Early Voting in Florida, 2004

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Copies of this paper are available at http://earlyvoting.net

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, alternatives to traditional Election Day voting have been introduced with increasing frequency. What were once "provisions to allow the elderly, infirm, and those out of the state to vote…before election day" have been significantly expanded (The Century Foundation 2005; Hansen, 2001). These alternatives include liberalization of absentee ballot laws, vote-by-mail (VBM) elections, and in-person early voting. Since the widespread controversies with the 2000 General Election, efforts to reform state and county elections systems have been ramped up considerably, in order to ease accessibility (including for disabled access), reduce long lines, and raise turnout. Voters have responded—not necessarily by turning out at higher rates, but certainly by turning to early vote options. The cumulative effect is shown in a comparison of two maps depicting early voting rates for 2000 and 2004 in Appendix A.

The terms "early voting" and "non-precinct voting" cover three separate yet related reforms to traditional Election Day voting. First, twenty-eight states explicitly allow *in person early voting*, where a voter can cast a ballot at community centers, fire stations, libraries, and other governmental offices, all well before election day (North Dakota and New Mexico, for example, allow ballots to be cast in person as early as 40 days before election day). Second, many states have dramatically liberalized absentee balloting. Twenty states allow no-excuse absentee voting, with some allowing voters to place themselves on a "permanent" absentee ballot list. Absentee ballots can obviously be cast as soon as they arrive in the mail, with required postmark dates varying by state.[1] Finally, one state, Oregon, has implemented a well-publicized experiment with *vote by mail* (VBM). VBM was legalized in 1981 and was adopted statewide in 1995. For VBM, the only limit on early voting is the date that the ballot is delivered to the voter (generally not more than 20 days before the election).[2]

In this paper, we begin by discussing the most commonly cited reasons for adopting early voting. Next, we describe the practical impact of early voting on voters and on political parties in Florida. Finally, we will use 2004 exit poll data from Florida to examine who votes early and in what ways early voters differ from or resemble "precinct" voters–that is, voters who cast a traditional ballot at their local precinct polling place on Election Day.

Citizens' Rationale for Voting Early

There are many reasons that citizens may prefer early voting, most of which can be boiled down into three kinds of convenience: convenience for turning out, convenience for learning and deciding, and convenience for campaign mobilization. There are certainly other reasons that election officials like early voting, such as cost, efficiency, and accuracy, but these are not considered here.

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[1] In Iowa in 2004, ballots were mailed out on September 8th, and the first ballots were returned September 23. There is a surprising amount of variation in when the ballot must *arrive* (see the table at www.electionline.org). Most require the ballot to arrive by poll closing on election day, but many only require an election day postmark, while the District of Columbia and Alaska allow absentee ballots to arrive 10 days after the date of election.

[2] The current status of early voting rules and regulations can be found at http://www.electionline.org/Default.aspx?tabid=474.

The first reason given for adopting early voting is that it is more convenient than election day or "precinct" voting. Because the early voting period is usually more than one week long, these systems provide busy people or people with special needs a more leisurely way to cast a ballot.[3] Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) and Haspel and Knotts (2005) both point out that the accessibility of the ballot box, especially with regard to distance from one's home or workplace, can have a significant impact on whether citizens participate in elections. Those who work for an hourly wage, have long commutes, or have heavy time restraints on a November Tuesday can use early voting to participate when they have more time – like on the weekend.[4] People with physical disabilities may have access issues and can use absentee or mail-ballots to alleviate these problems, or vote early in-person (when time and crowd-pressure is lower and better access may be available at libraries or elections offices). Those who are non-English speakers, or who cannot read well, can receive additional help when crowds are smaller and poll-workers aren't as strained.

Relatedly, early voting is preferred by some elections officials and voting rights advocates because they believe it increases turnout. Theoretically, because early voting reduces much of the cost associated with the act of voting (transportation, time, and other inconveniences), it should increase turnout.[5] Findings about this have been controversial: there is no clear evidence that early voting *always* increases turnout, and at least one recent study (Smith and Comer 2005) suggests that it may *depress* turnout. There is certainly no agreement on *how much* it might increase participation. Regardless of the empirical results, the impact on turnout is almost always cited in newspaper editorials, published speeches, and legislative debates over early voting.

Second, some argue that early voting improves the quality of democratic decision making. According to these advocates, early voting allows voters the time and leisure to reflect upon their voting options.[6] Unfortunately, there is no logical reason that voting *earlier* than election day provides *more* time to evaluate the options on the ballot, nor is there any empirical evidence sustaining the claim of more informed decision making.

We suspect there is a third reason that voters like early voting—although it is one that is not commonly cited in public debates. Early voting allows campaigns to target their get out the vote efforts more efficiently (and stop bothering voters who have already cast their ballot). While the "normal" or familiar structure of campaigns – building excitement and publicity up to the highest level, which is reached on or right before Election Day – must necessarily be altered under early voting systems – the high level of excitement and publicity must be reached earlier and maintained longer – the prolonged "period of voting" enables campaigns to **more specifically target supporters** and run more efficient campaigns overall. Instead of bombarding supporters with

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[3]Magleby 1987, Southwell and Burchett 2000a, 2000b, 1998, 1997, Stein and Garcìa-Monet 1997, Stein 1998, Karp and Banducci 2000, Neeley and Richardson 2001, Hanmer and Traugott 200_, Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003, Haspel and Knotts 2005

[4] For example, the AFL-CIO, at its more recent convention, considered a proposal to extend Oregon's vote by mail election system into other states. One of the primary reasons given was that by-mail voting was more convenient for shift workers. See Oregon AFL-CIO, "Resolution 34: Support and Expand Oregon's Vote-by-mail Elections in Other States." Resolution proposed at the 2005 convention of the AFL-CIO (available at http://aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaflcio/convention/2005/resolutions.cfm).

