

Don't Drown the Message: The Effects of Voter Education on Mail Ballot Acceptance in North Carolina

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Abstract

Mail voters in the United States frequently experience ballot rejections due to mistakes they make in the voting process. Younger and non-White voters are especially vulnerable to mail ballot rejection. One possible intervention to mitigate these effects is voter education by election officials, who can fill informational gaps about how to vote. Leveraging Facebook communications by North Carolina's local election officials (LEOs) during the 2020 U.S. election, we find when LEOs prioritized information about mail voting in their voter education efforts, mail voters were more likely to cast a ballot that was accepted. These efforts also benefited young and racial and ethnic minority mail voters. The positive effects of our voter education measure hold when taking into account other local efforts to improve the voter experience in 2020, specifically LEOs' usage of the Center for Tech and Civic Life's (CTCL) COVID-19 grants. Our findings have practical implications for election officials to ensure that voters avoid mistakes when voting by mail, and theoretical implications for assessments of the indirect effects of voting reforms.

Keywords: voter education, social media, vote-by-mail, North Carolina, local election officials

In the United States, questions about equitable voter access in mail voting have grown in recent election cycles as more voters cast ballots from home. There is strong evidence that ballots cast by mail are less likely to be accepted and counted than votes cast in person ([US Election Assistance Commission 2017](#)). This is especially true for new voters who may be less familiar with the process of voting, such as young voters and new registrants, and racial and ethnic minority voters who have historically experienced lower-quality services from election administrators and challenges with accessing the ballot ([Shino, Suttmann-Lea and Smith 2021](#)).

Alongside administrative discretion in how mail ballots are verified, discrepancies in whose ballot is more likely to be counted may result from gaps in voter education and outreach efforts from election officials on how to properly cast a mail ballot. This possibility underscores the importance of mail voters knowing what is needed to cast a mail ballot. While there is substantial evidence establishing which groups of voters are more likely to cast a ballot that gets rejected ([Shino, Suttmann-Lea and Smith 2021](#); [Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020](#); [Alvarez, Hall, and Sinclair 2008](#)), it remains an open question as to whether there are efforts that can mitigate mail ballot rejections.

In this paper, we assess whether voter education by local election officials (LEOs) can help individuals who vote by mail avoid a ballot rejection. Our core theoretical assumption contends voter education lowers the cost of completing complex processes associated with voting ([Merivaki and Suttmann-Lea 2022](#); [Mann and Bryant 2020](#)), and that the provision of information by LEOs about how to vote by mail increases exposure to information about this mode of voting. In short, LEO outreach efforts can provide voters with the information needed to ensure their mail ballot is ultimately counted, and not rejected for mistakes ([Adona and Gronke 2018](#); [Merivaki and Suttmann-Lea 2022](#)).

We suggest these efforts are especially important for younger voters, who are more likely to cast a mail ballot that is rejected on account of a lack of familiarity with the process of voting, and racial and ethnic minority voters, who are more more likely to otherwise have lower quality experiences in the services provided to them by their local election officials and face an increased chance of mail ballot rejection ([White, Nathan and Faller 2015](#); [Shino, Suttmann-Lea and Smith 2021](#); [Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020](#)). Finally, we argue it is not merely enough for LEOs to provide information about mail voting processes, but that they also need to prioritize it in their communications and be mindful of *how* they are presenting information about elections

so citizens aren't overwhelmed and key pieces information is not "drowned" out (Metzger 2007; Schwartz 2002).

Capitalizing on the national drive to encourage voters to view their state and local election officials as sources of #TrustedInfo during the 2020 election cycle and visit election officials' websites and social media pages, we use a novel dataset of the online presence of North Carolina county boards of elections on Facebook between September 1, 2020 and November 3, 2020 to assess the relationship between voter education and mail ballot acceptance (NASS 2019).¹ Using Facebook content shared by LEOs on their official Facebook page as a measure of LEO voter education, we evaluate the information environment cultivated by LEOs on social media. We consider the relationship between the proportion of posts uniquely dedicated to mail voting, posts dedicated to multiple aspects of the voting process, and posts dedicated to multiple aspects of the voting process that *also* include mail voting. We argue the *proportion* of content dedicated to providing information about mail voting, rather than the mere *volume* of information shared about mail voting, increases the likelihood voters' will be exposed to the content-specific information needed to vote by mail.

Surprisingly, given the emphasis placed on mail voting during the 2020 election by public health officials across the United States, we find that North Carolina's LEOs were more active in educating voters on their Facebook page about in-person early voting. They also shared more content with information about multiple aspects of the voting process relative to content about mail voting only. However, where LEOs dedicated a larger proportion of their efforts to educating voters about mail voting, mail voters were more likely to cast a ballot that was accepted or cured. A higher proportion of mail voting posts increased the likelihood of casting a mail ballot that was accepted for racial and ethnic minority and young voters as well, though these efforts did not narrow the gap in acceptance rates compared to White and older voters (Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021; Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020). Conversely, we find when LEOs shared content covering multiple aspects of voting, mail ballot acceptance rates decreased. This suggests there is a "drowning" effect when LEOs put out multiple pieces

¹From the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) Press Release promoted #trustedinfo: "#TrustedInfo2020 encourages American citizens to look to their state and local election officials as the trusted sources for election information. Driving voters directly to election officials' websites and verified social media pages will ensure voters are getting accurate election information, and cut down on the misinformation and disinformation that can surround elections." <https://www.nass.org/initiatives/trustedinfo>.

of information in one piece of content that is ultimately not effective in reaching the target audience. These results hold when accounting for other LEO efforts to improve the voter experience, which we measure using the amount of money spent per registered voter from the Center for Tech and Civic Life’s (CTCL) COVID-19 election administration grants.

These findings highlight how election officials who prioritize information about certain aspects of the voting process can cultivate an information environment that may mitigate mistakes in the voting process and limit the likelihood of voter challenges in the voting process, improving voter experience. In other words, it is not enough for election officials to simply provide information about the steps needed for voting. They also need to tailor their communications so that voters can clearly identify the information relevant to them and not become overwhelmed with a multitude of choices in the content shared ([Schwartz 2002](#)). Our evidence suggests voters may face higher informational costs when they reside in jurisdictions where their LEOs "drown" information about mail voting by sharing information about other election processes.

To our knowledge this is the first observational study to take a measure of observed voter education efforts by local election officials and examine their relationship with individual-level voter behavior across multiple jurisdictions. Our findings add external validity to field experiments showing that interventions within specific jurisdictions can have a positive impact on shifting voter behavior ([Mann and Bryant 2020](#); [Herrnson, Hanmer and Koh 2018](#); [Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022](#)). Theoretically, they have implications for research examining the effects of voting laws on voter behavior, suggesting that sub state-level processes like voter education efforts by election officials may play a role in explaining indirect effects of these laws ([Burden et al. 2014](#)). They also add to a burgeoning literature emphasizing the role voter education can play in shaping voting outcomes, clarifying the mechanism through which information about voting processes from official election sources helps voters cast a ballot ([Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022](#); [Suttman-Lea and Merivaki Forthcoming](#); [Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2021a](#); [Mann and Bryant 2020](#); [Herrnson et al. 2015](#)). Finally, they offer applied insight to local election officials and policy advocates interested in encouraging voters to take advantage of specific voting reforms, informing voters of requirements, and helping them mitigate mistakes that would otherwise prevent their ballots from being counted.

Existing Research: Whose Ballot Gets Counted?

Research on mail voting has primarily focused on whether casting a vote from home can increase voter turnout or make the composition of the electorate more representative of the overall U.S. population. On both fronts, research has produced mixed results. While earlier work found large substantive effects in the adoption of mail voting in Oregon in the late 1990s ([Southwell and Burchett 2000](#)), later research once more states adopted the practice - either universally or as an option - identified small or in some cases even negative effects of this and other convenience voting reforms ([Gronke and Miller 2012](#); [Burden et al. 2014](#); [Fitzgerald 2005](#)).

