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No Excuses: The Effect of Absentee Voting System on Voter Turnout

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No Excuses: The Effect of Absentee Voting System on Voter Turnout

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 Pandemic caused a significant change in the way people voted in 2020. Many Americans chose to absentee vote out of safety concerns. However, this process was not the same experience for all voters because some states required an excuse to absentee vote while others did not. This study analyzes whether there is a difference in voter turnout between states with no-excuse absentee voting and those without it. While reviewing voter turnout data for the 2016 and 2020 General Elections, this research shows that turnout was higher in states with no-excuse absentee systems than those that required an excuse. Of the two election years, this relationship was more significant in 2020. The study concludes that states with no-excuse absentee systems have higher voter turnout, which aligns with the rational choice model of voting behavior.

Keywords: voter turnout, absentee voting, absentee ballots, elections, voter behavior

In 2020, the global COVID-19 Pandemic changed all areas of American life – work, school, relationships, even grocery shopping. As many faced a world of isolation and social distancing, they also had to confront a question about political participation. How does the populace vote without visiting the polls in person? The electoral system must go on, pandemic or no pandemic, and citizens had to re-evaluate how they normally vote as they prepared themselves for a presidential election. In a time when crowds were a danger and sanitation was an ever-present worry, lining up at one's local polling place was simply not a risk that many people were willing to take. Indeed, the Pew Research Center found that 46% of voters chose to vote by mail in the 2020 General Election (2020).

Although voting absentee was a new experience for many Americans in 2020, for others it was a practice they took part in regularly. Absentee ballots are commonly used for students away at college and members of the military who are out of the country, as well as disabled and elderly voters for whom poll access is difficult. In some states, though, it is much easier to vote this way than in others. Currently, 16 states require an "excuse" to vote absentee (National Conference of State Legislatures 2020). Along with variations like voter ID laws and early voting access, regulations about who can use absentee ballots are an example of how voting access varies significantly from state to state. Much discussion is occurring in the political field about whether legislators should make it easier and simpler to vote, or whether restrictions need to be put in place to ensure election security.

With many voters having discovered the method of voting absentee in 2020, this kind of ballot could potentially remain more popular than it was in pre-COVID times.

Therefore, it is a relevant time to ask the following: does offering no-excuse absentee voting increase voter turnout? Could removing barriers to voting absentee potentially encourage voters who otherwise would be put off? This study aims to discover whether there is a correlation between a state's regulations for voting absentee and the voter turnout rates in that state.

Literature Review

Voting Regulations and Systems

The United States has long struggled with voter turnout. The 2020 election saw record turnout, with 61.7% of the estimated voting age population casting a ballot (Pew Research 2020). However, in an average election, turnout is often just over half of the eligible population, and the US falls below several other developed democracies in this regard (World Population Review 2023). There is also considerable variation in the voter turnout between different states (US Elections Project 2020). It is no surprise, therefore, that significant amounts of research have been dedicated to investigating voter turnout and what the factors are that influence it. What causes variations in turnout between states, local areas, demographics, or even different election years?

One of the factors that has been the most thoroughly explored is the regulations surrounding voting that different states put into place. For example, some states have strict laws regarding the types of identification that an individual must be able to provide at the polls to vote. There has been plenty of political discourse about the potential barrier to voting that strict laws such as this could cause, particularly for minority racial and ethnic groups. Pryor, Herrick, and Davis (2019) note that such laws increase the costs of voting, and because Americans receive few direct benefits, any factor that increases the costs of voting will cause turnout to decrease. In the case of voter ID laws, any individual who doesn't already have the necessary type of identification will have a clear increase in the costs involved in casting their ballot. The potentially discriminatory element of these requirements comes into view when it is taken into consideration that African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans are less likely than their White counterparts to have government-approved identification (Pryor, Herrick, and Davis 2019).

