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Registration reform and its relationship to turnout in the American states

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The Ohio State University, 1993
Registration Reform and Its Relationship
to Turnout in the American States

Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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* * * * *

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Chapter I
Introduction

Registration and voting requirements in the United States have changed considerably in recent history. Thirty years ago states controlled the franchise and permitted many localities complete autonomy. Such autonomy gave local officials arbitrary control over the franchise. Areas used poll taxes and literacy tests to discourage some from voting. Long residency requirements and little absentee registration made voting difficult. Moreover, the federal government was hesitant to intercede into what was considered state prerogative.

Since that time many of the arbitrary mechanisms are no longer in use due to federal intervention. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, poll taxes, literacy tests, and residency requirements became illegal. The federal government actively enforced equal protection of registration and voting rights, thereby standardizing some basic protections.

Following the federal changes, many states made registration and voting easier by providing it in numerous locations at more convenient hours. For instance, the proliferation of mail registration and the reduction in
closing dates were designed to make registration more accessible. Moreover, many areas expanded the locations where citizens might register. For example, some citizens could register when they renewed their driver's license or applied for unemployment benefits. Other states allowed deputy registrars to register citizens away from the permanent locations. Most of these changes, however, have occurred on a state-by-state basis.

In addition, at various times the federal government has sought to encourage these innovations in the states, but until recently it was largely ineffective. President Carter, for example, sought expanded opportunities for registration and a reduction in the closing date, but he failed to generate sufficient congressional support. In the last couple of years Congress tried to expand registration provisions, but President Bush did not support such changes. But the recent election of President Clinton has reignited the influence of the federal government in this arena. Both houses of Congress agreed on the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 and President Clinton signed the bill into law on May 20, 1993. Thus states may face significant federal influence in the realm of registration such that they have not seen since the mid 1960s.

These modifications in the current registration systems are controversial because we think that such changes have an effect on the size and composition of the electorate. Most
believe that if we reduce the cost of registration we will increase the number who register and therefore vote. If we employ Downs’ (1957) model, when there are costs associated with voting, it is rational for some who are not indifferent to abstain from the election. Elections and becoming eligible for elections involve the cost of time and information. When those costs exceed the short- and long-term benefits of voting, it is rational not to vote.

The cost in this research is the time and information to register and therefore vote. Finding a location to register within an accepted deadline and during certain hours imposes a cost on registrants. For example, those citizens who must register a month before an election in a particular office presumably pay a greater cost than those citizens who may register by mail a week before the election. Those areas with the least facilitative registration systems presumably impose greater costs. If theory is correct, these costs act to depress turnout. Thus if the cost of registration is reduced through reform, turnout should increase.

In order to test this hypothesis, I will compare states and respondents in states that impose different costs on their citizens. The states offer fertile ground for such analysis due to their similarities in other important facets. In the late 1960s a federalization of registration and voting law occurred due to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many of the grossest disparities between states were eliminated, thereby
creating a baseline for subsequent comparisons. In the early 1970s states began to modify their rules to make registration even easier, but many states maintained their systems with only the minimum designated by federal standards. Thus reforms occurred at different times in different states, thereby creating many opportunities to study the effects of these new forms of registration systems.

If turnout is related to the cost of registration, those states that provide more facilitative systems should have higher turnout. For example, registration provisions such as same-day registration and mail registration should make registration easier. If these factors do indeed correlate with the cost of registration and voting, their existence should correspond to higher levels of turnout.

However, measuring the effects of registration change is more difficult than it might appear. For example, over this same period of reform, turnout outside the South has suffered a steady decline, while southern turnout has increased to approach the nonsouthern levels. Although many different factors combined to increase turnout in this region, the southern increase is likely due to the effects of party competition and changing demographics, in addition to the increased protection for registration and voting rights. As a result, I cannot be sure how much turnout increase to credit to the institutional changes and how much to the changing electorate.
In contrast, nonsouthern turnout has declined during this same period. Several authors suggest that the decline is due to demographic and psychological changes in the electorate. For example, the electorate is both younger and older and is less attached to the political parties. Registration reform in all likelihood did not contribute to this decline. But because the reforms and turnout decline coincide, attempts to measure the effects of the registration reforms are confounded by other factors that have tended to depress turnout.

All of these countervailing forces make understanding the institutional environment even more important. We have suffered turnout decline at the same time that participation should have become easier. Thus it is important to determine the real effects, if any, of the latest registration reforms. Therefore, in this project I test if registration is indeed easier and the nature of its relationship to turnout. I characterize the states that have the most and the least reforms, and I test for any correlation between registration rules and turnout.

Understanding the causes of turnout is an important goal because such understanding reveals why people participate and the costs they are willing to endure. In addition, if we could explain how the current costs are related to turnout, we might be able to predict the effects of future changes in the rules. Given the recently-passed National Voter Registration Act, the environment for registration may change considerably.
While current practices are not identical to the federal reforms, they should provide an indication of the potential impact. If I find that the current reforms are associated with higher turnout, then I might expect an even greater increase with the proposed federal reforms. Conversely, if I find that the reforms are not associated with greater turnout, then I might expect little change due to the federal action. Either scenario provides insight into the relationship between the citizenry, participation costs, and turnout.

Other Research

Over the last thirty years many have tried to estimate the impact of the registration and voting laws on turnout in the United States. The earliest studies focused on aggregate comparisons of turnout and registration requirements while later studies moved the analysis to the individual level.

The path-breaking work of Kelley, Ayres, and Bowen (1967) linked registration and voting requirements to levels of turnout. They studied 104 of the largest cities in the 1960 presidential election. They found that the registration levels corresponded to the turnout levels, thereby concluding that denying registration could effectively limit voting more than efforts to deter voting once registered. Literacy tests and especially the closing date for registration were highly correlated with levels of registration. Unfortunately, their
aggregate data do not support generalizations that extend to the individual level.

Kim, Petrocik, and Enokson (1975) studied turnout across the states for the 1960 election. For each state they calculated what turnout would have been given that state's demographic composition. They then added electoral competitiveness and legal structures to the expected turnout due to demographic characteristics. They noted that for most states, "deviations of voter turnout from the national mean are adequately accounted for by the three factors—individual effects, electoral competitiveness, and legal facilitation" (p. 118).

Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978) conducted a cross-sectional analysis of the 1972 presidential election. They gathered registration laws for every state and combined them with the information from the Current Population Survey. Thus they were able to estimate variation in turnout levels due to personal characteristics and registration laws. They found that closing dates and office hours for registration could serve to limit registration the most. They predicted that turnout for the presidential election would have been 9.1 percentage points greater with more permissive registration and no closing date. But the political implications would be limited at best because the projected electorate would not differ substantially from the actual. Neither party would receive a large boost from this modest increase in turnout.
Katosh and Traugott (1982) compared the importance of psychological attitudes toward participation with the convenience factors associated with registration and voting. They found that predispositions toward voting were more important determinants of participation than the contextual setting of the potential voter. In other words, easing registration may not substantially increase turnout.

More recently, Teixeira (1992) used the Current Population Surveys to gauge the effects of registration reform. He determined that if all states had same-day registration, evening and Saturday registration, regular office hours, and no purge for nonvoting turnout would increase about 7.8 percentage points. Most of this increase, however, is attributable to same-day registration.

Many other authors have looked at the relationship between particular registration laws and turnout. Ashenfelter and Kelley (1975) combined social psychological and registration factors. They found that the social psychological influences, particularly citizen duty, were more important determinants than registration factors in the decision to vote. Squire, Wolfinger and Glass (1987) linked turnout to residential mobility, suggesting that mobile residents experience higher costs to remain registered. Patterson and Caldeira (1983) explored the relationship between electoral law and gubernatorial turnout. And, finally, Piven and Cloward (1988) proposed mechanisms, like
agency registration, that might reach a large mass of currently unregistered citizens.

All of the above research suggests that in some circumstances registration can depress turnout, but the relationship is not absolute. Other factors like party competition and interest in the election are sometimes more important in determining turnout differences. Given all of the changes and proposed changes in registration law, I want to determine their true, independent impact on turnout. My goal is to measure the effects of the reforms that have proliferated since the early 1970s, taking into account the other important determinants of turnout. I am interested in which of the reforms are likely to increase turnout and the circumstances in which this is likely to occur.

**Description of Chapters**

I begin the analysis of the reforms at the state level and then move it to the individual level. State-level analyses permit a longitudinal perspective on the institutional environment of the vote and its subsequent relationship to turnout. Individual-level analyses permit the addition of the relevant, personal factors in the calculus of voting. If both levels of comparison produce similar results, I can be more confident in my findings.
I begin the research by describing in detail the origins of certain registration provisions in Chapter Two. I provide a background of the changes with an emphasis on the last thirty years. I start with the federal attempts to control voting rights abuses in the states. Federal action culminated in the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which provided the strongest protection from registration and electoral mechanisms designed to disenfranchise certain groups. Following the federal changes, some states initiated their own reforms. States altered their closing dates and introduced provisions to make registration easier, such as mail and motor-voter registration. Such modifications have been occurring for over twenty years at different times in different states.

In Chapter Three I test the effects of the state-level reforms described above for this twenty-year period. Using aggregate statistics, I compare turnout between states with different registration provisions, with a particular focus on closing date, mail and motor-voter registration. I also compare the rates of turnout decline during this period in order to determine which states lose the most and the least voters and whether this corresponds to changes in the registration provisions. I conclude with a multivariate test using registration provisions as well as other aggregate characteristics of the states.

In Chapters Four, Five, and Six, I move the analysis to the individual level. Using the 1988 National Election Study,
I combine many of the characteristics often associated with turnout. In Chapter Four I determine which demographic and psychological characteristics are significantly related to the likelihood of voting. Those that survive the test are added to the analysis in Chapter Six in order to create a fully-specified model. Among the demographic variables, three reach significance: race, education, and residential mobility. Among the psychological variables, two reach significance: interest in the election and civic values.

In Chapter Five I combine political characteristics with registration characteristics. For each respondent in the survey there are corresponding registration rules as well as concurring elections. I compare turnout between respondents under different registration rules, as well as between different regions and types of elections. Most of these first-order comparisons produce results that are in the expected direction. Then I combine the factors for a multivariate test in order to control for their overlapping effects. Among the political characteristics, the South and the occurrence of a Senate election are significantly related to turnout. However, the results for registration variables are mixed.

In Chapter Six I combine the important demographic, psychological, political and registration factors for a multivariate test. This reveals which variables remain important after controls are added. Among the registration
variables, only the closing date is significantly related to turnout. I also test if a combination of certain reforms produces a greater impact than their individual effects. Although a combination would seem to be powerful determinant of turnout, the results do not support such a thesis. Therefore, based on the first comparisons, I estimate the change in turnout if all states had mail and motor-voter registration, as well as no closing date.

Finally, I conclude with our understanding of turnout and its relationship to the costs of registration. I suggest and critique alternative methods for assessing the effects of registration laws. I summarize the earlier findings and the consistency of the various tests. Both state-level and individual-level comparisons produce similar conclusions about the effects of each reform. These findings suggest that the prospects for increasing turnout based only on certain reforms may not be promising. Based on these results I discuss our understanding of the decision to vote and the potential impact of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993.
References


Chapter II

A History of the Changes in Registration and Voting Laws

The rules governing registration and the vote determine the context and ease with which citizens can participate. Participation and turnout levels cannot be fully understood until the broader context is included in the explanation. Because the environment for voting has changed dramatically across U.S. history, levels of turnout must be placed within their context and legal situation. In later chapters I will explore the effects of particular attributes of the system, but first the system and its transformations must be untangled. The modifications have included a mix of federal and state reforms, making some provisions universal while others remain unique to certain states. This blend of reform often confounds those that try to include such factors in their explanations.

Two important but separate trends have occurred. The first is the federalization of voting rights, developing mostly in the 1960s and early 1970s. The federal government enforced actions to make voting easier and less subject to local control. Based on the equal protection clause, the federal government intervened in the conduct of elections to
ensure equal access. As a result, variation across states declined as registration and voting became easier for almost everyone.

The second trend is the state-level innovation above and beyond the federal standards. Following the federalization of voting rights, many states embarked on paths of reform in order to increase their low levels of turnout. These reforms are not nationwide, but instead occur in a mixed fashion from one state to another. Some emerged as a result of the federal changes, but others appeared more recently. Thus states began to differentiate themselves with various revisions after they had reached common standards set by the federal government.

Both of the above trends should have increased national turnout, but instead turnout has suffered a steady decline in the last thirty years. Either the reforms had no effect, or they were offset by other factors. In Chapter Three I will explore the effects of state-level reforms and in later chapters I will include system-level as well as individual-level factors in trying to account for turnout differences. But first the history of federal and state reforms must be clarified in order to better understand their possible effects. The confusing array of federal and state initiatives will be separated in order to measure the effects of each in later chapters.
The Reforms

It is difficult to imagine the depth of change that has occurred in the area of voting rights. Access to the voting booth has achieved a dramatic transformation, even a revolution, across the last fifty years. Voting and the policies governing the right to vote have become much more routinized and uniform in the United States; in contrast, previously a world of variation existed across localities. In his classic work *Southern Politics*, V.O. Key (1949) noted that "The suffrage problems of the South can claim a closer kinship with those of India, of South Africa, or of the Dutch East Indies than with those of, say, Minnesota" (p. 661). Voting standards were so susceptible to local practices that two separate jurisdictions in the same country bore little resemblance to each other. By contrast, today there is much less of a gulf between the North and the South because national standards have evened the playing field to a greater extent.

The transformation of voting rights has evolved along two separate streams of activity. The first stream is the federal response to voting rights abuses most visibly evident in the South. The executive branch, Supreme Court, and Congress actively combatted and deterred the unequal access to registration and the voting booth, particularly in the 1960s. The second stream is the result of state response to demands
for greater access and concerns about declining turnout. In the 1970s and '80s, state legislators and governors eased considerably the requirements to register and vote. For example, many greatly increased opportunities to register through the use of state agencies and mail registration.

Thus the federal government has demanded certain basic protections and guidelines surrounding the vote. Beyond these guidelines, the states have developed and experimented with their own innovations, thereby adding unique imprints to the fundamental guarantees.

Because elections fall under state domain, the states largely determine the rules and regulations. These are subject to federal standards; for example, the Fifteenth Amendment bars discrimination to vote based on race. But the enforcement of such protections was rare and the interpretation of state laws usually favored the state before the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Hence, for a long period of time the states conducted their elections as those in power desired. Federal intervention occurred only after it became evident that state and local autonomy resulted in abuse in certain jurisdictions.

The foci of concern has been centered on the divergent policies of the South. In the twentieth century, the white, southern elite maintained their hegemony through control of the Democratic Party and the ballot box. Although the North is not without its own examples of abuse, the South provides
a clearer illustration of institutionalized efforts to disenfranchise blacks and other opposition to the status quo.

Following Reconstruction state legislatures in the South began to erect a series of legal barriers to limit the newly-won rights gained by blacks after the Civil War. Political leaders in the South had little incentive to conform to the rules set by Washington and imposed on them. So they responded with their own ordinances designed to perpetuate their rule. By controlling the mechanisms of power, they would be able to diminish the influence of those sympathetic to the federal cause or the rights of blacks. As a result, opposition was further excluded through a plethora of legal mechanisms, many purportedly designed to "improve" the quality of the electorate.

For example, literacy tests were introduced allegedly to ensure a knowledgeable electorate. But they also provided a means by which blacks could be excluded. Because the tests were subjective, even well-educated blacks might not satisfy the local registrar. In addition, blacks were disproportionately poor and illiterate, thereby decreasing the likelihood of successful passage (Key 1949). Moreover, the literacy test was not a color-blind means to improve the quality of the electorate. Illiterate whites rarely failed the test. Not surprisingly, enforcement was less than vigorous when a white neighbor was involved (Matthews and Prothro 1966).
In some areas the grandfather clause also protected whites. According to this provision, male whites whose father or grandfather possessed the right to vote before the Civil War would also gain access by association. This mechanism was a means to include the illiterate whites. The following states changed their constitutions to include the literacy tests and the grandfather clause provision: Mississippi (1890), Louisiana (1898), North Carolina (1902), Virginia (1902), Georgia (1908), and Oklahoma (1910) (Citizens’ Commission on Civil Rights 1988).

A more blatant means of disenfranchisement was the white primary. Several states protected white predominance by banning black participation in the Democratic primary. This effectively banned blacks from influencing the selection of office holders in many areas because of the nature of southern politics. The Republican Party was wiped out in the South following the Civil War. The support that it possessed came almost entirely from powerless minorities. Thus whoever won the Democratic primary would certainly win the general election against the Republican candidate. Hence, by excluding people in the first stage the public offices were safely under the domain of white, southern power brokers.

Not until 1944 did the Supreme Court put an end to the white primary. In *Smith v. Allwright*, the Court recognized the central role played by the primary and ruled that the primary should include the same protections of the right to
vote as those of the general election. Several areas attempted to circumvent this ruling but the courts denied their maneuvers (Claude 1970).

Such electoral contrivances were feasible because up until the middle of the twentieth century, the regulation of the voting booth was largely under local control. As a result, local practices had an enormous effect on black and white turnout. The South was not monolithic in its prohibitions of the black vote, however. V.O. Key (1949) emphasized the complexity and variation that existed even within the South. For example, within a single state, those counties with a higher percentage of black population were more innovative and persistent in limiting the franchise, whereas those counties where the likelihood of black rule was minimal made access to the voting booth less difficult. Additionally, enormous differences existed between the deep South and the peripheral South. Mississippi was vastly more restrictive concerning the vote than North Carolina, for instance. Thus the state could be more or less tolerant toward the actions of its local officials. Registration and voting procedures were primarily local issues. Hence, the local circumstances were more immediately important than the supposed federal protections that existed at the time.

In the past, then, there was a great amount of variation at the local level between the North and the South and even within the South. Voting rights were localized phenomenon,
controlled by the local authorities. But several important events caused voting to become more national in character.

The change across the last fifty years illustrates the broader picture surrounding voting rights. The distance between the all-powerful local registrar of the fifties and the bureaucratic civil servant of today is considerable. In the 1990s, registration and voting are less affected by local, idiosyncratic factors and more affected by state and federal standards. Voting has become standardized at both the state and the federal level, although not entirely. Localities can still influence the ease of registration and voting within given parameters, for example. But those parameters are significantly smaller than in the past.

This structural transformation symbolizes a detour in the normal path of the conduct of elections. Thus it is important to understand the source of this change and the extent that it has pervaded the localities. It is essential to comprehend the events and the long-term implications for the reforms. Current proposals must be interpreted in light of past actions. Following the chain of events that had the greatest influence on the vote offers a richer understanding of the factors affecting the vote today.
The Voting Rights Act

The greatest shift to affect registration and voting rights occurred in the 1960s. This is not to say that the courts and Congress were completely inactive before this, but several forces joined to enact surprisingly strong civil rights legislation after 1960. The Supreme Court was more receptive to a federal presence in the states to ensure federal rights. Newly-elected President Johnson was at a particularly powerful point in his presidency, in contrast to a couple of years later. And Congress was under increasing public pressure after extensive media coverage of southern politics splashed into the homes of millions of Americans.

Congress had moved toward greater civil rights protection by passing the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964. But none of these acts proved strong enough to greatly expand such rights. If citizens believed that they were denied their rights based on one of the above laws, they had to prove the discrimination in court (Claude 1974). The aggrieved party had to mount a court case to seek changes, but the change, if granted, applied only to that person, not to a class of persons. Thus one person might gain the right to register after a court challenge, but all others in the same circumstances had to go to court individually to gain similar protections. That such gains were limited to individuals certainly deterred groups from pursuing this strategy on
behalf of the aggrieved. Court cases were expensive, especially for the poor, time-consuming, and conducted in southern courts. Thus the incentive to undertake such an approach was slight.

The turning point came with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This law strengthened the powers of the federal government to intervene in order to assure voting rights protection. It abandoned the litigative strategy and adopted a more aggressive federal role. But it took considerable violence and public outrage to finally achieve its passage.

By early 1965, concerted attempts to register blacks in the South had prompted a violent backlash in some areas. Locals had used intimidation and savagery to keep blacks from the polls. Thus civil rights leaders wanted to demonstrate to the nation the obstacles and violence that they faced. They used Selma, Alabama, as a vehicle.

Many blacks had tried with great difficulty to register in Selma. The leaders also suspected that the sheriff of Selma would use force to quell further civil rights demands (Ball, Krane and Lauth 1982). Thus from January to March 1965 black leaders organized demonstrations to demand voting rights. The sheriff and police responded with brutal force, and their actions were captured on national television. Such violent scenes, combined with the murders of several supporters, sparked national, public outrage. As a result, Lyndon Johnson pushed to formulate more quickly and thoroughly
a response to such infringements. The proposal passed through Congress in a matter of months. Because of the particular chain of events, the remedy was more potent and timely than might otherwise have occurred.

This Act differed from those previously passed because it provided immediate instead of litigative relief. Other legislation required a longer trail to gain federal protection. But the 1965 Act dictated a standard of guilt that did not have to be proven in court. The act would cover or apply to those areas that had less than 50% registration or less than 50% voting turnout in the 1964 election. Not surprisingly, the 50% level was chosen so that most counties in southern states would be "covered" (Thernstrom 1987). This standard, or "triggering clause," allowed immediate protection and intervention in many southern states.

Moreover, the Act suspended literacy tests and other methods of disenfranchising blacks in covered areas (Bott 1990). It was automatically assumed that if the voting and registration levels were substandard, then the tests used to screen voters must be discriminatory. Federal dictate usurped state statute, which previously had prevailed in such areas as elections. Discrimination was assumed with suspect voting and registration levels.

This Act involved the federal government, especially the executive branch, in the affairs of the states more than did the past reforms. The Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and
1964 were not nearly as stringent and required less of executive agencies. In contrast, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 designated specific federal remedies for below normal voting and registration levels. If those levels were under 50%, federal examiners, civil servants that were protected politically, could be sent to ensure access to registration and voting (Bott 1990). There were not enough federal examiners to be sent to all jurisdictions, but the threat of their arrival spurred some covered areas to follow the federal guidelines. Moreover, the existence of federal examiners also coincided with concerted and successful ventures on the part of civil rights groups to register blacks (Ball, Krane and Lauth 1982). The groups were successful in part because of their own hard work, but the atmosphere created by the 1965 Voting Rights Act was more favorable for their toil. They had greater backing, both politically and legally. Undoubtedly the federal presence altered the environment for registration and voting rights.

In addition to assailing the current practices, the Act sought to curtail future machinations to sidestep the law. Certain areas had been extremely creative in producing laws and practices that may not have violated the letter of the law but certainly violated its spirit. The authors of the bill did not want new devices to serve the same function as the recently suspended restrictions. Thus covered jurisdictions had to "preclear" changes and standards that could affect the
right to vote (Ball, Krane, and Lauth 1982). For example, localities could not make a previously elective position into an appointive position. Many had tried this path when it became apparent that they could no longer control the election. Or several areas attempted to dilute the black vote through gerrymandering and types of election, e.g., at-large elections. Such changes were generally denied by the presiding authority.