When comparing Election Day voters to mail voters and voters who cast a ballot early in-person, existing research has also evaluated whether this mode of voting exacerbates existing inequalities in voter participation, making the question of *who* votes by mail especially important ([Gronke and Toffey 2008](#); [Berinsky, Burns and Traugott 2001](#); [Berinsky 2005](#); [Rigby and Springer 2011](#)). While this scholarship concludes that mail voting on its own does little to minimize existing gaps in participation between resource-advantaged and resource-disadvantaged voters, recent evidence suggests that both new and existing voters benefited from the expanded availability of mail voting during the 2020 general election, particularly in places that relaxed their eligibility and request requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic ([Persily and Stewart III 2021](#)). Moreover, there appears to be no distinct partisan advantage resulting from mail voting despite a rise in rhetoric suggesting the law advantages Democrats over Republicans ([Thompson et al. 2020](#)).

The growing use of mail voting in U.S. elections has highlighted the impact of administrative and individual-level factors on successfully casting a mail ballot. Although the process of voting by mail may be conceptualized as simple, meaning it includes three steps - request, complete, and return - the variation across the states in how each step works, and what is required from the voter in each makes this method of voting more challenging to those with fewer resources, less experience with and interest in the electoral process, and in communities where information about the voting process from election officials is less accessible ([Gronke and Toffey 2008](#); [Morris 2020](#); [White, Nathan and Faller 2015](#)).

Mail voting also does not allow for voters to address problems with their ballot or eligibility in the same way that in person voting does, where they can at minimum cast a provisional ballot if there are questions about a voter's eligibility. Although many states offer voters the

chance to correct (cure) mail in ballots, the process by which this occurs is often left up to the discretion of LEOs (NCSL 2020; Arjon et al. 2020). Even when a cure option is required, not every mail ballot will get an opportunity to be corrected, especially those whose ballots arrive close to the return deadline, leaving a limited window of time for election officials to contact voters.

There are two possible mechanisms that explain mail ballot rejections, *individual, voter characteristics*, and *systemic, administrative-level* processes (Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021; Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020). Voters who are less familiar with the process of voting, such as newly eligible younger voters, newly registered voters in a state, and voters not affiliated with a political party may lack experience in requesting and casting a mail ballot, increasing the likelihood their ballot is rejected. This lack of familiarity might include limited experiencing navigating the US postal service for young voters in particular that may lead to ballots being cast too late (US Postal Service 2018), and uncertainty about the process of properly filling in the ballot return envelope for newer voters in a state (Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021). Even something as seemingly small as an inconsistent signature can lead to challenges for voters, and more so for young voters who may have not yet established a solid signature practice (Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020; Suttman-Lea 2020).

At the systemic level, differences in the decisions made by election officials when counting mail ballots may drive disproportionate ballot rejections in certain jurisdictions. In some cases, administrative discretion increases the likelihood of rejection for voters who otherwise have fewer difficulties in casting a mail ballot that is accepted and counted, like older voters (Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020). Racial and ethnic minority voters of all backgrounds are also more likely to cast a mail ballot that gets rejected, whether for being late or for mistakes on the ballot return envelope, such as a missing signature or incorrect information (Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021). It is possible administrative discretion at the jurisdiction level in decisions about which ballots to count, or in the availability of and access to information about the voting process through voter education are more plausible explanations for the higher rates of mail ballot rejection among racial and ethnic minority voters than the individual-level lack of voting familiarity associated with being new to the voting process, as with young voters or new registrants (Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020; Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021; White, Nathan and Faller 2015).

Voter Education and Casting a Mail Ballot That Will Count

Higher rejection rates for mail ballots raise questions about interventions that might help minimize voter mistakes in the process. One potentially yet under explored intervention is voter education by local election officials (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022). As key administrators of elections, LEOs are the official sources of information for voters about how to vote, a position many election officials tried to capitalize on during the 2020 election cycle by using the hashtag #TrustedInfo2020 in their online communications (NASS 2019). Moreover, although state election officials may communicate election rules and changes through official avenues, such as press releases and on state election websites, voters may be more inclined to seek information or request clarifications from their LEOs. Voters may have a different rapport with their LEOs than their state election administrators; despite declining trust in American political institutions and elected officials, local election officials tend to garner higher levels of trust from the public (Adona and Gronke 2018).

The 2020 U.S. Presidential Elections posed a monumental challenge to voters and LEOs alike as the country navigated challenges with conducting accessible and safe elections in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is some evidence that relaxing policies regulating voting by mail across the states had a positive impact on the use and acceptance rates of mail ballots (Persily and Stewart III 2021), changes in election procedures still confused voters and created uncertainty about how and when to vote.² Rules typically governing the mail voting process were temporarily amended in 2020 in many states, including North Carolina, where the deadline for the receipt of mail ballots was amended from November 3, 2021 to November 12, 2021. These kinds of changes can affect even the most motivated voters, who may otherwise have a higher threshold of tolerance for overcoming information barriers in order to cast a vote (McNulty, Dowling and Ariotti 2009).

Previous work on the effects of educational interventions on voter behavior has largely relied on field experiments through partnerships with election officials and third party organizations. This work considers whether specific information interventions from election officials can shift voter behavior, and offers important internal validity for questions of intervention effectiveness.

²Dzhanova, Yelena. July 11, 2020. "Election officials fear voting changes will confuse voters in November." cnbc.com: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/11/election-officials-fear-changes-could-confuse-voters-in-november.html>.

For example, messages from credible sources like election officials can better inform overseas voters of their full range of voting options, and encourage them to take advantage of new reforms that make the process of receiving a ballot more reliable (Herrnson et al. 2015). A similar field experiment conducted with registered voters in the state of Maryland confirms that certain kinds of mail messages can increase citizens’ willingness to change their vote method and increase the use of mail voting (Herrnson, Hanmer and Koh 2018). Outside of research that considers interventions that focus explicitly on nudging voters to take advantages of new mail voting methods, there is also causal evidence that low-cost mailers from election officials can help voters overcome the information costs of registering to vote, a similarly complex process to mail voting from a bureaucratic perspective (Mann and Bryant 2020). Most recently, Hopkins, Shwarz and Chainani (2022) show that repeated contact with voters throughout an election cycle from government officials through low-cost mailers is an efficient and effective way to boost turnout that does not exacerbate existing gaps in participation.

These findings, while illustrative of the effects of specific interventions within the context of field experiments, do not capture observed efforts by election officials to educate voters outside of these kinds of partnerships with researchers. To date, we lack a cross-jurisdiction picture of LEO efforts to educate voters that allow for comparison using observational data. Within the growing body of work uses observed measures of voter education efforts by LEOs, there is evidence these efforts can influence different aspects of voting behavior, providing external validity for the positive impact of education interventions identified through field experiments. A recent study in the state of Florida shows that the provision of information about voter registration on county LEO Facebook accounts increased usage of the state’s Online Voter Registration Portal and rates of new successful voter registrations during the 2020 election cycle (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022). Moreover, there was a positive relationship between the rates of mail ballot acceptance in Florida in counties where LEOs were more active in posting about the mail voting process during this election cycle (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2021b). This evidence lends external validity to the robust body of research leveraging field experiments to gain causal purchase on the effects of educative interventions on voter behavior.

In line with previous research, we argue Voter education and outreach by LEOs facilitates access to voting by providing prospective voters with correct information about the process and updates on changes that voters may be required to navigate, or want to take advantage of - such as the expansion of mail voting during the 2020 elections. Ultimately, voter education

is potentially a cost-reducing mediator between the laws that govern voting and prospective voters, ideally minimizing the steps they need to take to learn what is needed to vote (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022; Mann and Bryant 2020).

It may be reasonable to expect that LEOs to engage in a roughly equal distribution of information and voter education efforts across jurisdictions within a given state, considering that voters have similar informational needs regarding accessing the election process within the same state. The reality is, however, that there are differences from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in both the availability of information online, and the voter education and outreach efforts of LEOs (Suttman-Lea 2022; Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2021a; Suttman-Lea and Merivaki Forthcoming; Rottinghaus et al. 2020; Garnett 2019). As such, there are differences in the access and exposure voters have to official sources of election information from LEOs.