However, Pryor, Herrick, and Davis (2019) also note that research on this topic has produced mixed findings. For instance, Heller, Miller, and Stephenson (2019) conducted a study using voter turnout data in federal elections from 2000 to 2014. They investigated whether voter ID laws affect turnout overall, as well as specifically looking at the effect on African American and Hispanic turnout. Heller, Miller, and Stephenson (2019) conclude that the results from their research offered no real evidence to support claims that voter ID laws suppress minority voters, nor that such laws provide protection against voter fraud. They did find that voter ID laws had a negative effect on Hispanic voter turnout of 2.6% to 5.4%, but they note that when controlling for state fixed effects, this negative correlation is no longer statistically significant. Heller, Miller, and Stephenson (2019) therefore conclude that whether a state has strict or lenient voter ID laws does not significantly affect the turnout of its voters.

Adding to the inconsistent findings on this topic, Hopkins et al. (2017) came to an unexpected conclusion from their research. In the state of Virginia, which requires voters to present photo ID, precincts where less active registered voters possess drivers' licenses saw higher turnout. The authors chose to look at Virginia partly because of

how it incrementally implemented the policy of ID requirements. In 2013, the state had a strict requirement for identification, but did not demand such ID to have a photo. However, in 2014, it moved to require photo ID to vote. The study, therefore, compared turnout between the 2013 Gubernatorial Race and the 2014 Senatorial Race. The authors hypothesized that the new requirements would cause an increase in voters who were turned away from the polls because they did not have the right type of identification or deter others from showing up to the polls at all. The study found that 474 provisional ballots were cast in 2014 because of inadequate identification, as opposed to less than 200 in 2013. Even though this is a notable difference, the authors point out that these provisional ballots are still a small proportion of the total ballots cast, suggesting that this was not a major issue. In addition, they found that voter turnout increased in places where more active registered voters lacked a driver's license, the most common form of photo ID. This is clearly a contradiction to claims that photo-ID requirements deter voters from turning out because of the increased costs of voting. However, Hopkins et al. (2017) do provide a potential explanation to this surprising result. Virginia's Department of Elections implemented an informational campaign that aimed to inform voters about the new photo-ID requirements. They sent out a mailer with information about the types of acceptable ID, as well as the free Voter Photo Identification Card that was available as an option. This campaign was targeted towards those who did not already possess the necessary identification. The authors suggest that this may explain why turnout was higher in these areas.

Voter ID laws are not the only regulation that can serve to either increase or decrease the costs of voting. Some states have implemented a policy meant to make it simpler and easier for their residents to register to vote: online voter registration. Yu (2019) analyzed the effects of this policy at both the state and individual level with data from 2000 to 2014, in which time twenty states adopted online voter registration. The author references the rational choice model of voting, which argues that voters will only vote if the benefits outweigh the costs of voting. By this model, it makes sense that decreasing the costs of voting and making the process easier will increase turnout. Yu's research supports this, finding that when using a difference-in-difference analysis, online registration increases turnout by approximately 3 percentage points. In addition to this result, an instrumental variable analysis found that when a voter registers online, their turnout increases by 18 to 20 percentage points. Notably, the study found that this has a particularly significant effect on the turnout of young voters in presidential election years. Although there have been many mixed findings regarding the rational choice model, this particular piece of research offers support for the idea that lowering voting costs will increase turnout.

Henrickson and Johnson (2019) delve further into the results of modifying the costs and stakes of voting. Specifically, they look at the state of Washington, which implemented a "top-two" primary format in 2008 and a vote-by-mail (VBM) system in 2012. The "top-two" format means that during primaries, voters can pick any candidate from any party, and the two candidates with the most votes move on to the general election no matter what party they are associated with. VBM simply means that every registered voter receives a mail-in ballot, eliminating in-person polls. As the authors note, the former policy raises the stakes of voting in primary elections, while the latter reduces the costs of voting. The result, this study finds, is an increase in turnout in Washington State. The VBM

system resulted in a turnout increase of 1.04% to 2.7%, while the "top-two" primary system correlated with a very substantial increase of 16% to 20%. In fact, since implementing these policies, Washington has a higher turnout in primary elections than some other states do in their general elections.