The preclearance had to be submitted to either the Justice Department or the Federal Court for the District of Columbia. Southern Federal Courts were not allowed to receive preclearance requests. Clearly the writers did not trust those that staffed the federal courts in the South; therefore, they prevented them from interpreting and enforcing the Act (Thernstrom 1987). Thus in an amazing step, the Act sought to protect against future attempts at disenfranchisement and to remove the power of review from southern courts. Oversight was further taken away from the locality and transferred to Washington, D.C.

The success of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is due also to decisions of the Supreme Court. As expected, southern states challenged the constitutionality of the law. It was immediately tested in South Carolina v. Katzenbach (1966). South Carolina argued that the law impinged on the reserved powers of the states and found certain states "guilty" without the benefit of due process. Moreover, elections had been
considered state domain, outside of an active federal presence. Opponents concluded that Congress had overstepped its bounds by dictating state law (Claude 1970).

Chief Justice Warren, rebutting such arguments, replied that Congress was producing appropriate legislation to guarantee rights under the Fifteenth Amendment. When states deny the right to vote based on race, Congress may take necessary steps to legislate protections. Enforcement of constitutional rights must come before contrary state laws. Therefore, Congress is acting in a proper manner to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment (Claude 1970). Thus the Court signalled that constitutional rights could be guaranteed through federal action and intervention, states rights notwithstanding.

The Supreme Court decided another case in 1966 that extended protection of voting rights to state and local elections. The Twenty-Fourth Amendment, ratified in 1964, banned the use of poll taxes in federal elections. In a 1966 case, *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, the Supreme Court expanded that standard to state and local elections. They decided that the poll tax was unconstitutional for all elections, not simply those that selected federal officials (Claude 1970).

By 1970 significant reforms had occurred to protect the right to vote, but the task was not yet complete. Congress debated whether to extend the provisions of the 1965 Voting
Rights Act or pursue a different strategy. The Administration submitted its own version designed to remove the stigma attached to the South and reduce the federal influence in enforcement. Congress adopted several provisions that were suggested by the Administration, but made the Act stronger than the Administration intended. The Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970 further nationalized and standardized elections. They banned literacy tests completely, not just in covered areas, for local, state and federal elections. Therefore, even if voting levels were not substandard, Congress decided that the literacy test was arbitrary and could be used to disenfranchise potential voters (Claude 1974).

The Voting Rights Act Amendments eliminated residency requirements for voting in the presidential election, but the amendment allowed a thirty-day period before the election in which the state could close registration books and check for fraud. This would eliminate long residency requirements as prerequisites for voting and set thirty days as a reasonable, maximum period of time. The renewal also directed the states to allow absentee balloting for presidential elections. Finally, in a truly expansive fashion, Congress ordered that the voting age for all elections, local, state, and federal, be lowered to 18.

The states again challenged this federal directive for voting practices. In Oregon v. Mitchell (1970), the Supreme
Court upheld almost all of the amendments. It affirmed the ban on residency requirements and literacy tests, as well as supported the thirty-day closing date and opportunity for absentee voting. On the issue of the 18-year-old vote, the Court divided. It ruled that Congress could lower the voting age for federal elections but could not do the same for state and local elections (Blumstein 1974).

By the spring of 1971, Congress had drafted the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to lower the voting age to 18 for all elections. By the summer of the same year enough states had ratified the proposal to make it part of the Constitution. Therefore, what Congress did not achieve by legislative effort was instead accomplished by constitutional change.

A partner in this reform movement was the Supreme Court. The Court had indicated that it was receptive to bids to expand the franchise. In Dunn v. Blumstein (1972), following the Voting Rights Act Amendments, Blumstein challenged state and local residency requirements. The state of Tennessee maintained a one year residency requirement to vote in state elections. Blumstein argued that the thirty-day limit should extend to state and local elections, not simply presidential elections. The Court agreed with Blumstein and ruled that all residency requirements are unconstitutional, thereby striking down differing requirements (Blumstein 1974). Thus the states and counties could not extend their requirements beyond the maximum, federal closing date of thirty days.
As a result of congressional legislation and Supreme Court rulings, the states were compelled to bring their laws in line with standards originally set for presidential elections, like the thirty-day closing date. Hence, in some instances the localities were directly ordered to change. When Congress altered the rules for presidential elections, the state and local elections were indirectly affected, too. The states had to decide if they would maintain dual lists for voting—one for federal and the other for state and local. For example, maintaining no provisions for absentee voting in state elections alongside absentee ballots for presidential elections would undoubtedly cause confusion. They would need to produce separate ballots, as well as determine that no one voted twice in a duplicate system. Moreover, maintaining records that reflected varying requirements would be very expensive. It is often difficult to maintain the current records with uniform standards. Different state and federal demands would be onerous and confusing. Therefore, it is understandable that states might change their laws to conform to and produce a single standard. Hence, an indirect, and possibly unintended, effect was the standardization of basic norms. Congress and the Supreme Court were determined in their efforts to ban the poll tax, for instance. But they probably did not plan to force states to provide more absentee balloting for state and local elections. That indirectly occurred in response to absentee
voting for president. Thus an administrative desire to keep requirements simple and consistent spurred state- and local-level changes.

In summary, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 began an era of vigorous protection against blatant attempts to keep certain groups from the polls. Discrimination based on race, color, or language became more difficult to perpetuate with the expansive federal protections. Obvious infractions received quicker responses, thereby altering the environment around registration books and the voting booth (Harris 1974). Thus the federal government attacked flagrant abuses and standardized voting to a large extent around the country. The more subtle forms of discrimination were addressed later on a state-by-state basis.

State Initiatives

As mentioned earlier, state laws governing registration and voting had reached some common standards by the early 1970s. The Voting Rights Act and Amendments forced states to discard some of the most restrictive barriers like literacy tests. Additionally, states sought to simplify their registration with uniform local, state and federal requirements. The result was a registration system with much less variation both within states and across states. In addition, the states began to experiment with new reforms in
order to increase the number registered and to ease the process of voting. They began fine tuning their systems to discover which mechanisms worked and which failed to have an effect.

In the process of reform, states had to cope with the advantages and drawbacks that accompany these changes. Proponents of reform sought to increase the number of participants by making the system more accessible. For example, a shorter closing date before an election gives citizens more time to register. This is particularly important because interest in the election increases as the election day nears. Thus proponents of reform want more relaxed standards so that more will be able to participate.

Some opponents to reforms fear for the integrity of the election. Using the above example, many states have not further reduced their closing date for fear of fraud. An earlier closing date allows more time to compile voter lists and check for duplications and possible fraud. As the closing date approaches election day, time for such procedures is compressed. If same-day registration is allowed, there is considerably less control over the lists and the people who register and vote on election day.

Others who oppose registration reforms have also used the threat of fraud to ward off another danger. Many politicians, particularly Republicans, fear that an increase in turnout is likely to remove them from office. Given that nonvoters are
more likely to be from lower socioeconomic groups, the mobilization of nonvoters would probably not benefit the Republican Party. Therefore, some politicians have opposed registration reforms under the guise of fraud when, in fact, they fear a surge of new, potentially hostile voters.

Certain states have more easily accommodated progressive voting systems, while other states have successfully blocked their introduction. Therefore, it is important to chart and compare different state systems and the nature and success of their reforms. It is also useful to determine whether certain reforms appealed to larger numbers of states while others were limited to a few.

Closing Date

Most states close registration before the election in order to verify the lists and provide the precincts with a final catalog of registered voters. The deadline for registration is referred to as the closing date. After the closing date, those that are not registered are shut out of the next election.

The length of this period should have an effect on the number and types of people who are registered. An earlier closing date will disenfranchise recent residents and those who become interested in the election later in the process. In contrast, a closing date closer to the election allows
citizens more time to become interested in the election and therefore register. It also permits voters who move immediately before elections to vote in their new location.

In order to understand closing dates, it is necessary to include a discussion of residency requirements. Closing dates have been associated with residency requirements because they interact in affecting who is eligible to register and vote. For example, if a state has a one year residency requirement and its registration closes sixty days before the election, then the closing date might as well be one year for all the new residents who arrive before the sixty-day mark. In the mid 1960s, two states required the resident to live in the state for two years, thirty-six required one year, and twelve states required six months of residency in the state (Harris 1964). Those who moved to a new state in that time period lost their right to vote in many instances.

As mentioned above, the Supreme Court concluded that long residency requirements were unconstitutional. In Oregon v. Mitchell (1970) they upheld the thirty-day closing date for federal elections, and in Dunn v. Blumstein (1972) they extended that to state and local elections. These rulings struck down the residency requirements and created thirty days as the outer limit on residency requirements and closing dates. (Later the Court allowed Arizona to keep its 50-day closing limit.) As a result, after these cases the emphasis
on voter access moved to closing dates instead of residency requirements.

The greatest changes in registration deadlines resulted from the Supreme Court rulings in 1970 and 1972. Since then the average closing date has not decreased dramatically, but a few states have adopted highly facilitative systems. By 1991, three states, Maine, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, allowed election day registration. (North Dakota has no registration.) Utah residents can register up to five days before the election, while Alabama, Idaho (with county clerk), Idaho, Nebraska, New Hampshire, and Oklahoma residents can register up to ten days before the election (Center for Policy Alternatives 1991; Smolka 1990). These states have some of the highest levels of voter turnout, but it is unclear if this is due to their permissive registration laws or other factors.

Minnesota switched to election day registration in 1973, while Wisconsin added it three years later in 1976. Richard Smolka (1977) analyzed both states and their implementation of election day registration for the 1976 presidential election. Although election day registration was administratively challenging, it yielded the expected results in registration and turnout. In Minnesota, 22.9% of voters registered on election day, albeit many were not new voters. Turnout for the presidential election increased 3.3 percentage points from turnout for the 1972 presidential election. In Wisconsin, 10% of voters registered on election day, while turnout for the
presidential election increased 3.5 percentage points from turnout for the 1972 election.

On the surface these numbers do not appear dramatic. But placed in the proper context, they are much more suggestive. Minnesota and Wisconsin already had high levels of voter turnout before they instituted election day registration. In addition, the average national turnout for the presidential election in 1976 declined from levels for the 1972 election. Thus the three percentage point gain must be compared against a benchmark of general decline elsewhere, thereby making the increase all the more unusual.

Despite the high turnout in same-day states, other states have not adopted election-day registration for their contests. In fact, Oregon allowed election-day registration for many years but repealed it between the 1984 and 1988 elections (Smolka 1988). The Ohio legislature passed such a provision in 1977, but the voters later rejected it (Ruth 1977). The fear of fraud may weigh too heavily for states to attempt such a reform. Election-day registration allows considerably less control over eligibility of voters, in addition to the added administrative burden on election day. As a result, election-day registration does not appear desirable to most states.

Thus a handful of states have changed their laws to allow registration much closer to election day, with three allowing election-day registration. Over the last twenty years only a slight decline in average closing dates has occurred (Bauer
and Garcia 1986). The most common norm is to close registration thirty days before an election, the maximum time allowed, except in Arizona. Movements to reduce the closing dates have not generated widespread support and backing. Instead, states prefer to keep an interval between the closing of registration books and election day.

**Mail Registration**

The opportunity to register absentee instead of in-person should be a boon to electoral reform advocates. The registrant is not confined by distance, hours of operation, or other terms of convenience. Instead, the applicant can complete the form in privacy and due time and simply mail it to the board of elections, provided it is in advance of the registration deadline. Some states preprint the return address and even provide the postage. Moreover, mail registration offers a tool for civic groups to conduct voter registration drives. Dissemination of postcard applications is an easy way to cultivate voters.

Mail registration has been available for a long time, but the systems that have developed in the last twenty years are a breed apart from earlier programs. The purpose of current policies is to make mail registration universally available and convenient year round, thereby minimizing some of the pre-election crunch in applications (Peters, Martin, and Kyle,
eds. 1986). Typically, postcards are available through civic groups and public facilities such as libraries, so that applicants can pick up forms when needed. In contrast, older mail registration systems often required special, written requests for a mail application. The registrant might even need to show valid reason, such as illness or disability. The old systems did not encourage citizens to register by mail; the process was laborious and inconvenient.

In 1941 Texas began mail registration, but, as noted above, the older systems required more from voters. Texas did not encourage the use of mail registration or make it simple to employ. Applicants also needed to pay poll taxes, making mail registration even more unattractive. In 1971 Texas changed to a system more facilitative to voters, although still not as simple as some of the other states (Young and Company 1977).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s states began to adopt mail registration on a larger scale. Two states, Kentucky and Minnesota, employed mail registration because they were adopting new systems that required mass access to the registration process. In 1973 Kentucky purged its registration lists to create a centralized, statewide system. Therefore, it had to start from scratch and reregister every voter with similar information and requirements. Moreover, after Kentucky created its new list of voters, it again
reduced the opportunities for mail registration (Young and Company 1977).

In 1974 Minnesota added mail registration to cope with the statewide requirements for registration passed earlier. Previously, the rural areas of Minnesota did not require voter registration. Thus Minnesota needed an efficient system of registering all of these previously unregistered voters. However, once implemented, they found that the recent availability of election-day registration acted to depress mail registration (Smolka 1975; Young and Company 1977). Nonetheless, Minnesota retained and expanded its generous mail registration provisions. Hence, Kentucky and Minnesota were inclined to adopt mail registration in order to convert their systems to modern, statewide requirements.

In 1974 New Jersey and Maryland also added mail registration opportunities, which would eventually be available statewide. These systems were the more modern and accessible models that offered mail registration to all (Smolka 1976). By the 1976 presidential election, sixteen states offered general mail registration (Smolka 1978). Nonetheless, after the initial burst of enthusiasm, the adoption and growth of mail systems became more modest. By the presidential election of 1984, 19 states allowed mail registration for anyone (League of Women Voters 1984; Smolka 1986). By the 1988 presidential election, 23 states allowed mail registration without reason or cause (League of Women
Voters 1988; Smolka 1990). And, by 1990, that number had grown to 25 (Cooper, Christe, and Nagai, eds. 1991; League of Women Voters 1990).1

Mail registration has proven to be more popular and less feared by leaders and administrators than they originally expected. Its appeal to election officials is its year-around nature. It spreads out registration and reduces some of the rush before election time. Thus officials have become more willing to adopt it. The steady increase in number of states providing mail registration indicates that it is one of the best-received reforms, which is why the provision for mail registration in the National Voter Registration Act was not controversial.

Agency-Based Registration

Agency-based registration is designed to allow a particular organization to use its offices to register voters. For example, federal, agency-based registration would put these services in federal offices and perhaps offices that received federal money. This would also be the case for state, county, and city governments. But this need not be limited to governmental agencies.

1 In general I followed the sources cited in determining which states provided mail registration. But in a few instances I modified their classifications when they conflicted with statute.
The personnel in these agencies can either be staff-active or passive in registering people, depending on the guidelines from the organization. A staff-active form of agency registration allows workers to ask the clientele if they are registered, and, if not, would they like to register to vote. The employees can answer questions about registration, offer the forms, and otherwise facilitate registration. They might also forward completed forms to the appropriate board of elections. A passive style of agency registration simply makes the applications available in the office, for example, on a table. The employees are not allowed to point out the registration forms or ask if the client is registered or would like to be registered. The agency merely offers accessibility to forms, not advice and initiative.

For those states that have adopted agency registration, the debate is over the type of agency that will provide forms.2 One form of agency-based registration is motor-voter registration. When citizens renew their licenses or car registrations, they also have the opportunity to register to vote. This has the potential to register a large percentage of the population, but the poor will be disproportionately

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2For the purposes of this research, I am interested in state-level initiatives because the unit of analysis is the state. Therefore, while recognizing that other forms of agency registration exist and are potentially influential, such as city and county agency registration, this section will cover only state agency registration.
missed because fewer of them drive (Piven and Cloward 1988). Thus if this is the only form of agency registration, the poor, who already are least likely to be registered, will not all be reached through this mechanism.

As a result of such fears, agency-based registration extends to other agencies in certain states. Proponents have sought to include welfare offices, unemployment offices, and other social service agencies that reach the neediest segments of societies. Although included in many states, these efforts have met with stiff political opposition. Some Republicans fear that these agencies will register a large number of people who will vote Democratic, while some Democratic incumbents fear a large number of new voters in their jurisdiction, especially if the incumbent's position is vulnerable. However, many of their fears have been allayed after initial experiments have not demonstrated such trends (Rosenfield 1986).

Agency registration began most visibly through Michigan's driver's license stations in 1975. The motor-voter registration law was passed with widespread support of both parties, the governor, and both houses of the Michigan legislature. This path-breaking legislation provided greater convenience to voters and eased the burdens of election officials. Voters could update their registration or newly register when they renewed their licenses, which is necessary every two to four years. The license agency was required to
forward their registration to the appropriate jurisdiction. Moreover, the regular hours of the license stations offered more opportunities than the branch offices of voter registration, which in some smaller communities kept limited hours of business (Austin 1986).

The motor-voter program also benefitted election officials. Regular registration throughout the year was much easier to handle than last minute rushes. By using the driver's license renewal, the stream of voter registration was steadier, therefore easier to verify. Additionally, the officials could use the license lists to validate the registration lists, making it easier to catch duplication and potential fraud. Thus it was in the interests of election officials to standardize and regulate voter registration through this particular agency (Austin 1986).

After Michigan's initial success, there has been an increase in number of states adopting motor-voter registration, although the implementation has been inconsistent. By 1990 seven states had motor-voter programs that were moderately or actively implemented. At least seven others had programs that were executed poorly or not at all.³ But several of those states, in addition to a few new states, were exploring ways to better activate and utilize the programs. It has proven to be popular enough that none of the

³ Personal communication with Jo-Anne Chasnow, National Associate Director, and Susan Kotcher, Senior Program Associate, of 100% Vote/Human SERVE, June 1, 1992.
states that have adopted motor-voter registration has seriously considered withdrawing it (Smolka 1990).

A broader, agency-based registration did not have such an easy start. Human SERVE began a concerted advocacy of agency-based registration in 1983. They directed their efforts at both non-profit agencies and state and local agencies. In the states, they pressured four Democratic governors who had won in 1982 with considerable support from the underprivileged: Anaya in New Mexico, Celeste in Ohio, Cuomo in New York, and White in Texas. "Between March and September 1984, Human SERVE did succeed in obtaining these four gubernatorial executive orders, and two others. The governors of Texas, Ohio, New York, and Montana directed that voter registration services be established in all state agencies, and the governors of New Mexico and West Virginia ordered that voter registration be established in state human service agencies" (Piven and Cloward 1988, 227).

Given the nature of the issue, their orders met political and legal opposition. The Governor of New Mexico rescinded his order under political pressure from both parties and the state attorney general. The New York and Ohio orders survived court challenges (the Ohio challenge was withdrawn). But governors and proponents of agency registration faced federal pressure, too. The Reagan Administration strongly opposed the action in 1984, fearing for the November election. Therefore, it threatened that state agencies that received federal grants
may be violating the Hatch Act by involving themselves in political activity. This deterred agency-based registration in Texas and frightened other states from proposing it. Neither Montana nor West Virginia put it to practical use (Piven and Cloward 1988).

Despite these setbacks other states have added agency registration, but once again the implementation has been inconsistent. At this point it is difficult to evaluate various state programs and assess degree of success. With time states may develop better systems and accurate measures of the effects of their systems. But agency registration is still in the earliest stages of maturation. Thus considering both motor-voter and agency-based registration, the states' role in registering voters has experienced a gradual transformation for a considerable number of states. Since 1975 when Michigan added voter registration through driver’s license stations, many of the states have assumed more responsibility in registering their citizens.

Motor-voter registration has proven be much more popular than the broader, agency-based registration. But both were experiencing increases in the number of states adopting them. However, the National Voter Registration Act requires motor-voter registration and some forms of agency registration in all states beginning in 1995, thereby hastening what had been a slow process of acceptance.
Other Registration Practices

There are several other trends in registration that deserve a closer scrutiny than is possible here. The use of deputy registrars has expanded in many states, with fewer requirements demanded of the registrar. In many areas the only requirement is that registrars are to be registered voters. However, in other areas they face more burdensome demands. Some deputy registrars are required to receive extensive training, while others have limited jurisdiction. But more states are allowing any registered voter to become a deputy registrar (Peters, Martin, and Kyle, eds. 1986; Smolka 1986).

The movement toward statewide computerization and centralization of voting records also serves many purposes. It keeps registration lists cleaner and allows processing of change of address notices more easily. It allows registration to be linked to other relevant databases in the state, i.e., motor-vehicle records. Fraud is more difficult when the lists are up-to-date and duplicates are eliminated. By 1991, 19 states had such systems, with two more to be in place by 1993 (Cooper, Christie, and Nagai, eds. 1991). In addition to fraud prevention, cleaner lists provide more cost-effective get-out-the-vote efforts. Excess mailing is eliminated because groups have better information. A centralized system offers a clearer picture of the status of registration in the state.
Finally, the purging of registered voters deserves closer attention. A more frequent purge can unjustly eliminate voters. Those states that purge for failure to vote in two years are probably deleting registrants who might not be removed with a four-year purge. Moreover, a few states still do not notify voters that they are being purged for failure to vote (League of Women Voters 1988). Thus this provision has the potential to decrease registration.

In piecemeal fashion, most states have reformed their procedures. Some revisions became more attractive after other states experimented with them and demonstrated that they were not riddled with fraud. Moreover, reforms have not been simply the prerogative of the legislatures. Executives also have harnessed their authority over state agencies to issue orders for agency-based registration, for example. As a result, many states have reconsidered their roles in the registration and voting process and made the system more facilitative to the citizen.

Ohio as a Microcosm

Ohio and its registration laws provide a useful illustration of the changes over the last twenty years. Like most states, Ohio has relaxed its requirements and made registration appreciably easier, but not with all of the provisions described above. On one hand, Ohio has very
progressive conditions for agency, and specifically, motor-voter registration. It allows mail registration for everyone and allows any registered voter to be a deputy registrar. On the other hand, it closes its registration books thirty days before the election, the maximum time allowed. It also does not provide absentee voting for all registered voters without valid reason. Therefore, Ohio is neither the most progressive state nor the most restrictive in terms of access to the ballot.

Like many states in the early 1970s, Ohio required lengthy residency requirements before citizens could qualify to vote. Applicants had to live in Ohio six months before they received that right. But due to the court case Dunn v. Blumstein, the Supreme Court forced such states to reduce it to, at most, thirty days. By 1975 Ohio had adjusted its state residency requirement to thirty days (Ohio Revised Code 3503.01).

Although it has received little attention in terms of increasing turnout, accessibility for the disabled improved considerably in this period. In 1976, a new Ohio statute dictated terms to the local boards of elections concerning their registration facilities. By November 1, 1980, all registration facilities were supposed to be accessible to the "handicapped" (Ohio Revised Code 3503.12). The boards of elections were given four years to make the structural changes
necessary to handle such equipment as wheelchairs and to ensure that other physical barriers were eliminated.