While the mere *provision* of information by local election officials may be enough to help voters overcome the sometimes complex bureaucratic processes associated with voting, we theorize that *how* the information is presented matters more for its effects on voter behavior. First, we argue that content presented in such a way as to emphasize many pieces of information may overwhelm the reader, leading them to miss key information they might be looking for (Schwartz 2002). Moreover, people also tend to heuristics related to design or how information is presented when judging information credibility (Metzger 2007). The modality of content that is presented in online spaces is also an important factor in explaining retention of information beyond the content itself (Sundar 2008). In the context of voter education, an LEO in one jurisdiction may share a higher number of posts about mail voting than an LEO in another, but if they are also sharing a higher number of posts overall, it is possible posts about mail voting specifically may be "drowned" relative to other election content, especially in information environments as saturated as those during election cycles. Ultimately voters interested in casting a mail ballot may not be exposed to information that is relevant to them, and thus not get adequately informed about how to complete the mail voting process.

Overall, we expect the information *environment* cultivated by LEOs about mail voting and the way they present information about the process is more important than the sheer amount of content they share about mail voting. We also argue considering whether they prioritize information about election processes are more representative of their overall interest in raising awareness about the steps voters must take to vote by mail than a simple count of the pieces of content shared about mail voting.

As such, our **first hypothesis (H1)** is as follows: mail voters living in jurisdictions where LEOs are more active in promoting mail voting *specifically* will be more likely to cast a ballot that is accepted relative to voters living in jurisdictions where LEOs shared a lower proportion of posts about mail voting specific posts, or who do not have an active Facebook account.

Of course, mail voting is not the only election process LEOs need to inform their constituents about through voter education and outreach. They also create content that includes pieces of information about other aspects of the voting process (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2021b). These include voter registration requirements and deadlines, options for early-in person voting and Election Day voting, as well as any responses they might have to ongoing developments in an election cycle, such as the shifting of deadlines for the return of mail ballots that happened during the 2020 election. One of the notable patterns arising from our descriptive overview of the content shared by North Carolina’s LEOs on social media was their reliance on content containing multiple pieces of information about elections in a single piece of information. While this content *may* contain information about mail voting, it is possible that the presentation of information in this way overwhelms or confuses the voter by presenting them with too many information options (Schwartz 2002; Michelson et al. 2012). The specifics of mail voting information may be "drowned out" when LEOs dedicate a higher proportion of their posts to sharing posts that include multiple pieces of information about the election process that may or may not include information about mail voting.

Our **second hypothesis (H2)** is as follows: voters living in jurisdictions where LEOs are more active in promoting posts that contain multiple election topics will be less likely to cast a mail ballot that is accepted relative to voters living in jurisdictions where LEOs shared a lower percentage of posts with multiple election topics, or do not have an active Facebook account.

Finally, while we do not expect that LEO voter education efforts on vote by mail to decrease the gaps in the likelihood of ballot acceptance between different groups of voters, we do expect that voters otherwise predisposed to cast a mail ballot that is rejected who are living where LEOs are more active in cultivating a mail voting heavy information environment will be more likely to cast a ballot that gets accepted. Specifically, we suggest that vote-by-mail specific voter education from LEOs can help young voters overcome a lack of familiarity with the process of mail voting, and increase access to information for racial and ethnic minority voters who might otherwise be hampered by lower quality interactions with election administrators.

As such, our **third hypothesis (H3)** is that young, and racial and ethnic minority voters

living in jurisdictions where LEOs dedicate a greater proportion of their content to promoting information about voting by mail *specifically* will be more likely to cast a ballot that is accepted relative to counties that dedicate fewer posts to mail voting, or that don't have an active Facebook account.

Finally, it is important to emphasize we are focused on the impact of LEO voter education on individuals who already overcame several information barriers required for voting, such as the process of registering (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), choosing candidates (Krupnikov 2012), and requesting a mail ballot (Gronke and Toffey 2008). We feel this strengthens the claims we make from our analysis, however, as these voters, by virtue of opting in to mail voting, already likely know more about the voting process and are less likely to be capable of being "nudged" by information cues. This is especially true given that while North Carolina did see an uptick in mail voters during the 2020 election cycle, it was not an exceptionally large surge relative to increases in other parts of the United States (Stewart III 2020). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that our sample of voters is derived from those who selected into mail voting during the 2020 elections, and our hypotheses are thus specific to *mail voters*.

Educating Voters about Voting by Mail in North Carolina in 2020: Variables of Interest

In North Carolina, voting early in-person and by mail are both defined as absentee voting. To vote by mail, voters are not required to provide an excuse to request a ballot, but they are required to have the mail ballot envelope signed by two witnesses or a notary public prior to returning it. Voters have the option to mail their ballot by Election Day (postmarked), or return it in-person (drop-off) to a county board of elections office or a one-stop early voting site.³ During the 2020 general election cycle, North Carolina made changes to mail voting requirements to facilitate access to voting in response to COVID-19. Among these changes, the state partially lifted the witness requirement from two witnesses to one. It also extended the return deadline to November 12 for ballots whose postmark date was up to November 3. Voters who opted to vote by mail, therefore, had the option to return their absentee ballot in-person at an early voting location (one-stop early voting) or at their county elections office

³NCSBE, "Detailed Instructions to Vote By Mail": <https://www.ncsbe.gov/voting/vote-mail/detailed-instructions-vote-mai#3-return-ballot>.

by 5:00 p.m. on Election Day, or mail it to their election office by November 12, as long as the ballot was postmarked by November 3, 2020.

To inform voters about which mail voting processes were amended and how they would apply for the November 2020 election, the North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) issued a series of press releases in October with information about when and where voters could return their mail ballots. This information also included details on when local election officials could notify voters of errors on mail ballots and offer them opportunities to cure them.⁴

Regarding the mail ballot curing process, local election officials were prohibited from contacting voters about errors on their mail ballots between October 4 and October 14, a time during which the state's cure policy was challenged in the courts. After a federal court ruling on October 15, the NCSBE stated that "County boards of elections across North Carolina are now contacting voters whose absentee ballot return envelopes were not properly completed to inform them of the steps necessary to ensure their votes are counted."⁵

The temporary changes in North Carolina's otherwise established absentee voting policy warrant an investigation of how the information environment cultivated by election officials allowed for the distribution of information for voters who wanted to use the mail voting option. Litigation over extending the mail ballot return deadline and resuming the cure process may have provided more incentives for LEOs to share information about mail voting to minimize errors that could otherwise invalidate a mail ballot, such as returning it late, or not completing it properly.

We evaluate the information environment cultivated by North Carolina's LEOs about mail voting by analyzing an original dataset that measures the content shared by LEOs on Facebook between September 1 and November 3, 2020. We collected data from North Carolina county boards of elections' official Facebook pages and documented how often they shared information about mail voting relative to any election related information, and information about other voting methods, such as voting early in-person, and voting in-person on Election Day.⁶

Our LEO Facebook content dataset measures only one tool LEOs have in their voter edu-

⁴NCSBE Announcement, October 29, 2020: <https://www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2020/10/29/receipt-deadline-november-12-ballots-postmarked-election-day>.

⁵NCSBE October 19, 2020 Press Release, "County Boards of Elections Now Contacting Voters with Absentee Ballot Deficiencies": <https://www.ncsbe.gov/news/press-releases/2020/10/19/county-boards-elections-now-contacting-voters-absentee-ballot>.

⁶An overview of the coding process is available in the online appendix, and the full code book is available upon request.

cation tool belt (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022), but one that can capture the information environment between LEOs and voters in a dynamic manner given it contains both the time and the content of all posts shared by these LEOs. We are especially interested in examining the effects of content-specific posts about mail voting, and posts that inform voters about multiple election topics that may also include information about mail voting. These data allow us to assess whether the context in which information is presented is related to the likelihood of casting a mail ballot that gets accepted.

