

Who Makes Voting Convenient? Explaining the Adoption of Early and No-Excuse Absentee Voting in the American States

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Abstract

Recent elections have witnessed substantial debate regarding the degree to which state governments facilitate access to the polls. Despite this newfound interest, however, many of the major reforms aimed at increasing voting convenience (i.e., early voting and no-excuse absentee voting) were implemented over the past four decades. Although numerous studies examine their consequences (on turnout, the composition of the electorate, and/or electoral outcomes), we know significantly less about the factors leading to the initial adoption of these policies. We attempt to provide insights into such motivations using event history analysis to identify the impact of political and demographic considerations, as well as diffusion mechanisms, on which states opted for easier ballot access. We find that adoption responded to some factors signaling the necessity of greater voting convenience in the state, and that partisanship influenced the enactment of early voting but not no-excuse absentee voting procedures.

Keywords

convenience voting, election reform, election rules, political behavior, policy adoption, policy diffusion

Less than a month before the 2012 presidential election, the U.S. Supreme Court cleared the way for Ohioans to make use of in-person early voting the weekend before Election Day.¹ The state had intended to remove early voting for a number of days

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before the election, with Republican officials arguing that local administrators were too occupied with preparation for Tuesday's vote to oversee the casting of ballots as well. Democrats cried foul, complaining that the reduction in early voting days represented an attempt to depress the participation of groups most likely to use this voting method, such as minorities and Democratic supporters (Liptak 2012). Similar efforts took place in a second battleground state, Florida, where the Republican controlled legislature and Governor Rick Scott sought to reduce significantly the number of early voting days and eliminate its availability the weekend before the election. As with their copartisans in Ohio, state Democrats saw this as an attempt to reduce turnout among key Democratic constituencies, especially given that Florida's African American voters in 2008 were more than twice as likely as white voters to have cast an early ballot (Alvarez 2012).

These debates about the pervasiveness of early voting reflect an increasingly partisan concern about the political consequences of this and other forms of convenience voting, or election reforms that make it easier for eligible citizens to cast a ballot. Such anxiety derives at least in part from three interdependent factors that also happen to drive general scholarly interest in the consequences of election reforms (for extensive citations, see Burden et al. 2014; Cain, Donovan, and Tolbert 2008; Hanmer 2009). First, voting via these methods continues to increase; about 32% of all votes in the 2012 presidential election were not cast at the polls on Election Day.² Second, despite the lack of consensus (Burden et al. 2014; Giammo and Brox 2010; Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2007; Gronke and Toffey 2008; Larocca and Klemanski 2011; Oliver 1996; Springer 2012; Stein 1998; Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997; Stein and Vonnahme 2008), a number of studies suggest these policies increase turnout in at least certain circumstances. Third, the ability to cast an early ballot may alter the composition of the electorate (along partisan, demographic, or socioeconomic lines) and create a potential electoral (dis)advantage for Republicans or Democrats (Alvarez, Levin, and Sinclair 2012; Jeffe and Jeffe 1990; Karp and Banducci 2001; Oliver 1996).

These outward partisan divisions are relatively new, and are perhaps best epitomized by efforts beginning in 2008 to use early voting to target nontraditional voters. Almost all of the states with convenience voting methods, however, had adopted them prior to the highly charged partisan atmosphere that has dominated election reform debate over the last several years.³ As such, the role of political concerns in the initial evaluation of these policies remains unclear. Despite the fact that scholars have devoted considerable attention to studying the impact of these reforms, we know substantially less about what factors influenced their adoption. Only recently have scholars sought to study the motivations behind the adoption of major electoral reforms (e.g., Bali and Silver 2006; Bentele and O'Brien 2013; Hale and McNeal 2010; Lawrence, Donovan, and Bowler 2009; Smith and Fridkin 2008), with the most recent work focused on laws that restrict access. The former efforts are certainly vital, but the latter are equally important, as the process leading to enactment may affect the impact of the policy and thus change the approach to its investigation (Hanmer 2009).

In this article, we aim to address this void in the literature by exploring the adoption of two common convenience voting electoral reforms—no-excuse absentee voting

and early voting. Our theoretical framework is centered on leveraging the institutional features of these policies to develop a set of hypotheses for each reform regarding the processes associated with their respective adoption. That is, we explore the characteristics of these policies as a way to establish how a variety of political and demographic factors influence adoption and how the laws might diffuse across the states. After discussing the key features of the laws, we link these features to the potential for partisan gain, arguing that there is little reason to expect the clear partisan divisions common in the process of adopting a variety of other laws. Next, we argue that constituent service matters, in that elected officials are more likely to implement these laws in states with populations that are better suited to benefit from greater convenience. The nature of the laws, notably their inability to drive interstate competition, also lead us to predict that the pattern of geographic diffusion to neighboring states found in many studies of policy adoption is not likely to hold for convenience reforms.