Demographics as Predictors of Voter Turnout

The tendencies of different demographics to turn out more than others is another topic that has plenty of political discourse surrounding it. Ideas about the turnout of different races, genders, ages, etc. influence campaign strategy, public policy and advocacy. There are, however, varying findings on the actual value of such demographics as predictors of turnout. Pomante II and Schraufnagel (2015) conducted a study to discover whether the age of a candidate has an effect on the turnout of young voters. Using ideas of social identity theory, which suggests that people are more likely to support candidates who are similar to themselves, the authors theorize that young people will be more likely to turn out and vote for candidates closer to their own age. This study aims not to use this variable as a predictor of vote choice, but instead as a predictor of commitment to vote. The authors conducted an experiment by surveying students between the ages of 18 and 24 and asking them about their commitment to vote. The students were shown a race with two old candidates, one with an old candidate and one young, and another with two young candidates running. They also analyzed real-world scenarios in recent senatorial and gubernatorial elections, particularly looking at the importance of the age gap between two candidates. The results from the experiment find that young people are more likely to commit to voting with a younger candidate running, and the analysis of real elections also suggest that the age of the youngest candidate and the age gap between candidates can be used to predict youth turnout.

Age is not the only factor in the social life cycle that can play a part in voter behavior. Another element is family structure. N. Wolfinger and R. Wolfinger (2008) look at family structure in terms of marital status and the presence of children in a household. They note that prior to their research, there had been mixed findings on the voter turnout of these particular demographic categories, with conflicting results as to whether marital status has an effect on turnout. This study used data from the U.S. Census, as well as the National Election Study, to explore any correlation between family structure and voter turnout. The authors do note that this data did not allow them to take into account unmarried, live-in partners. Also, marital status is categorized into married, divorced, separated, widowed and those who had never been married. The most prominent result that this research found was that married people have higher turnout than those who have never been married. Furthermore, people who were previously married, but are now divorced, separated or widowed, are less likely to turnout to vote. Finally, this study found that people with children are slightly less likely to vote; a finding that contradicts previous research on the topic (Wolfinger and Wolfinger 2008).

The turnout patterns of different racial groups is a topic much discussed. The process of redistricting and gerrymandering has been noted to have effects on turnout and potentially serve to diminish the political power of minority racial and ethnic groups. Fraga (2016) investigated the effects of redistricting on the turnout of particular racial groups. They looked at registration records from 10 states before and after the 2012

redistricting, to examine any changes in individual-level turnout. Notably, this study looks at 65.3 million records, and so boasts a considerable sample size. The results indicate that some groups are affected by redistricting in that they are more likely to vote when their district has either a majority of their own race, or the candidate is of their own race. Black, White, and Asian-American individuals are all more likely to turn out to vote when there is either a member of their own race on the ballot or if they live in a district where their own race is the majority. However, the opposite is true for Latino voters; these factors result in significantly less turnout from this group.

The issue of turnout can go beyond policy and encompass social and individual experiences as well. Understanding these relationships can, of course, influence public policy. Ojeda and Slaughter (2019) investigated the effect of depression on voter turnout, with the study taking an intersectional viewpoint of how this issue effects different demographics. As the authors note, depression is one of the most common disorders in the United States, and yet little research had previously been done on its effects on politics. This study looks at two sources of data: the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, which provided info about voter turnout by demographics, and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, a survey that included answers about depression in regards to the same demographics. The authors chose to look at this topic through an intersectional lens, noting that power structures and experiences that result from certain identities are not mutually exclusive. Specifically, they focus on the overlap between race and gender, looking at the experiences of White men, White women, Black men, and Black women. A criticism that may be worth noting is that for a study that focuses on intersectionality, perhaps more than just two categories of identification should have been looked at, and more than two racial groups. The results of this research found that depression affects the turnout of all the demographics that they looked at. Perhaps surprisingly, they found there to be no statistically significant differences in this effect between groups. Also, the researchers hypothesized that the following factors would mitigate the significance of the relationship between depression and participation: income, health insurance, church attendance, group consciousness and empowerment. However, their findings provided no evidence that this is the case.

The effect of ability status on turnout is a topic perhaps given not as much political and media attention as other factors such as race and age. Do the challenges that those with disabilities face make them less likely to turn out to the polls? Schur et al. (2002) investigated this question by conducting a telephone survey following the 1998 elections. The authors claim that the survey was nationally representative, with a sample size of 1,240, that included 700 individuals with disabilities. When controlling other demographic factors, the researchers found that people with disabilities are 20 percentage points less likely to vote than those without disabilities. The survey format allowed them to narrow down more details about these results. They found that out of the respondents with disabilities, those who are least likely to turnout are over 65, unemployed, have recently had an onset of a disability, or have trouble going outside on their own.