It is important to clarify we are using content shared by LEOs on Facebook as a *proxy* for the information environment cultivated by local election officials, not directly measuring how many voters were exposed to information shared on Facebook as these data are not available to us. As such, we make the assumptions that efforts to educate voters about voting processes on social media supplement existing information sharing structures, such as in-person and remote voter outreach and voter education via traditional and print media (TV, Radio, newspapers) and that variation in information shared about mail voting across counties reflects broader LEO commitments to providing information in similar patterns using other tools of voter education (Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022).

Regarding online voter education, although election official websites are among the primary sources for up-to-date information about voting and elections, their content varies and it may be challenging to navigate for many voters (Rottinghaus et al. 2020; Garnett 2019). In North Carolina, all 100 county boards of elections operate a local election website, which establishes a baseline information environment. Given that to our knowledge there are no other established measures of LEO voter education efforts across a range of jurisdictions, we conceptualize the provision of content-specific information on social media as a useful proxy and more dynamic measure of efforts by LEOs to raise awareness about important election details that can help voters navigate the voting processes without making mistakes. ⁷

These assumptions are consistent with testimonies of LEOs and reports from state election administrators. According to the 2020 Local Election Officials (LEO) Survey, there is strong support among LEOs in North Carolina to promote voter education, with %87 reporting that they enjoy educating voters and %71 noting that they view voter education as a key respon-

⁷Our focus on Facebook content, as opposed to other social media platforms, is driven by evidence that Facebook is the most commonly used platform by election officials across the country and in North Carolina (Suttman-Lea 2022).

sibility (Table 1). These mirror very closely LEOs' overall support for voter education when comparing North Carolina to the national sample. One of the most striking difference, however, is the difference between LEOs in North Carolina and LEOs across the United States in how well equipped they are to educate voters in addition to administering elections; only a quarter reported having adequate time and resources for voter education. The North Carolina State Board of Elections further confirms these patterns, noting that the state is taking a more active role in sharing information for voters, and that many LEOs lack capacity because they are understaffed and under-resourced.

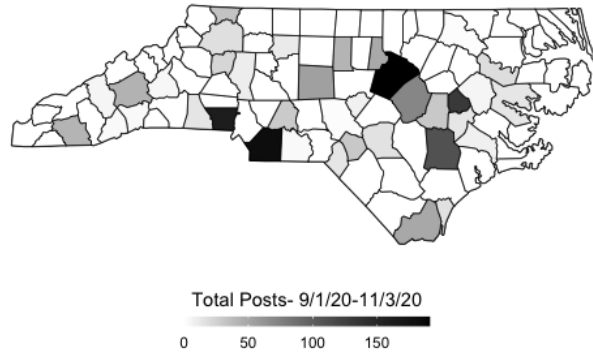
Table 1: Support for Voter Education and Resource Constraints - 2020 LEO Survey

Survey Question	% Agree	
	North Carolina	National Sample
I enjoy educating citizens about voting rules and procedures	87	90
The lack of citizen knowledge about voting rules and procedures causes significant problems when people go to vote	87	90
LEOs should consider it part of their responsibilities to work on voter education and voter satisfaction	71	71.6
My office has enough time and resources to work on educating voters, along with conducting the election	25	35.5
	N=21	N=710

In 2020, 35 counties operated an official LEO Facebook page.⁸ Across all 35 county Facebook pages, a total of 1,202 posts were shared between September 1, 2020 and November 3, 2020, with notable variation in the frequency of content shared across counties (Figure 1). Duplin, Union, Wake and Gaston counties were the most active on Facebook during this time period with over 200 posts shared, whereas Moore and Halifax counties only shared one post.

⁸Each page is labeled as "[Name] county Board of Elections" page, except for Duplin County, which operates a "County of Duplin Government" page. We include Duplin County's Facebook page in our dataset because it was the only local government social media account sharing information about elections.

Figure 1: All posts by county, September 1 - November 3, 2020



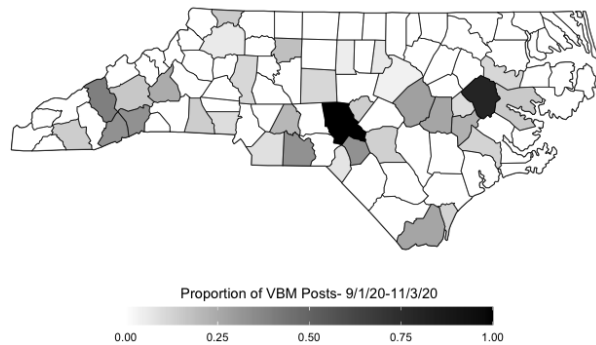
Our content analysis of LEOs' Facebook posts reveals some insight into the information environment cultivated by North Carolina LEOs in 2020. As we show on Table 1, information about early in-person voting was shared the most - 22.6% (272 posts)- compared to voting by mail - 5.7% (69 posts) - and Election Day in-person voting - 5.8% (70 posts). North Carolina voters voted overwhelmingly early in-person both in 2016 and 2020 ([Stewart III 2020](#)), with only small increases in the overall use of mail voting by North Carolinians. Finally, LEOs also prioritized sharing posts that contained multiple pieces of information about the elections process, for example, content that includes information about registration deadlines, how to request a mail ballot, and where to vote in person in one single post.

Table 2: Topics shared by North Carolina's LEO Facebook accounts September 1, 2020 - November 3, 2020

Main Topic	Number of Posts
Early In-Person Voting	272
Post-Election Processes (i.e counting, audits, certification)	243
Multiple Election Topics (i.e voting methods & COVID-19 protocols)	206
Non-Election Related	75
Election Day	70
Mail Voting (VBM)	69
COVID-19	54
Multiple Election Topics With Mail Voting Information	45
Polling Place Information	29
Staff Appreciation	23
Misinformation	12
Sample Ballots	10
Election Preparedness	9
GOTV	9
Voter Assistance	7
"I Voted" Stickers	5
Election/Voter Fraud/Misconduct	4
Candidate Information	4
Voter Eligibility Rules (i.e citizenship, residency)	2
Voter Registration	1
Total	1,202

Figure 2 shows only 20 counties shared content specifically about mail voting, with most county board of elections' Facebook pages posting only once or no more than five times about the topic, and only two counties - Johnston and Transylvania - posting 10 times or more.⁹ Henderson county, for instance, only shared one post on September 2, 2020, announcing that voters could begin requesting absentee ballots, and outlining the absentee voting process. Whereas the frequency of content across the counties may not necessarily yield higher engagement from voters, an overload of information may also increase voter confusion looking for information about specific voting processes like mail voting (Schwartz 2002). Information overload could take the form of excessive posting without prioritizing key information close to important deadlines, (Suttman-Lea and Merivaki Forthcoming), or sharing content about multiple topics in one post, potentially making it difficult for voters to determine which information is relevant to them.

Figure 2: Mail Voting (VBM) specific Facebook posts, September 1 - November 3, 2020



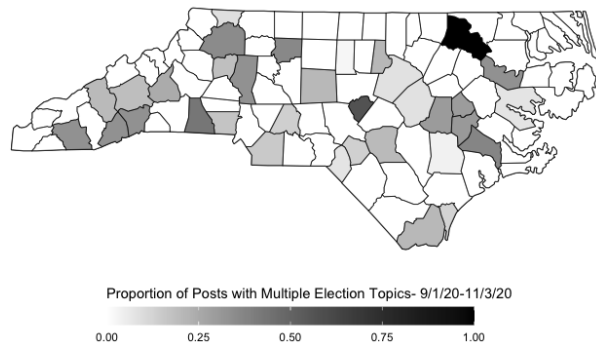
17.1% of LEO posts (206) included information about multiple election topics (Figure 3). These posts were long, and contained details about how to vote in-person, how to request and return a mail ballot, how to find a polling place, often attached with information about COVID-19 protocols.¹⁰ Comparing the county variation in content sharing patterns in Figures 2 and 3, there is little overlap between counties who posted information explicitly about mail voting, and sharing information about multiple election topics. In other words, the data suggest LEOs utilized an either/or approach, either posting about mail voting and other distinct processes

⁹Figure A1 in the Appendix shows an example of what a "vote by mail" specific post looks like.