Employing event history analysis from 1972 to 2013, we find evidence of a partisan influence limited to the decision to adopt early voting procedures. These results reflect the current politicized nature of changes to early voting policies and are consistent with the relative absence of debate (partisan based or otherwise) regarding no-excuse absentee voting procedures. They also comport with the greater risks associated with this reform to alter electoral outcomes. Both convenience voting options also occur in places where their utility in facilitating voting is greater, with no-excuse absentee voting exhibiting a regional dimension to its availability as well. As such, states appear to consider the potential partisan electoral consequences of these reforms, but they are also willing to make voting more convenient under at least some circumstances (or at least were prior to the heightened polarization that has emerged on these issues). Taken together, the findings provide potential insights into the policies' respective electoral consequences.

Origins of Convenience Voting

The trend toward facilitating voting over the past several decades includes two reforms that permit a registered citizen to cast their ballot without setting foot inside a voting booth on Election Day: no-excuse absentee voting and early voting. Absentee voting, originally designed to aid members of the military and then later civilian registrants who could not make it to the polls or who would have difficulty doing so (for reasons such as being out of town, illness, old age, or disability), permits an elector to apply for an absentee ballot that is either mailed to them or picked up from the elections office. In its original form, citizens must provide a reason for voting absentee that matches those allowed by the existing statute. The no-excuse variant of this policy removes this required justification, permitting any registered voter to request such a ballot and vote via this manner.⁴ In-person early voting, in contrast, allows an individual to vote early at either a satellite location or the county elections office. Those wishing to do so simply show up when these locations are open and vote; they need not apply for a ballot beforehand.⁵

Thus, while both reforms provide greater convenience for anyone who is eligible to vote and wants to participate, the nature of the convenience is distinct. No-excuse

absentee voting allows registered citizens to vote in their home or wherever they might be and return the ballot within a wide time frame, but it requires a multistep process that takes various amounts of time at each stage to complete. Early voting, for those who have previously registered to vote, requires just a single step on one day with no application, but the voter must potentially wait in line to cast a ballot and show up at one of the specified locations when they are open (usually normal business hours during the week and expanded hours on the weekend).

Structural Features and Partisan Advantage

Florida's and Ohio's efforts in 2012 reflect the heightened partisan divisions that have evolved on matters of election reform and would suggest that adoption patterns reflect parties seeking an electoral advantage. As the dominant belief (with some caveats) is that Democratic prospects improve when a larger proportion of the electorate turns out (Citrin, Schickler, and Sides 2003; DeNardo 1980; Hansford and Gomez 2010; Piven and Cloward 2000), Democrats may expect to benefit from any reform that makes participation easier.⁶ This expectation, however, is complicated by two factors. First, those whose participation is facilitated are not necessarily predisposed to vote Democratic. No-excuse absentee voting, for example, is often viewed as aiding Republican-leaning voters (Jeffe and Jeffe 1990; Karp and Banducci 2001; Oliver 1996), while in-person early voting is frequently associated with getting out Democratic supporters, at least in recent elections (Alvarez, Levin, and Sinclair 2012). Second, it is unclear that there is any inherent political benefit garnered through adopting these reforms, or whether increased convenience voting usage instead results from those who are already engaged selecting this option (Berinsky 2005). For example, any GOP advantage provided by no-excuse absentee voting may derive from the party's mobilization strategies (Oliver 1996) or reflect a shift to this method by supporters who would have otherwise voted on Election Day (Karp and Banducci 2001), rather than some intrinsic aspect of casting an absentee ballot. Likewise, although Democrats may benefit from early voting, evidence (Alvarez, Levin, and Sinclair 2012) only dates to the past couple elections and may stem from a change in mobilization strategy or improved capacity to get out supporters.

To better understand the potential for partisan interests to influence adoption, we contend it is important to explore the structural features of the policies and how their presence may create greater uncertainty about and risk to electoral outcomes.⁷ The key concern is the degree to which parties, candidates, and civic groups might leverage the reforms to mobilize their base and other registrants likely to vote and support them. Because registrants must first apply for an absentee ballot, mobilization around absentee voting is slightly harder. That is, campaigns can provide absentee ballot request forms to potential voters, but those individuals must fill them out, return them for administrative processing, vote the ballot once they receive it, and then return it to the appropriate elections office. This process requires campaigns to spend additional resources to follow up and to track who actually voted, as well as rely on the postal service for (timely) delivery. Overall then, enacting no-excuse absentee voting does

not necessarily provide an easily exploited procedure to mobilize opponents of those currently in office. This limited threat posed to job security reduces the reasons to expect partisan factors to influence adoption.