In terms of registration requirements, as recently as the late 1960s, Ohio belonged to a handful of midwestern states that did not demand registration in the rural areas. Every city with 16,000 or more people had to use voter registration. Those cities with less than 16,000 could choose whether or not they wanted to use such a system. But by 1977 the state code mandated uniform requirements: all persons participating in elections and referenda or signing petitions had to be registered (Ohio Revised Code 3503.06). As several states previously had done, Ohio joined the vast majority that required statewide registration, urban and rural.

Up until 1977, Ohio had an annual checkup on registration. The board of elections determined which areas needed closer scrutiny of their registration lists. In those areas the lists were given to the police to verify residence (Ohio Revised Code 3503.20). It is unclear how well this was implemented or whether it was exercised in a discriminatory fashion. Nonetheless, it was repealed in 1977.

Several other significant revisions in registration practices also occurred in 1977. All of these changes were part of a large, voter registration bill passed through the Ohio legislature with the support of the Democratic Party and organized labor. The Ohio bill coincided with attempts by President Carter to extend registration rights. The Ohio bill
proposed permanent registration, statewide registration, mail registration, motor-voter registration, deputy registration, and instant or election-day registration. The Republican governor line-item vetoed permanent registration, motor-voter registration and election-day registration (Associated Press 1977). But the Democrats had sizeable enough majorities to override his vetoes.

Additionally, the Democrats attached the necessary funds to implement the bill, thereby making it an appropriations bill. As a result, it was not subject to voters' referendum because the Ohio Constitution prohibits that on appropriations measures (Jordon 1977). In response, opponents mounted their challenge by placing a constitutional amendment on the ballot in the November election. The amendment called for at least a thirty-day closing date before the election and reregistration for citizens who had not voted in four years. If successful, these provisions would have eliminated the recently passed instant registration and permanent registration, replacing the latter with a four-year purge. The other reforms were not challenged.

In the fall, opponents of election-day registration used fear of fraud as their theme. The voters responded by passing the constitutional amendment placing stricter limits back on registration (Ruth 1977). Therefore, any future attempts to change the purge law or closing date are less likely now that they are part of the Ohio Constitution.
Before this legislation, voters who needed to register or change their registration could do so only at the "office of the board of elections at any time such office is open" (Ohio Revised Code 3503.11). Therefore, voters were restricted by the location and hours of operation of the office. The new law allowed citizens to apply "by mail, by telephone, in person, or through another person, for registration forms.." (Ohio Revised Code 3503.11). They then could return the completed form by mail, thereby greatly easing the process of registration. Moreover, the law did not require special circumstances for mail registration, unlike the earlier brands of mail registration.

Following Michigan's lead, Ohio took its first step toward agency registration by instituting motor-voter provisions among the other initiatives in 1977. When residents apply for licenses they also may register to vote. Employees are required to ask clients if they are registered and, if not, would they like to complete an application. The motor vehicles bureau has the responsibility of forwarding the completed forms to the appropriate boards of elections (Ohio Revised Code 3503.11). Thus Ohio adopted a staff-active form of motor-voter registration before most states even considered such an approach, although the implementation is less than ideal.

In an attempt to register more of its youth, in 1983 Ohio developed voter registration in high schools and vocational
schools, too. The local board of elections is required to supply each school with a registrar for a sufficient number of hours and days. In advance of this visit, students must be notified with an announcement explaining the purpose and location of the registrar (Ohio Revised Code 3503.10). This law coincided with other laws in the early 1980s making registration available in the schools. Georgia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma adopted variations on this theme (Smolka 1982).

In one of the more far-reaching changes, Governor Celeste issued an executive order to permit general, agency registration in July of 1984. With the strong backing of the Secretary of State, 500,000 forms were issued to state agencies and voter registration drives. Support materials, posters and information sheets accompanied the forms to explain the requirements and process. In the fall of 1984, agency registration was challenged, but when the opponents were satisfied with the nonpartisan nature of the order, they withdrew their dispute (Rosenfield 1986). The timing of Celeste's order put Ohio at the forefront in agency registration, with other states joining ranks in the following years.

Ohio's changing registration practices illustrate the liberalizing trend over this time period. Ohio has maintained its thirty-day closing period, but it has eased other requirements surrounding registration. Like many other states, it adopted the new style of mail registration that did
not require special cause to use it. Instead, its purpose was one of convenience. Ohio also was one of the first states to adopt motor-voter registration and then the more encompassing agency registration. It has adopted special provisions to reach the disabled and newly-eligible 18-year olds. Like most other states, Ohio has embarked on an incremental path of reform. It has tried to balance the integrity of the election against attempts to enfranchise and involve a larger segment of potential voters. Therefore, Ohio, like other states, has experimented with new rules and weighed the potential consequences. When fraud did not occur, opposition to the reforms dissipated.

Conclusions

The process surrounding the vote has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. First registration and voting underwent a standardization because of federal intervention. The 1965 Voting Rights Act demanded a minimum standard of 50% registration or voting in the previous presidential election. If that standard was not met, the jurisdiction fell under coverage of the act. Potentially discriminatory tests and devices were suspended and future changes had to be precleared by the Justice Department or the U.S. Federal Court in the District of Columbia.
The 1970 Voting Rights Act Amendments expanded the prohibition of potentially discriminatory tests and devices to all states, thereby affecting laws in all areas of the country. The Amendments also required that states provide absentee balloting for the presidential election and banned residency requirements for the same election. But a 30-day closing date was allowed to compile and verify registration lists.

The Supreme Court actively participated in this process by validating Congress's role in protecting voting privileges and the executive branch's position in implementing them. But the Court also extended rights beyond those issued from the other branches.

By the early 1970s new influence from the federal government was declining, and initiatives from the states began to grow. Partly in response to federal requirements for presidential elections but also in response to internal demands, states began their own programs of reform. In incremental fashion, many states initiated modifications to their registration systems. Several states moved their closing date closer to election day; a few allowed election day registration. Several experimented with mail registration with many more following. And, finally, state agency registration had its start with motor vehicle licenses, later unfolding into other types of organizations.
These early attempts offered a model to other states considering revisions. For example, mail registration proved to be very popular, but agency-based registration met with much more resistance. But to a greater extent, states accepted more of the responsibility in registering their citizens. Many of the changes were client-oriented, designed for ease of potential voters. Moreover, the trend to ease requirements has continued.

The next task, therefore, is to characterize states according to their systems to determine how variations among them affect turnout. Presumably turnout should have increased as a result of registration and voting reforms both from the federal government, then from the state governments. Moreover, the variation in turnout among the states should have declined following the federalization of voting rights. The next chapter will test these expectations to determine if the reforms had the desired and expected effect. Following chapters will include other non-registration related factors that may have an impact on turnout. When both types of factors are taken together a better gauge of the determinants of turnout differences should emerge.
References


Chapter III

Aggregate Comparisons of Reforms and Turnout in the States

Except for the South, most states have experienced gradual declines in voting turnout at the same time that they have been relaxing their laws that govern the right to vote. As shown in Chapter Two, the late 1960s and early 1970s was a time of considerable change in registration and voting rights. For example, poll taxes and literacy tests were abolished; registration and residency requirements were eased; and residency requirements were reduced to parallel the closing dates.

Yet reforms did not end following the extraordinary federal actions. Following the reduction in closing date, several states embraced other reforms. In the mid 1970s numerous states adopted liberalized mail registration, marking the first general acceptance of this form of registration. The new mail registration did not require special circumstances, as had the older style. Universal accessibility, typically through postcards, greatly reduced the need for in-person registration. The widespread success of this reform has led to a steady increase in the number of states adopting such provisions.
In 1975 Michigan led the nation by introducing motor-voter registration, a particular component of agency-based registration. Michigan citizens could register to vote when they renewed or applied for their driver’s license, making registration much more convenient for the electors and the state. Multiple states have adopted passive programs while a handful have initiated aggressive motor-voter procedures. The broader reform of agency-based registration, however, has met with limited success. Although legally available in many states, the implementation has been spotty.

From these first reforms states have been experimenting with their laws, generally making it easier to register to vote. But not all states have adopted such changes. Some states, like Minnesota, have assumed a greater role in registering its residents while other states have done the bare minimum required by federal law. Thus after states converged toward an accepted federal norm, they then began innovating and thereby differentiating themselves from each other.

But despite the considerable federal and state reform described above, turnout has continued to decline. Presumably these institutional changes should have had a positive impact on turnout levels. Numerous scholars have linked registration and voting, demonstrating that once people make the effort to register they are highly likely to vote (Erikson 1981). Therefore, turnout should not have declined in the face of
reforms that make registration easier. Instead, if the burden of registration is made lighter, turnout should have increased. Because it did not, other factors must be interacting with or counteracting the reforms. Either the institutional changes had no effect on turnout, had differential effect on turnout, or the changes offset an even greater decline than the one which occurred.

These possibilities raise the question of whether the new state initiatives make a difference. Can we distinguish turnout in more and less restrictive states? Is variation in law reflected in the variance of the turnout? In order to better understand this phenomenon it is important to determine the relationship between registration reforms and changes in turnout levels.

**Overall Turnout Decline**

Across the last twenty years average turnout has declined despite the many countervailing forces. Presidential turnout suffered a large decline after the adoption of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment. The inclusion of a large group of people with no voting experience increased the voting age population with a group that was less likely to vote. Following the 1972 election, the decline in presidential turnout became more gradual but continued nonetheless (Table 1).
Using state-level data, I can compare turnout trends in both presidential elections and the lower-stimulus midterm congressional elections. However, many states also have gubernatorial elections at the midterm while a few have them during the presidential election. Some might argue that the gubernatorial elections would stimulate higher turnout, which might confound comparisons of turnout in midterm congressional elections. However, I am comparing turnout decline across a period in which most states did not change the timing of their gubernatorial elections. As a result, the gubernatorial elections should be a constant, having a similar effect on turnout for each state from election to election. Therefore, the relationship between electoral reform and trends in turnout should not be sensitive to gubernatorial elections at the midterm or presidential election, as long as they consistently occur at the same time.

The figures that I use for turnout are based on Census Bureau estimates of the voting age population and the percent casting ballots for presidential and congressional elections. Because the estimates for the voting age population include many who are ineligible to vote, for example, institutionalized and illegal aliens, turnout of the eligible population is slightly higher. Teixeira (1992) estimated that turnout in the 1988 presidential election was approximately four percentage points higher when the voting age population was adjusted for eligibility. However, even the adjusted figure is an estimate because no one is sure of the size of the ineligible population. Therefore, I use the Census estimates because they are the best available. If turnout figures are similarly inflated over this time period, the estimates are not problematic. But I recognize that in certain states, for example, Texas and California, the estimates may be less accurate due to higher numbers of illegal aliens.
For this and later comparisons I use a twenty-year period to study turnout changes. Because I am interested in testing the effects of the state-level changes that have occurred since the early 1970s, I want to relate state-level turnout to state-level reforms. The federal changes in the 1960s should have created a standard or baseline from which to compare the states. The federal standard creates an ideal natural experiment because it stimulated both homogenization and quasi-innovation in state laws. By using 1968 and 1970 as starting points, I have a measure of turnout before the subsequent state reforms of interest.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nonsouth</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nonsouth</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>49.8</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>41.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>38.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As displayed in Table 1, turnout in the midterm congressional elections also has declined, but the change has not been monotonic. Turnout dropped precipitously between the
1970 and 1974 elections after the inclusion of younger voters. It dropped further in 1976, rebounded upward in 1982, then resumed the downward trend. Therefore, turnout in the midterm as well as the presidential elections has declined on average over the last twenty years.

In addition, both the South and the nonsouth have endured turnout declines in presidential elections. The South has had an average decline of -.23. Thus for every presidential election since 1968, the South has lost an average of a quarter of a percentage point in participation. The decline for the nonsouth, however, has been much steeper. Nonsouthern presidential turnout has an average slope of -.94; thus in every election the nonsouth loses an average of slightly less than a percentage point.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonsouth</td>
<td>-.94</td>
<td>-.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>+.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Turnout in the off-year congressional elections displays very different trends for the South and the nonsouth. From 1970 to 1990 the South experienced an average increase in turnout of .1 percentage points in midterm elections. Given
the overall turnout decline, the increase for midterm elections is surprising. Perhaps more competitive congressional races during this period in the South caused a turnout increase in the midterm, whereas the South already was competitive at the presidential level. In contrast, nonsouthern midterm turnout displays a similar change in degree and direction as nonsouthern presidential turnout. From 1970 to 1990 the nonsouth had an average turnout change of -.80, just slightly less than the presidential change.

Thus turnout has declined generally for all categories except for southern states in the midterm congressional elections. The average change reveals the broader trend but may mask individual variation for certain states. For example, some states, particularly southern states, may have lost much less than average, while other states lost more. If certain states lost a greater portion of their voters than others, some distinction may exist between those groups of states. Discovering that distinction may help to explain turnout change, as well as the effects of the reforms. Following is the slope of the change in turnout for the fifty states (Table 3).

5Several of the states, as indicated with an asterisk, have too few cases to reliably compare their slopes. These states do not collect turnout figures for uncontested House seats. As a result, their turnout figures are artificially low because of the absence of any turnout in the uncontested district. Therefore, if I use only the elections with complete data, in some of the states I am limited to two or three elections to compute the slope.
## Table 3.

Change in Turnout for Presidential and Midterm Congressional Elections by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>-1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>2.43*</td>
<td>New Hamp.</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>-1.47</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>-1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>-.89</td>
<td>-.63</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>-1.67</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>-1.56</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>-1.63</td>
<td>-1.27</td>
<td>N. Carolina</td>
<td>-.60</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>-.68</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>N. Dakota</td>
<td>-.88</td>
<td>-.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>-.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>-.37</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
<td>.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-.52</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>-1.46</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
<td>Penn.</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>-1.66</td>
<td>R.I.</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
<td>-.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>-.93</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>S. Carolina</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>-.91</td>
<td>-.87</td>
<td>S. Dakota</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
<td>-.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>-1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>1.32*</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
<td>-2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.47</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>-.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass.</td>
<td>-.92</td>
<td>-.84</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>-.89</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>-.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>W. Virginia</td>
<td>-2.28</td>
<td>-1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>-1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>-.70</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>-.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Insufficient number of cases.

As illustrated in Table 3, significant disparities in turnout change occur between states. Several states, primarily southern and border states, demonstrate increases in turnout despite the overall level of decline. It is likely that these states are benefitting from more active party competition as well as the easing of some of the most restrictive voting and registration laws on the books. Additionally, the South has become more like other parts of the country socially and economically. Thus higher levels of income and education should lead to higher levels of turnout. The systemic data used in this chapter cannot support such analysis, but the findings are consistent with other works that offer such explanations (Milbrath 1971). Therefore, given the variation in turnout decline, I am interested in determining if potential explanations coincide with registration differences.
### Southern States: Slope of Turnout Change Across Last Twenty Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>.30 Arkansas*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>.14 Louisiana*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>.07 N. Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>-.17 Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>-.18 Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>-.18 Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>-.34 Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>-.42 Florida*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Carolina</td>
<td>-.48 S. Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Carolina</td>
<td>-.60 Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>-.68 Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1.32</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Insufficient number of cases.


Among the southern states listed in Table 4, all but Tennessee have turnout changes that are higher than the nonsouthern average in the midterm congressional elections. Not counting those states with too few cases, seven states experience turnout increases over the twenty-year period. In the presidential elections, all of the southern states experienced turnout change that was higher than the nonsouthern average for this same period. Thus the change in turnout is clearly different for southern states than for nonsouthern states. However, southern states have experienced
turnout increases because they are beginning to approach nonsouthern turnout levels, not because they are exceeding nonsouthern turnout levels.

Even after removing the anomalous southern states, considerable differences remain among the nonsouthern states. Some experience declines that are considerably above the average while others experience only slight changes over this time period. Thus among the nonsouthern states an unlikely amount of difference persists in the levels of declining turnout.

Such state-level variation warrants an analysis at the same level of the nonsouthern states. In order to do this, in the next section I will compare turnout at the state level to determine if variations coincide with particular groupings or conspicuous categories of the states. If the new registration rules do indeed increase the likelihood of voting, states with the new provisions should have lost fewer than average voters.

Effects of the 1972 Changes

Since the early 1970s states have been changing their rules concerning registration. Previously some states had residency requirements of up to two years to participate in certain elections. The Voting Rights Act Amendments passed by Congress in 1970 eliminated residency requirements for the presidential election, but the amendment allowed a thirty-day
period before the election in which the state could close registration books and check for fraud. In *Dunn v. Blumstein* (1972), following the Voting Rights Act Amendments, the Supreme Court ruled that all residency requirements, state and local included, were unconstitutional, thereby striking down differing requirements (Blumstein 1974).

These requirements forced states to change the closing deadline for registration. Most states moved to a thirty-day closing date, while others used the opportunity to further reduce the deadline for registration. (Arizona was allowed to maintain a 50-day closing period, which was reduced to 29 in 1990.) After the initial upheaval of change, average closing dates would decline only slightly across the next two decades.

Despite the differences in state-initiated registration laws, the states became much more similar than before. As shown in Chapter Two, the registration and voting process experienced an intense nationalization or federalization of standards. Previously states had more control over the internal procedures of conducting elections. But several significant congressional and Supreme Court actions severely restricted the states' flexibility. As a result, the most egregious violations of registration and voting rights have declined. Thus I would expect that the variation in turnout that resulted from the differences would decline, also. The reforms in the 1960s and the standardization of the residency requirement should have diminished the interstate differences
in turnout. In Table 5, I test this hypothesis by obtaining the interstate standard deviations for turnout.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Presidential</th>
<th></th>
<th>Congressional</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Nonsouth</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

♦For midterm elections only eight of the eleven southern states are used due to the incomplete data.

When the South and nonsouth are combined, I expect that the variation over time would tend to decline because southern turnout loses its uniqueness and approaches nonsouthern turnout levels. For presidential elections this appears to be the case. The standard deviation for turnout declines almost two points over the twenty-year period. This is consistent with the findings that the upper levels of nonsouthern turnout have decreased at the same time that the lower levels of southern turnout have increased.
The decline in variation for all states is not quite as clear for midterm congressional elections as it is for presidential elections. The standard deviation for 1990 is less than that for 1970, but it is more than that in 1978, 1982, and 1986. There appears to be a slight decline over time, but the trend is not as consistent.

In presidential elections, nonsouthern states also have become more similar. The standard deviation declines over a point across the twenty-year period, although not monotonically. But congressional elections exhibit the opposite trend. The variation in nonsouthern turnout actually increases over time. For some reason nonsouthern states have diverged from each other during the off-year congressional elections. However, if midterm participants are more committed voters, their turnout levels might be less instead of more susceptible to registration changes.

The South poses mixed results. The standard deviation appears to increase across time in the presidential elections, while it fluctuates in the midterm elections. Although neither tendency is clear, the South exhibits the least variation in turnout of all categories.

When the southern and nonsouthern states were combined, I had expected a convergence over time. The decline in turnout variance is consistent with our knowledge of regional politics. But the nonsouthern trends are more perplexing. The decline in variance for presidential elections indicates
some merging for states with less obvious deviations. But the contrary trend for congressional elections confounds a legal-institutional explanation. Turnout levels should have converged in the midterm elections, too, if the registration systems became more alike. However, this difference may suggest a disparity between midterm and presidential voters in their ability to withstand different registration costs.

Special Provisions at the State Level

In the previous section I was interested in similarities or the reduction of differences due to federal requirements that standardized voting rights. In this section I will explore differences due to state-initiated reforms. In particular, I will focus on the states that provide easier registration. I wish to test if they, as a group, exhibit distinctive turnout levels in comparison with the rest. If turnout is affected by the registration laws, those states with certain reforms might not suffer the same level of decline as those without reforms.

I will first look at the various reforms and their relationship to state-level turnout without controls. However, because of the secular decline in turnout during this time period, the difference from the mean of nonsouthern turnout was used instead of absolute turnout. The difference from the mean illustrates which categories declined more than
average and which categories declined less than average. Those distinctions might be obscured in a figure in which all groups had negative or near negative slopes. Therefore, I am interested in the position of a state or group of states relative to the mean or remaining states.

After comparing the first-order effects of these changes, I will add state-level control variables for a multivariate analysis in the last section. State-level explanations are, of course, still incomplete. In later chapters I will compare turnout at the individual level across different systems. But the state-level differences first must be explored to determine why states have experienced widely varying levels of change and if those differences are associated with registration rules.

Variables of Interest

Closing date. How many days before the general election is registration closed? Presumably, longer closing dates will exclude those that become interested immediately before the election; whereas shorter closing dates allow for those who just became interested to become eligible. Closing dates range from zero to fifty. A few states allow registration the same day of election while Arizona, until 1990, required registration fifty days in advance. Most states, however, cluster around a thirty-day closing mark (See Appendix A.)
Motor-voter registration. Does the state register people in its motor vehicle offices? This variable is differentiated by active and less-than-active implementation (See Appendix A). I expect that states that actively register citizens when they come to the offices would have higher levels of registration and thereby higher levels of turnout.

Mail registration. Does the state offer universal mail registration without cause? If the state requires special circumstances or if the forms are not reasonably available, the state is not classified as a mail-registration state. I expect that those states with mail registration would register more people and therefore have higher turnout than those without mail registration (Appendix A).

Purge period. How often do states purge their lists for nonvoting? Although states have legitimate reasons for maintaining accurate lists, states that purge often may eliminate registered voters. Some states purge as often as every two years while other states never purge for nonvoting, although they often verify the lists. Many groups have suggested four years as a reasonable time period.

South. A dummy variable is added for the South. Because of a combination of several factors, southern turnout has approached turnout levels in other areas of the country. But

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6Results from analyses involving the purge period were not fruitful. Therefore, it is not included in the following section but is included in the multivariate analysis in the latter part of the chapter.
because southern turnout was previously so low, it has increased or remained the same while the rest of the country was suffering a turnout decline. Thus longitudinal comparisons of turnout change are confounded by the southern states, but more recent cross-sectional studies can include the South.

Unit of analysis. Each state is treated as an equal unit because I am interested in the effects of the individual state’s laws on its turnout. Therefore, when I compute averages for a group of states they are not weighted by population. Each state is a unique system. The ideal dependent variable would be registration level in each state. But because states run their own programs, some states have more inflated registration rolls than others. Thus comparing registration levels is even more problematic than comparing turnout. The underlying assumption of this analysis is that if people are able to register they will be more likely to vote. Therefore, ease of registration should translate into higher turnout. It is not a perfect measure, but it is the best available.

Years of Analysis. I selected the years 1968 and 1970 to start the comparisons for presidential and midterm elections, respectively. I want to avoid the large changes in the 1960s due to such provisions as the poll tax and literacy tests and instead capture the incremental, state-initiated changes in the 1970s and 1980s. I also want a measure that begins before
the residency changes, and, therefore, closing date changes that occur in the midst of the 1972 election. Unfortunately, the passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment in 1971 coincides with the residency changes; thus I am forced to take the initial measure with a slightly older electorate that is more likely to vote. The last measurements come from the 1988 presidential election and the 1990 congressional elections. These recent elections provide comparisons of the broadest range of reforms, particularly motor-voter registration. This provides both categories with six elections over a twenty-year span.