¹⁰Figure A2 in the Appendix shows an example of what a "multiple election topics" post looks like.

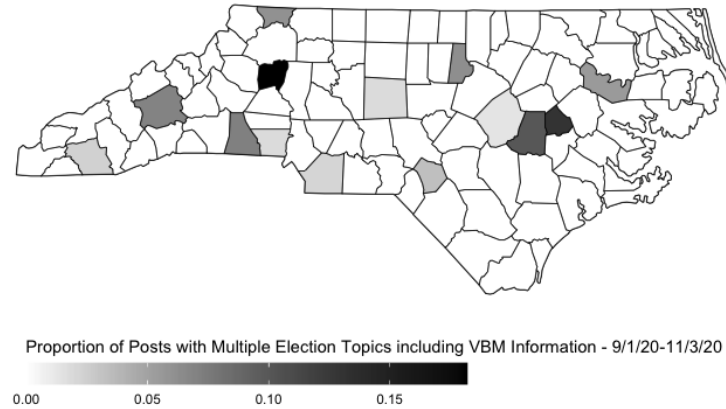
separately, or sharing information about all of them, and other topics, in a single post.

Figure 3: Facebook posts with multiple election topics September 1 - November 3, 2020



Only a subset of multiple topic posts included information about mail voting (21.8%, or 45 posts). Similar to the content sharing patterns we observed in Figures 2 and 3, there is little overlap in content shared and frequency of posting patterns for LEOs who shared information with multiple election topics, and those who shared multiple election topics that also included information about how to vote by mail (Figures 3 and 4). For instance, all four of Alexander county’s Facebook posts with information about multiple election topics included information about mail voting, whereas Greene county, which shared such posts more frequently (45 times between September 1 and November 3, 2020), mail voting was mentioned 17 times, accounting for 37% of all posts within this category. Macon county is another useful example; only one out of 17 posts that were shared with multiple election information topics mentioned mail voting.

Figure 4: Facebook Posts with multiple election topics including VBM information., September 1 - November 3, 2020



Compared to LEOs in other states who are regularly active in putting out voter education content like Florida ([Suttman-Lea and Merivaki Forthcoming](#)), LEOs in North Carolina shared content less frequently. Limited information about changes in the mail voting policy could be detrimental for ensuring voters return their ballots on time and without errors. Although overall acceptance rates were high across North Carolina counties, there were still voters who experienced issues with their mail votes, indicating the potentially negative impact of limited information about mail voting. In addition, the different content-sharing approaches by LEOs, such as frequently sharing information about multiple election topics, but not explicitly discussing mail voting, could result in inadequate exposure to mail voting information. In short, while LEOs may be putting the information out about mail voting, these descriptive data highlight how these messages may be drowned by other election content.

The lack of consistent and systematic voter education data available across and within the states makes it challenging to capture all efforts by election officials. This challenge makes our social media measure useful in capturing observed voter education efforts by LEOs, but it may not capture the scope of outreach LEOs engage in during an election cycle. To address this challenge, we include a measure of local-level investment in election administration in 2020: the funds some LEOs in North Carolina received from the Center Tech and Civic Life's (CTCL) COVID-19 grants. In 2020, over 2000 LEOs across the US applied and received a grant from

the CTCL to improve the administration of elections.¹¹ The CTCL reports most of these funds were used to staff polling places and improve the administration of mail voting, with almost a quarter of LEOs across the United States reporting that these funds were also allocated for voter education. Unfortunately, a detailed breakdown of how much funds were spent on voter education by locality are not available, which makes this measure a rough proxy of other outreach activities LEOs in North Carolina might have engaged in.¹²

The proportion of jurisdictions receiving these funds varied by state, with some states having most, if not all of their local jurisdictions supplementing their funding with a CTCL grant. In North Carolina, 29 counties received a CTCL grant (20% of all counties in the state). There does not seem to be a relationship between the size of the county – number of registered voters – and the amount of funds spent by each one of these counties. What is more, not every one of the CTCL grant receiving counties (Table 3) operated an official Facebook page in 2020. This variation in local-level investment in seeking private funding and presence of social media highlight the dynamics of the information ecosystem LEOs can cultivate in their jurisdictions. It also allows for an evaluation of the impact of LEOs' voter education efforts in the absence of supplemental funding for elections.

¹¹Center for Tech and Civic Life, "Election Officials Made Democracy Happen." Available at: <https://www.techandciviclelife.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Election-Officials-Made-Democracy-Happen-in-2020.pdf>.

¹²The Center for Election Innovation and Research (CEIR) also offered grants for voter education to the states, but these funds were used by state election officials and were not distributed to localities to use, which is why we do not use them in our analysis: <https://electioninnovation.org/research/ceir-2020-voter-education-grant-program/>.

Table 3: Facebook Presence and Use of CTCL Funds

County	Facebook Page	CTCL \$ / Reg. Voter
Alamance	Y	\$1
Alleghany	Y	\$1
Beaufort	Y	\$1
Brunswick	Y	\$0.7
Buncombe	Y	\$0.7
Camden	N	\$0.7
Catawba	N	\$0.7
Craven	N	\$1
Durham	Y	\$5.8
Edgecombe	N	\$0.5
Harnett	N	\$1.03
Hoke	Y	\$1.5
Iredell	Y	\$0.8
Jackson	Y	\$1.6
Johnston	Y	\$0.9
Jones	Y	\$1.1
Lee	Y	\$11.1
Lenoir	Y	\$1.5
Martin	Y	\$1.4
Mitchell	N	\$0.6
Orange	N	\$2.5
Pamlico	N	\$0.9
Randolph	Y	\$0.9
Stanly	Y	\$0.8
Swain	N	\$0.9
Union	Y	\$0.6
Watauga	N	\$0.7
Wilkes	Y	\$0.8
Yancey	N	\$0.6

Research Design and Data Description

We merge the LEO social media dataset and the CTCL COVID-19 funding data with North Carolina’s absentee voter history file from the November 3, 2020 election (last updated on November 30, 2020). We evaluate whether voters who requested and returned a mail ballot in North Carolina for the November 3, 2020 election were more likely have it accepted or cured if their LEO prioritized information about mail voting on their official Facebook account, either by explicitly discussing how to vote by mail in a single post, or by including information about mail voting in posts that contain information about other election topics, such as how to vote in-person. The absentee voter history file contains information on the 4,732,448 individuals who requested a mail ballot and voted early in-person, such as demographics - age, gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, and dates voters requested and returned their mail ballot, as well as whether their ballots were accepted or cured. Since our population of interest involves those who requested to vote by mail, the sample we are evaluating includes 1,215,947 voters (25.8% of all voters).

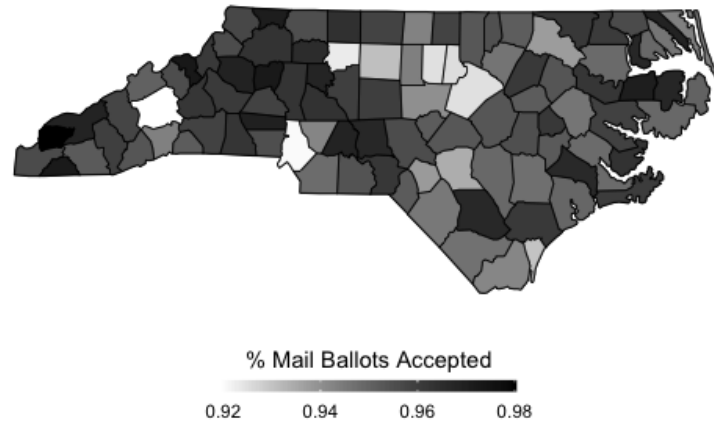
The 2020 mail voting electorate in North Carolina was older, predominately White and non-Hispanic, and slightly more Democratic. Compared to all absentee voters, Democratic and Unaffiliated voters cast their ballots by mail at higher rates compared to their Republican counterparts (45% and 34.1% respectively). These patterns are consistent with national trends showing partisan differences in voting mode during the 2020 election, particularly between voting in-person and by mail (See table OA2 in the online Appendix for a complete demographic breakdown of absentee voters).