In contrast, early voting is more like Election Day voting. It requires just one step, allowing campaigns to more easily ensure success when they target individuals or groups; for example, a candidate could schedule transportation for voters to the polling places to confirm who voted and when, and to free up resources to spend on mobilizing additional registrants.⁸ Which party is best at this will surely vary across time and place, but relative to no-excuse absentee voting, the risks to altering electoral outcomes appear larger, which could create divisions with respect to partisan support for early voting. Since Republicans are generally less supportive of policies that make voting easier (Hasen 2012; Herron and Smith 2014) and more open to procedures (e.g., voter identification laws) that increase the costs of voting (Bali and Silver 2006; Hale and McNeal 2010), we expect they will be less likely to favor adopting early voting laws.

If political interests do exert an important influence on adoption, then partisan strength in the state's governing institutions should determine whether convenience voting options are extended to citizens. Maintaining a majority in both legislative chambers, for example, would permit a unified party to overcome the strong divisions on election administration and reform policies that generally split almost unanimously along party lines at both the state and federal level (Erikson and Minnite 2009; Lee 2009). This greater probability of partisan bloc voting in these circumstances makes compromise unlikely, heightening the importance of unified legislative control to attracting sufficient support for enactment.

Executive branch control should exert an impact on the adoption process as well. Any convenience voting option that survives both legislative chambers must garner the governor's approval, with this veto player status (Tsebelis 2002) affording them considerable power over which reforms ultimately pass. The legislature can of course override a veto if used, but securing the sufficient number of votes to do so is often difficult. The combination of these factors shapes any such policy approved by the legislature, as the proposed law must exhibit at least a minimal congruence with the governor's preferences (see Ingberman and Yao 1991; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1988; McCarty 2000 for evidence of this relationship at the federal level).

Structural Features and Constituent Service

Regardless of any partisan considerations, we also expect convenience voting adoption to be influenced by its utility in a given state. That is, elected officials adopt the laws as a form of constituent service. For example, one group whose presence should affect enactment (at least of no-excuse absentee voting) is senior citizens. The elderly encounter greater obstacles to participation (related to limited mobility and an inability to get to the polls), which heighten the importance of access to more convenient ways to vote. They frequently use such methods (Alvarez, Levin, and Sinclair 2012; Barreto et al. 2006; Oliver 1996) and may participate at greater rates under liberalized absentee

laws (Karp and Banducci 2001). Although most of these statutes that require an excuse include an exemption for senior citizens, large numbers of these individuals may convince elected officials to simply drop the excuse requirement altogether. We thus anticipate that a larger percentage of the population over the age of 65 corresponds to a greater likelihood of reform enactment.

Another group that stands to strongly benefit from these voting options is rural residents. These citizens face considerable commutes to traditional polling places from their homes or work that increase the costs of turning out on Election Day. Longer distances to voting sites are associated with a higher rate of voting by mail (Dyck and Gimpel 2005), and rural voters are more likely to vote absentee than the general public (Oliver 1996). As Haspel and Knotts (2005) note, small changes in the distance to the polls can exert a significant influence on participation, suggesting that the use of early voting sites in places other than traditional locales may be a particular convenience for such individuals. As such, we expect that states with higher proportions of rural residents are more likely to adopt methods of convenience voting.

Relatedly, many of the additional costs borne by rural voters are similarly faced by large state residents. These individuals also encounter longer traveling distances on average to polling places, which makes voting more cumbersome. Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller (2007) note the overlapping impact of these factors on voting habits, observing that convenience voting is highest not only where the percentage rural is large but also in the geographically largest states. We thus similarly expect that the larger the state's size, the more likely it will enact the convenience voting reforms.

Structural Features and Diffusion

We also address the state- and region-specific factors that potentially explain the passage of convenience voting. State policies frequently diffuse across jurisdictions, with actors making decisions based on the (in)actions of other states. Diffusion is often geographically based, with elected officials seeking to learn from, emulate, or compete with their neighbors (Berry and Baybeck 2005; Berry and Berry 1990; Mooney and Lee 1995; Shipan and Volden 2008; Volden 2006; Walker 1969). However, we suspect that attention solely to adjacent states' policies is minimal for two reasons. First, the electoral link and (at least recent) party polarization on these matters suggests a strong advantage to examining the responses of similar actors across the entire country. Second, the absence of a competition component to these matters limits the probability that states will turn to those on their borders, which they might do with laws related to revenue generation (Boehmke and Witmer 2004). For example, unlike gambling, which can pit states against one another to capture development and tourism dollars, the presence of a convenience reform in one state does not have any effect on the fortunes of neighboring states. As such, we expect that a rise in the proportion of neighboring states that already permit a convenience voting method exerts little influence on the probability of adoption.