[5] Magleby 1987, Southwell and Burchett 2000a, 2000b, 1998, 1997, Stein and Garcìa-Monet 1997, Stein 1998, Karp and Banducci 2000, Neeley and Richardson 2001, Hanmer and Traugott 200_

[6] See, for example, Susan Davis, "Voting by Mail Could Improve American Democracy," *Roll Call,* June 22, 2005; "Voting by Mail," Oregon Secretary of State's Office, http://www.arcweb.state.or.us; Resolution 34 at the 2005 AFL-CIO Convention, cited previously;

reminders for a week or more, campaigns can focus their attention on supporters who have not already cast a ballot by five days before Election Day, three days before, the day before, etc. In addition, campaigns can hold rallies and other events centered on early voting. In 2004, for example, campaigns bussed people to early voting sites after rallies and gave people who had already voted special admission to music events. Heavily-partisan voters can cast a ballot early and move on with work or family.

On the other hand, there are also potential disadvantages of a longer high-intensity campaign period. First, campaigns risked over-campaigning if they did not have access to specific early voting records or if they did not have sufficient supporter lists. This would make campaigns much less efficient by wasting money and volunteer hours on people who had already voted and failing to mobilize those potential voters most in need of an external prompt to make them go to the polls (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Second, while the effects of political advertising are in dispute, it is possible that a longer high-intensity campaign period characterized by negative rhetoric and negative advertising is off-putting to some voters. This may be true especially of individuals who do not identify with either major party (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995).

Although this is may be an important change in campaigning caused by early voting, there is little scholarship on the changes that early voting brings with regard to campaigns, and legislators generally do not seem to take campaigning advantages or disadvantages into account when adopting early voting.

We test each of these claims underlying early voting in our analytical section. From each of them, we derive a specific expectation about what kind of voter should be more likely to vote early relative to those who cast their ballots on election day. First, however, we review the details of early voting in Florida in 2004, reviewing briefly the legislative history behind the adoption of early voting and detailing the problems that Floridians encountered in voting early for the first time.

Florida's Experience with Early Voting in 2004

Early voting was implemented in Florida as one of the major responses to the 2000 election. By 2004, the state legislature defined "…early voting as 'casting a ballot prior to election day at a location designated by the supervisor of elections…" and "…passed legislation which standardizes early voting throughout the state."[7] The passage of this legislation, designed to fix certain problems and improve voting for Floridians overall, had several problems of its own (enumerated below).[8]

Administrative Problems

In response to the chaos of the 2000 general election, Florida adopted legislation aimed at ridding the election system of its problems. Elections officials looked to early voting as a way to increase turnout while also alleviating much of the 2000 mess: lines would be shorter, those who

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[7] "Early Voting – Division of Elections" http://election.dos.state.fl.us/earlyvoting.shtml. Site accessed on 15 August, 2005.

[8] "Casting your ballot." *Florida Today*, March 17, 2005. However, despite the initial bumps in the road, Florida is continuing early voting in 2006, even contemplating the adoption of "super precincts" to make early voting even more convenient.

needed individual assistance could be attended to, there would be fewer disputes, and ambiguity issues with ballots and laws would be resolved or never occur at all. Beginning in 2002, county elections supervisors could choose to offer early voting, but it was not uniformly required or implemented across the state until 2004. In an editorial supporting the adoption of statewide early voting, the Palm Beach Post asserted that "early voting would help lessen the election-day strain on facilities and systems and would diminish the demand for absentee ballots. Elderly voters who require more time would have it. Elections officials could trouble-shoot potential technical problems and fix them before the mass turnout." Citing the 2000 "election day meltdown", the article continues that "if Floridians have learned anything about voting since 2000 it's that [Florida] cannot run elections on the cheap and that the more safeguards built into the system, the better" (Palm Beach Post, "Vote early and uniformly").

Unfortunately, there were problems with the new voting system. Under pressure to fix the problems from 2000 as quickly as possible, especially before the next presidential election, the Florida State legislature neglected to include voter protection provisions that would have mirrored the protections in other voting laws. According to Florida law, campaign supporters cannot solicit voters within 50 feet of the entrance to a polling place on the day of "any election"; however, Secretary of State Glenda Hood "decided that the early voting sites were exempt from the 50-foot barrier because they are in local government buildings to which the public must have access" (Kam, "Early-Vote Sites Report Intimidation"). Furthermore, although elections supervisors in each county are allowed to open additional early voting sites, the only sites they are *required* to have are the single sites at their elections offices. This meant that, potentially, some citizens would have considerably greater or less access to early voting than others, simply based on how populous their county was, or how easy it was for them to get to the elections office.

Technology failure and ballot ambiguity was a big issue in 2000, so Florida adopted many new, largely untried, electronic voting machines. Many critics predicted problems with the new technology, particularly because it had not been tested for high-volume elections like the 2004 presidential race. Also, as most counties had never offered the option of early voting prior to this election, it was difficult to predict the actual volume of voters who would want to take advantage of the new voting option. Moreover, volunteers who worked at polling places are disproportionately elderly, a group least comfortable with the use of technology. As a result many polling places had staffing problems.[9] News reports of polling places that opened late or had machine failures were widespread.[10] Campaigns and their Get Out The Early Vote efforts (discussed below) were an unknown quantity in this equation: how much and how successfully they embraced early voting would affect turnout.

Getting out the *Early* Vote

One of the most important changes that results from implementation of early voting is seen in the timing of campaigns. Campaigns which normally would time their efforts to reach a crescendo on, or just before, Election Day must now, with early voting, reallocate resources in order

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[9] http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/07/20/politics/main630728.shtml
[10] In the 2002 September primary election, Representative Carrie Meek, a 10 year Congressional veteran, was turned away from the polls when election workers were unable to verify her identity when attempting to vote early.

draw in early voters, and then sustain this energy or even increase it as Election Day years. For Florida, this meant two weeks of high-energy campaigning instead of just a few days.

This longer campaigning period had several potential advantages as campaigns transitioned from their traditional Get Out The Vote (GOTV) tactics to Get Out The Early Vote (GOTEV). First, if the campaign was run well and a party had sufficient access to early voting records, it had the ability to better target supporters by sending pamphlets, calling, and knocking on the doors of only those supporters who hadn't voted. By encouraging people to vote early, campaigns could "bank" votes well before Election Day (NewsHour, October 26, 2004), and focus more of their money and efforts on people who hadn't yet voted, particularly on "swing" voters. In some cases, campaigns can get a good idea of whether or not they have won an election even before Election Day, based on the numbers of supporters they know they have turned out for early voting.