The Effect of Economics

Another important question regarding voter turnout is why there is not only variation between groups of people and between states, but also between different election years. Why do some election years,

even for the same position of government, see higher turnout than others? Some researchers have turned to the economy for an explanation. Shah and Wichowsky (2019) looked at the effect that economic adversity has on voter turnout. Specifically, they focused on the foreclosure crisis and the loss of home and resources that it resulted in for many people. The authors note that prior research had looked at the effects of unemployment, but this study chose to investigate the impact of individual loss. They found that, on the individual level, homeowners who were experiencing foreclosure were less likely to vote in 2012. The researchers also found that neighborhoods with higher rates of foreclosure saw lower rates of turnout. They also explain that this is most concentrated in middle-income areas but note that this level of nuance needs further investigation.

Rubinfeld (1980) also looked at the importance of economics, but he focused on local elections rather than those at the national level. Specifically, he looked at local school elections in Detroit, using individual household data. The research resulted in findings that suggested there to be neither little value in using economic variables as predictors of voter turnout, nor in demographic factors. There also was no significant relationship between voter turnout and the level of voter demand for educational expenditures. However, as the author notes, this survey was limited to just one community, and the survey had a relatively low response rate. These results need to be replicated to see if they hold up to know how sound these findings are.

Development of Theory and Research Question

There has clearly been extensive research on the topic of voter turnout, which is no surprise since it is key to the democratic political system and has the ability to affect the outcome of elections. However, even with the considerable literature that exists on the effects of different voting regulations, the topic of absentee voting represents a gap in the existing literature. Although previous research has looked into the effects of fully Vote By Mail systems, there is a lack of research into the difference between excuse-required and no-excuse absentee voting regulations. With this study, I intend to contribute to understanding of voter turnout by looking at whether requiring an excuse to absentee vote has an effect on turnout. As mentioned, this is a relevant and timely issue, as many more people are absentee voting because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is, therefore, important to find out whether by offering no-excuse absentee voting, and thereby reducing the costs of voting, states can produce higher voter turnout.

Hypothesis

In this study, I intend to test the following hypothesis:

H1: States with no-excuse absentee voting have higher turnout than those that require an excuse.

This expectation is based on the rational choice model of voting (Yu 2019), which suggests that individuals turn out to vote when the benefits of voting outweigh the costs. Lowering the costs of voting should, therefore, increase voter turnout. By requiring an excuse to vote absentee, state lawmakers create a barrier to using this method of voting, and by removing that barrier, it potentially becomes easier for individuals to vote. This is why I expect that this study will find higher turnout in states with no-excuse absentee systems.

Data and Methodology

Using states as my unit of analysis, this study will look at the absentee voting system as my independent variable. This will be operationalized as whether a state requires an excuse to vote absentee, or whether it offers no-excuse absentee voting. There is an exception to this; five states (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah and Washington) have entirely Vote By Mail systems (Henrickson and Johnson 2019). I argue that this kind of system is considerably different than just offering absentee voting as an option, and that the study of its effect on turnout should be undertaken as a research project entirely separate from the one that I am conducting. Therefore, I have chosen to remove these five states from my data to avoid their interference with and skewing of my results. I will code the remaining 45 states based on whether they have excuse or no-excuse absentee voting. For information about which states have which system, I will be using a list compiled by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), which breaks down the states into the three categories of no-excuse absentee voting, excuse required, and all-mail (VBM) systems (2020).

My dependent variable is the voter turnout in each of these states. As previously discussed, 2020 was unprecedented for absentee voting as well as overall turnout. I therefore wanted to examine the effect of my independent variable during a pre-pandemic election year, as well as in 2020, to be able to gain a comparison between the two. To do that, I will be conducting two separate analyses, using voter turnout in the General Elections of 2020 and 2016, as a percentage of the voting eligible population (VEP). This data will come from the US Election Project (2016, 2020), which gives the total number of ballots counted as a percentage of the VEP. Any missing data will be coded as "." to avoid its interference in the results.