This is not to say that the enactment of these election reforms is simply an internal process. Scholars are increasingly cognizant that policy diffusion is not limited to

geographic neighbors (see Boushey 2010; Karch 2007; Shipan and Volden 2012). We suspect that adoption patterns could follow a learning process that is ideological in nature. Grossback, Nicholson-Crotty, and Peterson (2004) convincingly argue that ideological diffusion often takes place in circumstances where the issue cannot be easily placed on the liberal/conservative continuum. Given the absence of evidence that one side clearly benefits from its deployment, such a characterization may apply to manners of convenience voting, with states focusing their attention on the actions of states with a similar ideology (though perceived advantages regarding their use may hinder such efforts).⁹

We also control for a potential regional dynamic to adoption. All western states maintain at least one of these voting methods, which may reflect cultural tendencies to facilitate access to the polls and engage the citizenry, at least for those who are already registered to vote. Such a possibility is congruent with this region's dominant use of other political institutions that afford citizens a greater role in the political process (such as the initiative process). It may also be consistent with some unique aspect of political culture limited to these states. We thus expect western states are more likely to permit these polices.¹⁰

Racial and Ethnic Composition

Finally, we account for the state's racial and ethnic composition by controlling for the percentages of African Americans and Latinos. Both Blacks and Latinos historically participate at depressed rates, suggesting they could benefit from efforts to make voting easier. These demographic groups, however, have not made heightened use of these voting methods (Neeley and Richardson 2001; Oliver 1996; Stein 1998), at least until recently (Alvarez, Levin, and Sinclair 2012). In addition, states with large minority populations have also not tended to facilitate their participation. Blacks in particular have long faced electoral rules designed to restrict their poll access (e.g., poll taxes and literacy tests) and suppress their vote (Keyssar 2009; Kousser 1974). Partisan factors may arise as well, given the tendency of these two groups to strongly support the Democratic Party.¹¹ As such, it remains unclear whether states with substantial minority populations are more likely to adopt convenience voting.

Data and Method

Our analyses cover the time period of 1972 through 2013.¹² To determine those states that extend either no-excuse absentee or early voting options to their residents, as well as when they did so, we conducted a historical analysis of each existing statute.¹³ The majority of documentation regarding pertinent amendments and/or modifications to the statute section numbering was readily accessible through resources such as LexisNexis and HeinOnline, but for some states we could not easily obtain this information. In these circumstances, we secured the information from law libraries or relevant state election divisions. We also confirmed that these reforms never existed in any state currently without them. For every instance, we successfully determined the genesis of each state's laws and traced their evolution to the current version.¹⁴