According to the data reported by the NCSBE, between September 24, 2020 and November 3, 2020 a total of 4,471,257 ballots were submitted by mail, by e-mail or fax (UOCAVA, or overseas voters) or in-person during the early voting period (October 15 - October 31, 2020).¹³ The vast majority of these ballots were cast in-person (73.8% or 3,490,241). The absentee voter file data have no absentee return dates recorded for 5.5% of voters (261,191), which means that 85.5% of mail voters across the state returned their ballot.

Acceptance and cure rates were generally high for mail ballots across the state (Figure 5). Nevertheless, voters still experienced challenges in returning their ballots on time, or completing

¹³ Among those voters who requested to vote by mail, only 201 voters actually voted early in-person instead.

Figure 5: Mail Ballot Acceptance Rates



them correctly, and thus had their ballots rejected, or they returned them too late to be cured (Table 2). LEOs are required to follow specific administrative steps to process absentee ballots, such as implementing an address change, a new voter, a same-day registration, or an inactive voter (Table OA3 in the online appendix). However, mail voting requires additional verification steps: ballots returned by mail and by Fax/e-mail from overseas voters had issues with meeting the notary requirement, being returned undeliverable or too late to be cured, or with mismatched signatures.

It is possible that errors in meeting mail voting requirements, such as providing witness information, or properly completing a mail ballot, reflected voter confusion about changes in the mail voting process. Compared to voters who voted early in-person, voting by mail is more complex and involves unique administrative challenges for voters and LEOs alike. Gaps in voter information about how and when to return one's mail ballot could exacerbate these challenges, especially for voters who are not experienced with the process, or for voters who were not sufficiently informed about mail voting changes.

Table 4: Ballot Returned Status By Return Method, All Absentee Voters

Ballot Return Status	Early In Person	By Mail	Fax / E-mail	Total
Not Returned	16	125,658	3,495	129,169
Accepted	3,486,692	937,367	22,110	4,446,169
Accepted-Cured	1	7,480	3	7,484
Assistant Info Incomplete	0	2	0	2
Cancelled	2,441	0	0	2,441
Conflict	5	3	0	8
Duplicate	46	232	51	329
E-transmission failure	0	0	4	4
Contacted- No Time to Cure	0	52	0	52
Not properly notarized	0	9	0	9
Not voted	417	0	0	417
Pending	0	1	0	1
Pending Cure	1	3,788	3	3,792
Returned After Deadline	0	1,011	22	1,033
Returned undeliverable	0	1,812	0	1,812
Signature mismatch	0	16	1	17
Spoiled	5	135,597	572	136,174
Witness Info Incomplete	0	2,919	0	2,919
Wrong Voter	616	0	0	616

Our outcome of interest is whether a mail ballot, among those who requested to vote by mail in North Carolina in 2020, was accepted or cured. Our key independent variables meant to capture the information environment cultivated by North Carolina LEOs measure the number of Facebook posts that explicitly discuss mail voting, and those containing information about multiple election topics shared by North Carolina LEOs on Facebook between September 1 and November 3, 3030. To assess the exposure to, or potential "drowning" of information about mail voting, relative to other election related information, we also include a measure of the proportion of mail voting and multiple election topics posts relative to all posts shared. Additionally, we include a measure of the proportion of posts that contained information about mail voting within the population of multiple election topics, to test any drowning effects in posts that include multiple pieces of election information. We chose November 3 as the cutoff date for the LEO social media post data, because it is the date by which individuals needed to postmark their mail ballot.

We control for local-level investment in election administration by including the amount of private CTCL funds LEOs allocated per registered voter (Table 3). This measure does not

directly capture voter education efforts by LEOs, but it indicates additional efforts to improve the voter experience, with some LEOs across the country reporting to CTCL that these funds were used to educate voters about mail voting.

Based on our review of prior research on mail ballot rejection, we control for a series of individual-level factors included in the absentee voter file data (Table OA2 in the Online Appendix): voter age, gender, race and ethnicity and partisan affiliation ([Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021](#); [Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020](#)). To account for county-level administrative factors, we include a categorical variable for which process the county LEOs followed to verify absentee ballots (Table OA3 in the online appendix). Finally, to account for administrative differences in LEO discretion exercised when evaluating mail ballots ([Baringer, Herron and Smith 2020](#)), we control for the aggregate acceptance rates by county for the 2018 and 2016 election cycles. This allows us to address unmeasured differences in administrative practices for processing absentee ballots from county to county.

Analysis and Findings

We evaluate the impact of voter education efforts by LEOs in North Carolina on the likelihood that a voter's returned mail ballot is accepted or cured by running a logistic regression with robust standard errors, clustered by county. We report average marginal effects (Figures 6 and 7) and then proceed with marginal effects broken down by race/ethnicity and age.

Our findings are consistent with our expectations relating to the effects of relative exposure to, or "drowning" of, information about how to vote by mail. In jurisdictions where LEOs shared a higher proportion of content devoted to mail voting specifically relative to other topics (Hypothesis 1), the likelihood of accepting or curing one's mail ballot increased, all else equal. Conversely, we find that the relationship between total count of mail voting-related posts and the likelihood of an accepted or cured ballot was negative (full regression outputs are in appendix Table A1). This suggests that the mere provision of information is not sufficient for helping voters cast mail ballots; such information also needs to be prioritized.

The relationship between sharing multiple election topics relative to other topics and the likelihood of casting a mail ballot that is accepted or cured (Hypothesis 2) is null ($p=.056$). This evidence may dampen our overall thesis that the provision of multiple pieces of information may overwhelm voters looking for specific information, such as voting my mail. In effect, our

analysis shows that the effect of the total *count* of posts with multiple election topics is positive. Increased exposure to information about multiple voting methods among voters who intended to vote by mail may have changed their voting calculus, making in-person voting a more viable option. However, only a few absentee voters (201) among those who requested to vote by mail ultimately decided to vote early in-person.

It is also possible that posts containing multiple pieces of election information that include information about mail voting may help voters cast a mail ballot that gets counted, a possibility we account for in our model. We find that when accounting for the total number of posts containing multiple pieces of election information that *also* contain information about mail voting, the effect is statistically significant and positive. However, our measure of the proportion of mail voting-related information within the posts that contain multiple topics is null.