Closing Date

Since 1972 states have set their own closing date as long as it fell within federal standards. Most states kept their closing dates near the thirty-day standard, but many others reduced theirs to a period closer to the election. In terms of closing date, I first will compare turnout levels of those states that adopted same-day registration. All of these states began same-day registration in the early and mid-1970s, providing a longer period to study its effects. I would expect that these states, more that any other group, would lose fewer voters over this time period. Same-day registration allows potential voters a longer time span to become interested and therefore register to vote. Hence,
same-day registration may be able to counteract some of the
effects of other variables such as lower political interest
and party identification, although such conjectures are only
tentative.

Figure 1 illustrates turnout before and after
implementation of same-day registration compared to the
nonsouthern mean. All four of the states adopted same-day
registration on a statewide basis in the mid-1970s. (See
Appendix A for the specific years for which the laws were in
effect.) The first election year that the law was effective
is indicated by T=0. The following election, presidential or
midterm, is designated as T+1. In this manner the states are
standardized and therefore comparable.

Both Maine and Oregon demonstrated turnout increases
relative to the mean. Maine showed a clear and sharp
improvement after using same-day registration, moving to
almost eight percentage points above the mean. Oregon also
showed improvement, even with the slight dip that occurred two
elections following implementation.

Minnesota’s turnout relative to the mean declined the
first year of implementation but then jumped above previous
levels. The drop during the first election of implementation
might also be explained by Minnesota’s shift to statewide
registration that election. Previously, certain areas did not
maintain registration systems, and the shift might have caused
some confusion that depressed turnout.
Wisconsin’s record was less clear. Turnout relative to the mean improved every other election (during the presidential elections). During the midterm election, (T+1 and T+3) however, Wisconsin’s turnout was and has continued to be much closer to the nonsouthern mean. Thus except for the midterm elections in Wisconsin, the states experience a general improvement relative to the mean after they introduce same-day registration (Figure 1).
A second way to study the effects of the closing date is to group states accordingly and compare their turnout to each other. Using this method, I can see if certain categories consistently have turnout below or above the mean. For this exercise states are divided into three groups. The first group involves the above states after they have adopted same-day registration. A second group of states represents the middle ground between the thirty-day closing date and same-day registration. This group, on average about ten states, provides a simple comparison between the two extremes. The third group includes those states that have closing dates of 21 days or more among nonsouthern states.

As illustrated in Figure 2, states with same-day registration have the highest average turnout among all three categories. The group of states with same-day registration have an average turnout of almost eight percentage points above the nonsouthern mean of turnout.

The next highest turnout belongs to those states that have reduced their closing dates but have not gone as far as offering same-day registration. This middle group has remained above the mean nonsouthern turnout, typically by almost three points, since 1972. The performance of this group also demonstrates that briefer deadlines for registration, short of same-day registration, coincide with higher than average turnout. Even moderate closing lengths parallel higher turnout levels.
Those states with the earliest deadlines for registration also demonstrate the lowest turnout with respect to the mean. This group, ranging from 23 to 26 states, clusters around the 28-30 day closing schedule. Their average turnout has been consistently lower than the nonsouthern mean by about two percentage points for the last twenty years.

In comparing the strengths of these differences, the difference of turnout means is significant at the .01 level for all combinations of the three categories. The closest two
categories are the same-day group and the middle group. All other combinations are significant at the .0001 level. Therefore, the closing date shows a clear and significant association to average turnout over the last twenty years.

Motor-Voter Registration

Motor-voter registration should provide more convenient access to the registration process by integrating registration into the procedures for licensing. However, comparing its impact is more difficult than for the closing date. The effects of motor-voter registration are difficult to gauge for numerous reasons. Many states do not tally the number registered through this mechanism, thereby eliminating one avenue of comparison. Multiple states allow motor-voter registration but do not actively implement it (See Appendix A). Therefore, the mere existence of such provisions does not guarantee its use. Thus comparisons of states simply on this measure is clearly problematic. As a result, it is necessary to distinguish the states both in terms of the provisions for motor-voter registration and in terms of their success in implementation.

For the longitudinal comparisons in the next figure, I required that the program be in effect at least since 1986. This would allow enough time for the program to register additional people if it is able. Gauging the effects of a
program begun the same year of the election would be a premature test of its effects. A length of four years allows a complete election cycle to elapse and also should capture a more accurate measure of the use of the motor vehicles bureau.

Given such standards, three states meet the criteria. Michigan's law has been in effect since the 1976 election, while Arizona and Colorado's programs have been in effect since the 1984 and 1986 elections respectively. North Carolina implemented the program before the 1984 election, relaxed implementation for the next two general elections, then improved implementation again before the 1990 election (Cloward, Piven, and Chasnow 1991). Thus North Carolina is not a good example of a long-running program for comparisons of its effects across time.

Figure 3 illustrates turnout before and after the implementation of motor-voter registration as compared to the nonsouthern mean. As in the earlier figure, the first election year that the law was in effect is indicated by T=0. The following election, presidential or midterm, is designated as T+1.

Both Arizona and Colorado increased their turnout in comparison to the mean after the adoption of active motor-voter programs, although the relationship is not absolute. Arizona had experienced turnout increases relative to the mean even before the addition of motor-voter registration. Therefore, I am hesitant to attribute the later increase to
motor-voter registration. Colorado, however, experienced a large jump to above average turnout after the adoption of this provision. Although its turnout then declined somewhat, it did remain above the nonsouthern mean.

Michigan also experienced increases relative to the mean until the third (T+3) election after adoption. Surprisingly, the turnout relative to the mean in the latter election was worse than the turnout in the second and third elections before the adoption of motor-voter provisions. This latter
finding may suggest a decline after the initial enthusiasm of a new program.

North Carolina (not illustrated here) provides some of the most interesting findings. In 1984 North Carolina registered approximately 60,000 people through its motor-voter program. Subsequently it experienced a dramatic increase in absolute turnout and in turnout relative to the mean in 1984 as compared to earlier elections. After the election North Carolina severely curtailed the program, registering only a few thousand each year for the next four years (Cloward, Piven, and Chasnow 1991).

By 1988, after several years of limited implementation, its turnout declined absolutely and relatively. However, in 1989 the program became more active again. In 1989 North Carolina registered almost 37,000 people through the program, and in 1990 it registered about 84,000 in the first eight months of the year (Cloward, Piven and Chasnow 1991). The turnout in the next congressional election in 1990 was 6.5 percentage points higher than in 1986 and almost ten points higher than in 1982, marking an amazing increase.

A second way to compare the effects of motor-voter registration is to compare states in terms of their implementation of the program. Among the states that offer motor-voter provisions, two divisions can be drawn--active and inactive implementation states. Figure 4 offers a simple comparison of the turnout of these states with other
categories, which are not mutually exclusive. Overlap exists between states without motor-voter provisions and the most restrictive states. In addition, the number of states that offer motor-voter programs is so low that the comparisons must be qualified. In 1984 only two states offered active programs and only one state offered a relatively inactive program. By 1990 six states offered active programs and six more offered inactive.

---

**Figure 4.** Motor-Voter. Difference from Mean.
As indicated in the Figure 4, inactive programs have higher average turnout than active motor-voter programs, although active programs have experienced a greater increase in average turnout. Additionally, nonsouthern states without motor-voter programs also have a better record until 1990 than states with active policies. Even the restrictive states fare better in 1984 and 1986.\footnote{Restrictive is defined as having 1) no mail registration, 2) a closing date more than twenty days, and 3) neither active nor inactive motor-voter programs.} Therefore, either the programs did not have the desired effect or other factors that have more impact on turnout are suppressing its effects. However, all conclusions must be tentative given the small number of cases and short history surrounding motor-voter programs.

Mail Registration

Mail registration, in contrast to motor-voter registration, exists in a considerable number of states. Some states make mail registration as easy as sending in a postcard while others require notarization or witnesses. Unfortunately, because many states do not keep track of the numbers registered through this mechanism, I cannot compare the programs in those terms. As a result, all states that provide for generally available and universal mail registration are grouped together in one category, and the available information does not indicate that this arrangement...
is a severe problem. The categorization is rough but the best available given the information about the various programs.

Since the early 1970s a majority of states have adopted some form of universal, mail registration. Looking only at the nonsouth, four states allowed universal mail registration in 1974. By 1980 that number climbed to fifteen, and by 1990, 22 of the 39 nonsouthern states allowed universal mail registration (Appendix A).

The absolute number of states with mail registration limits the possibility for before and after comparisons, but the number permits a broader comparison than an analysis of two or three states. The widespread nature of mail registration makes the following figure a more appropriate method.

As illustrated in Figure 5, average turnout in mail registration states is distinct from turnout in states without this provision. At the beginning of the 1970s when only a few states had mail registration, average turnout among those states was lower than the nonsouthern mean. In 1974 and 1978 those states without mail registration had higher average turnout than the nonsouthern mean and states with mail registration. In 1976 and after 1978 the mail registration states surpass their counterparts in average turnout and maintain higher average turnout up to the most recent measurement point.
Figure 5. Mail Registration. Difference from Mean.

Even though a visual distinction exists between the two groups, the gap does not survive a difference of means test. When comparing the means of the two groups, the t-statistic is significant at a level of about .3. In other words, we cannot be confident in concluding that their means are significantly different.

Despite the disappointing t-statistic, the number of states and duration of reform support better comparisons than
those for motor-voter programs, for example. The large category of mail registration states also is more than a surrogate for the other reforms. Those states with mail registration are distinct from states with several other reforms. The clearest differentiation occurs between those states with active motor-voter programs and mail registration states. In 1990, of the six nonsouthern states that operated active motor-voter registration systems, only two also offered mail registration. The other four have successfully avoided mail registration, oftentimes because they already provide motor-voter registration.

Mail registration states do include the states that offer same-day registration, thereby boosting the turnout average. But the sheer number of states that utilize mail registration captures a wide variety of characteristics and minimizes the effects of a few exceptional cases.

For the three reforms described above, the higher turnout among those states could have occurred simply because the more progressive states adopted the provisions while the more restrictive did not. For example, those states that adopted same-day registration already were more likely to have an active electorate, thus they would have had higher turnout in any event. Similarly, increased party competition or particular races may have spurred the adoption of registration reforms. The increased turnout may instead be a result of the competition instead of the reforms. For example, North
Carolina's active implementation of motor-voter provisions in 1984 and 1990 also happened to coincide with two heated attempts to unseat Senator Helms. Either or both parties may have wanted the provision to ensure that their supporters were eligible to vote. Therefore, we must be careful in attributing the turnout increases in these elections to the motor-voter program. Reforms in certain states may coincide with higher turnout but may not have caused the higher turnout.

Conversely, a link may exist between the reforms and the higher turnout. Those states that made registration easier may have offset some of the decline that occurred for other reasons. Those states that adopted same-day registration, in general, increased their turnout relative to the nonsouthern mean. A similar, but smaller improvement also was evident for those states with active motor-voter programs. Thus the reforms may not reverse the trend of turnout decline, but they may dampen it.

**Absolute Change in Turnout**

There is another way to examine the effects of reforms on turnout. Instead of focusing on the reforms and corresponding turnout, in this analysis I will compare turnout levels in the states and look for corresponding reforms. From the list of turnout change, I have grouped the nonsouthern states into
categories according to how much decline occurred across the last twenty-year period. I will look at the groups of states that lost the most and the least of their electorate to see if any common traits emerge. Theory would suggest that those states that lost the most voters would be less likely to have liberalized registration provisions.

In comparisons of state-level turnout, West Virginia has suffered the greatest decline of all nonsouthern states in presidential elections (Table 6). Since 1984, West Virginia has offered mail registration, but its closing date remains at the maximum period of thirty days. The second biggest decline occurred in New Mexico, which also ties for sixth place on the congressional loss list. New Mexico has a twenty-eight-day closing period and offers neither mail nor motor-voter registration.

The third biggest decline occurred in Delaware, which registered the tenth largest decline in midterm congressional elections. Delaware closes its registration books either seventeen or twenty-four days before the election, and it offers neither modern, mail registration nor motor-voter registration. Wyoming and Indiana close registration thirty and twenty-nine days respectively before the election; and neither offer mail nor motor-voter registration. Among the twelve biggest losers in presidential elections, only four

\[^{9}\text{Delaware closes registration on the third Saturday in October before the general election.}\]
offer mail registration. The only one with motor-voter registration is Nevada, which did not begin it until 1988. Moreover, Nevada's 1988 turnout was greater than its 1984 and 1980 turnout, possibly for this reason. In addition, nine of the twelve states that lost the most voters have closing dates of 28-30 days.

Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonsouthern States that Lost the Most Voters Over the Twenty-Year Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Change 1968-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In midterm congressional elections, Utah has experienced the greatest loss of voters. Surprisingly, Utah also has mail registration and closes its books only five days before the
election. New York and New Jersey close their books thirty and twenty-nine days respectively before the election, and both also offer mail registration. Indiana closes its registration twenty-nine days before and offers neither mail nor motor-voter registration. Among the twelve, more have permissive laws than the twelve with the greatest decline in presidential elections. Five offer mail registration, and eight close their registration 28–30 days before the election. Michigan, number twelve, has offered motor-voter registration since the mid 1970s and Nevada has offered it since 1988.

In Table 7, the twelve nonsouthern states with the best record generally have more permissive registration laws. Surprisingly, Alaska overwhelmingly leads both lists. It closes registration thirty days before the election, but Alaska also has one of the longest established mail registration systems because of the nature of its geography. Turnout was relatively low in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it has approached national levels by the late 1980s.

Among the remaining states with the best performance, those that allow same-day registration are well represented. Maine, Minnesota and Wisconsin allow voters to register on the day of the election. All three appear in the first column and Maine and Minnesota appear in the second. A fourth state, Oregon, allowed same-day registration for about ten years before moving it to twenty-one days between the 1986 and 1988 election. (Its turnout subsequently dropped.) Oregon also
appears on both lists of states with the best record. North Dakota, a state with no registration, is number ten for congressional elections and barely misses making the presidential list.

Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonsouthern States that Lost the Fewest Voters Over the Twenty-Year Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Change 1968-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Insufficient number of cases.


The states with the best record for presidential elections also provide more opportunities for registration. Ten of the twelve states offer mail registration. Of the two that do not, Vermont and Arizona, Vermont provides an inactive
form of motor-voter while Arizona sustains an actively implemented program. Ohio also has an inactive motor-voter program while Minnesota has a recently adopted, aggressive program. Six of the twelve states close registration twenty-nine days or more before the election.

The states with the best record for midterm congressional elections are almost the same as those for presidential elections. Ten of the twelve appear on both lists. The two differences are North Dakota and Oklahoma. Oklahoma is a unique case, and North Dakota, as previously mentioned, does not require registration. Thus the states that have fared the best in congressional elections have an equally impressive record for easing registration requirements.

No clear, conclusive evidence separates the group of states that lost the least voters from the group that lost the most voters across the last twenty years of elections. But, in general, those that suffered the greatest decline had more restrictive registration provisions than those that did not. Among the group of twelve that lost the most voters, four and five states offer mail registration for presidential and congressional elections respectively. Among the group that lost the least voters, ten offer it for presidential elections while nine offer it for midterm elections. North Dakota has no registration requirement. Additionally, the same-day registration states and North Dakota appear among those that lost the least. Overall, among those that fared the best, the
most progressive states in terms of registration laws were overrepresented.

**Multivariate Analysis**

Although first-order comparisons between reforms and turnout are useful, conclusions must wait for multivariate analysis in order to introduce control variables. Multivariate comparisons extend the analysis beyond the previous, simple comparisons and allow for the likely interaction among variables. For example, I expect that turnout also is affected by the types of elections on the ballot and the degree of party competition in the state. In addition to the previously studied reform variables, this analysis includes two more political factors, as well as the purge provision, that may help to explain differences in turnout.

*Concurrent gubernatorial election.* Does a gubernatorial election coincide with the presidential or midterm congressional election? In these comparisons I have added a dummy variable to reflect the existence of a gubernatorial election on the ballot. In the last thirty years, particularly in the 1960s, states moved their gubernatorial election from the presidential, election year ballot. In most cases the states changed the terms to coincide with the midterm elections, but in some cases they moved the
gubernatorial election to the odd year between midterm and presidential elections. Often this coincided with a switch from a two- to a four-year term. As a result, I expect that presidential turnout would be hurt but midterm congressional turnout would be helped by the mobilizing effects of gubernatorial elections (Patterson and Caldeira 1983).

_Interparty Competition._ Using the Ranney index, a variable is added to indicate whether a state is competitive. States can be classified as two-party, modified one-party, or one-party states. In general, I expect that the more competitive states would have higher turnout because both parties would participate to get out the vote and individual voters would be more likely to affect the outcome. The measure is based on state races and does not include the presidential race, for example.

In the analysis I compare different time periods to determine if the registration rules are significant both in a cross-sectional analysis and in an across-time analysis. I compare turnout among states for the 1990 midterm election as well as the 1988 presidential election. I also combine the three most recent midterm and presidential elections in order to capture several recent cases. And, finally, I combine the five most recent elections to capture a twenty-year measure. The latter comparisons are somewhat problematic because many states had higher turnout in the early 1970s at the same time that they had more restrictive registration. The coincidence
of registration reform and declining turnout may appear to suggest that the registration reforms are negatively associated with turnout levels. Therefore, negative relationships must be greeted with caution.

In the multivariate analysis displayed below, some of the registration variables appear to be related to turnout (Table 8). Among the variables compared in the last section, only the closing date is consistently significant. It has a strong and significant effect on level of turnout. For each increase of one day in the closing date, turnout levels will decline about one-third of a percentage point. The sign is in the expected direction because as the closing date increases the turnout levels decrease.

Mail registration is significant in only the last group of elections. However, the expected sign is positive, which it is not in three of the six coefficients, including the significant one. These findings are consistent with the mixed results noted earlier in Figure 5 when the single-order differences between turnout in mail-registration states and states without mail registration did not achieve significance.
Table 8.

Aggregate Relationships for Turnout in Presidential and Midterm Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Presidential</th>
<th>Midterm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>80-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Date</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
<td>-.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Voter</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-6.58*</td>
<td>-6.46*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purge Period</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.43*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Competition</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>1.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Cases</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent variable is turnout.
*p <= .05
**p <= .10

Motor-voter provisions are significant in only one group and are in the expected direction in that group. That year, the 1990 midterm congressional elections, is the only category with a considerable number of states classified as having motor-voter provisions, both inactive and active. Evaluating the success of the program may still have to wait until it has developed and expanded to more states, which will be possible because several states have slated new provisions to take effect in the next several elections. Additionally, several of the states with inactive programs have planned to improve and expand their implementation. But the 1990 results suggest that the program may be associated with higher turnout levels.

The South as a dummy variable is consistently significant and in the right direction. Southern states, controlling for other system-level factors, still exhibit turnout levels six to ten points below those of nonsouthern states.

Gubernatorial elections were significant only when many years were combined. They also were in the expected direction. I had expected them to have more influence, but the existence of a gubernatorial race during the midterm election has become so common as to almost eliminate any variation between states on this variable.

For some unknown reason, the purge period is consistently and significantly related to turnout in presidential elections but not in congressional elections. The expected direction is positive, suggesting that those states who purge less often
will remove fewer eligible voters and place fewer burdens for
needless reregistration. The relationship suggests that the
larger pool of voters in presidential elections is more
susceptible to registration requirements than the smaller pool
in midterm elections. No other research has found such strong
effects on turnout for the purge variable.

Party competition is in the expected direction and
significant in half of the categories. I had expected greater
party competition to have more of an effect in the lower-
stimulus congressional elections as opposed to the
presidential elections. The coefficient is largest for the
collapsed midterm elections from 1974 to 1990. But the other
midterm elections did not reach significance.

The model also had less explanatory power for the midterm
elections. The adjusted $R^2$ ranges from .37 to .46, whereas it
ranges from .56 to .59 for the presidential elections. As
stated earlier, I had expected that systemic-factors would
have more of an effect in lower-stimulus elections where
voters might be less inclined to surmount registration hurdles
and other election depressants. On the other hand, perhaps
congressional voters are unique and more interested than
presidential voters. As a result, they are less deterred by
system impediments because they are willing and capable of
mastering the registration requirements. However, either
theory must wait for individual-level comparisons before I
project aggregate trends onto individual behavior.
In addition to the above model, I ran the same equations but changed the dependent variable to change in turnout. For example, the measure for the 1990 midterm election would reflect the difference in turnout between the 1990 and 1986 midterm elections. Closing date, mail registration, and motor-voter registration were the only registration-related variables to reach significance. The closing date was significant only for the change in turnout between the 1990 and 1974 midterm elections. Contrary to expectations, mail registration was significantly and negatively related to turnout in three of the six comparisons. In contrast, motor-voter registration was significantly and positively related to turnout in three of the six comparisons.

Unfortunately, these findings are difficult to interpret given all of the other confounding forces. The previous comparisons suggest that closing date is the provision most likely to have an influence on turnout levels and change. However, it is significant only for the midterm elections over the longest time period. The results for mail registration are equally unlikely. This provision in negatively related to turnout levels in half of the comparisons. And, finally, the results for motor-voter registration may reflect the influence of a few, spectacular cases and not the overall experience of the program. Therefore, these latter comparisons may not be the most appropriate method for assessing the effects of the changes.
Conclusions

At the beginning of this twenty-year period, the federal government forced states to provide minimum standards to ease registration and voting. Those minimum standards reduced the considerable variation that had existed between different state procedures. The variation in turnout among the states also has converged over the last twenty years, reflecting the reduced variation in state provisions. Except for nonsouthern congressional turnout, the variation among nonsouthern states and especially between nonsouthern and southern states has declined.

Despite the federal efforts to reduce the cost of registration and voting, however, turnout has continued to decline. Since 1968, presidential election turnout has declined an average of ten percentage points. Since 1970, midterm congressional turnout has declined about 8.5 percentage points. But the decline has varied among the states. Southern states, in general, have lost less than average, while considerable variation also exists among the remaining nonsouthern states.

During this same time period and following the federal reforms, states initiated their own programs to reduce the cost of registration. Moreover, those states that offered the easiest registration have some of the highest levels of turnout. Same-day registration states increased their turnout
levels above the mean and experienced turnout that was well above average across the entire time period. Those states that offered motor-voter registration showed short-term gains and slight improvements relative to the mean. And, finally, mail registration states had better than average turnout, while those states that did not offer this most common reform had below average turnout. Despite the difficulties in measurement, a correspondence persists between registration reform and turnout levels.

Considerable variation exists among the states, especially the nonsouthern states, in terms of how much decline occurred in this time period. Among the states that declined the least, those that executed registration reforms appear most often. Among the states that declined the most, few offer state-level reforms while most do no more than federally required.

