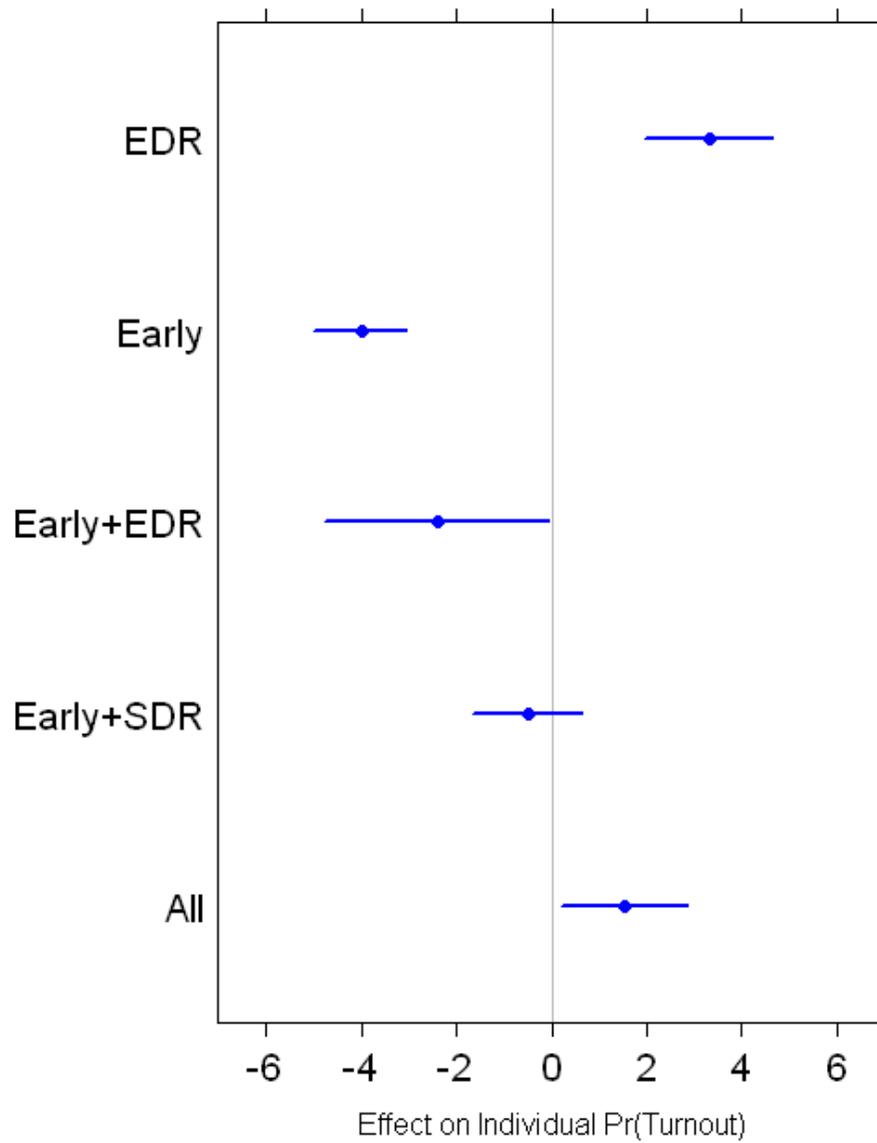


Figure 2: Effects on Aggregate Turnout



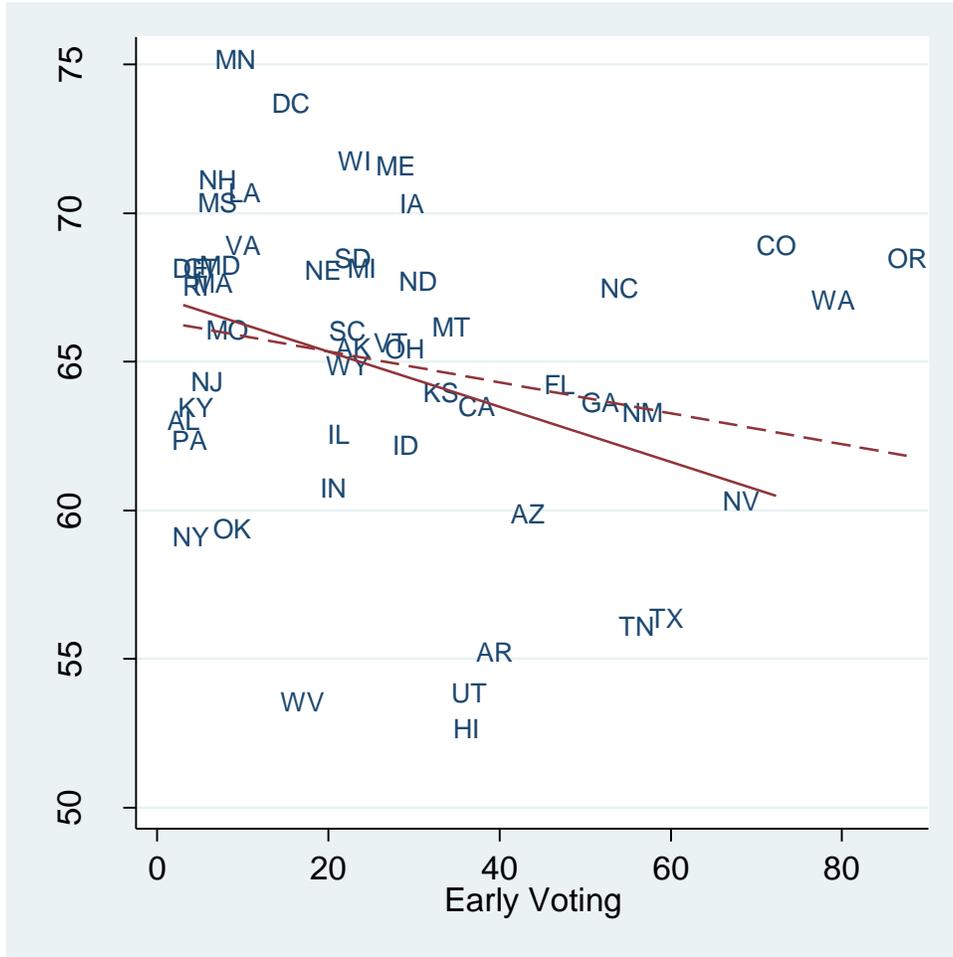
Notes: Dots are effect point estimates and lines represent the 95% confidence intervals. Data are based on results in Table 1.

Figure 3: Effects on Individual Turnout



Notes: Dots are effect point estimates and lines represent the 95% confidence intervals. Data are based on results in Table 3.

Figure 4: Early Voting and Turnout in the States



Note: Dotted regression line represents all states. Solid regression line omits OR and WA.

Table 1: Regression Estimates of EDR, SDR, & Early Voting Effects on County Turnout

| | I | II |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| EDR | 6.19** (2.42) | 6.67* (4.20) |
| EDR + Early Voting | 4.95***** (1.46) | 5.54***** (1.47) |
| EDR + SDR + Early Voting | 4.16** (2.07) | 10.86***** (2.03) |
| Early Voting + SDR | .42 (1.79) | -.96 (2.29) |
| Early Voting | -3.51** (1.52) | -5.58***** (1.61) |
| Closing Date | -.10 (.10) | .07 (.13) |
| ID Requirement | .78 (1.32) | .05 (1.63) |
| Ex-Felons Barred | .09 (1.32) | 1.19 (1.67) |
| Percent Black | .12*** (.04) | .12*** (.04) |
| Median Income | .0003***** (.00005) | .0002*** (.0001) |
| Percent College Graduates | .32***** (.07) | .30***** (.07) |