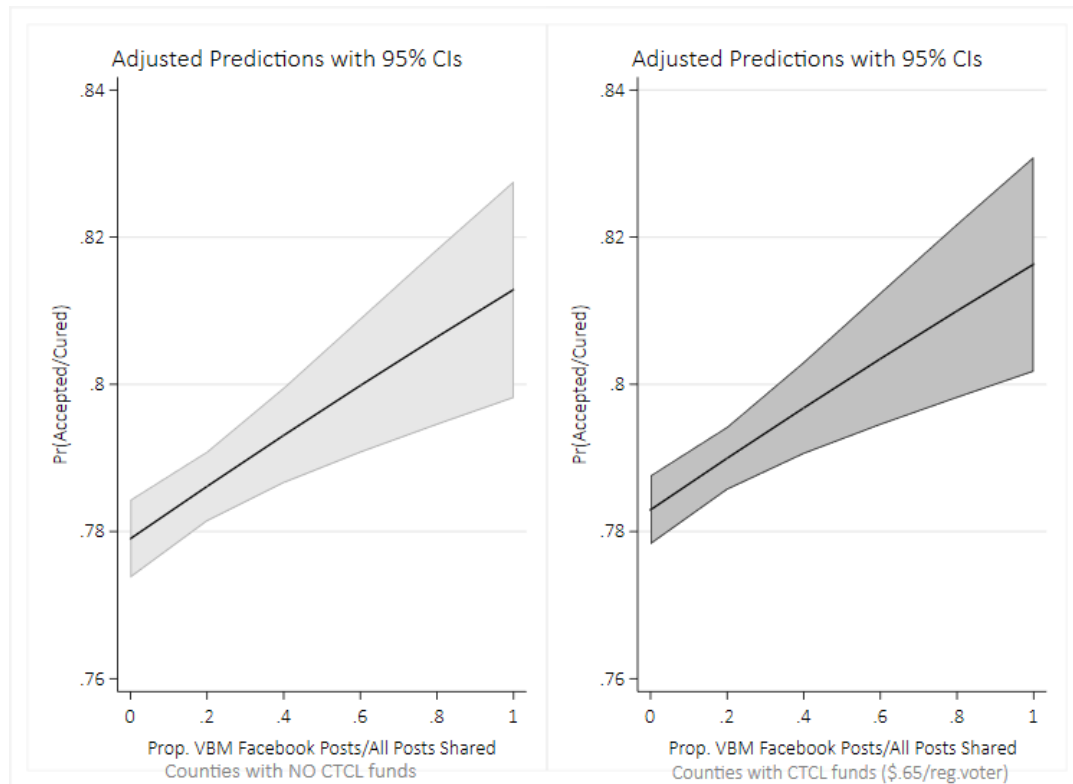
Overall, these findings offer support for our expectations about relative exposure to information, especially as it relates to the potential for content-specific messages to "get drowned" amidst of other topics that LEOs communicate to voters. LEOs may share information about what voters need to do to participate in elections, but emphasizing content containing multiple pieces of election information may not be effective in reaching mail voters voters. If LEOs engage in voter education, their efforts may be less effective in helping mail voters successfully cast their ballots because of the way they opt to convey the message. These findings are consistent with our descriptive analysis, which highlights notable gaps in the information environment maintained by North Carolina LEOs on their Facebook accounts, particularly when it comes to content about specific voting methods like mail voting that require more steps than other vote methods. Voters whose LEOs shared information about mail voting more often relative to other topics are reaping the benefits of a content-specific information environment compared to voters whose LEOs are not. Considering these voters had already completed all the steps in the mail voting process, in that they requested, filled, and returned a mail ballot, the positive impact on mail voting specific information on accepted mail ballots suggests the provision and prioritizing of information about specific processes can help voters avoid errors and risk their ballots getting rejected.

It is possible election officials engaged in other forms of outreach to improve the mail voting experience for voters, that our social media measures do not capture. As we show in Table 3, 29 out of the 100 LEOs in North Carolina received a CTCL COVID-19 grant, and not all of them operated an official Facebook page in 2020. We find that, everything else constant, for voters

who lived in counties where the proportion of funds spent per registered voter were higher, the likelihood of returning a mail ballot that would count was higher. Although the allocation of funds does not seem to be substantial, with some counties spending as little as \$.5 per registered voter, the positive finding indicates these funds improved the voter experience for mail voters, despite the strong emphasis on early in-person voting in other LEO communications (Table 1 and Table 2).

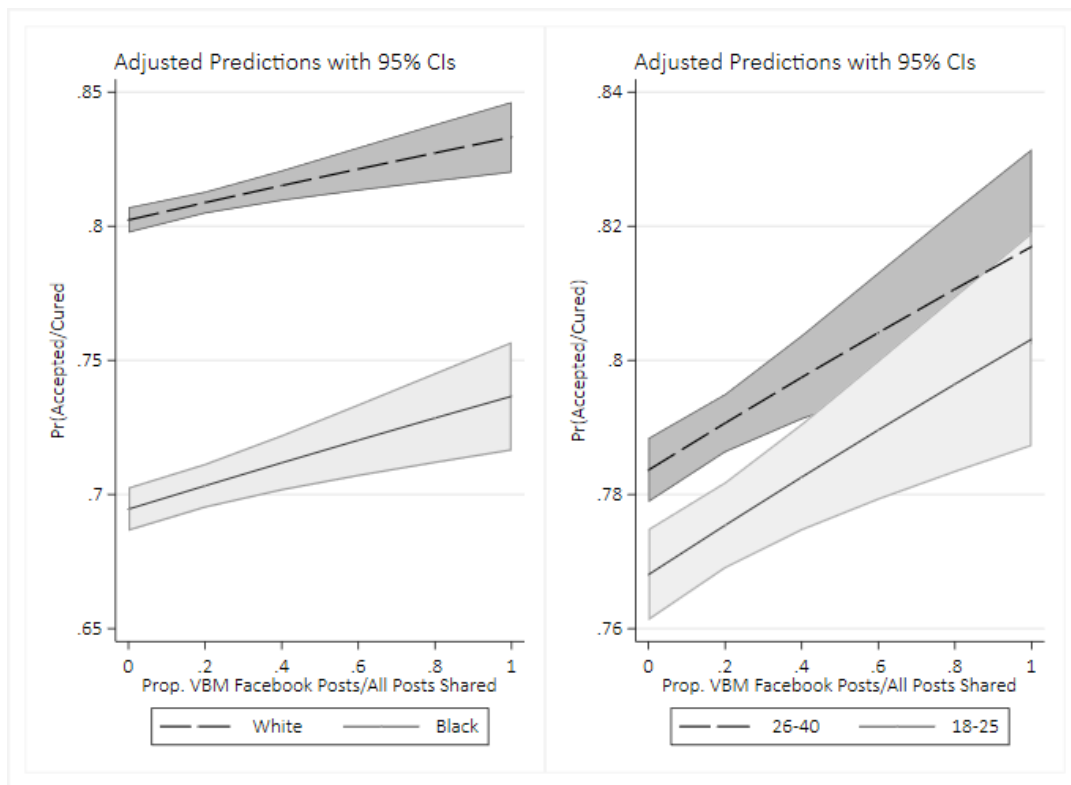
To assess how the availability and additional spending on election administration interacted with our measure of voter education efforts, we plot the marginal effects of the proportion of mail voting-related posts in counties that did not receive a CTCL-COVID-19 grant, and those who received one and spent an average of \$.65 per registered voter. If the marginal effect of the latter is stronger than the former, this would suggest that Facebook voter education efforts are not adequately capturing LEO voter outreach. As we show on Figure 6, the difference in the two panels is non-existent; the substantive effect is that the higher the proportion of mail voting-related posts LEOs shared on Facebook between September 1 and November 3, 2020, the higher the probability that a mail voter returned a ballot that was counted of cured.

Figure 6: Probability of Ballot Acceptance/Cure by Mail Voting Specific Posts



We also hypothesized that voters who traditionally experience more challenges with casting mail ballots that will be accepted like young voters and racial and ethnic minorities may benefit from voter education about mail voting. In Figure 7, we plot the predictive margins of a voter’s race and age on the likelihood of having their mail ballot accepted or cured, comparing Black and White voters, and voters in the 18-25 category compared to voters who are 26-40 years old. We find that while non-White voters and young voters were less likely to have their ballots accepted, they fared better in counties where the proportion of mail voting posts shared by LEOs was higher relative to counties where it was lower, or where LEOs did not have a Facebook presence. Black voters, nevertheless, had significantly lower chances of mail ballot acceptance even where LEOs were more active in promoting mail voting, reflecting gaps in access to information about how elections in these communities. We find similar dynamics with respect to young voters (18-25), a quarter of whom were voting for the first time (1,808 out of 5,961). As Figure 7 shows 18-25 year old voters were less likely to have their mail ballots accepted compared to their older cohorts. Young voters whose LEOs prioritized mail voting information, however, had better chances of having their ballots accepted. These findings are consistent with research on whose mail ballot is less likely to count ([Shino, Suttman-Lea and Smith 2021](#)), and provides some evidence that these differences may be attributed to a lack of information about the mail voting process from local election officials.