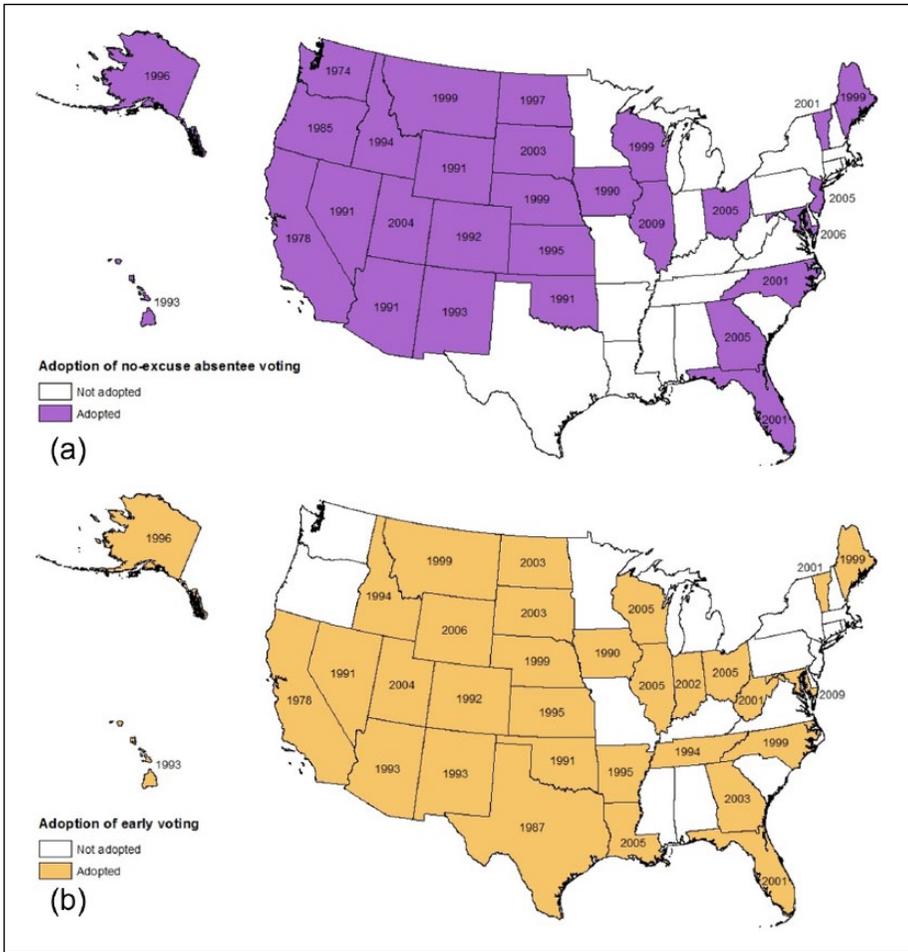


Figure 1. State adoption of convenience voting laws, through 2013. Note. (a) No-excuse absentee voting. (b) Early voting.

Figures 1a and 1b illustrate the results of our investigation. Beginning with no-excuse absentee voting, Figure 1a shows the adoption dates for the 28 states that enacted this policy since 1972. Washington started the movement in 1974, with Illinois the most recent adopter in 2009. Western states dominate the distribution, with all 13 from this region extending this option to voters at some point over the past four decades. The West also contains most of the early adopters, including 8 of the first 10 states to do so. In contrast, states in the northeast and south appear somewhat resistant to this policy. Only six states from these two regions maintain no-excuse absentee voting (Maine, New Jersey, Vermont, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina), and none enacted it prior to 1999.¹⁵

Shifting our focus, Figure 1b demonstrates that 31 states afford voters the opportunity to cast an in-person ballot before Election Day. California was the first to adopt this policy in 1978 (Maryland was the last in 2009), and the map appears somewhat similar to that for no-excuse absentee voting. Much of the West adopted this policy as well (11 of the 13 states), but the South is much less impervious to adoption, with Texas the second state in the country to permit in-person early voting in 1987. By comparing Figures 1a and 1b, we see that 26 states maintain both voting options (18 enacted them at the same time, while the remaining 8 did so on separate occasions). We re-emphasize that these dates (and our interest) pertain to the adoption of these laws, not their implementation, which might differ.

As we seek to explain the probability that a state adopts the specified manner of convenience voting at a particular point in time, conditional on it not having previously done so, our unit of analysis is the state within a given year. This means that we have an observation for each state in each year of the analysis. Given their distinctiveness, we model the laws separately. States are coded as one if they adopt the specific policy in the given year and zero if they do not. After the voting method is enacted, the state drops out of the dataset the following year. Since the data are best described as binary time-series-cross-section (BTSCS) data or grouped duration data (see Beck, Katz, and Tucker 1998; Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004), we follow Carter and Signorino's (2010) approach to account for temporal dependence by running logit models that include variables measuring the time to adoption, the time to adoption squared, and the time to adoption cubed.¹⁶

To explain why states adopt no-excuse absentee or early voting, we incorporate in our model measurements of the factors discussed above. For those political in nature, this includes dichotomous indicators for Republican control of the state legislature and governorship in the year in question (data are taken from Klarner 2003 and subsequent updates).^{17,18} We denote the potential demographic influences on enactment as the percentage elderly (over 65), living in a rural area, African American, and Latino,¹⁹ each of which is lagged one year.²⁰ Geographic diffusion is captured by the proportion of neighbors in the given year that previously adopted the convenience voting method. We measure ideological diffusion as the absolute value of the difference between the state's ideological score and the weighted average of the scores for those who currently maintain the policy from the year in which the policy was adopted (Grossback, Nicholson-Crotty, and Peterson 2004), relying on Berry et al.'s (1998) measure of ideology (updated through 2010).²¹ Finally, we account for states' geographic sizes in logged square miles and denote states in the West with a dichotomous indicator.

Results

We turn first to explaining the adoption of no-excuse absentee voting. As limited dependent variable models are inherently interactive in all the variables, we focus our discussion on the relevant predictions from the model to determine whether the effects are substantively and statistically significant.²² Following Hanmer and Kalkan's (2013) recommendation, we generate all predicted probabilities using the observed

Table 1. Change in the Predicted Probability of State Adoption of No-Excuse Absentee and Early Voting Based on Political and Social Determinants.

