Increasing Voter Turnout: How Academics Can Help Administrators Evaluate Outcomes

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Some Oregon Firsts

• First to move to full vote by mail (or universal ballot delivery)
• First to move to automatic voter registration
• First state to see the eclipse
Outline

• The Political Science Approach to Turnout: The “Resource Mobilization” Model

• Be A Political Scientist! Automatic Voter Registration and Voter Turnout

• How Administrators and Academics Can Partner to Improve American Elections
Turnout: The Big Picture

The Resource + Mobilization Model

- **Individual Resources:** Education, Income, Interest and Efficacy.
  → Those who know more & care more participate more

- **Social Resources:** Community Involvement, Church Attendance, Homeownership, Union membership.
  → Those who are more connected participate more

- **Organizational Mobilization:**
  Campaigns, Community Orgs, Social Movement

  Citizens ↔ Organizations → Elections

A complex, connected, interrelated system
### Table 7-3 Decomposition of the Decrease in Black Voter Turnout in Presidential Election Years Between 1968–1972 and the 1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Change</th>
<th>Effect on Percentage Change in Turnout Between 1968–1972 and 1980s</th>
<th>Percentage of Decline in Black Turnout Explained</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An easing of voter registration laws</td>
<td>+ 2.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased formal education</td>
<td>+ 2.6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A younger electorate</td>
<td>− 3.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakened social involvement</td>
<td>− .8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declining feelings of efficacy</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weakened attachment to and evaluations of the political parties and their candidates</td>
<td>− 2.6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decline in mobilization</td>
<td>− 6.2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decline of voter registration efforts around the Voting Rights Act</td>
<td>− 5.2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net change in black voter turnout:</td>
<td>−12.8</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Appendix D.*
What About Election Administration?

• Election laws and rules can be implemented in ways that increase or decrease turnout; overall impact is low.

• Election laws should be evaluated using the resource + mobilization model

• Election laws should be evaluated on more than just their contribution to overall turnout
The Political Science Approach Applied to Automatic Voter Registration

• The question: Does ”Oregon Motor Voter” increase voter turnout?
• Possible answers:
  – Compare turnout before AVR and after AVR
  – Compare turnout among ”Traditional” Registrants vs. “Automatic” Registrants

Any problems with these approaches?
OCVR as of November 2016

It looks like the breakdown is as follows:

- “Traditional”:
  1. Registered prior to 1/1/2016
  2. Registered from 1/1/2016 – book closing

- OMV “Phase 1”:
  1. Engaged in a DMV transaction from 1/1/2016 – book closing

- OMV “Phase 2”:
  1. Engaged in a DMV transaction in 2014 – 2015
    and did not register to vote

Here is the full registration source chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration Source</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency 3</td>
<td>25499</td>
<td>1.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency 4</td>
<td>15650</td>
<td>0.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Forces</td>
<td>1243</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMV</td>
<td>482010</td>
<td>26.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FVAP</td>
<td>3447</td>
<td>0.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>314082</td>
<td>17.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Voter</td>
<td>399722</td>
<td>21.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCOA</td>
<td>6339</td>
<td>0.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>224591</td>
<td>12.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Agency</td>
<td>54470</td>
<td>2.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Means</td>
<td>302673</td>
<td>16.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1829726</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OMV and Turnout: The Easy Part

- TO=Voted/Registered
- What will happen?
- TO=Voted / VEP
- What will happen?
- Additional quantities of interest:
  - OMV Turnout
  - Phase 1 Turnout
  - Phase 2 Turnout
  - Affiliated vs. Unaffiliated Turnout
  - "Traditional" Turnout
  - Affiliated vs. Unaffiliated Turnout

**FIGURE 7**
Turnout rate by registration method and party affiliation

![Bar chart showing turnout rates](chart.png)

The population of OMV Registrants differ from the population of Traditional Registrants. If these differences are correlated with voter turnout, we may attribute differences to "OMV" that are actually a function of something else. Any guesses?
OMV and Voter Turnout: The Nearly Impossible Parts

• **The Counterfactual**: What would have happened in the absence of OMV?
  – Some citizens would still have registered on their own
  – Some citizens would have been registered by third party organizations

• **The Unknown Future**: How will OMV registrants behave in the future?
  – How many will affiliate with a party?
  – How many will be mobilized?
Election Administration and Election Sciences: A Marriage Made in Heaven (or at MIT)?

Election Sciences, Reform, & Administration

The Summer Conference on Election Science, Reform, and Administration was held in Portland, Oregon from July 27 – 28, 2017.

***Registration for the 2017 conference has closed. Please check back next year for the 2018 conference***

The goals of the conference are:

• To provide a forum for scholars in political science, public administration, law, computer science, statistics, and other fields who are working to develop rigorous empirical approaches to the study of how laws and
Questions, Comments?

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Early Voting Information Center http://earlyvoting.net