To help analyze the actual significance of my independent variable, I will also include three control variables. To make sure that the majority party of a state is not the key influence on turnout in each of these elections, each state will be categorized as Republican or Democrat. These categories will be based on which party holds the majority in their state legislature. States with a split or non-partisan legislature will be coded as missing to avoid skewing of the data. My source for this will be the NCSL's data on 2020 State & Legislative Partisan Composition. Race will also be a variable, since previous research indicates that it can play a role in turnout. While recognizing prevalent measurement issues, I have chosen to operationalize the variable of racial makeup as the percentage of the population that identifies as White to incorporate this variable into my model in as simple a manner as possible. This data will come from the United States Census Bureau, using their statistics on race from the 2020 DEC redistricting data. Finally, research has found age to be a possible predictor of turnout, and it is also relevant to this particular topic because people with disabilities, many of whom are elderly, are often users of absentee voting. I, therefore, include average age as a control. This will be operationalized as the median age of a state and will also come from the U.S. Census; the data for age and sex from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates provides the information that I need.

Results

Descriptive statistics for my independent and dependent variables can be seen in the following bar chart and histograms. In regard to the absentee system, Figure 1 shows that there are more states with no-excuse systems than those that require an excuse; the exact numbers are 29 and 16 states, respectively. Looking at the dependent variable, it appears

from Figures 2 and 3 that voter turnout in 2020 and 2016 follow similar patterns to each other with both histograms following a quite similar shape. Both years have outliers in their upper tails, but it does not appear that these outliers are significant enough to skew the data. It should also be noted that the mean for 2020 is 67.62, higher than the mean of 61.96 in 2016; this supports the reported record turnout that occurred in 2020. The standard deviation for 2020 is slightly higher than in 2016; 5.728 and 5.403 respectively. It should also be noted that N=39 in 2016, as opposed to N=45 for 2020, because in the data source I used for this information, there were several cases missing for the 2016 turnout.

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Figure 1: Distribution of Absentee Voting Systems Across States