	No-excuse absentee voting	Early voting
Republican unified legislature	0.001 [-.021, .027]	0.014 [-.009, .036]
Republican governor	-0.007 [-.026, .015]	-0.023 [-.048, .000]
Percentage over 65	0.013 [.002, .031]	-0.001 [-.009, .009]
Percentage Black	-0.006 [-.016, .012]	-0.005 [-.014, .007]
Percentage Latino	0.002 [-.004, .009]	0.018 [.007, .032]
Percentage rural	-0.002 [-.012, .011]	0.015 [-.001, .036]
Geographic size	0.014 [.000, .035]	0.028 [.005, .059]
Geographic diffusion	-0.007 [-.016, .001]	-0.003 [-.016, .008]
Ideological diffusion	0.005 [-.007, .019]	0.018 [-.004, .053]
West	0.135 [.027, .300]	-0.013 [-.050, .032]
Time	0.101 [.046, .161]	0.076 [.005, .153]
N	1,372	1,190

Note. Predicted probabilities estimated with all other variables set at their actual values. All effects except those for dichotomous indicators calculated for moving from the mean to one standard deviation above the mean. 95% confidence intervals, generated via simulation (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013; Herron 1999), are in brackets.

value approach, which sets the variables not being manipulated to their actual values in the sample. This approach, common in the turnout literature (see e.g., Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), allows for more direct tests of our hypotheses and a more efficient use of the data. We present our estimates with 95% confidence intervals generated via simulation (see Herron 1999).

Column 1 of Table 1 presents these results and reveals no partisan influence on the decision to permit absentee voting without an excuse. GOP unified control of the legislature, as well as a Republican in the governor's mansion, exerts effects on the decision to adopt that are substantively and statistically indistinguishable from zero.²³ The absence of these relationships provides evidence against a partisan story of this policy's enactment and suggests that partisan politics played a minimal role in determining whether to extend this convenience to voters.²⁴

In contrast to the limited impact of political factors on adoption, stronger evidence points to the appearance of no-excuse absentee voting in locations where it might be most helpful in facilitating participation. The presence of a large elderly population, for example, increases the probability of adoption by a statistically significant 1.3 percentage points (moving from the mean to one standard deviation above), a substantively large effect given the baseline propensity to enact of 2.4%. Although old age is usually a permissible excuse when absentee voting is restricted (due to concerns about these individuals' ability to easily get to and access the polls on Election Day), it appears that states with a higher percentage of residents over the age of 65 simply decide to streamline the process. Consistent with the alternative theory of utility, larger geographic states, where voters may face longer distances between themselves and

their polling place, are also more likely to make voting easier in this manner by 1.4 points (changing from the mean to one standard deviation above in logged square miles). In addition, adoption appears to be a western phenomenon (as suggested by Figure 1a), with states in this region 13.5 points more predisposed to enact no-excuse absentee voting in a given year. Time was an important factor as well; the likelihood of adoption increases by 10 percentage points when moving from the mean number of years prior to adoption to one standard deviation above the mean. We find little evidence of policy diffusion through a dependence on the actions of either adjacent or similar ideologically leaning states.

Column 2 of Table 1 reveals a somewhat different story regarding the influence exerted by political factors on the adoption of early voting statutes. Again, the state legislature's partisan composition matters little in the decision to permit the general public to vote in-person before Election Day. States with Republican governors, however, are 2.3 points less likely to extend early voting options to their residents. Thus, the heightened partisan conflicts over its current use appear to have also at least partially characterized the initial process by which states adopted this convenience voting method.

As with no-excuse absentee voting, in-person early voting adoption patterns reflect the reform's apparent usefulness in facilitating overall participation. For example, the size of the state's rural population influences the decision to enact, with an increase from the mean to one standard deviation above in the proportion of this community heightening this probability by 1.5 percentage points ($p < .1$), half the 3.0 point baseline adoption likelihood. Similarly, an increase from the mean to one standard deviation above the mean in the state's geographic size (in logged square miles) heightens the propensity to enact by 2.8 points. In short, the utility of this voting method for the state's citizens seems to provide substantial insight into the motivations behind its adoption.

The results for the remaining potential explanatory variables are mixed. In terms of racial and ethnic composition, increasing the percentage of the Latino population from the mean to one standard deviation above surprisingly raises the probability of adoption (by 1.8 percentage points). However, the percentage of African Americans in the state does not exert any influence. The effect of time on the adoption of early voting is similar to that of no-excuse absentee voting, with an increase from the mean to one standard deviation above the mean increasing the likelihood of adoption by nearly 8 percentage points. Finally, the policy diffusion pattern of early voting mirrors that of no-excuse absentee voting. In choosing whether to adopt this manner of convenience for voters, states do not turn for policy information to adjacent states or those that share a similar ideological predisposition.

