



# Examining the Effect of State Electoral Institutions on Voter Turnout During Presidential Elections, 2004-2016

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# The Big Why?

- Recently, voter suppression and ballot access have become a very popular topic within political discourse.
- We all have assumptions, but are they correct?
  - Do expansive reforms increase voter turnout?
  - Do restrictive measures decrease voter turnout?
- Conventional wisdom would suggest yes, but does Political Science and more importantly, the data agree?

# A look at past Political Science research

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- *Springer (2012)* examined voter turnout in presidential election from 1920 to 2000
  - Her results found that:
    - (1) Only a very small number of expansive laws significantly increased voter turnout in non-southern states
    - (2) Expansive laws had no effect in southern states where turnout rates were the lowest.
      - But how could this be???



# Hypothesis

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Expansive reforms increase voter turnout in presidential elections.

- Voter registration opportunities will increase voter turnout
- More liberal voting procedures will increase voter turnout

Regressive reforms will decrease voter turnout in presidential elections

- Residency length requirements will decrease voter turnout
- Voter ID Laws will decrease voter turnout

# Methodology: Variables

## Dependent Variable:

- Voter turnout during presidential elections per state

## Independent Variables:

- Residency requirements
  - Residency Length Requirements
- Voter registration:
  - Election day registration
  - No-Excuse Absentee voting
  - Registration Closing Date
- Voting procedures
  - Polling location hours
  - Voter ID Laws

# Methodology: Data Collection

- State voter turnout during presidential elections was calculated as a percentage of total presidential votes cast in the state divided by the state's voting eligible population.

- $$\text{State voter turnout (\%)} = \left( \frac{\text{Total Presidential Votes Cast}}{\text{Total voting eligible population}} \right) \times 100$$

- All data was collected from *The Book of States*, *Ballotpedia*, *The National Conference of State Legislatures* as well as state-specific voter guides.

state	year	presvotes	VAPth	VAPtotal	voteturnout	pervoteturnout	opentim	closing	totalophou	closingdate	electdayreg	NEAvote	voterIDlaw	residency
Alabama	2004	1,883,415	3,436	3,436,000	0.54814173	54.81%	7	7	12	10	0	0	1	0
Alaska	2004	312,598	467	467,000	0.66937473	66.94%	7	8	13	30	0	0	1	0
Arizona	2004	2,012,585	4,197	4,197,000	0.47952943	47.95%	6	7	13	29	0	0	1	1
Arkansas	2004	1,054,945	2,076	2,076,000	0.50816233	50.82%	7:30	7:30	12	30	0	0	1	0
California	2004	12,421,353	26,297	26,297,000	0.47234867	47.23%	7	8	13	15	0	0	0	0
Colorado	2004	2,129,630	3,423	3,423,000	0.62215308	62.22%	7	7	12	29	0	0	1	1
Connecticut	2004	1,578,769	2,665	2,665,000	0.59240863	59.24%	6	8	14	14	0	0	1	0
Delaware	2004	375,190	637	637,000	0.58899529	58.90%	7	8	13	20	0	0	1	0
Florida	2004	7,609,810	13,394	13,394,000	0.56815066	56.82%	7	7	12	29	0	0	1	0
Georgia	2004	3,301,875	6,497	6,497,000	0.50821533	50.82%	7	7	12	29	0	0	1	0
Hawaii	2004	429,013	964	964,000	0.44503423	44.50%	7	6	11	30	0	0	1	0
Idaho	2004	598,376	1,021	1,021,000	0.58606856	58.61%	7	8	13	25	0	0	0	1
Illinois	2004	5,274,322	9,475	9,475,000	0.55665668	55.67%	6	7	13	28	0	0	0	1
Indiana	2004	2,468,002	4,637	4,637,000	0.5322411	53.22%	6	6	12	29	0	0	0	1
Iowa	2004	1,506,908	2,274	2,274,000	0.66266843	66.27%	7	9	14	10	0	0	0	0
Kansas	2004	1,187,756	2,052	2,052,000	0.57882846	57.88%	6	8	14	15	0	0	0	0
Kentucky	2004	1,795,882	3,166	3,166,000	0.56724005	56.72%	6	6	12	29	0	0	1	1
Louisiana	2004	1,943,106	3,351	3,351,000	0.57985855	57.99%	6	8	14	30	0	0	1	0
Maine	2004	740,752	1,035	1,035,000	0.71570242	71.57%	6	8	14	0	1	0	0	0
Maryland	2004	2,384,238	4,163	4,163,000	0.57272111	57.27%	7	8	13	21	0	0	0	0
Massachusetts	2004	2,927,455	4,952	4,952,000	0.5911662	59.12%	7	8	13	20	0	0	0	0
Michigan	2004	4,839,252	7,579	7,579,000	0.63850798	63.85%	7	8	3	30	0	0	1	1
Minnesota	2004	2,828,387	3,861	3,861,000	0.73255297	73.26%	7	8	13	0	1	0	0	1
Mississippi	2004	1,139,824	2,153	2,153,000	0.52941198	52.94%	7	7	12	30	0	0	0	1
Missouri	2004	2,731,364	4,370	4,370,000	0.62502609	62.50%	6	7	13	28	0	0	1	0
Montana	2004	450,434	719	719,000	0.62647288	62.65%	7	8	13	30	0	0	1	1
Nebraska	2004	778,186	1,313	1,313,000	0.59267784	59.27%	7	7	12	14	0	0	0	0