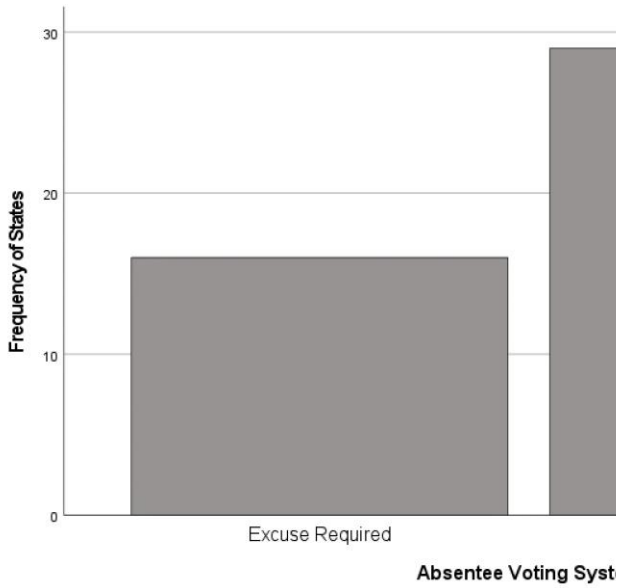


Figure 2: Distribution of State-Level Voter Turnout Percentages for 2020

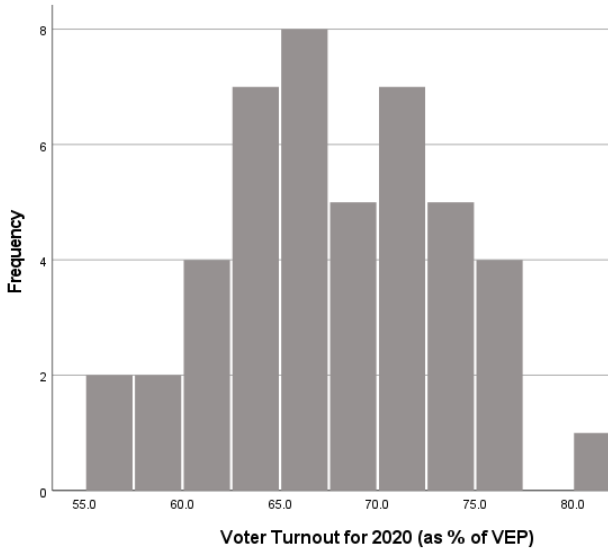
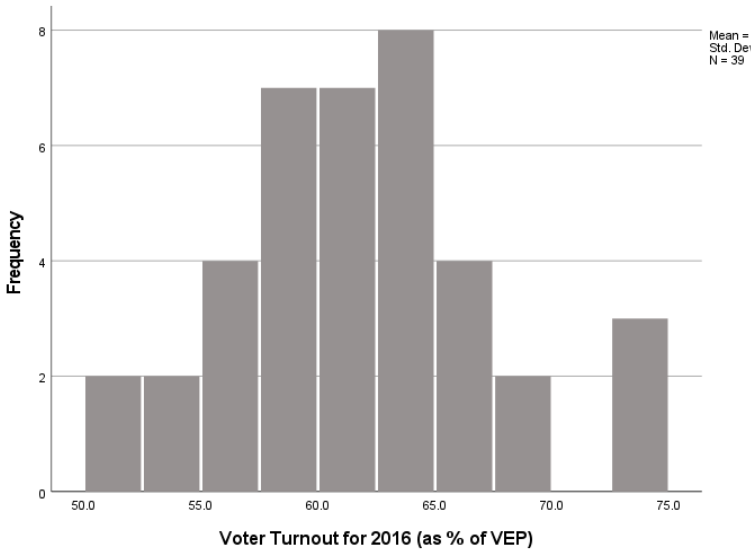


Figure 3: Distribution of State-Level Voter Turnout Percentages for 2016



Next, I examine the descriptives for my control variables. For party majority, the data was coded so that 1 = Republican-majority, and 2 = Democrat-majority. I found that 29 states were controlled by the Republican Party, and 14 were controlled by Democrats; recall that split and non-partisan legislatures were coded as missing, of which there were two. With the average age being quantified as the median age of each state, analysis of the data set as a whole finds a median of 38.600 and a mean of 38.673. Given that these numbers are so similar, it suggests that there are no significant outliers in this data. Finally, the percentage of the population which identifies as White has a median of 70.21 and a mean of 69.16. This variable has considerable dispersion with standard deviation of 13.093 and a range of 49.58.

When looking at the following scatterplots (Figures 4 and 5), it is important to note that the absentee system was coded as 0 = excuse required, and 1 = no excuse. It, therefore, appears that there is generally higher turnout for the no excuse category than for the excuse required, and that this is true for both years. However, given that there are only two response categories for the independent variable, it is difficult to determine from these scatterplots just how strong this relationship is.