Second, many campaigns found that early voting provided an excellent way to focus many events. Instead of general excitement-building GOTV rallies, many parties held GOTEV rallies after which attendees were transported to early voting sites. Some received "I voted early" pins which then granted them free admission to concerts. Others got to meet celebrities (like Danny Devito and Rhea Pearlman) or famous politicians at "Come vote with me" events.

While there are no solid data available on the amount of resources devoted to GOTEV efforts in Florida, they formed an important part of both Republican and Democratic Party mobilization efforts. Their increasing popularity in Florida will only increase their importance in the future.


Queuing up to vote early

Unfortunately, the optimism that accompanied the state's adoption of early voting evaporated within the first few hours of actual balloting. Reports of an elected official receiving only half of a ballot when she asked for a paper copy instead of using the touch screen machines came in around 10am. Subsequent hours and days yielded reports of harassment and intimidation, very long waits, people leaving discouraged (http://gotv.blogspot.com/2004/10/ray-suarez-reports-from-florida.html; Word, "New Duval elections supervisor quickly adds early voting sites", October 19, 2004). One of the most high-profile reports of early voting problems in Florida came from Palm Beach County, where "One worker wearing her identification badge around her neck was throttled by an irate person 'who tried to choke her with it'" (Kam and Keller, "Early-Vote Sites Report Intimidation", October 25, 2004). By the time Election Day rolled around, the media circus surrounding early voting made it seem like a complete failure.

Concerns about the lack of the 50-foot non-solicitation zone in the legislation proved prudent, as many voters reported campaign supporters harassing, intimidating, or simply annoying them. Poll workers themselves complained to elections supervisors about campaigners from both major parties, and some quit because of the stress this caused. As Dara Kam and Larry Keller reported, "The early voting problems reveal yet another facet lawmakers failed to consider in their sweeping election reform package passed in the wake of the 2000 fiasco – the establishment of early voting sites without the same protections given to precinct locales on Election Day". In some counties, early voting was nearly shut down: early voting required considerably more staffing than traditional precinct voting.

One oft-cited problem was the number of sites available to voters. Generally, too few machines led to long lines and extended waits. More specifically, however, there was heavy criticism from many interest groups and minority communities about the lack of early voting sites in areas where black, Latino, and low-income residents could vote. When William E. Scheu replaced John Stafford as Duval County election supervisor, he quickly added sites at four regional libraries in Jacksonville, "including one on the city's northwest side, a predominantly black area" in response to the outcry. This and other areas in urban Florida had a history of elections issues and minority groups from 2000, when "27,000 ballots were mismarked and thrown out because of misleading instructions" (Word, October 19, 2004).

Even at sites with an adequate total number of machines, long waits ensured because of technological limits. In Miami Dade County, for instance, twenty sites were open for early voting. County residents were allowed to vote at any of the twenty sites. However, because machines lacked enough memory to store all of the ballot forms needed to address each of the different local issues, only half of the machines at any one site could be used for ballots appropriate for local residents. The remaining machines, which largely went unused, were dedicated to ballots other than those facing the local community. As a result local residents faced long waits while about half the machines in each polling place went unused. Moreover, the publicity given to the long waits seemed to spur people to vote early for fear of an impending election day disaster.

Early Votes by Date
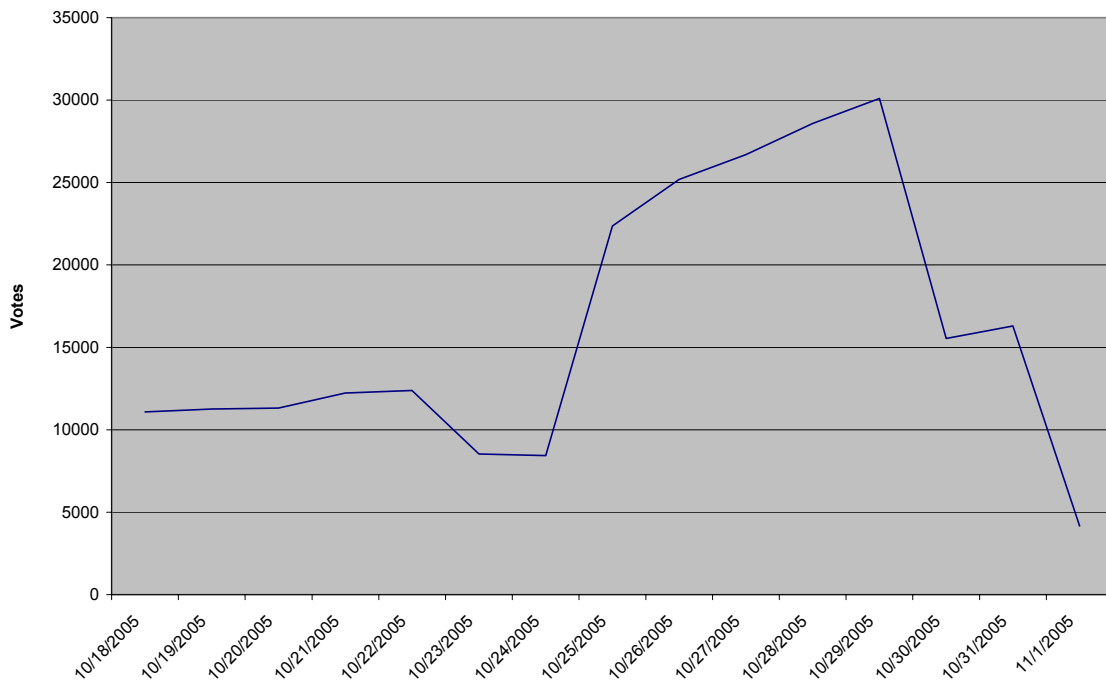
As we can see above, excepting the weekend dates of October 23, 24 and 30 and 31 as well as November 1 when only two early voting sites were open, early voting increased throughout the period.

In summary, Florida encountered many difficulties in implementing early voting reforms in 2004. Some of the problems, such as long early voting lines, were also evident in other states (e.g.

Georgia). Florida election officials, along with many across the nation, anticipated neither the level of interest in voting early, nor the mobilization efforts targeted at this mode of balloting. Finally, elections officials took great care to avoid the problems associated with the 2000 contest, but in their efforts to make sure all ballots were counted accurately, they may have ironically dissuaded many from voting altogether. The tension between convenience, integrity, and accuracy is one that election officials continue to contend with.