The reforms had mixed results when controls were added. The closing date remained significant and strongly related to turnout, whereas mail registration did not survive a similar test. It was significant in only one category and was in the wrong direction. Motor-voter registration had poor results except in the 1990 election. But this also was the only election when a sizable number of states implemented the provisions. Hence, it may prove to be an effective reform, although the numbers thus far are mixed.
In most cases registration reforms have not been able to reverse the turnout decline, whereas they do appear to mute or offset some of the descent. But the results are not definitive. Mail registration did not demonstrate significant differences, even though a large number of states have adopted it. Motor-voter states suffer from the opposite problem of too few cases. But both reforms correspond with higher than average turnout. The natural next step is to add individual-level characteristics to the state-level characteristics just introduced. In later chapters a fully specified model may better measure and predict the effects of these variables and their possible interaction with other factors in the likelihood of voting.
References


Chapter IV

An Analysis of the Impact of Personal Characteristics on Turnout in 1988

In the previous chapters I analyzed registration reforms at the macro or state level. The initial findings suggest that some of the reforms are associated with higher turnout or less-than-average decline at the state level. In general, states that offered the minimum required by federal directive had lower turnout than those that experimented with new reforms designed to increase registration and therefore voting. Such comparisons provide a useful starting point in understanding the relationship between registration reforms and turnout. But the conclusions are limited to generalizations and conjecture about individual behavior.

State-level reforms may not have in the aggregate the same effect on individuals. For example, those states that adopted the easiest systems of registration are not a representative, cross-section of all states. They include many of the same states that had higher turnout before such reforms. They tend to be states with competitive party systems and other characteristics that are associated with higher turnout. Similarly, the composition of individuals within states would be related to turnout levels. Many of the
states with the most progressive registration systems also have more homogeneous populations with higher levels of education and lower levels of poverty. Thus they already have a population more likely to participate, whereas states with very poor populations might not experience similar turnout levels with similar laws.

As a result, we must be hesitant to explain levels of turnout with simple, aggregate comparisons. The higher turnout of a particular state may be due to its historically high turnout, active party competition, and the composition of its electorate instead of its registration system. Unfortunately, many of these characteristics occur together, making explanations of turnout levels more difficult. Thus the natural next step is to extend this analysis to the individual level by including those individual-level variables that may have an impact on turnout.

The switch to a different level of analysis is necessary given what we know about voting. Most studies indicate that the decision to vote is driven by individual-level factors, for example, partisanship and age. The background, capabilities, and interests of voters frame their motivation to participate. Moreover, the cost of registration and voting is strongly affected by these individual characteristics that influence motivation.

When systemic factors such as registration laws interact with decisions to vote, those factors interact with the
individual-level influences that determine voters' capabilities and motivations to vote. Registration laws affect the costs associated with voting, and those costs are not borne equally. The costs decrease or increase based on personal factors that are unique to individuals, e.g., education. For example, theory would suggest that better educated people have greater motivation to participate and are better able to sustain the necessary costs to do so. Thus the theoretical underpinnings of participation and voting necessarily begin with individual factors.

Given the nature of voting as the joint product of motivation, capability and cost, I should first establish a baseline using individual-level factors before I try to estimate the effects of systemic factors. In this chapter, I examine turnout and its relationship to demographic and psychological characteristics in a survey that is large enough to support such comparisons.

In order to explore and better understand this association, I will focus on the relationship between demographic characteristics, psychological factors, and turnout. First I will produce the bivariate association between each factor and turnout in order to illustrate the direction and strength of the relationship. Following these comparisons, all of the variables will be combined in multivariate analysis to determine their net effect on turnout. The most important variables will then be included
in the analyses in Chapter Six to estimate the effects of registration laws at the individual level.

In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I will study the links between systemic factors, registration provisions and the vote. Two types of systemic variables are employed. First I use general institutional rules, number of elections, and the degree of competitiveness. Second, I employ specific registration and voting requirements. In Chapter Six I will combine the most important factors from both groups to determine their impact on the vote at the individual level. This analysis allows us to achieve the ultimate goal of this project: to estimate the effects of registration reforms on individual voters.

**Data Choice**

I use the 1988 National Election Study to explore the individual-level relationships between personal characteristics and the systemic rules. This survey occurs in the midst of many of the reforms, such as motor-voter registration, which have proliferated only lately. Therefore, when I add registration-related factors to individual characteristics, I will have more of the former to manipulate. I also prefer a survey from a presidential election rather than from a midterm election. The presidential election is the only national election, thereby offering a control for the
candidates. It is also a higher stimulus election that brings a larger pool of people to the voting booth. A few midterm elections are equally high stimulus due to a heated congressional, senatorial, or gubernatorial race. But the interstate differences during midterm elections would confound many of the comparisons. Thus a recent presidential election offers the most variation in registration variables while minimizing interstate differences in elections.

The 1988 survey includes considerable measurement of local registration procedures in addition to the usual survey of attitudes and characteristics. The interviewers surveyed local officials about registration and voting practices. As a result, I also have a measure of the institutional environment for each respondent. This survey offers a unique opportunity to place the individual respondents in their particular local, legal context with regard to registration rules and practices.

The survey of the 1988 presidential election also includes a vote validation procedure. It is this validated vote that I will use as the dependent variable. Instead of relying on reported vote, the researchers verify the reports with voting records. The validated vote procedure is not perfect, however, because sometimes the records are either unavailable or unclear. But using the validated vote removes many of the problems of vote overreporting that exist with other surveys. Unfortunately, even the validated vote is well
above the national average. The higher figure is likely due to the biased population of the survey. The transient and poorest segments of the population are the least likely to vote and can be the most difficult to reach (Traugott and Katosh 1979). Despite the inflated turnout figure, I can use the survey to determine the relationship among the variables. The inflated figure need not affect the underlying relationship between such factors as age, education and turnout.9

Individual-Level Factors

Demographic factors are closely associated with turnout in the United States. For example, since the 1960s there has been a widening gap between the turnout of those of higher and lower socioeconomic status. The better-educated and wealthier citizens are more likely to vote than those with less education and less income. Thus we can assume that such factors somehow influence the likelihood of voting and therefore must be included in an analysis.

9If the stimulus of the survey encouraged some to vote who otherwise might not, the relationships might be suspect. For example, if someone with little education would not have voted without the catalyst of the survey, then we would measure an unlikely relationship between education and voting. Traugott and Katosh (1979) found that the stimulus effect was more worrisome for those in a panel study than those in a single, cross-sectional survey.
Among demographic characteristics, education remains the most important factor in explaining turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). For example, Wolfinger and Rosenstone attempted to dissect and separate the components of socioeconomic status, and they found that education appears to be the driving force. Using multivariate analysis with the luxury of a large sample, they were able to isolate and gauge the strong effect of education. "Citizens with a college degree are 38 percent more likely to vote than are people with fewer than five years of schooling. The effect is greatest among those with the least education" (p. 34). Even after controlling for other factors, the authors found a strong link between education and turnout. Hence, they concluded that in some manner education powerfully facilitates voting participation.

There are several hypotheses concerning why education should play such a prominent role in the likelihood of voting. Education may impart bureaucratic skills that make it easier to register in advance and vote on election day. Those skills reduce the cost of registration and voting for the better educated citizens. In addition, education reduces the cost of obtaining political information. Better educated people probably have a base of understanding on which to assimilate the new, incoming information, whereas lesser educated people may be confused and therefore not as comfortable with participating in the election (Campbell et al. 1960). And,
finally, better educated citizens, by being more aware of social norms, may feel compelled to vote because of citizen duty (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 18). They know that they are expected to vote and that it is socially undesirable not to do so. This may be why the better educated are more likely to overreport voting (Silver et al. 1986).

The link between voting and education is evident in the 1988 presidential election. Table 9 contains a breakdown of voters by several characteristics. For education, higher levels of education are associated with a greater likelihood of voting. Respondents with at least a college degree are almost one and a half times as likely to vote as those without a high school diploma.

Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) also isolated income and occupation in an effort to understand the impact of socioeconomic status. But very often the better educated are the same respondents with greater income and white-collar occupations, thereby creating a great deal of multicollinearity. Once education is included, much of the effects of the other two variables disappear (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

Table 9 displays the relationship without controls between income and voting. (See Appendix B for the coding and variable numbers.) A clear, positive association exists between the two. As income increases the likelihood of voting increases, but, of course, this may reflect the impact of
education. In the latter part of this chapter income will be combined with education to determine the former's net contribution to the vote in the 1988 election.

Another crucial demographic variable is age (Campbell et al. 1960; Cassel and Hill 1981; Sigelman et al. 1985; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). In a curvilinear fashion, voting participation tends to increase across the life-cycle until very old age, at which point participation tends to decline again. Scholars hypothesize that this occurs for several reasons. Younger people tend to be more mobile, thereby lessening ties to a particular community that might inspire them to vote. They may have less of a stake in the outcome than those who have accumulated possessions over time. Also, because they are less likely to be married, they are less likely to be influenced by a close, loved one to vote. Furthermore, it may be a process of maturation and experience that eventually leads to the vote.

Age also may serve as a substitute for education (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). As someone ages they gain experience in many areas, including acquiring the bureaucratic skills needed to register and vote. Because voting is a two-step process with registration in advance of the election as a first step, it requires advance planning and intention.
Table 9.

**Validated Turnout by Selected Demographic Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Percentage Who Voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-11 Years</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-15 Years</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 or More</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.165***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Income in Dollars</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-9999</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10000-19999</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20000-34999</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35000 or More</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.175***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-30 Years</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50 Years</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-70 Years</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71 and Older</td>
<td>75.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.156***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>76.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not married, separated</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.156***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residency in Present Home</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-12 Months</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-24 Months</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-7 Years</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Years or More</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.169***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.200***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B for coding and variable numbers.*

*** *p<=.01*
If someone is not registered, that person must determine where to register and when this is possible, which in most cases is a month before the election. With age, the citizen is more likely to have encountered this situation before, as well as similar situations that require interaction with a government agency. Therefore, the advantages that the better educated gain through schooling may eventually be balanced by the skills from experience.

Campbell and colleagues (1960) viewed age as a collector of political beliefs. As people become older their partisan identification becomes firmer, thereby increasing the desire to vote. Younger people are still forming their opinions and are more likely to be politically independent. Hence, their desire to vote is much weaker. As a result, the interaction of partisan intensity with age creates greater voting across the life span, except for the elderly.

The decline of participation among the elderly might occur for several reasons. A generational effect could occur in which many members of minority groups or even women have not been socialized to vote. For example, there are a larger number of women among the elderly who may not have been socialized to participate in elections. Moreover, this is not limited to women who grew up before they achieved suffrage. Women raised in traditional settings would also receive less encouragement to be active political participants. For example, Cassel (1979) argued that increased southern turnout
is due not only to greater turnout among blacks, but also because of the mobilization of southern women. Southern women had been voting at rates well below those of southern men and nonsouthern men and women. But by 1976 their rates approximated those of other groups.

In addition to generational effects, the elderly may find it more difficult to get out and vote or follow the elections because of physical infirmity due to natural life-cycle effects. As health declines the ease of movement also declines. Simple tasks like reading about the candidates or going to the polling place are more difficult to perform. As a result, the cost of voting may outweigh the reward.

Additionally, the elderly are less likely to be married, thereby eliminating a source of support and encouragement to participate. There is evidence that marriage makes voting a group activity and reinforces the tendency to vote or not vote. Moreover, it also serves as a shortcut to information gathering. The partners can share information, thereby reducing the costs. Hence, as a result of both aging effects and the circumstances that accompany it, turnout tends to decline again when people reach very old age.

In the 1988 election, age and turnout covary in a curvilinear pattern (Table 9). Turnout tends to increase from the younger age groupings to the older age groupings, except for the oldest category. After age 70 turnout levels declined among the survey respondents.
Marital status is also positively related to turnout (Table 9). Those respondents who are married are more likely to vote than those who are single, divorced, separated or widowed. Presumably, marriage reduces some of the information costs associated with voting and reinforces the tendency for both spouses to vote.

Another relevant characteristic is residential mobility. Squire, Wolfinger, and Glass (1987) analyzed the effects of residential mobility on the likelihood of voting. Those who have recently moved are less likely to vote than those who have lived in the same area for multiple years. This is especially important given the mobile nature of the population; approximately one-third of the population moves every two years. Therefore, one-third must reregister every two years if they hope to vote. As might be expected the mobile are more likely to be young and single, therefore less likely to vote in any event. But in other respects they are similar to the rest of the voting population. Hence, except for their age, we might expect them to turn out at higher rates. Because they do not we suspect that registration requirements keep a group from the polls that might otherwise vote.

In the 1988 election, there is a consistent relationship between residency and turnout (Table 9). As expected, those who live in their current residence the longest are the most likely to vote. The lowest turnout is among those who have
lived in their current home or apartment for a year or less. As residency in the current home lengthens, turnout tends to increase, too.

Finally, I conduct a simple comparison between race and turnout (Table 9). Minorities, in general, vote at lower rates than whites. But much of the difference can be linked to differences in socioeconomic status. Verba and Nie (1972) found that when socioeconomic status is included, the disparity between black and white participation is greatly diminished. In the 1988 presidential election, whites are almost one and one-half times as likely to vote as nonwhites. But I expect that these differences will diminish when other factors are controlled.

From these comparisons it is clear that certain demographic characteristics are associated with levels of turnout.\(^\text{10}\) Higher levels of education, higher income, older but not oldest age, marriage, stable residency, and race are related to higher turnout. Later in this chapter I will test whether these relationships endure in multivariate analysis.

**Psychological Variables**

In addition to the above demographic variables, certain psychological variables are associated with the level of

\(^{10}\)I also checked the effects of gender in the 1988 election. The slight difference that existed between the turnout of men and women was not statistically significant.
turnout. Scholars have looked at political interest, partisanship, political efficacy, and perceptions of the closeness of the race, among others. Multiple authors point to declining political efficacy coupled with declining partisanship as primary reasons for lowered turnout (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Kleppner 1982; Shaffer 1981).

Because partisanship is closely related to the vote, it has received extra scrutiny. Those who are affiliated with a party have a greater interest or stake in the election (Campbell et al. 1960). Multiple authors (e.g., Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979) have noted the decline in partisanship since the seminal work in The American Voter. Lower levels of partisanship appear to be a significant cause of turnout decline. But many of the relevant variables are closely intertwined. Therefore, attempts to measure the impact of a single factor become more difficult.

Abramson and Aldrich (1982) conducted analyses solely of psychological variables and their effect on turnout. They focus on external political efficacy and strength of partisanship. Using National Election Study data they examine the source of turnout decline between 1960 and 1980 for both congressional and presidential elections, utilizing a longitudinal approach too often neglected in other research. They limited their study to the two above-mentioned variables, avoiding multivariate analysis because of the difficulty in interpreting the results. They find that since 1960 levels of
external political efficacy have declined, as well as the number of strong partisans in the population. The number of independents has increased with the number of people who believe that government officials do not care what they think and that "people like me don't have any say about what the government does" (p. 510).

The changing levels in these variables would cause turnout to decline for several reasons. People who do not feel that government is responsive or that voting makes a difference have less incentive to bear the costs of voting. If the government is viewed as unresponsive regardless of which party is in office, the vote becomes less important. Similarly, those who are strong partisans believe in their political party and want that party to staff the government. Therefore, they are more likely to vote because of their psychological tie to the party. In contrast, independents, for several reasons, are less likely to vote. Thus if there is a decline in strong partisans and a subsequent increase in number of independents, voting turnout should be lower.

In the 1988 election, the relationship between strength of partisanship and turnout remains (Table 10). Strong partisans, both Republican and Democrat, are more likely to vote than weak partisans. And weak partisans are slightly more likely to vote than those with no political affiliation.

Shaffer (1981) also found that decreased political efficacy and declining partisanship were important, but the
effects were not quite as robust when entered into a multivariate relationship. Shaffer, also using National Elections Study data, looked at presidential elections from 1960 to 1976. But he allowed other variables to explain some of the variation that Abramson and Aldrich leave to efficacy and partisanship. In rank order of importance, Shaffer attributed the decline to 1) the changing age composition, 2) declining efficacy, 3) less reliance on newspapers, and 4) decline in strong partisans (p. 92). Thus he illustrated the difficulty in attributing a large explanatory value to a few variables without controlling for others.

In the 1988 election, feelings of external, political efficacy appear to be related to turnout (Table 10). Using the same two questions that Shaffer as well as Abramson and Aldrich used, those who feel they have more say are more likely to vote. Those who believe that "public officials care what they think" and those who think that they "have a say in government" turn out to vote at a rate of about 80%. In contrast, those who believe they "have no say in government" and who believe that "public officials don't care what they think" turn out about ten percentage points less than the previous group. The responses to the two questions produce nearly identical results.
Table 10.

**Validated Turnout by Selected Psychological Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Percentage Who Voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partisanship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .080***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People Like Me Don’t Have Say</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .110***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Officials Don’t Care What I Think</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .106***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Close Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Close</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .056**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Campaign</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat, Not Much</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Much</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .123***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Care Which Party Wins</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Very Much</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Good Deal</td>
<td>74.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .137***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shouldn’t Vote If Don’t Care About Outcome</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .116***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B for coding and variable numbers.

** p<=.05
*** p<=.01
Several authors have proposed that perceptions of whether the election will be close will influence the decision to vote. Ashenfelter and Kelley (1975) attempted to explain the decline in turnout using multiple attitudinal variables. They considered two theories of voting. One theory is that turnout is determined by personal characteristics such as age, sex, and education. In the other theory, voters participate to influence the political future. In instrumental fashion they weighed the costs and benefits of voting. The authors expected that attitudinal variables, when combined with demographic variables, would take away the explanatory power of the latter. To their surprise, perceptions of the closeness of elections and other instrumental views of voting were not supported in the analysis. Instead, they found that voters did not think that they could influence the outcome; moreover, the attitudinal variables did not eliminate the effects of personal characteristics, especially education. Instead, the authors hypothesized that people go to the polls because it is the socially expected activity, not because they intend to influence the outcome of the election.

In Table 10, those who believe that the election is close are more likely to vote than those who perceive the race as not close. Similarly, those who care which party wins and those with more interest in the campaign are more likely to vote than their counterparts. The responses to these two
indicators reveal some of the largest differences between response groups.

Looking at the final issue of civic responsibility, notions of socially expected behavior may motivate some to vote even when they do not care about the outcome. Given that voting is considered a civic duty, societal pressure may spur the otherwise disinterested to vote. In the 1988 election, those who believe in voting regardless of interest are quite a bit more likely to vote than their counterparts; over ten percentage points separates those who disagree and agree with the obligation to vote (Table 10). Such results are consistent with what Ashenfelter and Kelley (1975) found above.

The findings from the previously-described variables are consistent with other scholarship. Strong partisans, those with external political efficacy, those who perceive a close race, those who are interested in the campaign, and those who view voting as a civic duty are more likely to vote. All of the relationships are in the anticipated direction and conform to expectations. Thus the next step is to test the strength of those relationships in multivariate analysis in order to determine the most powerful influences on turnout.

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^{11}I also checked to determine if trust was related to the vote in the 1988 election. In response to whether the respondent trusts government to do what is right, greater trust was not necessarily related to higher turnout.
Methodological Issues

The comparisons above provide a rough approximation of the relationship between the individual-level variables and turnout. But many of the independent variables are correlated with each other, raising the possibility that the numbers reflect greater influence than actually exists for any single variable. Therefore, the next step is to combine the independent variables into one equation so that the effects of other variables are controlled.

I use probit instead of linear regression to estimate the impact of the independent variables on the likelihood to vote. Probit provides a more appropriate estimation procedure to predict the underlying shape of the relationship between individual-level variables and turnout. The dependent variable can be only one of two values. Thus I am not interested in estimating the change in the dependent variable as I might with ordinary least squares. Instead, I use Maximum Likelihood Estimation to compute parameter estimates with the greatest likelihood of correctly predicting my dependent variable—turnout. Unfortunately, because the maximum likelihood estimates are nonlinear, they are more difficult to interpret.
Both the psychological and the demographic variables must be combined to determine which contribute independently to explaining turnout. The considerable number of variables is somewhat awkward, but I am interested in which variables emerge from this analysis. Unlike last section, I use the full measure of the variables. For example, I do not collapse years of education or income into smaller categories. (See Appendix B for description.) From this group of variables I will determine which personal variables to incorporate into the fully-specified model in Chapter Six.

As expected, due to the interrelated nature of many of the variables, most of the factors fail to achieve significance even though they were related to turnout in the earlier bivariate analysis. For example, education is significantly related to turnout while income is not (Table 11). Given previous research on these factors, I had expected that education would dilute the effects of income, in addition to possibly other variables.12

A more surprising result is the probit estimate for race. Contrary to expectations, even after controlling for other variables, race has a strong and significant effect on turnout. Other authors (e.g., Sigelman, Roeder, Jewell, and

12I tried many variations of the variables. For example, I squared education and squared age to better approximate the shape of the relationship, but neither achieved significance.
Baer 1985, 759; Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978, 31) found that with controls race did not have an independent effect on turnout. Once the usual socioeconomic factors were included, the effects of race typically disappeared. However, in 1988 the impact of race extends beyond these characteristics.

Tate (1991) suggested that Jesse Jackson's candidacy may be the source of this difference. In 1984 his candidacy mobilized the black community, but his 1988 candidacy was a "negative political stimulus" (p. 1172). His lack of success and Dukakis's lack of appeal alienated many black voters. However, if this is the case, some of the difference should have been reduced by the psychological measures, e.g., interest in the campaign. I will test the strength of this relationship further in Chapter Six.

Many of the other demographic characteristics did not reach statistical significance. Age does not have a significant effect on the likelihood to vote despite the considerable evidence to the contrary (e.g., Sigelman, Roeder, Jewell, and Baer 1985). Its effects may be subsumed by other factors, particularly length of residency. Younger people are more likely to be mobile whereas older people are more likely to have maintained a stable residency for several years.
Table 11.

Probit Estimates of Individual-Level Variables on Validated Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Expected Sign)</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education (+)</td>
<td>.078*</td>
<td>.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income (+)</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education*Income (+)</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (+)</td>
<td>.579***</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (+)</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dummy Age-70+ Years (-)</td>
<td>-.115</td>
<td>.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status (+)</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency (+)</td>
<td>.041***</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan Intensity (+)</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Efficacy¹ (+)</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in Campaign (+)</td>
<td>.100**</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Race (+)</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Duty (+)</td>
<td>.122**</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care Which Party Wins (+)</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.136</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>997</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.499</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-479.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.
¹ This variable reflects the collapse of the two questions.
* p<.10
** p<.05
*** p<.01
Length of residency, in fact, does have a significant effect on the likelihood of voting even when other factors are held constant. Mobility has an effect above and beyond the demographic and psychological characteristics of the most mobile. Such results suggest a potential link to the registration factors that influence costs and convenience. Mobile citizens must reregister every time they move and may therefore experience greater costs to participate.

Among the psychological variables, several surprising results occur. Neither partisan intensity nor external political efficacy reach a reasonable level of significance. These results may be understood more easily given the research question. Most of the scholarship surrounding these variables is focused on their changing levels over the last twenty years and the subsequent turnout decline, whereas I am testing whether these variables are significant for the 1988 election. Thus the research interests are different but the variables still should have reached statistical significance.