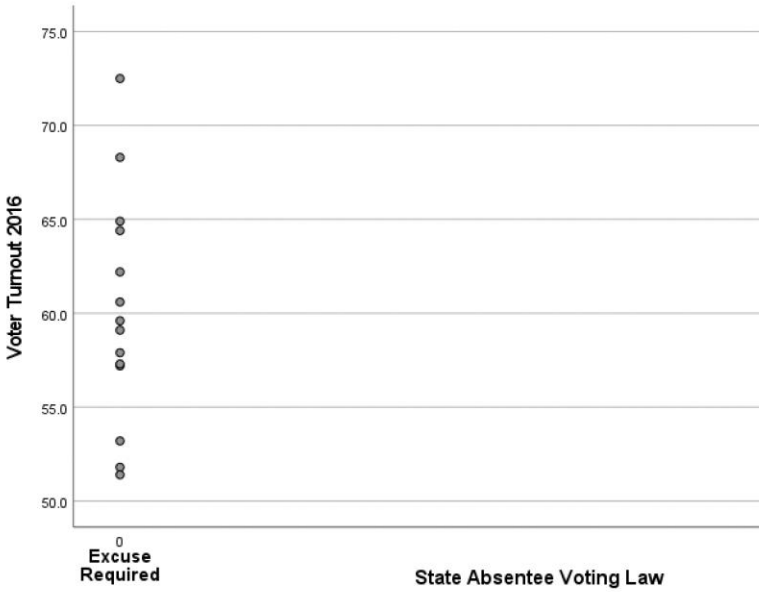


Figure 4: Relationship Between Absentee System and Voter Turnout in 2020

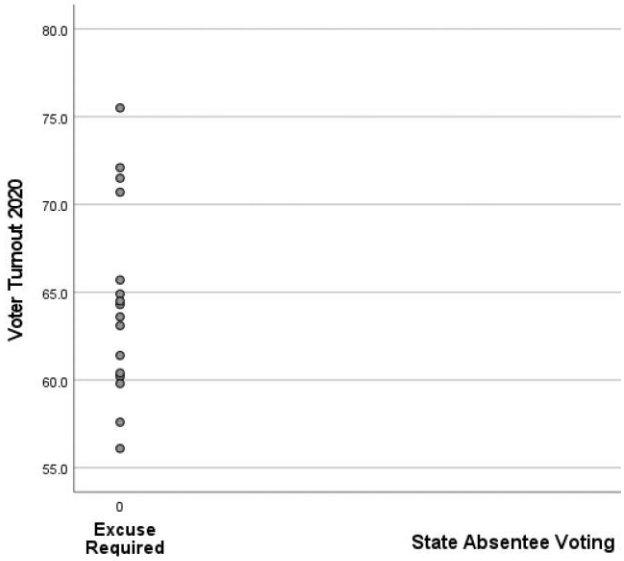


Figure 5: Relationship Between Absentee System and Voter Turnout in 2016

To better understand this relationship, I ran two bivariate linear regressions with my independent and dependent variables, one for each of the chosen years. For 2020, the R Square value is .172, while in 2016, the R Square value is 0.074. This means that in 2020, the absentee system explains 17.2% of state-level variation in voter turnout, while in 2016 it explained 7.4% of state-level variation in turnout. This suggests that the absentee system had a greater impact on turnout in 2020 than in 2016 and aligns with the knowledge that because of the Pandemic, many more people utilized absentee voting than in previous years. From these bivariate regressions, I crafted regression equations for both years. In the equation written as $\hat{y} = B0 + B1X1 + \varepsilon$, $\hat{y}$ is the dependent variable of voter turnout, and X1 indicates the independent variable, which is the absentee system. The equation for 2020, therefore, is $\hat{y} = 64.462 + 4.906(X1) + \varepsilon$. The equation for 2016 is written as $\hat{y} = 60.029 + 3.019(X1) + \varepsilon$. For 2020, one unit change in the absentee system results in a 4.906 unit increase in voter turnout. For 2016, the same change in X results in a 3.019 unit increase in voter turnout. Again, voter turnout is coded as 0 = excuse required, 1 = no excuse, and voter

turnout is coded as a percentage of the VEP. Therefore, a change from an excuse required to no excuse resulted in a 4.906% increase in 2020, and a 3.019% increase in 2016.

While bivariate regressions can be informative, I additionally ran multiple regression analyses to incorporate my control variables as well, the results of which can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. Looking at the complete models in each table (Model 4), I can see that the R-Squared values for both 2020 and 2016 increased significantly from the bivariate regression analyses, to 0.430 and 0.487 respectively. This suggests that the control variables help to better explain the totality of voter turnout, but they still collectively explain less than half of the variation in the dependent variable. Looking at standardized beta coefficients and p-values, it appears that average age is the greatest predictor of voter turnout in both General Elections, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.460, and a p-value of 0.006 for 2020, and in 2016 a standardized beta coefficient of 0.543 and a p-value of 0.002. These positive coefficients indicate that as age increases, voter turnout also increases. However, the independent variable of absentee system also proved to be a significant predictor. In 2020, it has a standardized beta coefficient of 0.431, with a p-value of 0.002 (Table 1). In 2016, the absentee system is less significant with the standardized beta coefficient being 0.275, and the p-value at 0.042 (Table 2). These results indicate that at the 0.05 significance level, I can reject the null hypothesis for both years. In addition, for 2020, the null can also be rejected at the 0.01 significance level. Being able to reject the null hypothesis for both years indicates that no excuse absentee voting is a statistically significant predictor of state-level voter turnout.