| Percent 65 or Older | .86***** (.09) | .68***** (.18) |
| Population (in 100,000s) | -.39***** (.08) | -.14*** (.05) |
| Population Density | -.0004*** (.0002) | -.0003***** (.00004) |
| Campaign Competitiveness | -.09 (.07) | -.25*** (.07) |
| Oregon | 3.03** (1.13) | 4.68***** (1.16) |
| Washington | .10 (2.17) | 5.67** (2.14) |
| Constant | 32.22***** (4.03) | 36.00***** (4.50) |
| R^2 | .417 | .585 |
| Weighted by Population | No | Yes |

Notes: $N = 3109$. ***** $p < .001$ **** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$, one-tailed test.
Cell entries are OLS regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses.
Robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

Table 2: Effect of SDR Window Length on County Turnout

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Length of Window (in Days) | .29*** (.03) |
| Closing Date | .03 (.04) |
| ID Requirement | .77 (.88) |
| Percent Black | .05* (.03) |
| Median Income | .0002* (.0001) |
| Percent with BA | .32*** (.05) |
| Percent 65 or Older | .67*** (.07) |
| Population (in 100,000s) | -.14** (.05) |
| Population Density | -.0003 (.0002) |
| Campaign Competitiveness | -.06** (.04) |
| Constant | 34.05*** (2.88) |
| R^2 | .464 |

Notes: $N = 713$. *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, one-tailed test.