Looking only at a cross-section of one election, other variables emerge as important. For instance, interest in the campaign and notions of civic duty reach the necessary level of significance. One of the questions captures an election-specific phenomenon while the other represents a more enduring trait. These findings also are consistent with what has been found in earlier studies. Ashenfelter and Kelley (1975) suspected that part of the reason people vote is for
entertainment, which may be related to interest in the campaign. But even more important is the civic obligation to vote. People choose to participate not because they believe they can affect the outcome, but because they believe it is their moral responsibility to carry out the duties of the democratic citizenry.

Many of the results are surprising but understandable. Among the demographic variables, I had expected age to reach significance, whereas among the psychological variables I had expected partisanship and efficacy to be significant. Perhaps their relationship to turnout is better illustrated in the longitudinal studies described above, or perhaps they are captured in the measurement of other variables. However, despite numerous manipulations and attempts, they do not achieve significance.

Using only the five variables that achieve significance, I will compute the probability of change in the dependent variable, turnout, based on change in the independent variable. Education and residency are the only variables with interval level measures, making the estimates easier to interpret. In analyzing the effects of education, for every year increase in schooling, turnout is likely to change 2.8 percentage points, which is a considerable rate.

Three of the four other variables include categorical data, making the comparisons less clear. The strongest effect of all of the individual-level data occurs for a variable that
I predicted would not be significant—race. This variable is divided between white and nonwhite, with black respondents accounting for over 80% of the nonwhite category. The probability of change in turnout from nonwhite to white respondents is 16.5 percentage points. Moreover, the number would be even greater if the nonwhite category included only blacks.

The other interval level variable is residency. Measured in years in current home or apartment, an increase in years should correspond with an increase in turnout. For each two year increase up to eleven years, turnout is likely to increase about 1.5 percentage points, thereby conforming to expectations.

The final two variables are interest in the campaign and notions of civic duty, both of which are divided into three categories. As interest in the election increases, turnout is likely to increase about 3.5 percentage points. In terms of civic duty, as responsibility for voting increases, turnout is likely to increase about 4.1 percentage points. Of course, both variables have only three classifications, but the difference in turnout is considerable.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have compared certain demographic and psychological variables to gauge their impact on turnout.
Many variables are associated with turnout levels in bivariate analysis, but only a few remain significant when all are combined in a multivariate analysis. For example, age, income, partisanship, and efficacy appear to be related to turnout. But none of these factors survive a multivariate test. Instead, only education, race, residency or mobility, interest in the election, and civic duty independently affect the likelihood of voting in the 1988 presidential election.

These results are useful in order to understand variations in turnout for this particular election. But their purpose is to fit individual variables into a more comprehensive model of participation. These individual characteristics affect the likelihood of voting and interact with the costs of voting. Citizens who are mobile, less educated, and have weaker feelings of citizenship are likely to be affected differently by inconvenient registration laws than others. These individual factors combine to form composites of voters' capabilities and motivations. Then the capabilities and motivations play a role in conjunction with the environment to determine the costs of voting. The first factors to influence the motivation or desire to vote are individual-level. But those variables occur in an environment that causes them to be important. Thus an understanding of turnout must include both influences.

In the next chapter, I will include the environment of the vote by replicating the earlier comparisons for political
and registration-related variables. Then I will combine the information for the individual-level variables with that of the system-level variables to estimate the ultimate effects of registration reforms on turnout.
References


Chapter V

An Analysis of the Impact of Political and Registration Factors on Turnout in 1988

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, turnout is associated with personal factors that influence the motivations and capabilities of potential voters. Socioeconomic influences are closely tied to turnout in the United States partly because of its restrictive registration systems (Powell 1986). Such association suggests that the motivations and capabilities are correlated with turnout because of the cost of registration. As a result, personal characteristics enable some and prevent others from participating. Thus a model of turnout must include both the personal characteristics and the broader, system-level variables that influence the costs of participation.

Some of the results in the previous chapter suggest that system-level variables are, in fact, involved. For example, residency or mobility appears to have an effect on turnout even when other factors, such as age, education, and interest in the election, are controlled. The resiliency of the mobility variable may reflect a broader phenomenon or factor like the dampening effect of registration requirements. Those who are mobile experience higher costs to register and vote
than long-time residents who are likely to be registered already before any given election.

In a similar vein, why is education related to turnout? Educated voters may have a greater desire to participate or they may find the requirements more manageable than others. Perhaps their education reduces the otherwise onerous cost of participation. If the latter is true, a variable that at first appears individual-level may reflect an underlying relationship based instead on the nature of the electoral system. If this is the case, explanations of turnout based on individual-level factors will be misestimated. A better understanding must include the electoral rules and systems that surround individual decisions.

In the previous chapter, I studied the relationship between turnout and individual-level variables such as demographics and psychological attitudes. In this chapter, I will analyze individual turnout and its relationship to system-level variables. System-level variables include those environmental factors that may encourage or discourage people from voting. For example, registration variables such as purging, closing dates, and mail registration affect entire groups of people by altering ease of registration. Furthermore, the election calendar and party system also should be important because of how they affect motivation for registering and voting. For instance, concurrent Senate and gubernatorial races should increase turnout, as should a
competitive party system. Thus if these factors do indeed correlate with the cost of registration and voting, they will influence the level of turnout.

In order to test these hypotheses, I first will compare turnout between respondents under different registration rules, then I will compare turnout under different political or electoral features. Using the 1988 National Election Study, I can measure turnout within and between areas with distinct registration systems. For each respondent in the survey there are corresponding registration rules as well as offices for election. The 1988 National Election Study provides far more contextual information than is usually available, and this information can be tied to specific respondents in order to make individual-level comparisons. (See Appendix B for a description of the coding and choice of variables.)

After the initial comparisons I will combine all of the factors for a multivariate test. This will reveal which variables remain important after controls are added. Like the comparisons in the last chapter, I will be able to estimate changes in turnout if different systems exist.

The product of this analysis will allow me to compare and predict individual behavior in different contexts. When all factors are combined I will be able both to estimate the impact of different registration reforms but also to assess the relative influence of personal and environmental
characteristics. This will eliminate the need to project individual behavior from aggregate statistics.

Registration Factors

Registration rules can vary by state, county and city. Some areas of the country lead the way in registration reform while others resist modifications in their systems. Within states, reforms may occur through several routes. Legislatures may pass provisions or executives may issue orders that modify the registration process. Neither path, however, guarantees active implementation in different parts of the state. Counties and cities also can make registration more or less convenient by offering their own resources, often through mobile or permanent registration sites. Due to this overlapping jurisdiction and inconsistent implementation, states are not internally homogeneous units, although they retain similarities that exceed their differences. Nonetheless, while many of the variables of interest appear statewide, this survey also captures some of the local differences in registration provisions.

In Table 12, I provide an illustration of the amount of variation within states. The numbers reflect the percentage

\[ \text{I suspect that some of the local variation is due to reporting and survey error. However, it is beyond the scope of this project to determine how much of this occurs. Therefore, I have tried to use the survey findings except in a few instances.} \]
of states for which all respondents in the given state either have or do not have access to the particular provision. In the remaining states, the provisions are available for a portion of the electorate.

Table 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Percentage of States</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closing Date</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purge for Nonvoting</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Registration</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Registration</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor-Voter Registration</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.

The greatest variation occurs with library registration, where in two-thirds of the states all or none of the respondents have access to this provisions. The least variation occurs with post office registration, where in 90% of the states all or none of the respondents have access to registration at the post office. For all of the provisions, over half of the states have similar, internal rules. Therefore, with some confidence we can classify states as
coherent units given that the differences between states still exceed their internal variation.

More importantly, I am interested in the turnout differences between respondents with different provisions. In order to test for variation across areas, I compare categories of respondents and the percentage voting in each group. For example, in the survey the interviewers gather information on the local purge procedures. Some areas purge their registration lists of nonvoters, whereas other areas may send postcards to nonvoters to ensure the validity of the current registration record. In the former I would expect that valid voters are purged from rolls only because they have failed to vote in the specified time frame. In contrast, the latter areas probably do not eliminate valid registrants as often, although they likely have a problem of inflated registration rolls.

Similarly, among states that purge for nonvoting, the time frame for purging voters also should be important. Presumably those that purge often are more likely to cancel valid registrations than those that allow a longer period to elapse. For example, those states that purge nonvoters every two years place a higher burden on registrants than those states that purge every five years. Citizens in the former must maintain a more active voting record than citizens in the latter. Proponents of reform often suggest a four-year interval before purging (Mangum, Cooper and Stumberg 1991).
A period of four or more years allows a cycle of presidential elections to occur. Anything less than that can punish registrants for failing to participate in state or local elections.

The purge procedure also can be used as a political tool because of the considerable discretion afforded localities in some states. For example, registration lists from areas with minorities or partisans for the party out of power can be more vigilantly monitored and cleared than lists from areas sympathetic to those in power. Thus the provision is not always neutral (Mangum, Cooper and Stumberg 1991) and has the potential to exclude those least able to bear its costs.

Turnout among respondents broken down by purge procedure is displayed in Table 13. Consistent with expectations, in those areas that purge for nonvoting, turnout is several percentage points less than those areas that do not follow such a practice. In addition, among those that purge for nonvoting, turnout is slightly lower with a more frequent purge. Such differences, although modest, may reflect the variation in costs for the citizens. Those citizens who live in areas with frequent purges for nonvoting must reregister more often and therefore pay higher costs than those citizens who retain valid registration with the same voting record.
Table 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Percentage Who Voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validated Turnout by Selected Registration Characteristics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purge for Nonvoting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>72.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purge Period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 Years</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or More Years</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Days</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-20 Days</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Days or More</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>-.055**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.106***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Registration Locations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Library</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>-.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Post Office</td>
<td>73.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.051*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Bureau</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Motor Vehicle Bureau</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B</td>
<td>-.049**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.

*** p<=.01
** p<=.05
* p<=.10

I have modified some of the coding. For example, residents in Minnesota have a twenty-day closing date. But because they also can register on election day, I have changed them to same-day registration.
The next provision, the closing date, is the period before an election when registration books are no longer open. During this period officials have an opportunity to prepare lists for precincts and check the rolls. From the vantage point of election officials, a closing date further from the election allows greater scrutiny and management of the electorate. But from the perspective of voters, a closing date closer to the election allows potential voters more time to become acquainted with candidates and issues, and thereby become interested in the election. A closing date thirty days in advance of the election forces potential voters to endure the costs of registration before the motivation is as high, whereas same-day registration systems harness the desire to vote directly to the need to register.

In the 1988 election, those areas that have the closing date nearest the election do indeed have the highest turnout (Table 13). In those areas where voters are allowed to register on election day, fully 85.3% of the respondents vote. (In this survey those respondents live in Minnesota and Wisconsin.) In the middle category are those respondents who have neither the most liberal nor the most conservative closing date. These respondents must register in advance but not as far in advance as most states. The turnout of this group, 68.4%, is lower than those with the longest and the shortest closing dates, although the difference is negligible with the longer closing dates (Table 13).
The largest number of respondents, about four out of every five, lives in areas that require registration twenty-one days or more before the election. Within this group most have closing dates of twenty-nine or thirty days. Among this group of respondents, about 69% voted in the 1988 election, which is slightly more than the next group and about seventeen percentage points less than those respondents with the most liberal closing date (Table 13). Thus without controls a considerable difference exists between respondents with respect to this provision, but not always in the expected direction. If the reduction in closing date increases turnout, those respondents with the longest closing date should have voted at lower levels than those respondents with shorter closing periods.

If the results for the closing date are counterintuitive, it may be due to the skewed nature of the data. Because most of the respondents live in areas with longer closing dates, the other two categories are sparsely populated. Therefore, comparisons of means are suspect and produce problems of generalizability. When reforms exist in only in a handful of states, the chance of spurious relationships due to other variables is greater. When this happens, it is more difficult to tie the changes in the dependent variable of turnout to changes in the independent variables of reform. But, based on these modest comparisons, same-day areas have turnout well above the others.
The next comparison involves mail registration, which does not suffer from the problem described above. The reform of mail registration allows potential voters to register without the burden of an in-person visit to a designated office, oftentimes only in daytime hours during the week. The existence of mail registration also should facilitate registration drives because it allows interested groups and political parties to distribute registration applications. Thus mail registration should offer a great deal of convenience, thereby reducing the cost of registration. If this is the case, those areas that offer mail registration should experience higher than average turnout.

In the 1988 election, a majority of respondents, about 61%, lived in areas with mail registration. Among the respondents, those who lived in areas that offered mail registration voted at a level considerably higher than their counterparts in areas without. Almost nine percentage points separate the turnout of those with and without mail registration (Table 13). This difference is all the more compelling given the widespread distribution of the reform. With over half of the respondents having access to mail registration, idiosyncratic factors are less likely to skew the differences.

The next factor is registration location. Presumably those areas that offer more locations to register will have more registered citizens and therefore voters. The measure of
this variable, unfortunately, does not differentiate between active and inactive registration at these locations. Moreover, like all of these variables, a certain amount of interaction probably exists. For example, the existence of mail registration and/or a shorter closing date would seem to interact with locations of registration. In other words, the existence of many reforms in one state would seem to add even higher turnout. But comparisons such as those in Table 13 do not differentiate if any given reform is the only available alternative or one of many alternatives.

Among the respondents in 1988, no clear pattern emerges for registration locations. Turnout is slightly higher among those that have permanent registration locations at the post office and motor vehicle offices. But turnout is lower among those that have registration availability at the library. Therefore, all of the relationships are not in the expected direction, but the results are disappointing particularly for advocates of motor-voter registration. The multivariate test later may be more revealing due to controls, but the initial comparisons are not suggestive of higher turnout.

The final provision involves deputy registrars, which are available for over 80% of the respondents. This arrangement allows private citizens or specially designated persons to register citizens away from the usual locations. The effectiveness of deputy registrars to add citizens to registration rolls is dependent on the participation of local
organizations and regulations for commissioning registrars. Some localities require extensive training, which may deter potential volunteers, whereas other areas require only that the deputy be a registered voter.

In those areas with deputy registrars, turnout is lower than those without deputy registrars. On the surface this makes little sense because this provision should ease registration. This result may reflect lack of or uneven success for deputy registrars. The potential for variation between areas is so great that this simple measure may be inadequate.

Thus among the registration-related factors, about half are associated with higher turnout among the respondents. Purging seems to be weakly related to turnout, whereas the closing date shows substantial differences only between same-day registration and the remaining dates. Those respondents with mail registration vote at higher rates than those without. The location of permanent registration sites does not show a clear pattern of improved turnout. And, finally, turnout is actually lower in areas with deputy registrars than those without such options.

Before I move to a multivariate test, I am concerned about how many of the registration-related variables occur together. If two of the variables are highly correlated, for example, I may not be estimating their actual effects. Among
the reforms, I am most interested in the correlation between mail, motor-voter, and same-day registration.

Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Mail</th>
<th>Library</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>M-V</th>
<th>Deputy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonvoting Purge</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-Day Close</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.07*</td>
<td>.06*</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.37*</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.56*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor-Voter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.
* p<=.05

As illustrated in Table 14, most of the registration reforms do not occur together.¹⁴ For the three most important variables, the closest relationship exists between same-day registration and mail registration. While the relationships are not in perfect correspondence, I will test the differences with and without the closing date and mail registration in the next section.

¹⁴A strong, positive sign indicates the reforms occur in the same states. A strong, negative relationship indicates they are nearly mutually exclusive.
The relationship between deputy registrars and almost all other variables is particularly interesting. Except for motor-voter registration, the variable for deputy registrars is negatively associated with all of the other reforms. This relationship is likely due to the widespread nature of the provision and its status as being the only provision for many states. Therefore, it almost acts as a surrogate for no reform, thereby explaining its negative relationship to the other reforms. Overall, the generally weak relationship between provisions suggests that the coincidence of too many reforms will not be a problem.

**Political Factors**

Voting occurs in the context of registration rules and regulations, which exist in a larger context of state politics. Progressive registration laws may have little impact when elections are not competitive or when the office to be elected is not visible. Thus above and beyond registration rules is the political environment in which the rules occur. The broader environment further influences the motivation to sustain the costs associated with registering and voting.

For example, the number and type of offices to be elected is demonstrably related to the motivation to vote. In recent decades, states have expanded their election calendars to
separate state and federal elections (Jewell and Olson 1988), and many localities have separated municipal and county elections from state elections. As a result, voters experience increased costs to participate in all and decreased motivation to participate in any given election (Boyd 1981). For example, those states that separate their gubernatorial election from the presidential election may be robbing both of voters. By moving the elections to two separate events, voters also must make two separate attempts to participate. Hence, we would expect that a concentration of important offices in any given election would tend to increase turnout compared to more numerous and separate elections for the same posts. (See Appendix B for coding of political variables.)

In general, presidential elections provide the greatest stimulus to register and vote. The presence of contests on the presidential ballot, though, can stimulate turnout even more. In 1988 most states had Senate elections, and a handful had gubernatorial elections. Therefore, I would expect that the likelihood of voting is greater in states with other high-stimulus elections.

As shown in Table 14 for the 1988 election, considerable disparity exists between those states that have a Senate election and those states that do not. Over ten percentage points separate the turnout levels of respondents. The added office may increase media attention and exposure, particularly in areas where the presidential race is not competitive.
Senate elections are often high-stimulus and appear to produce added incentive to turn out and vote in the presidential election. Such findings are consistent with the above theories of the election calendar.

In contrast, turnout between individuals in states with and without gubernatorial elections is almost indistinguishable (Table 14). Contrary to the supposed importance of these elections, the respondents in those states with gubernatorial elections that coincide with presidential elections do not experience higher turnout. Yet the scant difference may not be an accurate reflection of the drawing power of gubernatorial elections. Similar to the problem of the closing date, few states still conduct gubernatorial elections during the presidential election; most states have moved those elections to the midterm, and a few have moved them to the year between midterm elections. Therefore, the independent variable has scant variation.

In this survey five states had gubernatorial elections in 1988. In four of the five states, incumbents were running for reelection, three of whom won easily. Only one of the five states had an open seat, and in that state the margin of victory was the smallest of all five contests. Thus conclusions based on turnout during the presidential election must be tentative, given that a more interesting test of the power of gubernatorial elections might occur during the midterm elections.
Table 15.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Percentage Who Voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senate Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>78.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .103***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>70.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party System in State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-Party</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modified One-Party</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B .095***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsouth</td>
<td>75.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>55.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendall’s Tau B -.199***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study and own data. See Appendix B.
*** p<=.01

A less tangible but powerful feature is the nature of the party system in a state. When one party dominates elections, voters have less incentive to participate; whereas when elections are close and meaningful, citizens have greater incentive to pay the costs for registration and voting. When the South was solidly Democratic, the real election occurred in the primary for the party’s nomination because the general election was a foregone conclusion (Key 1951). As a result, turnout suffered in the general election because the races were not competitive. Thus if we assume that voters want to
influence the outcome of the election, more competitive races will inspire higher turnout.

Competitiveness cannot be easily defined, however. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, I will use a commonly accepted method to classify states: the Ranney index of interparty competition. The index is based on state legislative and gubernatorial elections, using length of service and success in the voting booth as a measure of the parties' strength. Unfortunately, because it does not include federal elections, it does not reflect the sometimes differing levels of competition between state and federal offices. Nevertheless, it is useful and an easily understood standard.

In 1988 none of the states in the survey are classified as one-party states15 (Bibby et al. 1990). Instead, they are divided fairly evenly between modified one-party systems and two-party systems. Although a clear dichotomy does not exist between one-party and two-party states, I expect differences to endure between the two categories represented in bivariate comparisons.

As shown in Table 15, turnout in two-party states is almost nine percentage points higher than turnout in modified one-party states. This may reflect more intensive get-out-the-vote efforts and closer elections in the states with

15Mississippi is the only state classified as one-party Democratic. No states are classified as one-party Republican. For the multivariate comparisons in the next section I use the distance from the extremes. The more competitive states will approach .5 while the less competitive states will approach 0.
greater competition. It also may reflect the lower turnout of southern states, which are typically modified one-party systems. Yet many of the states with the highest levels of turnout also are modified one-party states. Therefore, conclusions must wait for the multivariate test, but the initial results indicate that greater party competition corresponds to higher turnout.

The final classification reflects the enduring importance of the South as a unique political unit. As much as the South has become politically like the rest of the country, it still retains some of its patterns, particularly lower voting turnout. Turnout for respondents in nonsouthern states is about twenty percentage points higher than that for southern states, which is not a trivial difference (Table 15). The persistent power of the South to depress turnout is considerable. But given the available measures, I expect to reduce the power of the South as a distinct variable when other factors are included, such as demographics and registration provisions. The South is poorer and has some of the most restrictive provisions, relatively speaking, for registration. I suspect that much of its influence is due to the composition of the electorate and the institutional environment in which its electorate participates.

Many scholars of turnout delete the South from their research because of its patterns and trends that are contrary to the rest of the nation. But because I have both
individual-level data and registration-related data I think that I can control for many of these sources of variance. Thus it will remain in the analysis and will form an important part of the comprehensive model in later investigations, although the specifically "southern" effect may dissolve.

In summary, among the four political variables compared in this section, only the occurrence of a governor's race does not appear to be related to turnout differences. Those respondents in states with a concurrent Senate election vote at a higher rate than those without. Those respondents in two-party states vote more than those with less party competition. And, finally, an enormous difference exists between respondents inside and outside the South. This classification demonstrates the biggest difference to date.

Registration and Political Factors Simultaneously

The bivariate associations illustrated above between these variables and turnout provide an indication of the strength and direction of the relationships. But they cannot predict and explain individual behavior with much certainty. Because many of these factors do not occur alone, we must be careful to assign responsibility. Due to their interactive nature, a multivariate test is a more accurate method to determine each factor's influence on turnout.
Because turnout has only two categories, the method of analysis is again probit. The variable for length of purge is dropped from this comparison due to the properties of the estimator. Because all cases with missing values are dropped from the analysis, the respondents who live in areas without purges would be dropped from all comparisons because they would have a missing value for length of purge. In order to make more accurate comparisons, I have made every attempt to keep the number of cases as high as possible by excluding unnecessary variables that increase the number of cases with missing values. However, one important variable is a source for much of the missing data—locations for registration.

The results below of the multivariate test are both surprising and disappointing (Table 16). Among the registration variables, all are in the expected direction except registration availability at the post office and motor vehicle bureau, however, only one achieves statistical significance\(^6\).

I had expected that the closing date would reach significance because of the considerable literature supporting such a relationship (e.g., Kelley, Ayres, and Bowen 1967; Rosenstone and Wolfinger 1978; Teixeira 1992).

