

Colorado Electapalooza

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Preface

This is an example of a thesis setup to use the reed thesis document class.

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Introduction

The democratic system is based on procedures as much as principles. The way that democracies chose to tally the will of the people is always a messy, controversial process. Thus the design and implementation of voting systems is far from being neutral; the decisions made on who votes, and how, when, and where they do so is inherently coupled with the outcome. Underlying those decisions is a nebulous, inconclusively answered question: are elections fair, and how can we make them more so.

The passage of the Help America Vote Act—or HAVA—(Robert Nay, 2002), which mandated states to update and consolidate public voter registration files, and created the US Elections Assistance Commission that makes available county level data, innovated the way we use data based approaches to answer this question. HAVA offered political scientists and statisticians direct access to the voting population’s voting patterns, political registration, age, geolocation and much more; information that up to then was only accessible by sampling through surveys. The immense leap here happens because true population data does away with the need for sampling techniques that are often biased and inaccurate. We can now not only get a complete picture of the data, but also link and merge with other sources of information such as US Census data on religion, race, education, or income—work that has been lucrative for firms such as Catalist or Target Smart. By posing Political Scientific questions, and trying to respond with rigorous statistics, both disciplines tackle these data to face joint problems such as quantifying the quality of voter registration files (Ansolabehere & Hersh, 2010), or linking disparate voter records (Ansolabehere & Hersh, 2017).

Chapter 1

The State of the Literature

In this chapter I will go through the existing literature on Vote-By-Mail (VBM). I will define what Vote-By-Mail, or VBM, is; I will then summarize the expectations that researchers have of the effects of VBM on turnout, based on existing theories of electoral participation. I will continue with a summary of previous quantitative research on the effects that VBM and similar policies have had on turnout. I will conclude with some more general comments on the available data, and literature concerning the most commonly used quantitative methods.

1.1 What is VBM?

Gronke (2007, 2008), RMStein (1998)

Vote-By-Mail is a process by which voters receive a ballot delivered by mail to their homes. Voters then have a variety of options on how to return these ballots, ranging from dropping them off at pre-designated locations, to mailing them in, to bringing them to a polling place and voting conventionally. This varies across states that have implemented VBM. Some common forms of the VBM policy are:

- *Postal Voting*: All voters receive a ballot by mail, which can then be returned to a pre-designated location or mailed in to be counted. This is the current system in Oregon, is an option in Colorado, and is implemented by a number of counties in California, Utah, and Montana.
- *No-Excuse Absentee*: Voters can choose to register as absentee voters without giving any reason related to disability, health, distance to polling place etc. This is the case in 27 states and the District of Columbia.
- *Hybrid or Transitional Systems*: In hybrid systems, voters receive a mail ballot but can choose to disregard it and vote conventionally. This is the case in Colorado. Transitional systems exist in states that have chosen to eventually conduct all elections by postal voting, but have given counties an adjustment period during which this shift is not mandatory, or mandatory only for certain elections. This is the case in California, Utah, and Montana.

1.2 The Calculus of Voting

1.2.1 Why Turnout Matters

1.2.2 Theories of Voting

1.2.3 How they Apply to VBM

1.3 Previous Study Results

1.3.1 General Results

1.3.2 The Gerber Piece

1.4 Why Voter Registration Files?

1.4.1 Inaccuracy of Survey Data

1.4.2 The Importance of VRF

1.5 Common Methods Used and Problems Encountered

1.5.1 Methods

1.5.2 Issues

Chapter 2

Hypothesis, Data, and Methods

2.1 The Data

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2.1.2 Structure

2.1.3 Wrangling

2.2 Hypotheses

2.2.1 Description of Hypotheses

2.2.2 Criteria

2.2.3 Expected Results

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2.3.1 EDA

2.3.2 Description and Parametrization of Models

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Chapter 3

Results

3.1 EDA

3.2 Model Output

3.3 Gerber Expansion Results

Conclusion

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