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

Analysis is limited to states with same day registration.

Robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

Dummies for individual states not reported.

Ex-felon disenfranchisement variable omitted because it does not vary in SDR states.

Table 3: Logit Estimates of EDR, SDR, & Early Voting Effects on Individual Turnout

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------|
| EDR | .170*** | (.037) |
| EDR + Early Voting | -.117* | (.057) |
| EDR + SDR + Early Voting | .077* | (.035) |
| SDR + Early Voting | -.029 | (.029) |
| Early Voting | -.198*** | (.024) |
| Education | .601*** | (.010) |
| African-American | .735*** | (.032) |
| Hispanic | -.057 | (.033) |
| Self-Reported Vote | .828*** | (.019) |
| Naturalized Citizen | -1.05*** | (.102) |
| Naturalized 10+ years | .469*** | (.108) |
| 30-day Registration close | -.116*** | (.021) |
| Married | .425*** | (.020) |
| Residence 1 Year | .269*** | (.026) |
| Income | .081*** | (.003) |
| Gender | .148*** | (.018) |
| Age | .025*** | (.001) |
| Age 18-24 | .421*** | (.033) |
| Age over 75 | -.116** | (.042) |
| South | -.039 | (.025) |
| Campaign Competitiveness | -.005*** | (.001) |
| Oregon | .165* | (.077) |
| Washington | -.045 | (.069) |
| Constant | -3.85 | (.068) |
| Pseudo- R^2 | .145 | |
| Pct. Correct Predicted (null) | 73.4% | (68.8%) |
| N | 74,327 | |

Notes: *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, one-tailed test.

Cell entries are logit regression estimates with standard errors in parentheses

Table 4: Resources and Clerk Support for Early Voting

| | No more likely to support early voting | Somewhat more likely to support early voting | More likely to support early voting |
|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| Increase in paid staff (n=1,369) | 61.1% | 18.4% | 20.5% |
| Increase in funds to pay poll workers (n=1,370) | 57.2% | 21.5% | 20.4% |
| Increase in security protections (n=1,365) | 65.6% | 14.1% | 20.4% |
| Increase in office space (n=1,367) | 70.6% | 13.0% | 16.4% |
| Increase in funds for voter education (n=1,366) | 62.6% | 15.2% | 22.2% |

Table entries are responses to the question, “How much would increases in each of the following resources affect the likelihood that you would support Early Voting?”

Table 5: Factors Affecting the Perceived Administrative Burden of EDR

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| In-Person Absentee Voting Makes It Harder to Process EDRs | .288*** (.007) |
| Per Capita Income | -.000018** (.000007) |
| Number of Presidential Votes Cast in Municipality | .000039** (.000016) |
| Percent African-American | .047* (.027) |
| Percent High School Graduates | .015* (.006) |
| Percent of Clerk's Job Spent on Elections | .004* (.002) |
| EDR is a Right | -.19*** (.020) |
| Number of Presidential Elections Worked as a Clerk | .035** (.015) |
| Appointed Clerk | .181* (.089) |
| Full Time Clerk | .241** (.097) |
| Pseudo- R^2 | .198 |
| Log Likelihood | 4450.7 |
| Number of Cases | 1,253 |

Notes: *** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, one-tailed test.

Dependent variable is a seven-level variable ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" that EDR increases the administrative burden on clerks. Six threshold estimates are not reported.

Table 6: Early Voting and Perceived Difficulty of Clerk’s Job

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| In-Person Absentee Voting Makes It Harder to Process EDRs | 1.240*** (.228) |
| Most Voters Should Be Required to Vote on Election Day | .985*** (.193) |
| Per Capita Income | -.000027* (.00001) |
| Number of Presidential Votes Cast in Municipality | -.00005** (.00002) |
| Percent African-American | .039 (.054) |
| Percent High School Graduates | -.003 (.016) |
| Percent of Clerk’s Job Spent on Elections | -.011** (.005) |
| Number of Presidential Elections Worked as a Clerk | .005 (.038) |
| Appointed Clerk | -.244 (.222) |
| Full Time Clerk | -.485* (.226) |
| Constant | 2.477* (1.185) |
| Pseudo- R^2 | .173 |
| Log Likelihood | 951.4 |
| Number of Cases | 1,252 |

Notes:*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, one-tailed test.

Cell entries are logit estimates with standard errors in parentheses.

Dependent variable equals 1 if clerk believes that early voting would “make my job more difficult.”

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