Who Votes Early? Data and Methods

The Early Voting Exit Poll
The Miami Exit Poll surveyed 1,456 voters in Miami Dade County Florida as they left their polling places between October 22, and "election day" November [2nd] 2004. Surveys were administered in three languages: English, Spanish and Creole with the overwhelming majority completed in English and Spanish. On average, the surveys took respondents about 25 minutes to complete. Interviewers approached every third person who exited the polling place (i.e., after a refusal or interview they ignored the next two people) to ensure randomness in the selection of respondents.

Surveys were administered by 106 undergraduate political science students, about 90% of whom were enrolled in either a course on public opinion or a course on presidential elections. The response rate was about 46% which we attribute to the prominence with which students displayed their affiliation with the University, which has an extremely positive reputation in the community. Students were trained as interviewers with a 25 minute presentation made in class, followed by a 5 minute refresher when they arrived to get their polling materials. Students were randomly assigned to polling locations through the county in teams of 2-3.

Three incentives were built in to the project to ensure that students faithfully administered surveys. First, cash prizes were awarded to the students whose samples most closely reflected the Presidential election result in their assigned precinct (measured using the mean squared error). Students were taught in class the statistical principle that as the number of responses increases, the variance around the true population parameter should decrease. Second, five students were employed as monitors to check up on interviewers to ensure they showed up at their assigned polling places. Third, students were given the results of their surveys and required to use them as the basis for the course term paper, for which part of the assignment was to explain voting patterns in the precinct given the demographic characteristics of the area.

Polling locations were determined through two methods. Early voting in Miami-Dade County occurred at 20 sites, at which any voter in the county could cast a ballot. Since we had no previous experience on which to draw, we assumed voters at these sites to be uniformly distributed, and we randomly selected (with replacement) 16 different locations that were polled over about eight of the fourteen days on which early voting occurred. Early voters constituted 31% of the county electorate, but because of the extended period available for polling, 41.6% (606) of our sample. However, our sample does not include respondents who voted by absentee ballot (13.1%). So of the people who voted in person, early voters actually constituted 35.6% of the population of such voters. The survey instrument and information on survey weights is contained in Appendix B.

Theoretical Expectations

Despite all the things that went wrong with Florida's first statewide early voting election[11], 30% of voters cast their ballot before Election Day. Moreover, EV was instituted for a reason – to help some people vote better and more easily; but who were these people? Who really did vote early?

The conventional political science wisdom is that people will take advantage of early voting in general based on a) how motivated they are to turn out to vote, b) and how inconvenient precinct-place voting is for them. Thus, we expect voters to take advantage of convenience measure to a greater degree based simply on their "special" status – people who have disabilities or language difficulties, for example. But common sense tells us that people who don't have these special needs also took advantage of the new system. For instance, in other research, Gronke (2004) has compared early voting rates among individuals who face longer commutes or live in rural vs. urban areas. Here, however, we have the advantage of individual level attitudinal data, so we focus on the demographic and attitudinal components of early voting.

In his study of in-person voting in Texas, Stein asks, "What types of voters are likely to have made up their vote choice before election day?" He reasons that voters who are likely to have made up their mind before Election Day are the same who are likely to vote early. All other things held equal, why not cast the ballot earlier, at a time and place of your choosing, rather than waiting until the day of the election (given that there is no information advantage to waiting)(Stein 1998)? Nadeau, et al., agree with Stein that strong partisans are more likely to vote early because "individuals who make up their mind about which candidate or party to support before the campaign even begins should be less likely to switch their vote choice in response to events and messages occurring during a campaign." Although pre-campaign and campaign deciders "are similarly interested in politics, similarly attentive to media coverage, similarly informed about general campaign political facts…they differ significantly in their level of partisan commitment" (Nadeau, et al., 2003). Thus, we hypothesize that **strong partisans**– people who almost always vote with one or the other party, regardless of the individual candidate or issues at stake – are the most likely group to have their vote decided before Election Day (Stein, 1998).

Relatedly, we expect voters who are, *ceteris paribus,* **better informed and more interested** in politics will also vote early.[12] However, there is an alternative hypothesis. Following Zaller's (1992) model of opinion change, it is possible that *both* the least-informed and the most informed voters make up their mind early and consequently vote early. The first group, the least well informed, chooses early because they are disinterested in the campaign and not exposed to political information. The second group, the most informed, choose early because they have strong predispositions, are already highly informed, and are relatively unaffected by the campaign. In this case, the relationship between informedness and early voting should be **curvilinear**, with the highest rates of early voting among the moderately informed.

We also consider the relationships between **education** and early voting, in large part because education generally leads people to be better informed about politics and, often, more interested in

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[11] Word, October 19, 2004; Kam and Keller, October 25, 2004; (http://gotv.blogspot.com/2004/10/ray-suarez-reports-from-florida.html; Associated Press, October 18, 2004; Burkeman, October 19, 2004

[12] We include both a measure of political informedness, based on three factual items, and another measure of media exposure (an item asking the individual how many days they watch the news).

politics (Zaller, 1992). In addition, we examine **trust in (local) government**. While previous research (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) has not found trust to be a predictor of turnout, these studies have focused on election day, rather than early, voting. Motivation to go to the polls prior to election day may represent an extra commitment to civic duty that, we suspect, is greater among those who trust government.

We expect that **socio-economic status**, signaled by income, will also be positively correlated with the probability of voting early. Lastly, we also expect early voters will be **older**, on average. Older people are more likely to vote, have more experience with voting, and tend to be more interested in voting than younger people, and thus would know their vote choice beforehand. In addition, the elderly are a group that EV aims to aid by providing extra time and more convenient places and days to cast a ballot.

Because we know that political parties and other groups engaged in major GOTEV efforts in Florida, and because past scholarship has shown that party mobilization efforts increase turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993), we include party and non-party **contacts** in our model of early voting. Obviously, we don't have a measure of contacts dedicated specifically to early voting, but this is the best surrogate we have to work with.