\(^6\)I also ran the computations with states distinguished as active motor-voter programs. The results were the same. In the 1988 survey, those states would be Colorado, Michigan, and Minnesota. Other states with active programs were not included in the National Election Study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Expected Sign)</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purge for Nonvoting (-)</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Date (-)</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration (+)</td>
<td>.182</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Registration (+)</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Registration (+)</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Voter Registration (+)</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars (+)</td>
<td>.355*</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interparty Competition (+)</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td>.986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election (+)</td>
<td>.404***</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial Election (+)</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South (-)</td>
<td>-.385**</td>
<td>.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>839</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R^2</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Log Likelihood: -446.66

Source: 1988 National Election Study and Own Data. See Appendix B.
*** p<.01
** p<.05
* p<.10
I also speculated that mail registration would reach significance given its strong, bivariate relationship with turnout and its widespread use.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, none of the registration variables achieve significance except deputy registrars. I find this particular result suspect given all of the other substantive information surrounding this factor. The bivariate comparisons earlier in the chapter indicate lower turnout in those areas with deputy registrars, and the potential use of this reform varies widely. This reform also acts as the lowest common denominator among all of the reforms. About 84\% of the respondents live in areas with provisions for deputy registrars.

Given the above results, I tried alternative specifications for the registration provisions. Using independent sources to collect the registration provisions in 1988, I found slightly different classifications for states. I used these new statewide classifications and modified certain respondents with reference to the following three variables: closing date, mail and motor-voter registration. The results were the same for registration factors.

Among the political features, both a Senate race and a gubernatorial election are positively related to turnout, but only the estimate for the Senate race is statistically

\textsuperscript{17}I removed the variable for mail registration to see if it had an effect on closing date, and I removed the variable for closing date to see if it had an effect on mail registration. Neither made any difference.
significant (Table 16). These results are the opposite of what Boyd (1986) found in the 1980 election. In that year gubernatorial elections increased the likelihood of turnout while Senate elections had no effect.

The regional variable of the South, as expected, is negatively associated with turnout while interparty competition does not reach significance (Table 16). Despite my expectations, I cannot explain the influence of the South by including registration provisions and party competition. The South exerts a strong and independent effect on turnout beyond these factors\textsuperscript{18}.

In transforming the probit estimates to compute the change in turnout, I will use the three significant variables, all of which are dichotomous, and the closing date. The only registration-related variable to reach significance is the provision of deputy registrars. When deputy registrars are available, turnout is likely to increase about 11 percentage points. Although this seems an unlikely event, I will wait until next chapter to dismiss or accept its effects. I also

\textsuperscript{18}I also tested if the South was explaining some of the variation that might also coincide with the registration and political factors. I removed the regional variable and computed new probit estimates. Several interesting results occur. Among the registration variables, the closing date variable becomes significant and the variable for deputy registrars falls below an acceptable significance level. However, the other registration variables remain largely unchanged. Among the political factors, the variable for interparty competition becomes significant and strongly related to turnout. Given the lower levels of party competition in the South, this result is not surprising. The other two political variables do not change.
calculated the change in turnout based on the change in the closing date. With each one-day increase in the closing date, turnout is likely to decline .3 percentage points.

Senate elections appear to have a sizable influence on turnout even with a presidential election. The presence of such an election is likely to increase turnout about 12 percentage points. Similarly, the South still acts to depress turnout beyond its restrictive registration systems. States in the South are likely to lose about 13 percentage points of turnout as compared to their nonsouthern counterparts.

Given the unexpectedly weak influence of registration reforms, I am concerned that I am incorrectly specifying the problem. Therefore, before I dismiss the effects of these provisions, I want to test them in a different way. It is possible that I am underestimating the effects of reforms by testing each of them as unique and distinct provisions. Instead, the reforms may have a greater cumulative than individual effect. One reform may offer some new opportunities for registration but three or four reforms may complement and reinforce each other beyond the individual contribution of each.

In order to test this, I combine the seven provisions described above into an index to test if the existence of several reforms is associated with higher turnout levels. The index could theoretically range from zero to seven. But the actual range is one to 4.5 because I coded those with closing
dates between zero and twenty days as .5. The mean number of reforms is 2.8.

**Table 17.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Expected Sign)</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Index¹ (+)</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interparty Competition</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election (+)</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gubernatorial Election (+)</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South (-)</td>
<td>-.508***</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.684</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>1262</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.404</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Log Likelihood           | -680.26  |                |

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.

¹ This variable is the number of reforms.

The index of reforms has only a slight relationship to turnout and the overall explanatory power of the equation declines from the previous example. The marginal influence of several of the reforms, however, may be the cause of these results. The addition of library and post office registration, for example, likely have little effect. But the combination of mail registration and a shorter closing date might have a different result. In the next chapter I will test combinations of registration factors that I suspect have
more influence with the personal characteristics of the voters.

Conclusions

Among the political variables, the regional distinction of the South and the existence of a Senate election have conspicuous effects on turnout. Both are strong and in the expected direction. The relationship between turnout and registration characteristics, however, is not as strong as theory would suggest. When turnout is compared without controls to any given characteristic, most relationships are in the expected direction. But when all of the characteristics are combined in a multivariate test, only a few reach significance. Among the registration variables of interest, one of the least likely appears to be positively related to turnout: the existence of deputy registrars.

In addition, the weak relationships do not appear to be due to the measurement of the registration variables. For example, an index of registration variables does not appear to provide a better conceptualization of their impact. Moreover, an independent classification of respondents in certain states does not change the findings.

Despite such results, I will retain all of the registration variables for the later analyses. The findings for deputy registrars seem unlikely and should be tested more
thoroughly. The most likely candidates for success are the variables for closing date and for mail registration. Both appear to be positively and strongly related to turnout in bivariate comparisons, and both have considerable, substantive merits. Perhaps those relationships will emerge in a more fully-specified model.
References


Chapter VI
A Fully-Specified Model of Turnout in 1988

In the previous two chapters, I compared various characteristics to individual turnout to determine the nature of their relationships. In Chapter Four, I examined turnout and its association with individual characteristics and attitudes. These include demographic characteristics such as age, education, race, and residency. They also include psychological attributes such as partisan intensity and interest in the election. In Chapter Five, I added those variables that form the individual's environment in which the decision to register and vote are made. Registration-related variables such as closing date and purge procedure are combined with political considerations like types of elections and party competition. In this chapter, I combine all of these considerations to better understand the impact of the registration variables on the individual decision to vote.

The goal of this project has been to understand the effects of the registration system on the individual's likelihood of voting. The analyses in Chapters Four and Five provide a guide to what we might expect, but until the various characteristics are combined, we cannot be certain of the
independent impact of the reforms. In this chapter, I first combine the relevant personal and political variables with all of the available registration provisions. From those results I estimate the influence of liberal registration provisions on turnout levels. I determine which registration variables have an impact and the magnitude of the impact.

**Personal, Political and Registration Variables**

The first test in this chapter is to combine the registration variables as well as the significant personal and political variables that were explored in the previous chapters. We cannot determine the importance of registration reforms until we include the personal and political characteristics that influence the motivation to register. Hence, this analysis should reveal which factors exert independent influences on turnout.

I run the model of these variables in two separate forms in order to better explore the effects of the reforms. In Model 1, I include those personal and political factors that reach significance in the earlier tests plus all of the registration-related factors examined in Chapter Five. Because I am particularly interested in the effects of registration provisions, I do not exclude from Model 1 those reforms that were not significantly related to turnout in earlier analyses.
In Model 2, I drop all of the registration-related variables except closing date, mail registration, and motor-voter registration. I retain these three for several reasons. On a substantive basis, I expect mail registration and the closing date to be strongly associated with turnout. However, I include motor-voter registration because of the new federal law to expand this program. Given the potential change due to this provision, it is important to understand any possible implications. (See Appendix C for the sources of missing data for the analyses in this chapter.)

After testing the individual effects of the reforms, I also try a different measure of their potential impact. Using the last three provisions, I create a reform index to determine if the existence of these reforms together produces a different impact than each individually. If this is the case, the relationship should emerge with the combination of these important factors.

When all of the factors are combined in Model 1, none of the registration-related variables achieve significance except library registration (Table 18). Given the earlier findings in Chapter Five, I had expected that most of the registration variables would not survive such a test. Several of these provisions either do not have an impact or do not have a measurable impact in this survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Expected Sign)</th>
<th>Estimate-Model 1</th>
<th>Estimate-Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purge for Nonvoting (-)</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.143)</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Date (-)</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.008)</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration (+)</td>
<td>.145</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.154)</td>
<td>(.136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Registration (+)</td>
<td>.234*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.131)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Registration (+)</td>
<td>-.128</td>
<td>-.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.196)</td>
<td>(.117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Voter Registration (+)</td>
<td>-.175</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.139)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars (+)</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.238)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election (+)</td>
<td>.409**</td>
<td>.371**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.164)</td>
<td>(.161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South (-)</td>
<td>-.390***</td>
<td>-.354***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.142)</td>
<td>(.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (+)</td>
<td>.644***</td>
<td>.527***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.150)</td>
<td>(.140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (+)</td>
<td>.039*</td>
<td>.043**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.022)</td>
<td>(.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency (+)</td>
<td>.035***</td>
<td>.032**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.013)</td>
<td>(.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the Election (+)</td>
<td>.212***</td>
<td>.194***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.061)</td>
<td>(.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Values (+)</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.061)</td>
<td>(.059)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.196</td>
<td>-.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.497</td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-318.96</td>
<td>-341.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.

* p<.10
** p<.05
***p<.01

The numbers in parentheses are standard errors of the estimates.
The effects of the purge variable, for example, are probably better tested on a smaller scale, perhaps a case study of two different states with registration as the dependent variable. This may be a more appropriate method of estimating the impact of purge provisions. This factor, among all of the provisions, may be the most difficult to tie directly to turnout.

Among the location-related registration provisions, the estimate for library registration seems unlikely and is quite sensitive to model specification. If motor-voter registration does not reach significance, it is doubtful that registration at either the post office or library would be significantly related to turnout. Over ninety percent of the population is licensed to drive a car, therefore, a large portion of the eligible electorate must come into contact with the motor vehicles bureau. Registration at the post office or library may be an added convenience, but it is unclear how many citizens utilize these resources.

As suspected, the power of deputy registrars fades when other controls are added (Table 18). I am not certain why it reached significance earlier, but that result appears premature and substantively unlikely. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the potential variation in implementation of this provision is enormous. To become a deputy registrar, some areas require only that the deputy registrar be a registered voter, whereas other areas require training or particular
employment. In addition, political parties and interest
groups must be motivated to use this provision. Without a
close election or a contentious issue, groups may not try to
register additional voters. Thus the likelihood is small that
deputy registrars would have a considerable and consistent
impact in all areas of use, although under the right
circumstances they may substantially increase the number of
registrants.

In Model 2, I remove the above registration variables,
retaining only the closing date and mail and motor-voter
registration. When only these three are included, closing
date nearly reaches significance, although the influence of
this variable is likely due to the overwhelmingly higher
turnout of same-day registration states. I tested this by
changing this variable to a dichotomous, same-day registration
measure. The results were similar to those in Models 1 and 2.
There does not appear to be a clear, inverse relationship
between closing date and turnout. Instead, those respondents
who live in areas with same-day registration are greatly
advantaged, but anything longer than that exhibits a weak
relationship to higher turnout. Given that other authors have
confirmed the relationship between closing date and turnout,
these results are not unexpected.

The other two variables of interest in Model 2 are mail
registration and motor-voter registration. Neither reaches
statistical significance and the latter is not in the expected
direction. Nevertheless, the result for mail registration is the more surprising of the two. The reform is common enough that I do not suspect a spurious relationship. On the contrary, over half of the respondents live in areas with mail registration. Given this distribution in the independent variable, I should be able to measure its impact, if any exists. But the reform does not appear to be statistically related to higher turnout. Despite our expectations that mail registration should ease considerably the burden of registration, it does not appear to heighten turnout.

The relationship between turnout and motor-voter registration is similarly weak, but perhaps for different reasons. Motor-voter registration is neither widespread in 1988 nor comparably implemented. Only a few states had active motor-voter systems operating before the 1988 presidential election. Among many other states, some were in the process of creating their programs while others provided limited access to this procedure. However, many of the states in the National Election Study are classified as offering motor-voter registration, despite the well known variation in implementation of the programs. Such inconsistency may be due to the newness of the reform, or it may be due to resistance from the agency or political actors. Regardless of the source, many motor-voter systems can be defined only loosely as such. Thus conclusions must be tentative. In 1988 those respondents who lived in states with motor-voter registration
were no more likely to vote than those that did not. But given the variation between programs, some programs may have been effective but were obscured among the other cases.\textsuperscript{19}

The results for mail and motor-voter registration are similar to those found by Teixeira (1992). He combined data for several presidential elections and found that the closing date had the greatest potential for increasing turnout. Mail and motor-voter registration did not exhibit consistent and significant effects on turnout, although he also was concerned about his measurement of the motor-voter provision.

Despite the consistency of these findings, I am concerned that they are incomplete due to the powerful effect of another variable—the South. For example, many of the southern states also have fewer reforms and lower turnout. But the relationship between the absence of reform and lower turnout may be dwarfed by the regional variable. Therefore, I executed Model 1 and Model 2 without the regional variable (Table 19).

\textsuperscript{19}I tested different classifications for motor-voter registration. Using an independent source to identify states with active programs, I then recoded the respondents in those states. I ran the analysis again and arrived at similar findings. The new motor-voter variable that I created also was negatively but not statistically related to turnout. However, given the small number of cases in this category, I am hesitant to discount a null effect due to this proposal.
Table 19.

Probit Estimates of Registration, Political and Individual-Level Variables on Validated Turnout Without the Regional Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Expected Sign)</th>
<th>Estimate-Model 1</th>
<th>Estimate-Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purge for Nonvoting (-)</td>
<td>.217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.141)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Date (-)</td>
<td>-.015**</td>
<td>-.016**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.007)</td>
<td>(.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Registration (+)</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.151)</td>
<td>(.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Registration (+)</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.128)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office Registration (+)</td>
<td>-.088</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.196)</td>
<td>(.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Voter Registration (+)</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>-.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.132)</td>
<td>(.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrars (+)</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.234)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election (+)</td>
<td>.531***</td>
<td>.498***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.156)</td>
<td>(.152)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (+)</td>
<td>.677***</td>
<td>.560***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.149)</td>
<td>(.139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (+)</td>
<td>.044**</td>
<td>.048**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.022)</td>
<td>(.021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency (+)</td>
<td>.033**</td>
<td>.031**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.013)</td>
<td>(.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the Election (+)</td>
<td>.204***</td>
<td>.180***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.060)</td>
<td>(.058)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Values (+)</td>
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<td>.081</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.061)</td>
<td>(.059)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
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<td>-.963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R$^2$</td>
<td>.493</td>
<td>.496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-322.75</td>
<td>-345.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 1988 National Election Study. See Appendix B.

* p<=.10
** p<=.05
***p<=.01

The numbers in parentheses are standard errors of the estimates.
For both models the only change among the registration provisions involved the variable for closing date. In both models the closing date was statistically and negatively related to turnout when the regional variable was excluded. The likely reason for the strength of this relationship is the longer average closing date in most southern states. When the regional variable was removed, I could more clearly specify the association between closing date and turnout without the influence of the South. In the previous findings the South was "explaining" some of the variance that also coincided with more restrictive registration systems because the South has fewer reforms, relatively speaking, than the rest of the country.

None of the other registration provisions reached significance without the regional variable. However, the variable for deputy registrars switched from the expected positive sign in Table 18 to an unexpected negative sign. The switch likely reflects that the provision for deputy registrars is the only reform for many southern states. When the regional variable was removed and could not explain the lower turnout in the South, other variables assumed that role. The provision for deputy registrars probably does not lower turnout, but its existence without other reforms may reflect a more restrictive system and therefore lower turnout. But, in general, the exclusion of the regional variable does not improve the explanatory power of the registration variables.
I also tested the possibility that these relationships are different inside and outside the South due to its strong, independent influence. Comparisons of southern respondents are difficult due to their small number. But when I exclude those respondents for comparisons outside the South, the relationships are similar except for mail registration. The closing date, as expected, is negatively and significantly related to turnout. Contrary to expectations, motor-voter is still negatively but not statistically related to turnout. However, for nonsouthern respondents, the variable for mail registration shows an unlikely, negative relationship to turnout. Although the estimate is not statistically significant, the direction is bewildering. But I suspect this finding is not meaningful given all of the other information concerning this variable.

Thus by removing the regional variable or by analyzing only nonsouthern respondents, I reach similar findings. The closing date is statistically related to turnout and in the expected direction. Neither of the other two variables reaches statistical significance. In both of the latter two tests, motor-voter registration remains negatively associated with turnout. In contrast, mail registration is positively related to turnout when the regional variable is excluded, but it displays an unlikely, negative relationship among nonsouthern respondents.
However, before I dismiss the registration reforms, I will attempt one more conceptualization of their impact. As described in Chapter Five, the reforms may have a cumulative influence that is different from their individual effects. In the last chapter, I combined all of the reforms to create a seven-point index to approximate ease of registration. In this chapter I combine only the three reforms of mail, motor-voter, and same-day registration\textsuperscript{20} to create a three-point scale of convenience. These particular reforms have substantive merit as well as public policy implications given the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. In addition, the combination of mail and motor-voter registration is a closer approximation of the new law. Citizens would have several methods to register; for example, if they did not drive a car, other outlets would be available. On this new scale or index, the values range from zero to three, with a mean of 1.04 reforms.

\textsuperscript{20}I am using same-day registration instead of closing date for the index. However, the few respondents with closing dates of less than two weeks are assigned .5 for this variable.
Table 20.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable (Expected Sign)</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reform Index¹ (+)</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate Election (+)</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South (-)</td>
<td>-.404***</td>
<td>.106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (+)</td>
<td>.598***</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (+)</td>
<td>.040**</td>
<td>.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency (+)</td>
<td>.041***</td>
<td>.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the Election (+)</td>
<td>.134***</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Values (+)</td>
<td>.114**</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.907</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>.503</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-499.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ This variable reflects the number of reforms of mail registration, motor-voter registration, and same-day registration.

** p<=.05

*** p<=.01

Source: 1988 National Election Study
Despite my expectation that the combination of these particular reforms might demonstrate a stronger relationship to turnout, the use of an index does not prove such an association (Table 20). The reform index is positively related to turnout, however, it does not achieve statistical significance. All of the remaining variables maintain their original relationship to turnout. This result indicates that even when citizens have several options that make registration more convenient, turnout is not necessarily higher. Thus the combination of the three most promising reforms does not reveal a relationship to turnout that is not evident for each individual reform.

Given the findings described above, same-day registration appears to be the only reform with the expected relationship. However, I will use all three of the registration provisions to calculate a new turnout as if all were significantly associated to turnout, although, of course, they are not. This calculation should indicate the potential for turnout increase if the reforms did achieve the desired effects. Using the estimates from Model 2 in Table 18, I can calculate the expected turnout with the most liberal laws—mail, motor-voter, and same-day registration. By setting the other variables to their means, I can compute an expected turnout if

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21I tested this relationship without the regional variable. The strength of the reform index increases and the standard error decreases, but it still does not achieve significance.
all respondents had these provisions. Using this survey, the new turnout with the most liberal provisions would be ten percentage points higher, assuming the reforms did have the expected result. This increase is due to the effects of the closing date and mail registration, not motor-voter registration. The latter provision is negatively associated with higher turnout and detracts from this percentage total. This ten-percentage point change is turnout is based on the assumption that the estimates were significantly related to turnout. Because they were not, we must be careful not to assign too much influence to the reforms.

The finding of a ten percentage-point increase is somewhat higher than that found by Rosenstone and Wolfinger (1978). They computed that if all states allowed same-day registration in the 1972 election, turnout would have been 6.1 percentage points higher (p. 35). But when they added other provisions like absentee registration and increased hours for registration, they predict that turnout would have been 9.1 percentage points higher (p. 34). If we interpret the latter arrangements as having similar effects as mail registration, the findings are remarkably close.

The similarities to other research notwithstanding, the results of my final analyses produce a paradox. Same-day registration appears to make registration and therefore voting easier. As a result, turnout is higher in those areas even while holding constant other relevant factors. But if this
reform produces the expected effect, the other reforms should have similar if smaller effects. The success of the former makes the failure of the latter all the more perplexing.

Other Findings

Another unexpected finding in this research is the strong effect of race. I began this dissertation by describing the registration and voting systems that were designed to keep minorities from the polls. Restrictive hours, poll taxes, and literacy tests allowed the disenfranchisement of minorities and undesirable whites. Not only have those restraining factors been eliminated, other reforms have further eased registration and lessened the arbitrary power of localities. Given these changes, I would not expect race to exert a strong, independent effect on turnout in 1988.

Other researchers have found that the influence of race diminishes with the addition of demographic and psychological data. Because minorities are more likely to be in the ranks of the poorer and lesser educated, when these considerations are added race usually does not exert an independent effect. But in my findings race remains strongly and significantly related to turnout, which is why the results are all the more surprising.
Tate (1991) describes the large variation in black turnout between the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections.\textsuperscript{22} She argues that blacks are mobilized through local organizations, and when those organizations are not active, turnout is likely to be lower. Jesse Jackson's successful candidacy sparked an increase in turnout in 1984, whereas his failed candidacy likely caused a turnout decline in 1988. Thus part of the explanation may be due to a lack of stimulus in the black community in 1988.

Even given Tate's hypothesis, the turnout difference between races still seems unreasonably large. In the 1988 National Election Study, nonwhite turnout is 25 percentage points below that of white turnout. I conducted several bivariate comparisons between whites and nonwhites concerning the appeal of the candidates, their interest in the campaign, and their feelings of civic duty. None of these comparisons produced more than small differences in the responses. Even if the turnout difference among blacks is due to the lack of mobilization at the community level, the difference indicates an unusually large volatility in turnout.

Unfortunately, because of its numbers, this survey does not support a thorough examination of a subgroup in the survey. Thus the cause of the discrepancy remains unclear, but the result is obvious. Minorities are not voting at the

\textsuperscript{22}Black turnout in 1984 was four percentage points higher than in 1988.
rates of whites even when other considerations are included. The structural barriers that used to keep minorities from the polls no longer exist, and the new registration reforms have failed to bring minorities into the voting booth in greater numbers. Other influences have become more important than legal obstacles in discouraging and suppressing minority turnout.

In addition to the independent influence of race, the other unexpected finding is the enduring power of the South as a distinctive influence. I predicted earlier that when demographic, psychological, political, and registration variables, in particular, are included, the unique effect of the South would diminish. Instead, it exerts a strong, independent, and negative influence on turnout that surmounts its composition, its registration rules, and its political structure. Some other factor or set of factors remains unexplored in understanding the distinctive power of the South. Consequently, I have been unable to solve several mysteries of turnout with a better understanding of the registration environment.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I estimated a model of turnout using the relevant demographic, psychological and political characteristics. To this model I added the various
registration variables to determine their influence in explaining turnout differences. Theory would suggest that those factors that make registration easier would be associated with higher turnout. Those factors should produce an impact independent of the voters’ characteristics and the nature of the election. Indeed, the provision of same-day registration does have an independent and positive effect on turnout. Those respondents who have access to same-day registration vote at levels well above average.