Table 1. The Effect of Absentee System on Voter Turnout, 2020

Predictors	*Model 1 B(S.E)*	*Model 2 B(S.E)*	*Model 3 B(S.E)*	*Model 4 B(S.E)*
Absentee System	4.906(1.642)**	4.132(1.585)*	4.913(1.392)**	4.870(1.430)**
Party Majority	3.001(1.635)	1.434(1.487)		1.523(1.796)
Average Age		1.201(0.321)**		1.157(0.402)**
Racial Makeup			0.012(0.067)	
Constant	64.462(1.318)**	60.712(2.393)**	15.906(12.146)	16.525(12.755)
N	45	43	43	43
Adj. R^2	0.153	0.185	0.385	0.369

Note: The absentee system is coded such that 0 = excuse required, and 1 = no excuse required. Racial makeup represents the percentage of the state's population that is White. ^p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 2. The Effect of Absentee System on Voter Turnout, 2016

Predictors	*Model 1 B(S.E)*	*Model 2 B(S.E)*	*Model 3 B(S.E)*	*Model 4 B(S.E)*
Absentee System	3.019(1.759)^	2.269(1.708)	3.123(1.346)*	2.858(1.349)*

Party Majority			
1.918(1.735)	-0.641(1.457)		
0.538(1.712)			
Average Age			
	1.515(0.318)**		
1.249(0.377)**			
Racial Makeup			
0.078(0.061)			
Constant		60.029(1.408)**	
57.563(2.602)**		1.903(11.841)	
5.399(12.042)			
N		39	
37	37		37
Adj. R^2		0.049	
0.036	0.412		0.423

Note: The absentee system is coded such that 0 = excuse required, and 1 = no excuse required. Racial makeup represents the percentage of the state's population that is White. ^p<.10, *p<.05, **p<.01

Discussion

In conducting these regression analyses, I was able to reject the null hypothesis for both the 2020 and 2016 electoral contexts. This supports my hypothesis that there is a relationship between absentee system and voter turnout. Overall, I found that states that offer no excuse absentee voting have higher voter turnout than states that require an excuse. Notably, this relationship was stronger and more significant in 2020 than it was in 2016. This suggests that in a year when an unprecedented number of people voted absentee, offering this option with no excuse required played a more important role. This study also found there to be other factors that play an important role in predicting turnout with the average age of a state being a particularly strong predictor of its turnout levels. The party majority of the state's legislature and the racial makeup of a state proved to be much less significant predictors.

Conclusion

Finding evidence that states with no-excuse absentee voting have higher turnout suggests that when barriers to a simple, accessible form of voting are removed, people are more likely to turn out to vote. This supports the rational choice model, which is the theory that reducing costs of voting increases voter turnout. However, as noted in my review of previous literature, many researchers have found mixed support for this model, including Heller, Miller and Stephenson (2019), and Hopkins et al. (2017). There would, therefore, be value in expanding this research to include more controls. From my analysis of background literature, previous researchers have found many other variables predict turnout, such as online voter registration and redistricting. Including factors such as these in the model would likely result in a better picture of what factors explain voter turnout. Disability, in particular, would be a very valuable variable to factor in. As mentioned previously, having a disability is a common reason for an individual to vote absentee, so it would be worth exploring whether this is an important factor behind the results that this study found.

In addition, I believe that this study should be replicated to analyze future elections. This study found that when a substantial portion of U.S. voters chose to vote absentee in 2020, the absentee system was a much more important predictor. As the country continues to deal with the COVID-19 Pandemic, as well as in the future when it is no longer an important consideration, will voters continue to make use of their ability to vote from home? If so, what does this mean for states that require an excuse? Should no-excuse absentee voting be implemented

across all states? It seems that there would be great value in exploring whether this study's findings continue to hold up for future elections.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary Material 1: Multiple regression results, 2020

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	16.525	12.755		1.296	.203
	Excuse required or no excuse to vote absentee	4.870	1.430	.431	3.407	.002
	Party majority of legislature	1.523	1.796	.131	.848	.402
	Average age	1.157	.402	.460	2.882	.006
	Percentage white	.012	.067	.030	.183	.856

a. Dependent Variable: Voter Turnout for 2020

Supplementary Material 2: Multiple regression results, 2016

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	5.399	12.042		.448	.657
	Excuse required or no excuse to vote absentee	2.858	1.349	.275	2.119	.042
	Party majority of legislature	.538	1.712	.051	.314	.755
	Average age	1.249	.377	.543	3.315	.002
	Percentage white	.078	.061	.206	1.280	.210

a. Dependent Variable: Voter Turnout for 2016