Florida provides a nice laboratory for examining early voting. Florida is competitive and large, so it receives a great deal of attention from the campaigns and has great political and ethnic diversity. In many ways it might be seen as broadly reflective of the country in these respects in that it has rural areas that tend to be more conservative as well as urban areas than trend more Democratic. Within Florida, Miami Dade county with its 2.3 million citizens is an especially appropriate test case. Despite having a uniquely heterogeneous ethnic setting, with well-identified and politically active ethnic groups, it is essentially a swing county politically. According to the 2000 census, Cuban-Americans who vote solidly Republican constitute about 29% of the county while non-Cuban Latinos constitute another 28.5%. The county is about 20% African American, 3% Haitian, and 21% white. The first two of these groups vote strongly Democratic. While the county is diverse and has some dense urban areas (e.g., Miami Beach is among the most densely populated cities in the US) it also has extensive suburban and rural areas. The result is a great deal of ethnic, political and economic diversity. For example, while John Kerry won the county with 52.8% of the presidential vote, the Republican Senate candidate Mel Martinez and Republican mayoral candidate Carlos Alvarez both won the county in the November election. To account for this diversity, we include in our model **ethnic and racial identification**, including Cuban, Haitian, Black (non Haitian), and non-Cuban Latino.

Finally, people's experiences with voting may encourage or discourage early voting. While we know that voting is habit forming, less is known about the consequences of negative experiences at the polls or doubts about the fairness of the counting process. According to a New York Times/ CBS poll shortly before election day, "A majority of voters – and an overwhelming number of African-Americans – said they were concerned that their own votes would not be counted properly, and one-third said they expected to encounter problems when they went to vote.[13] We therefore included a dummy variable to capture **whether the individual felt that their ballot was likely to be counted** – our expectation being that among the voters of our sample they would be risk averse

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[13] "In Final Days Before Vote, Divided Electorate Expresses Anxiety and Concern," Adam Nagourney and Janet Elder (11/1/04).

and avoid the potential queues and chaos of election day; such problems at early voting sites still leave the opportunity to come back another day. We also included a measure of **time in the United States** – the longer an individual has been in the United States the more likely they are to have been socialized into the American electoral process – and a dummy variable for first time voters. Early voters should be less likely to be **voting for the first time** because the habit of voting and the sense of the civic duty that often accompany it has not had time to develop.

Results

Bivariate Results

First, we turn to some basic bivariate breakdowns of early voting by partisanship, information level, and educational level. As shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3, there are noticeable differences between early voters and day-of-election voters, although in at least one case, opposite of what we predicted. As shown in Figure 1, early voters constituted the largest proportion of Independent voters, followed by Strong Democrats, then Strong Republicans (all results are statistically significance at the .05 level).   Perhaps this is our first indication that it is the moderately interested voter who votes early. Alternatively, it is possible that parties did not bother to mobilize their core supporters, since they were probable to turn out regardless, and focused on independent "leaners."

Figure 1: Party Differences among Early Voters

Pearson chi2(5) = 11.9043 Pr = 0.036
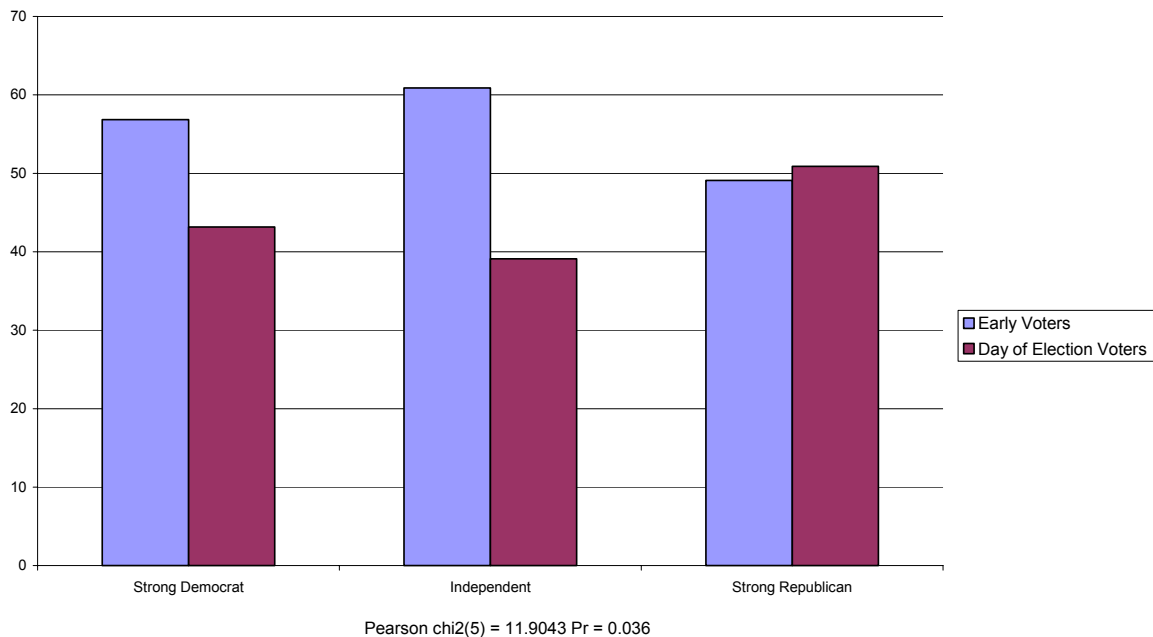
Figures 2 and 3 report the information and educational levels of early voters, precinct voters, and all voters in the poll. In this case, our expectations are confirmed: early voters are significantly more informed and are slightly more highly educated than are day of election voters (again, all differences are statistically significant). We don't have much evidence from these displays, however, of a curvilinear relationship between rates of early voting and information.