But the other provisions do not have similar effects. Relaxed purge procedures, more locations for registration, and deputy registrars do not appear to be related to turnout. More importantly, mail registration and motor-voter registration cannot be tied to higher turnout. Mail registration has become widely accepted in the states as a way to facilitate registration. But despite its widespread use, it is not associated with a greater likelihood of voting. Motor-voter registration does not enjoy a similar level of support or use. It has experienced inadequate implementation and only limited acceptance in the states. But, like mail registration, it cannot be tied to higher than average turnout. Furthermore, the combination of mail, motor-voter, or same-day registration does not increase the likelihood of voting. The combination of reforms does not have a greater impact than each individual provision. Therefore, given the weak relationship between a majority of these provisions and
higher turnout, more convenient registration does not appear to be the path to higher turnout.
References


Chapter VII
Conclusions

Since the early 1970s, the voter registration systems in the fifty states have changed profoundly. Modifications designed to make registration easier and more convenient have proliferated. Some of the reforms occurred in response to the alarming turnout decline both nationally and in a majority of states. Other reforms were the product of interest group pressure to expand voting rights through registration reform. And, finally, certain reforms were fashioned to include the politically powerless. But regardless of the impetus, the goal of the reforms was to increase the number of registered citizens in order to expand the size of the electorate.

Given all of the changes in the registration systems in the fifty states, turnout should have increased over this time period. For example, since the early 1970s there has been a small but steady decline in the length of time between the closing date for registration and the elections. On the heels of a 1972 Supreme Court decision, most states reduced their closing dates to thirty days and many reduced them even further. Several states allow their citizens to register on
election day, and several more allow registration within two weeks of the election.

A second and somewhat different reform has been mail registration. Mail registration has become both widespread and modernized during this same time period. Previously, several states allowed burdensome forms of mail registration, requiring extensive justification and verification. However, over the last twenty years a majority of states have adopted convenient forms of mail registration, typically in postcard style.

Another trend in reforms has been to increase the locations for registration. Registration is offered in more locations at more convenient hours. For example, agency registration provides this service at the offices of the given state, county, or city government. State agency registration provides registration forms statewide at government offices with public contact, while city and county registration provides the services at their own offices. A particular form of state agency registration, motor-voter registration, offers these services at the offices of the bureau of motor vehicles.

All of these opportunities are designed to incorporate registration into the other, daily activities of citizens. Instead of requiring a special trip to the board of elections, citizens may register when they renew their driver's license, get married, apply for unemployment benefits, or buy a hunting license, among other things.
Similarly, the existence of mobile registrars reduces the need to register at the board of elections. Deputy registrars are citizens who can seek out new registrants at schools, shopping malls, and other places where people congregate. Due to the expansion in availability of deputy registrars, the requirements to recruit and register citizens are much easier. While considerable variation still exists, the use of deputy registrars is nearly universal.

Given all of these reforms, policy makers and the public expected a halt to the turnout decline and, in many instances, an increase in turnout. With each new reform came the expectation of higher turnout at the voting booth. Similarly, with each reform proposal, opponents would predict massive voting fraud, speculating that large numbers would take advantage of the more liberal system. Instead, both sides have been incorrect in their prophesies. Not only have the reforms been unable to increase turnout, in most instances they have been unable to halt the decline. Moreover, officials have detected little fraud resulting from these changes. In fact, some of the reforms, like motor-voter registration, encourage independent verification of registrants. The predicted masses of proper and improper voters have not materialized as a result of the new registration rules.

Such findings produce a bewildering paradox. Registration has become easier at the same time that turnout
has declined in most states. But despite this relationship, most still believe that simply by changing the rules, the nature of turnout will change.

Effects of These Changes

In order to determine if the various reforms did, indeed, have any effects, I analyzed turnout on two levels and used numerous mechanisms to uncover possible variation due to the rules. I compared aggregate turnout levels across time, and I compared individual turnout levels in the 1988 presidential election. The analyses of aggregate and individual turnout produced similar but not identical results.

In Chapter Two, I conducted aggregate comparisons of turnout for the period covering the last twenty years as well as a cross-section of recent elections. As the aggregate analysis revealed, closing date was consistently related to turnout. As the length of time between the closing date and the election declines, turnout tends to increase. This result was valid both across time and in single elections.

Also in the aggregate, states with mail registration have had higher average turnout since 1980, but the difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, motor-voter registration appears to have improved turnout in those states with active programs. In most instances, an active program is associated with a turnout increase relative to the national
mean. However, in the multivariate analysis, motor-voter registration was significantly and positively related to turnout levels only for the 1990 midterm elections. This result is not surprising given the proliferation of the program by 1990. And, finally, in the aggregate multivariate comparisons, the length of the purge period was significantly related to turnout levels in the presidential, but not the midterm elections.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I extended the analysis to the individual level by examining turnout in the 1988 presidential election. Among the registration provisions, the closing date displayed the most consistent effect on individual turnout. Analogous to the aggregate results, longer closing dates were associated with lower turnout, whereas same-day registration was likely to increase turnout. Also like the aggregate comparisons, mail registration was positively but not significantly related to individual turnout.

Among the location-related provisions, two of the three did not demonstrate strong, positive relationships to individual turnout. Motor-voter registration, for example, was negatively but not significantly related to individual turnout in the 1988 presidential election, whereas post office registration was positively but not significantly associated with turnout. Library registration, however unlikely, was positively and significantly associated with the likelihood of
voting. Other provisions such as deputy registrars and the nonvoting purge also were not associated with individual turnout.

In fact, the results for most of the changes do not conform to expectations. Proponents of registration reform argued that such changes would reduce the turnout decline. By making registration and therefore voting easier, the proponents believed that more people would participate. They assumed that the cause of low turnout was the burdensome registration system in the United States. If that system was relaxed, more people would vote.

Regardless of expectation, not only did turnout not increase over time, in most states it continued in a steady decline. Only a few states have positive changes in turnout rates over time, and most of those are in the South. Perhaps the only effect of these reforms is less-than-average declines. Based simply on aggregate comparisons, I found that states with more restrictive laws lost a larger percentage of their electorate than states with more generous rules. However, this is not a demanding standard. Registration reform was supposed to produce more than "less-than-average" decline. Reforms were designed to increase turnout.
The Cost of Voting

I have premised this project on the assumption that the decision to vote is sensitive to registration costs, and by reducing or increasing costs, voting rates will increase or decrease. For example, Downs (1957) described the rationality behind the decision to abstain from voting. Even if there are no costs to voting, those who are indifferent will abstain. But when there are costs, it is rational for some who are not indifferent to abstain from the election. Elections and becoming eligible for elections involve the cost of time and information. When those costs exceed the short- and long-term benefits of voting, it is rational not to participate.

The cost of interest in this research project has been the time and information required to register. Because most people who are registered will eventually vote, we presume that if we reduce the cost of registration, turnout will increase. I have, in effect, tried to measure different costs of registration systems in order to determine their effect on turnout. I have assumed that the variation in costs due to registration provisions would be reflected in varying turnout levels. However, the decision to vote reflects a calculus of the individual motivation weighed against the costs of participation. Therefore, differences in cost may not directly translate into differing turnout levels.
For example, same-day registration states offer a useful illustration of this relationship. The cost of time and information is overcome as election day approaches because motivation is higher. Citizens can combine the requirements for registration with the act of voting at a time when interest in the election is likely to be greater. For those citizens in the states that allow same-day registration, turnout is higher than one might predict given knowledge of the other individual and political characteristics. Thus we might conclude that those citizens exhibit higher turnout because at the time that they must register they are more motivated to do so.

But if these assumptions about the relationship between costs and turnout are correct, the result of mail and motor-voter registration should be higher turnout. By making registration more readily available, the cost of registration should decline and turnout should be higher. Because it is not, either these reforms do not significantly affect the costs and therefore turnout or the change in costs are only weakly related to the likelihood of voting because the motivation to participate still does not outweigh the costs associated with the new registration provisions.

For example, perhaps mail and motor-voter registration do not make registration easier for the marginal participant. Although we expect that either reform should facilitate registration, we may be overestimating or misestimating the
impact. Using state records we can verify that many citizens do, indeed, use these mechanisms to newly register or update their registration. However, if the only citizens who use these reforms are those who would have registered by a more difficult mechanism in their absence, then the absolute level of turnout will not change. Meanwhile, those who were unregistered previously have remained unregistered. Thus the reforms may reduce the costs of those who are motivated to register in any event, but they are not appealing or easy enough for those who were not registered under the earlier systems. The reforms may not sufficiently alter the costs to reach those who have remained unmotivated to register under various systems.

In contrast, perhaps these reforms have reduced the cost of registration, but the motivation to participate has been so weak that the more liberal requirements are not reflected in the turnout levels. I have assumed that shifts in the cost of registration would be reflected in turnout, but perhaps I have ignored the tie to perceived benefits of participation when I estimate the effects of costs. Other characteristics of the electoral system, e.g., the party system or the candidates, are important factors in motivating people to vote. For example, the turnout increase in 1992 coincides with a more visible, third-party candidate who challenged the two major parties. The added competition created a greater change in turnout levels than any of the registration reforms.
Similarly, turnout levels that are sensitive to motivation rather than structural barriers also provide a better explanation for lower turnout among nonwhites. Motivation and cost interact to determine the likelihood of participation. Therefore, even when the costs are lowered, citizens must be motivated to register to vote.

It makes sense that if people perceive a benefit in voting, they will pay the necessary cost within a reasonable range. For the remaining citizenry, if the benefits are few, it seems unnecessary to shoulder the burden of registration. Thus increasing or decreasing obstacles to registration within a small range will not alter turnout while the benefits remain unchanged. In this scenario, the motivation must exceed the costs in the decision whether or not to vote.

Either of the above scenarios must disappoint advocates for registration reform. States that have adopted such reforms have not realized many of the promises that accompanied them. Supporters of reforms had expected that such mechanisms would bring the disenfranchised into the electorate, but changes have been modest. For example, Michigan has the longest-established program of motor-voter registration in the United States. Since the mid-1970s, Michigan has allowed citizens to register when they make transactions with the bureau of motor vehicles. During this same period of time turnout has declined both in presidential elections and in midterm elections, except in 1992. Because
similar trends appear with other reforms, projections for a greatly expanded electorate appear unrealistic.

The reforms in this project, however, represent only a small range of possibilities. Unlike many industrialized democracies, the U.S. citizen must bear individual responsibility for registration. The current reforms may make registration more convenient, but the citizen still must make an effort to take advantage of that convenience. Given the range of laws in the United States, the likelihood of voting appears to show a closer association to the perceived benefits than to the costs.

It appears that citizens must be motivated to register and participate in elections. Given the experience in 1992, when citizens are motivated to participate, the turnout levels are higher. Therefore, the motivation to register and vote must be greater than the necessary cost in order to increase participation in the United States.

Federal Proposals

Given our experience, the response from both parties to the newly-passed National Voter Registration Act of 1993 appears unwarranted. The law contains provisions for uniform mail registration and some forms of agency registration, which includes registration at motor vehicle offices, libraries, military recruitment centers and public assistance outlets.
The Republicans strongly opposed registration in the latter location. The law supports "automatic" registration that encourages but does not force applicants to register at government locations. For instance, when people provide information for their driver's license they are also registered to vote unless they decline.

The compromise version of the bill did not include unemployment offices in the list of government locations to register. It also sought to separate the act of registration from the request for public assistance in order to ensure the independence of workers in these locations. However, the law, which will go into effect in 1995, did not include appropriations for implementation.

The Democrats hope and the Republicans fear that a large number of currently inactive citizens will swell the voting ranks. Because those new voters are likely to have lower incomes and less education, both parties assume a windfall for the Democrats. But given the weak relationship between registration reform and higher turnout, their assumptions seem unwarranted.

For example, over half of the states already have mail registration, and its use has not corresponded with higher than expected turnout in those states. As demonstrated earlier, those respondents who live in areas with mail registration are no more likely to vote than their counterparts without mail registration. Thus given its
already widespread nature, the addition of mail registration in the remaining states is unlikely to increase turnout.

The addition of agency registration also is unlikely to significantly increase turnout. The current forms of motor-voter registration are simply examples of the broader reform of agency registration. Given the history of motor-voter programs, dramatic changes in registration and voting are unlikely. Motor-voter registration experiences vastly different implementation in various states (Montjoy 1992). In some of the states with strong political support for the provisions, the program has experienced success. But in many states it has languished on the books. Many employees who should carry out these activities also are overburdened with their regular responsibilities. Therefore, it may be unreasonable to expect any agency to embrace this added responsibility.

The only way that federal reforms could produce different results is if they are both superbly implemented and different from the current systems. If they are automatic, perhaps that will have a different impact. The ideal, registration system proposed in this law is not like the registration systems in 1988. However, we cannot predict if even an ideal system would change turnout given our understanding of voting.

The National Voter Registration Act will require computerized centralization of records between state agencies and registration officials, thereby increasing the price for
implementation. While some states have moved to such a system already, many states maintain separate records that would require considerable resources and time to combine. If a unifying system does not presently exist, implementation will be slower.

In addition, the lack of money appropriated to implement the program will influence its success. Most states are experiencing budget shortfalls due to declining revenues and increased responsibilities. Voter registration is unlikely to be a high priority given the demands on state money. In fact, many members of Congress complained that this law is one more directive for the states from the federal government without the appropriate financing. Therefore, because the federal government is relying on the states to pay for their conversion to a new system, the transition may be slow and uneven.

Even if an ambitious and automatic system to register voters is implemented, turnout is unlikely to meet the exaggerated claims of supporters. Proponents assume that a significant majority of the newly-registered will eventually vote. But these estimates come from experiences where citizens must make some minimal effort to register. If eligible voters are registered almost automatically, we can assume that more will lack sufficient motivation to vote.

For example, Cain and McCue (1985) compare turnout levels between people who registered themselves and people who were
registered by a group. Among those registered, 57% of the self-registered and 41% of the group-registered eventually voted in the next election (p. 1226). Many in the latter group may have registered because it was expected but had little interest or ability to vote in the general election. Hence, if we change the rules for registration, we should not assume that the new population will vote at the same levels as the population under the previous rules.

All of the evidence suggests that most of the registration reforms have made little difference in turnout. Same-day registration appears to be significantly and positively related to turnout, but that provision is not part of the new federal law. The other reforms do not exhibit the same relationship, even in combination. Therefore, their expansion nationally probably will not have much of an effect. Contrary to our theory and expectations, making registration easier does not necessarily translate into higher turnout. If the perceived benefit is less important than the cost of voting, the benefits must change before turnout will increase.

**Future Research**

The passage of the National Voter Registration Act presents two separate opportunities for studying registration law and practice. The first area will involve comparisons of the new federal mandates with current state practices.
Similar to the analyses above, we will want to determine the impact of the new programs on turnout. Given our experience with registration law, most changes have not been able to produce the expected increase in turnout. However, if these reforms are sufficiently different, they may have more of an impact than current practices.

The "automatic" registration in government offices has the potential to reach a broader audience by shifting the burden from the individual to the state. Individuals need not be motivated to seek out methods to register. Instead, when they conduct normal business, they will have the opportunity to register. Therefore, registration will no longer be distinct from interactions with other government agencies. As a result, we should study the characteristics and voting habits of this newly-registered and presumably larger population.

The second area of potential research is in implementation studies. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 represents a considerable federal intrusion into local election practices. The new law requires coordination of state agencies and their information systems. Moreover, even if states create suitable systems, local areas must implement the program. Thus the success of the program will be dependent on both state and local cooperation. If either partner resists, the federal laws will not have the intended impact on the responsibility for registration.
Undoubtedly for reasons of money, patronage, party politics, or simple bureaucratic resistance, certain areas will not embrace the federal mandates. Because registration is influenced by local characteristics, a certain degree of variation is to be expected. Understanding the extent and sources of variation will further our knowledge of implementation in general and registration law in particular. This law provides an illustrative example of an unfunded federal directive that is likely to be unpopular among the street-level bureaucrats that are supposed to implement it. The law will create added responsibility for many employees that currently have no association with voter registration. As a result, the implementation of this law is likely to provide an interesting perspective on cooperation and resistance among policy makers and bureaucrats.
References


Appendix A: Date Relative to Chapter III. State Registration Laws

Gathering this information should have been a straightforward task. It was not. I used multiple sources and cross-checked them for accuracy, but usually the sources offered opposing information. *The Book of the States* has an election section that was extremely helpful, but it did not cover much of the information. Richard Smolka, who writes some of the above sections, has written several case studies about the beginning of several, innovative state programs. *Registering Voters by Mail* (1975) and *Election Day Registration* (1977) offer excellent background. The League of Women Voters Education Fund gathers and prints posters of state registration procedures. I used the 1984 poster "Easy Does It" and the 1988 poster "Vote! The First Steps." They also provided a 1990 update of the 1988 poster. The organization 100% Vote/Human SERVE provided guidance for motor-voter classifications. Jo-Anne Chasnow, National Associate Director, and Susan Kotcher, Senior Program Associate, were able to evaluate programs according to a rough dichotomy, which allowed much better measures of the program's success. The Center for Policy Alternatives in Washington, D.C., published several relevant books, *Voter Registration and the States* (1986 and 1991) and *Voter Purging* (1991). They also maintain updated lists for such provisions as closing dates. The information from Wolfinger and Rosenstone's *Who Votes?* (1980) offered a beginning to the 1972 statutes. I also checked state statute at the Ohio Supreme Court Library. All of these sources taken together provide an approximate picture of state laws, but several inconsistencies could not be reconciled.

**Mail Registration.** For the multivariate comparisons, states were coded a 0 or 1 depending on if they provided this provision. Following are the states that allow universal mail registration and the election year it was begun. Alaska, before 1972; California, 1976; Connecticut, 1988; Hawaii, 1990; Iowa, 1976; Kansas, 1976; Kentucky, 1974, although it is unclear how widely available it is; Maine, 1984; Maryland, 1976; Minnesota, 1974; Montana, 1976; Nebraska, 1986; New Jersey, 1974; New York, 1976; Ohio, 1978; Oregon, 1976; Pennsylvania, 1976; South Carolina, 1988; South Dakota, 1986; Tennessee, 1976; Texas, before 1972; Utah, 1976; Vermont, 1990; West Virginia, 1984; Wisconsin, 1976. Delaware, although classified by most as a mail-registration state, does
not make this list. Residents must apply for mail-registration forms and must return them by October 1.


Closing date. The state's actual closing date was used for the multivariate comparisons. The values ranged from 0 to 50.


Appendix B: Data Relative to Chapters IV-VI. Coding of Variables for Individual-Level Analysis

1988 National Election Study

Registration-Related Variables:
Purge (variable 1154): 1=nonvoting purge, 0=no nonvoting purge.
Length of Purge (variable 1160): 0=1 to 3 years, 1=4 years or more.
Closing Date (variable 1210): numbers of days before election registration closed.
Mail registration (variable 1277): 1=mail registration, 0=no mail registration.
Library Registration (variable 1224): 1=permanent registration available at library, 0=no registration available at library.
Post Office (variable 1227): 1=permanent registration available at post office, 0=no registration available at post office.
Motor Voter Registration (variable 1228): 1=permanent registration at motor vehicle office, 0=no permanent registration at office.
Deputy Registrars (variable 1262): 1=deputy registrars, 0=no deputy registrars.

Political Variables:
Senate Election (variable 51): 1=concurrent Senate election, 0=no Senate election.
Region: 1=southern states, 0=nonsouthern states.
Gubernatorial Election: 1=concurrent gubernatorial election, 0=no gubernatorial election.
Interparty Competition: I subtracted the Ranney index of interparty competition from 0 or 1, depending on which one was closer. The values for the most competitive states approach .5 on the Ranney index, whereas the least competitive approach 0 or 1. Therefore, when subtracted from the nearest extreme of 0 or 1, the more competitive states approach scores of .5 while the less competitive states approach scores of 0.

Demographic Variables:
Race (variable 412): 1=white, 0=nonwhite.
Marital Status (variable 418): 1=married, 0=never married, divorced, separated, widowed.
Education (variable 419): single years of education completed.
Family Income (variable 520): used increments provided by survey. A higher increment indicates higher income, but the categories at the low-income end cover smaller income ranges.
Residency (variable 551): .25=0-6 months, .75=6-12 months, 1.5=1-2 years, 3.5=3-4 years, 5.5=5-6 years, 7.5=7-8 years, 9.5=9-10 years, 11=11 or more years.

**Psychological Variables:**
Interest in the Election (variable 97): 3=very much, 2=somewhat, 1=not much.
Close presidential race (variable 99): 0=not close, 1=close.
Care which party wins (variable 102): 0=don’t care very much, 1=care a great deal.
Partisanship (variable 274): 1=Independents and Independent leaners, 2=weak Democrats and Republicans, 3=strong Democrats and Republicans.
Civic Values (variable 936): 3=disagree strongly or somewhat that shouldn’t vote if don’t care about outcome, 2=neither agree nor disagree, 1=agree somewhat or strongly.
People like me have no say in government (variable 937): 1=agree strongly or somewhat, 2=neither agree nor disagree, 3=disagree strongly or somewhat.
Public officials don’t care what I think (variable 938): 1=agree strongly or somewhat, 2=neither agree nor disagree, 3=disagree strongly or somewhat.

**Validated Vote:**
Record of respondent voting, including no self report (variable 1148): 1=registration record found and indicates respondent voted, 0=record found, but not listed as voting; record found and not listed as voting, but some records unavailable; no registration record; no name, records not checked; respondent self report as not registered.
Appendix C: Data Relative to Chapter VI. Description of the Sources of Missing Data.

When analysis of data is based on too few cases, we become concerned about the validity of the findings. In the analyses above many cases were lost due to the casewise deletion procedure in the probit program. Whenever there was missing data for a respondent in a relevant variable, that case was dropped from the comparison. Because most variables have at least some missing values, when many variables are combined the problem is compounded. Therefore, I will briefly describe the important sources of missing data in the comparisons from Chapter VI.

The first source of missing data was the use of the validated vote as the dependent variable. Any respondent without a post-election interview was automatically excluded from the comparisons, as well as people for which no records were available. This variable reduced the number of cases to a little more than 1600.

The variables for permanent registration locations were the next source of case loss. About 30% of the respondents did not have this corresponding registration information, thereby creating an unusually large amount of missing data. Because the variable for motor voter registration was of particular interest, I did not want to exclude it from the analyses. When this variable was combined with the validated vote, the number of cases fell to 1076.

The addition of the other registration, political and demographic variables did not make as large of an impact. When all of the registration variables were combined with the validated vote, the number of cases fell only to 995. The additional loss due to the variables for race, education and mobility was minimal.

The variables for the psychological measures were the final source of significant case loss. The measure for civic duty contributed to some missing values, but the measure for "interest in the election" dramatically reduced the number of valid cases. When registration and demographic variables were included with the variable for interest in the election, the number of cases drops by over 200 to 789 total cases.

I re-examined Model 1 from Table 18 without the registration location variables. Without the latter the number of cases increased by over 300 to 986 valid respondents, but the substantive results were similar. As a result of this and earlier comparisons, I do not believe that the smaller number of cases altered the findings.
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