# Methodology – Data Analyses

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- Pooled time-series and cross-sectional models
  - Time series analyses were conducted within each state, then cross sectional models were created by pooling all state time series analyses
  - For continuous (1, 2, 3, 4...) independent variables association was identified using regression models.
  - For categorical (0, 1, 1, 0...) independent variables group differences were identified using t-tests

# Preliminary Results: Regression

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## Voting Procedures: Polling Hours

- No statistically significant correlation found between number of hours poll locations were open and voter turnout

## Voter Registration: Registration closing

- Statistically significant weak positive correlation found between registration closing date and voter turnout



# Preliminary Results: t-test

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States with No Excuse Absentee Voting had no statistically significant difference in voter turnout than states without No Excuse Absentee Voting

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States with Election day registration on average had a statistically significantly higher voter turnout than states with no election day registration

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States with Residency requirements had no statistically significant difference in voter turnout than states with no residency requirements

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States with Voter ID Laws on average had a statistically significantly lower voter turnout than states with no Voter ID Laws

# Preliminary Results continued

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- For all southern states the same variables had a positive impact on voter turnout\*:
  - Election Day Registration
  - Registration Closing Date

*\*However, even though they had a positive association with increased voter turnout, the association was less strong than those in non-southern states, but the difference was not to a statistically significant degree*



# Preliminary Results

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## Statistically Significant

- Voter ID Laws
- Election Day Registration
- Registration Closing Dates

## Not Statistically Significant

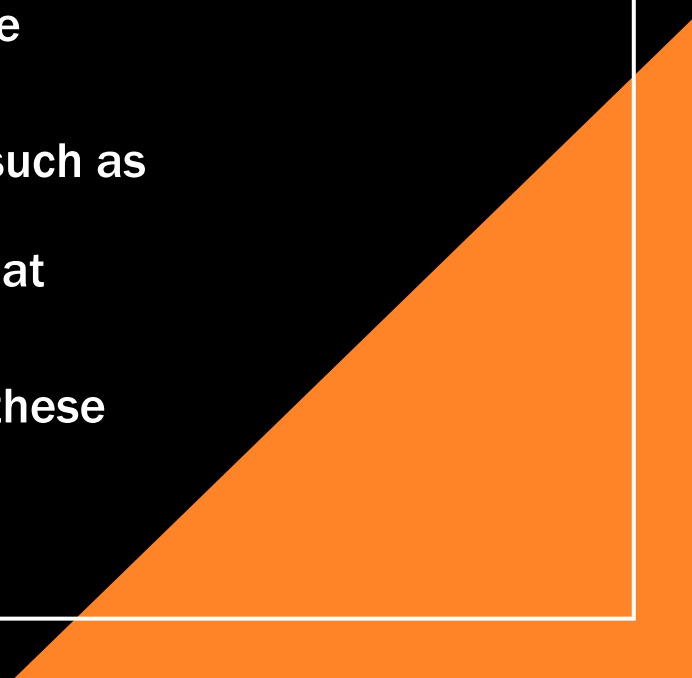
- No Excuse Absentee Voting
- Residency Requirements

# Implications

Electoral institution's impact between Southern and Non-southern states has decreased.

Legislative changes within the past decade that impact electoral institutions have had an impact that more closely resembles what our conventional wisdom suggests.

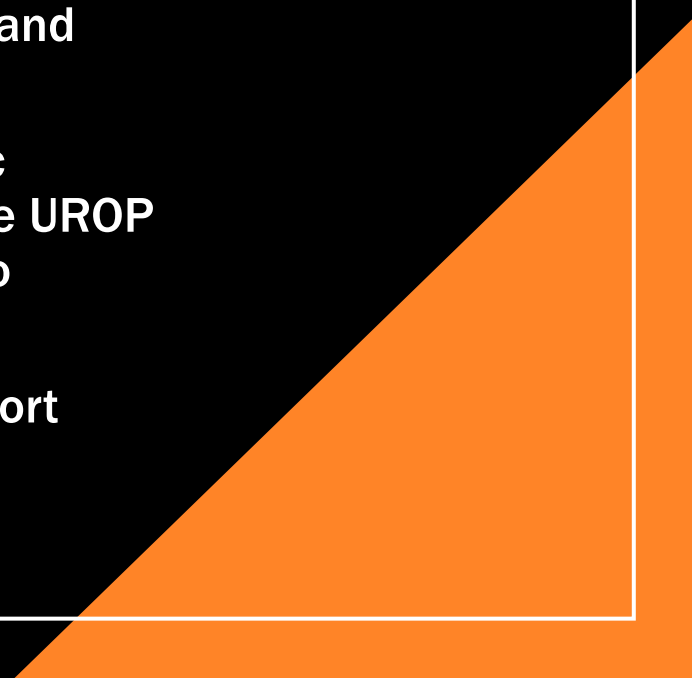
# What's Next? ...For Omer

- More data needs to be collected regarding same-day registration as well as in-person early voting in order to get a more holistic picture of the effects of electoral institutions
  - Furthermore, data on noninstitutional factors need to be collected such as the electoral calendar, vote margin, and demographic composition (education per capita income, age) to account for other variables that could affect voter turnout
  - Additionally, more comprehensive data analyses that accounts for these additional variables need to be conducted.
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# What's Next? ...For Political Science

- This study combines the data from a time period that includes numerous significant changes to electoral institutions such as the Help America Vote Act of 2002, Crawford v Marion County Election Board.
- As such, it is hard to determine the specific impact each variable had in terms of altering the degree of voter turnout.
- This study also does not include data from the 2020 election, which led to a lot of changes in people's electoral beliefs as a whole. This could be further examined as a potential variable in examining voter turnout, especially in the South, where changes in electoral beliefs tend to be more likely to be impactful.

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