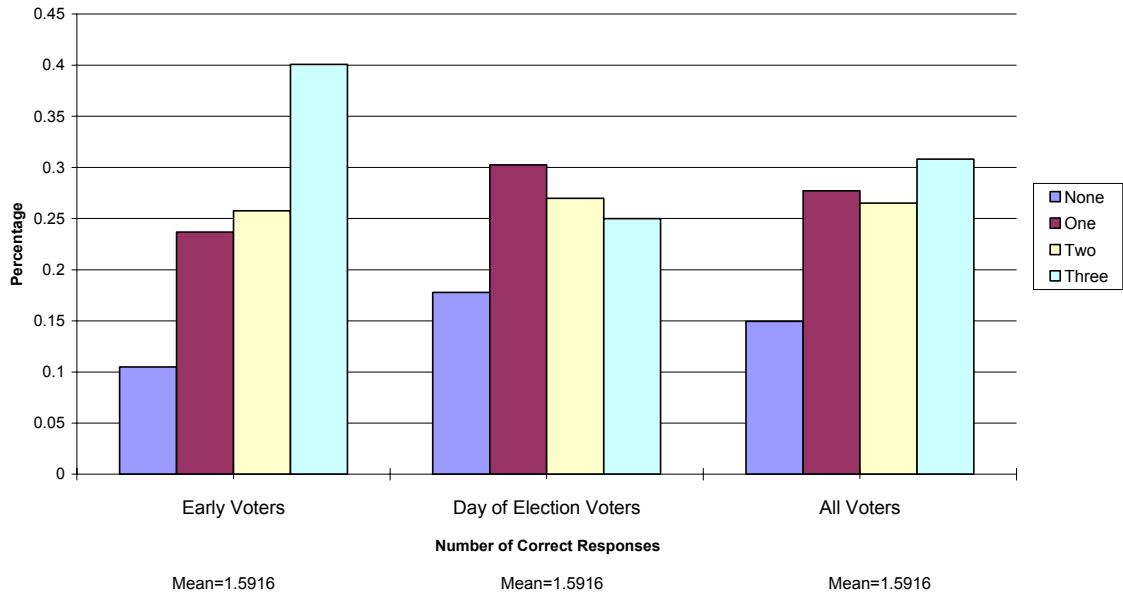**Figure 2: Political Information Levels of Early Voters**

Legend: None, One, Two, Three

Y-axis: Percentage
X-axis: Number of Correct Responses

Early Voters — Mean=1.5916
Day of Election Voters — Mean=1.5916
All Voters — Mean=1.5916

Figure 3: Educational Levels of Early Voters

Legend: < High School, High School, Some College, College Grad, Postgraduate

X-axis categories: Early Voters, Day of Election Voters, All Voters

Pearson chi2(4) = 14.7540 Pr = 0.005
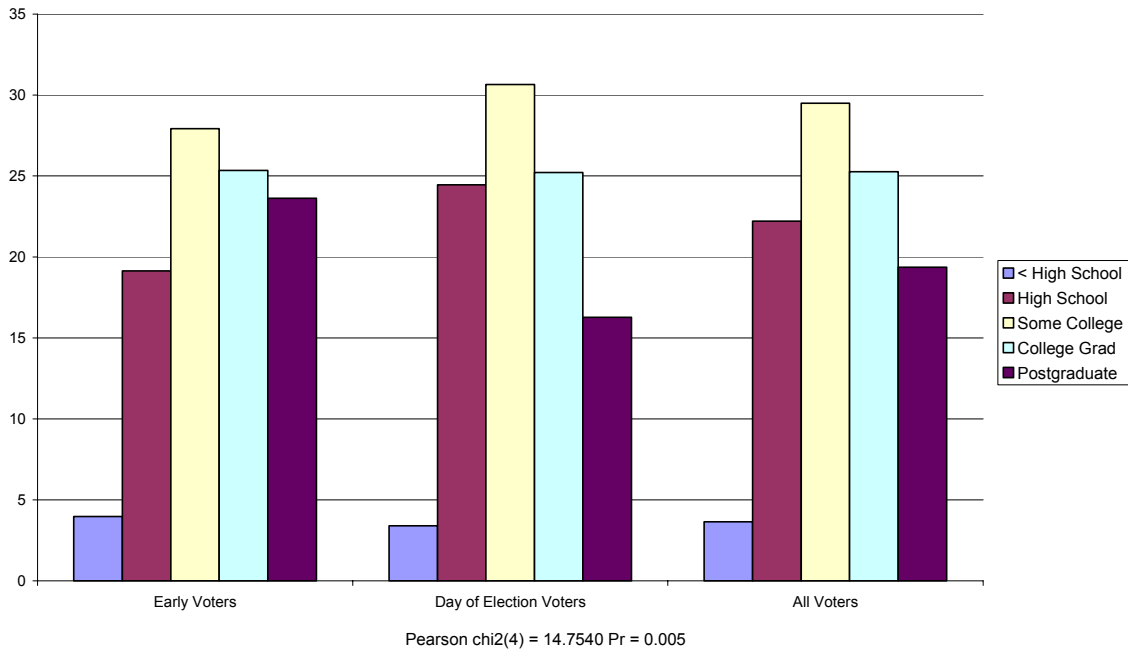
In Table 1, we present a series of breakdowns of early voting by race, age, experience with voting, and sense of ballot integrity. With respect to age, we find that our prior expectations were correct—early voters are actually on average seven years older than are election day voters. Older voter generally have more firmly held political beliefs, but they also have longstanding political habits that they may be loathe giving up. Voting at the precinct place seems an inconvenience that older voters are willing to avoid. We also found that first time voters were more likely to vote on election day, while voters who feared that they ballot would not be counted were more likely to vote

early. Finally, we found intriguing differences by race. African Americans were more likely to vote on election day—confirming results found in Oregon (Gronke 2004), but one for which we have no particular explanation. On the other hand, we were not surprised to find that Cuban Americans voted early at higher rates. Cuban-American are the oldest, wealthiest, best organized and most politically active of Miami's ethnic groups. Moreover, the Cuban American community stumped heavily for early voting, warning Cubans that this was a better way to make sure that their ballot was accurately counted.

Table 1: Early Voting Across Various Demographic and Attitudinal Indicators

	Not Early Voters	Early Voters	P-value
Percent Black	0.187	0.115	0.000
Percent White	0.283	0.348	0.020
Cuban origin	0.360	0.433	0.021
Age	36.544	42.744	0.000
First time voters	0.198	0.135	0.004
Will my vote be counted?	0.865	0.814	0.014

Source: University of Miami Early Voting Exit Poll

In sum, we have found some bivariate evidence that confirm our initial expectations about the relationship between political information, interest, age, and early voting. We discovered some intriguing patterns with respect to race and ethnicity. Our expectations regarding partisan strength were not supported. However, the next step is to test a model of early voting in the multivariate context.