Figure 7: Probability of Ballot Acceptance/Cure by Facebook Posts with Multiple Election Topics, by Race and Age



Discussion

Mail voting has become an increasingly popular method of voting in the United States, and the widespread use of it during the COVID-19 tinged 2020 election cycle facilitated this trend. While significant attention has been paid to disparities in mail ballot acceptance rates among different groups of voters, there is little work that addresses whether the public servants tasked with administering elections have voter education tools at their disposal that will allow them to mitigate the number of ballots cast by mail that are rejected. In this paper, we assess the relationship between one such tool - online voter education efforts through Facebook - and the acceptance of mail ballots cast during the 2020 general election in the state of North Carolina.

Overall, we find the information environment cultivated by LEOs matters more for the likelihood of mail ballot acceptance than simply sharing information about mail voting. That is, for mail voters living in counties where LEOs dedicated a larger proportion of their total posts between September 1, 2020 and November 3, 2020 to mail voting specifically were more likely to cast a mail ballot that was accepted. Conversely, where LEOs dedicated a higher proportion of posts to content that covered more than one aspect of the elections process, mail voters were more likely to cast a mail ballot that was rejected, although this effect was not significant. Among the small subset of posts that included multiple election topics that also discussed mail voting, the effect on mail ballot acceptance was positive and substantively large, but also not statistically significant. Our results hold when accounting for other measures of LEO efforts to invest resources into election administration and improving the voter experience, as measured by their use of CTCL COVID-19 funds.

Our hypotheses that *how* information is presented matters are bolstered by evidence showing that the mere provision of *more* information about mail voting decreases the likelihood of ballot acceptance. In other words, even if LEOs are sharing higher numbers of pieces about how to vote by mail LEOs, they to be sure this information is not drowned out by other election information, either within the context of a specific post or by a deluge of additional content.

Looking at the effects of our voter education measure on two demographic groups already less likely to cast a mail ballot that is accepted - younger voters and racial and ethnic minorities - we find a significant and positive relationship, which may seem small in magnitude, but we argue is nevertheless substantively important. These mail voters were more likely to cast a mail ballot that was accepted if they lived in a county where LEOs dedicated a larger share of

their Facebook posts to voting by mail specifically relative to their counterparts living where LEOs were less active in promoting mail voting on its own in posts, or where their LEOs did not have an active Facebook account.

Our analysis yields important descriptive insights on the patterns of information sharing by LEOs, as well as the impact of this information on voter behavior. The patterns presented in our findings suggests if LEOs are interesting in nudging voters to take advantage of certain electoral reforms or mitigate certain kinds of voter mistakes, the simple provision of information about election processes, even if shared a number of times during an election cycle may be less important than the attention they dedicate to certain aspects of the voting process. In an electoral environment where key pieces of information about the voting process may be drowned out by a deluge of news and election updates, emphasizing and prioritizing content related *specific* election processes like mail voting are important if LEOs wish to encourage certain kinds of voter behavior and minimizing errors made in the process of voting.

Our findings have implications for our understanding of the tools available to local election officials for informing voters about the process of voting. While our measure of voter education centers on one tool - social media - for voter education, we expect similar efforts to cultivate an vote-by-mail friendly information environment through other modes of voter outreach like the placement of ads in newspapers and visits to communities of interest - such as colleges and universities and racial and ethnic minority communities - will have similar positive effects on voters' successful completion of the mail voting process ([Merivaki and Suttman-Lea 2022](#)). Moreover, there are ongoing efforts by state-led organizations like the National Associations of Secretaries of State (NASS) to continue promoting #TrustedInfo for upcoming election cycles, building off of efforts cultivated during the 2020 election cycle to drive voters to see their state and local election officials as the most trusted sources of information about elections and driving them to get their info from election officials' from online platforms and websites ([NASS 2022](#)). These efforts highlight the importance of assessing the impact of online voter education as a core component of broader voter education efforts, and the findings presented here highlight ways election officials can enhance the effectiveness of their online presence for voter education.

Finally, paper offers insight into the potential *indirect effects* of election reforms through their most direct arbiters, local election officials ([Burden et al. 2014](#)). It is striking our admittedly blunt measure of voter education for which we cannot directly observe whether voters were actually exposed nevertheless had a relationship with the individual likelihood of mail

ballot acceptance. These findings only speak, however, to one aspect of the voting process - the acceptance of mail ballots. Future work should consider how the content shared by LEOs in their voter education efforts shape other aspects of voting - including the decision to vote by mail or vote in person, or even the decision to vote in the first place. Finally, it will be vital to explore the extent to which individuals who live in jurisdictions where LEOs cultivate rich, transparent information environments have greater confidence in the electoral process, a question that is increasingly important given the crisis of confidence facing American democracy following the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election.

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Appendix

Figure A1: "Vote by Mail" Specific Post Example



Figure A2: "Multiple Pieces of Election Information" Post Example

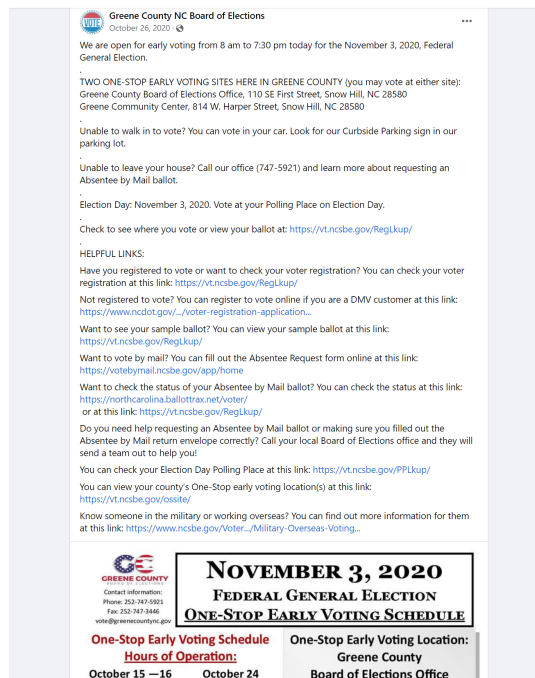


Table A1: Logistic Regression Full Output

	<i>Mail Ballot Acceptance</i>
CTCL Funds / Reg. Voter	-0.035*** (0.010)
VBM Count	-0.014** (0.005)
Multi-Election Info Count	0.011*** (0.001)
Multi-Election with VBM Info Count	-0.044** (0.014)
VBM Proportion	0.208*** (0.054)
Multi-Election Info Proportion	-0.224 (0.117)
Multi-Election with VBM Info Proportion	0.478 (0.762)
LEO Facebook Account	0.028 (0.050)
Demographic Controls	
Black	-0.584*** (0.021)
Asian	-0.107 (0.043)
Other Race / 2 or More	-0.418*** (0.109)
Race not designated	-0.212*** (0.018)
Hispanic	-0.257*** (0.025)
Ethnicity not designated	-0.045*** (0.009)
Female	-0.073*** (0.005)
Gender not designated	-0.005 (0.016)
Democrat	0.036 (0.003)
Other Party	0.045* (0.017)
No Party Affiliation	-0.140*** (0.040)
Age: 18-25	-0.090*** (0.016)
Age: 41-65	0.102*** (0.024)
Age: 66 and up	0.371*** (0.027)
Election Admin. Controls- Past Ballot Acceptance	
Mail Ballots Accepted 2016	0.389 (0.433)
Mail Ballots Accepted 2018	3.025** (0.846)
Election Admin. Controls- Voter Verification Status	
1st verification	-0.716*** (0.133)
2nd verification	-0.939*** (0.174)

2nd verification pending	−0.902*** (0.191)
Address change	−0.427 (0.334)
Address change pending	−0.262 (0.249)
Confirmed	−0.615** (0.181)
Confirmation pending	−0.690* (0.297)
Denied	−2.098*** (0.133)
Inactive	−2.007*** (0.229)
New Voter	−0.119 (0.229)
Verified	0.181*** (0.027)
Voter Change	−0.532*** (0.139)

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001