Conclusion

The expansion of convenience voting over the past four decades followed a general trend in the country that facilitated easier access to the polls. The most recent battles over the circumstances and availability of these voting methods, combined with other

reforms that increase the costs of participation (such as voter identification laws), appear to signal a halt to the liberalization of the voting process and highlight the current partisan nature of the debate about easier voting. Through the employment of a unique dataset identifying the adoption date in each state of no-excuse absentee and in-person early voting, respectively, we demonstrated that political factors played a modest role in the enactment of these policies, with partisan state legislative strength exerting little influence and control of the governorship playing a role only in enacting early voting provisions. Successful adoption also derived from the utility of the voting method, with larger populations of those that would benefit from convenience voting (such as the elderly and rural residents) and increased geographic size leading to its implementation. In addition, no-excuse absentee voting adoption exhibited a regional dynamic, with western states more likely to extend this voting method to their residents. Thus, while partisan concerns played a role in enactment (at least of early voting), state officials also exhibited a willingness to facilitate participation when doing so was likely seen as less of an electoral threat.

These findings stand in relative contrast to the current polarized debate on these reforms, spurred at least in part by recent efforts to use them (especially early voting) to activate nontraditional voters. This enactment pattern likely derives at least in part from the extension of these voting methods to citizens before they became politically charged, though future work should expand upon and examine this contention, with a particular focus (perhaps through case studies) on what the political community actually thought of these reforms when they were proposed. Given that this explanation likely does not define current attitudes on the policies, however, future work should also examine their current implications for candidate and legislative actions. Despite substantial work on the potential impact of these reforms on electoral composition (Burden et al. 2014; Giammo and Brox 2010; Gronke, Galanes-Rosenbaum, and Miller 2007; Gronke and Toffey 2008; Larocca and Klemanski 2011; Oliver 1996; Springer 2012; Stein 1998; Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997; Stein and Vonnahme 2008), we know relatively little about their other political consequences, such as how the presence of these voting methods might affect a candidate's campaign strategies, particularly with regard to how they alter efforts to activate potential supporters and/or change the types of supporters that they target. Furthermore, given the recent roll back (though not elimination) of these reforms in some states (e.g., the reduction of early voting days or elimination of this practice on the weekend before the election), further investigation is needed to understand the motivations behind these efforts.

The inconsistent role of partisan conflict as a driving force behind convenience voting enactment contrasts with the patterns of adoption of the most recent electoral reform, voter identification laws (Bali and Silver 2006; Hale and McNeal 2010). It remains an open question for future research which adoption story better characterizes electoral reform in general: Was the spread of no-excuse absentee voting an aberration, or might other electoral changes lack a partisan dimension as well? Policies related to election administration do not fit neatly into existing typologies, and perhaps they cannot and should not be grouped so tightly together. Alternatively, the limited political impact attributed to the passage of this reform may relate to many states

adopting it before the heightened polarization of election reform along party lines. The reduced partisan role and lack of geographic diffusion suggests that endogeneity concerns that arise when estimating the outcomes of these laws may not be as severe as they are in other areas (such as registration reforms; see Hanmer 2009), at least over the period we study. But in the face of continued efforts to restrict (at least to a certain degree) these manners of convenience voting, further work on the explanations behind election reform can only broaden our insights into understanding their true impact on both participation and the composition of the electorate.

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Notes

1. We use the terms *in-person early voting* and *early voting* interchangeably. Although “in-person” is often put in front of early voting to distinguish the act of going to a designated location to vote versus the more general action of casting a ballot in any manner before Election Day, we use both terms to refer to the former act to avoid confusion.
2. Figure calculated from 2012 Current Population Survey November Supplement.
3. Illinois and Maryland are the only states to adopt either reform since 2006 (no-excuse absentee and early voting, respectively, in 2009).
4. Prior to the first state’s adoption of no-excuse absentee voting (Washington in 1974), every state maintained general absentee provisions for the public (i.e., not just limited to military personnel; Keyssar 2009 and own analyses).
5. In practice, in-person early voting occurs at a number of locations: in the county elections office; in satellite voting centers set up at the discretion of election administrators; or in required centers frequently established in locations such as shopping malls, libraries, or other public facilities. Moreover, some states allow citizens to register to vote and then vote early on site. We do not distinguish between these early voting variants in the discussion and analyses below.
6. This belief affects attitudes toward other election laws, with Republicans favoring voter ID laws in part because they are expected to reduce the Democratic share of the vote (Hasen 2012).
7. The fact that both no-excuse absentee voting and early voting are largely aimed at those who are already registered to vote brings less uncertainty for the parties than policies aimed at voter registration, as the pool of potential voters is already known via voter registration lists.