Multivariate Results

We present the results of multivariate probit analysis in Table 2 below. The dependent variable in our model is whether or not an individual voted early. We group the explanatory variables into "demographics," "knowledge, media exposure, and trust," "party identification and mobilization," and "experience and perception at the polls." As noted in Appendix B, all estimates are weighted so as to account for differential probabilities of being selected into the exit poll. In brief, we find the results generally supportive of our primary hypotheses. Older individuals are more likely to vote early, confirming results found in other research (Gronke 2004). As we posited, the relationship between knowledge levels and the probability of voting early is not linear, but is curvilinear. Measures of exposure (media usage and political contacts) are positively related to early voting. Finally, there are some differences among ethnic groups, which we comment on more below.

Table 2: Determinants of Early Voting in Florida

	Coeff	StdErr	T-Statistic	P-Value
Demographics				
Cuban	0.215735	0.105398	2.05	0.041
Haitian	0.055482	0.207456	0.27	0.789
Black (non Haitian)	-0.15406	0.16931	-0.91	0.363
Gender (female)	0.217851	0.100389	2.17	0.03
Age (5 category)	0.152669	0.053003	2.88	0.004
Income	0.020843	0.034616	0.6	0.547
Time in Country	-0.055484	0.057027	-0.97	0.331
Faith and Confidence				
Will by vote count?	0.419492	0.124535	3.37	0.001
Trust in government	0.183397	0.065321	2.81	0.005
First time voting	-0.140573	0.139181	-1.01	0.313
Knowledge and Exposure				
Political Knowledge	-0.135544	0.179095	-0.76	0.449
Pol. Knowledge **2	0.096033	0.051228	1.87	0.061
Education	0.149094	0.264275	0.56	0.573
Education **2	-0.017229	0.038064	-0.45	0.651
News Exposure	0.068836	0.052015	1.32	0.186
Party ID and Contacts				
Strength of PID	0.072173	0.065325	1.1	0.27
Party Contacts	-0.085952	0.107366	-0.8	0.424
Other Contacts	0.097329	0.063652	1.53	0.127
Constant	-2.129579	0.597802	-3.56	0
N of Observations	961			
F (18, 943)	3.60 (p<.000)			

Estimates are probit coefficients, taking into account survey clustering.
Data come from an exit poll conducted by Bishin and Stevens.

First, some demographic indicators are related to early voting as we expected. Early voters are more likely to be old. Across the full age range, this difference is fairly significant, as shown in Figure 4. While gender effects were not part of our theory, women also seem to vote earlier. Both relationships, we believe, are most likely the result of the greater time opportunities for these groups, which eases participation (Verba et al. 1995) – young people and men are more likely to have full time jobs – but also in the case of the old to the fact that they are more likely to have acquired the voting habit.

Figure 3: Older Voters Tend to Vote Early
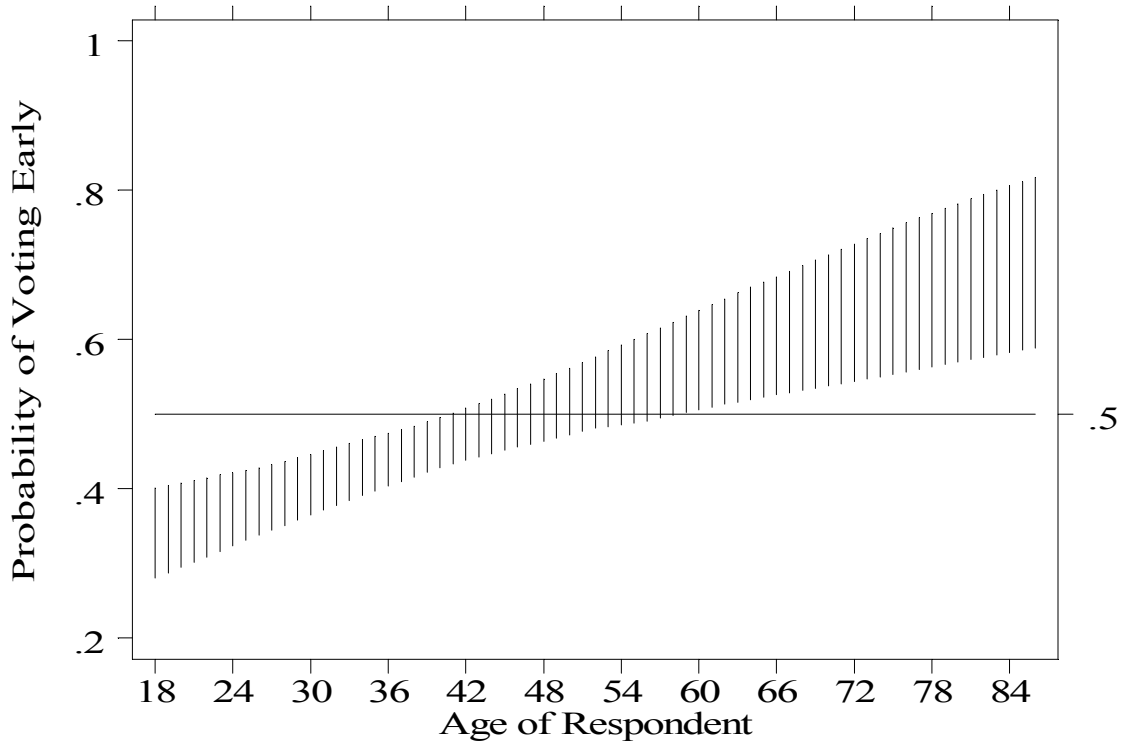
As expected, Cubans were more likely than other groups to vote early in Miami Dade. This is likely the result of a strong sense of Cuban identity in Miami, part of which is an expectation that Cubans will vote. There were also several Cuban Americans on the ballot, including Mel Martinez for United States Senator.

Second, an individual's level of political knowledge is positively related to the likelihood to vote early. We proposed two alternative hypotheses, one linear and one curvilinear. These data support the curvilinear hypothesis, even though this received no clear support in the bivariate analysis. Individuals low and high in political knowledge are less likely to vote early than the moderately knowledgeable. As we suggested, following Zaller's (1992) model of political learning, this would result from a greater *change* in knowledge of the candidates and the election among the *moderately* attentive. This leads to the greatest increase in excitement and engagement with the election and thence a desire to get to the polls early.