8. Although it is possible for campaigns to bring potential voters together to fill out absentee ballot request forms, the onus to return the ballot once received remains on the individual, and thus does not provide the campaign with the same level of certainty regarding their turnout.
9. Program success may color adoption patterns (Shipan and Volden 2008; Volden 2006), which in this case involves a greater partisan imbalance in convenience voting than would occur if voting was limited to Election Day. The ability to identify any such advantage, however, is hampered by data limitations, as most states do not report the information needed for analysis.
10. Although including an indicator for western states may imprecisely capture a number of dynamics of the social and political environment (rather than a direct effect of region *per se*), we control for this section of the country to minimize the chance that we introduce omitted variable bias into our estimates. Robustness checks that model political culture directly (instead of, or in addition to, controlling for western states) do not change any of the statistically or substantively significant results we present below (these efforts include controlling for the classifications of Elazar 1984 and Lieske 2012, as well as Hero and Tolbert's 1996 racial index).
11. Of course, the opposite is true for rural residents (who tend to favor the Republican Party) and possibly the elderly. To ensure that demographic group size does not reflect an indirect manner through which the parties attempt to gain an advantage by the enactment of convenience voting methods, we examined the interactive effect of each of these factors with the political factors described above. As a preview of our results, we find no evidence that the partisan composition of state government conditions the impact of any demographic factors on the propensity to enact.
12. Because it is the first presidential election in which both the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and 26th Amendment were in place, 1972 is an appropriate starting point.
13. We began by first using three resources: the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Brennan Center, and Cemenska et al.'s (2009) early and absentee voting dataset. The former two provide current information regarding the availability of convenience voting across the country, while Cemenska and his colleagues attempt to establish when these policies were implemented. Relying on these sources ensured that we checked the proper statutes and that our coding was able to track changes in statute numbering.
14. Our interest resides solely in understanding the adoption of these policies, not their actual implementation by states (see Boushey 2010). As such, accounting for any disparities in interpretation or actual practice is beyond the scope of this project.
15. Oregon and Washington, which currently conduct all their elections via mail, both enacted this voting method before moving to all-mail balloting and never permitted in-person early voting. Minnesota, North Carolina, Idaho, and Iowa all proved difficult to code. Employing any combination of various possible adoption dates for these states does not alter the statistical or substantive significance of our findings pertaining to either manner of voting. We discuss these coding difficulties in the Supplemental Appendix.
16. Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998) show that BTSCS data can be analyzed using ordinary binary response models provided the models take into account temporal dependence. Carter and Signorino (2010) build on Beck, Katz, and Tucker's (1998) insight and suggest an even simpler and more straightforward method to account for temporal dependence, which we follow (our substantive conclusions do not change when we instead use splines or a lowess smoother). We prefer the binary response model set up to a Cox proportional

hazards model because the results are easier to understand and discuss. All models are estimated with clustered, robust standard errors that account for the repeated observations of each state.

17. The focus on the partisan composition of the legislature requires us to drop Nebraska, whose legislative body is nonpartisan. The state adopted no-excuse absentee and early voting through the same legislation in 1999.
18. The findings reported below are robust to measuring Republican legislative strength as either the percentage of seats held in both chambers or the difference in seats from the previous year.
19. To ensure that partisanship does not play an indirect role by conditioning the effect of demographic variables on adoption, we tested for interactive effects in all the models following Berry, DeMeritt, and Esarey (2010) and found none of the effects to be statistically significant. These results are available upon request.
20. We lag these variables to reflect the available information to political actors in a given year (i.e., the data accessible in 2012 are usually 2011 estimates). Information comes from the Census. See the Supplemental Appendix for details of variable coding and sources.
21. This weighted average attributes greater influence to the most recent adopting state's ideology, with the expectation that states deciding whether to enact a similar policy will pay greater attention to the most recent action. Specifically: Ideological distance = Absolute value $\left[\frac{(\text{Most recent adopter ideology} + \text{Average of all other adopter ideologies})}{2} - \text{Potential adopter ideology} \right]$. Calculating this distance requires a state to adopt the policy in question, meaning our analyses start the year following the first enactment of the convenience method (1975 for no-excuse and 1979 for early voting) and drop the adopting state (Washington and California, respectively). In addition, the state ideology variable only goes through 2010, meaning that the years 2011 through 2013 are excluded from the analysis (no states adopt either convenience voting method during these years). The deletion of the ideological diffusion variable from the models and inclusion of years dropped do not alter the overall conclusions we draw below.
22. See the Supplemental Appendix for all model output.
23. The absence of evidence supporting a partisan role in the adoption of no-excuse absentee voting persists when we differentiate its influence across southern and non-southern states.
24. In analyses not shown, we also employed two distinct measurements to investigate whether the competitiveness of a state conditions the partisan influence on adopting convenience voting methods. The first, the difference in the state's two-party vote for the top vote receiving office on the ballot, exerts no influence on the propensity to enact and does not alter the statistical or substantive effect of the partisan variables, nor is there any interactive effect between the variables. The use of the second, the Ranney index, requires us to exclude the variable denoting unified GOP control of the legislature (as legislative strength is used in its construction). The index is negatively correlated with the adoption of early voting ($p < .05$), but its inclusion does not alter the influence of Republican gubernatorial control on adoption.

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