To illustrate the pattern more clearly, we report in Figure 4 the range of predicted probabilities of voting early by knowledge squared.[14] While the range of predicted probabilities is wider at the end points due to the small sample size, the pattern shows that the least well informed, as expected, are the least likely to vote early. The rate of early voting increases, but not linearly, across rates of political knowledge. While a curvilinear pattern fits the data better than the linear form, there is no noticeable dropoff in early voting rates among the most well-informed.

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[14] These and all other predicted probability plots were produced using the Clarify program.

Figure 4: The Curvilinear Effect of Knowledge on Voting Early
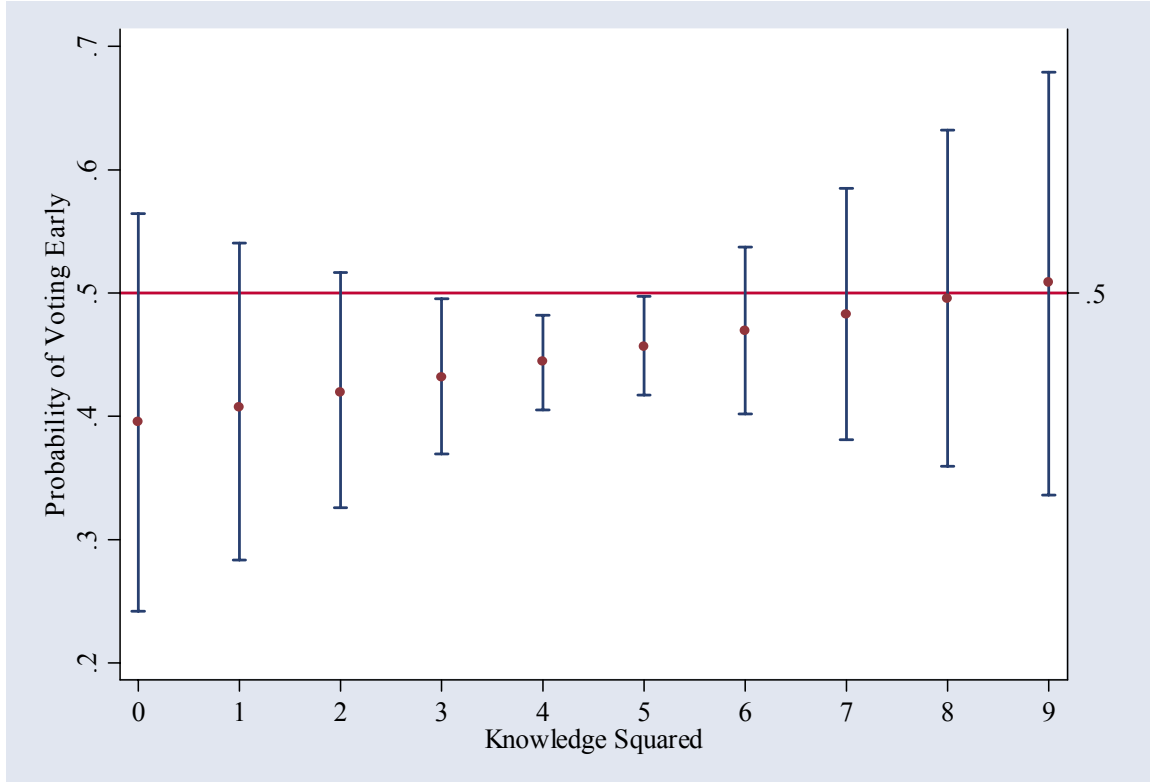
Our results also suggest that mobilization matters for early voting, but not by political parties. Nor, counter to our expectations, do stronger partisans turn out to vote early at higher rates than do less partisan respondents. The estimates in Table 2 show neither an effect of partisan intensity – strong partisans are no more likely to vote early than Independents – nor of party contact. Thus the notion that early voting provides the parties with an opportunity to target voters for mobilization, while it may be true, does not actually appear to be an opportunity that has been taken effectively. Still, contact by groups other than one of the parties – ethnic, racial, religious, and so on – comes closer to having a statistically significant, and positive, relationship with voting early. This is further evidence that early voting is not limited to highly knowledgeable partisans who are urged to go the polls by their parties.[15]

Trust in (local) government is also positively related to voting early. As we discussed earlier, this is particularly interesting in light of research that has indicated trust does not affect turnout generally. While we cannot rule out the possibility that the relationship with early voting is an artifact of measuring trust in local rather than national government (i.e., we would replicate other findings if we examined trust in national government) neither can we eliminate the possibility that early voting provides a unique set of incentives to voters which generates a slightly different set of influences and motivations than election day voting.

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[15] In Oregon, Gronke (2004) found that self-identified partisans (using registration records) did vote earlier.

We find some relationship between voting early and previous experience at the polls, but for only one of the three dimensions we examined. As we theorized, those who were least confident that their vote would be counted were also the most likely to avail themselves of the opportunity to vote early. However, while the sign for first time voters is in the expected direction it is not statistically significant, and for the variable gauging when a respondent's family had first come to the United States neither sign nor significance is what we expected. This implies that specific perceptions of the voting process are more important to voting early, we have suggested due to greater risk aversion on the part of those who are least confident their vote will be counted, than the number of times an individual has been to the polls or their familiarity with American democracy.

Still, the impact of voting irregularities, as occurred in Florida in 2000, can be significant. Compare, as an illustration, the relative impact of age and trust in the integrity of your ballot on early voting. In Figure 5, we plot the predicted probability of voting early across age and among those who did (above the dashed line) and did not (below the dashed line) thought their vote would be counted. Thinking that your vote would count is worth about 30 years, in that you are virtually certain to vote early if you think your vote will count once you are over about age 40. If you do not think your vote will count, then you will not reach the same predicted level of early voting until about age 68. Put another way, an election irregularity like Florida experienced in 2000 might be expected to take well over a generation before its impact on turnout behavior finally recedes.

Figure 5: Comparing Trust in the Ballot and Age on Early Voting
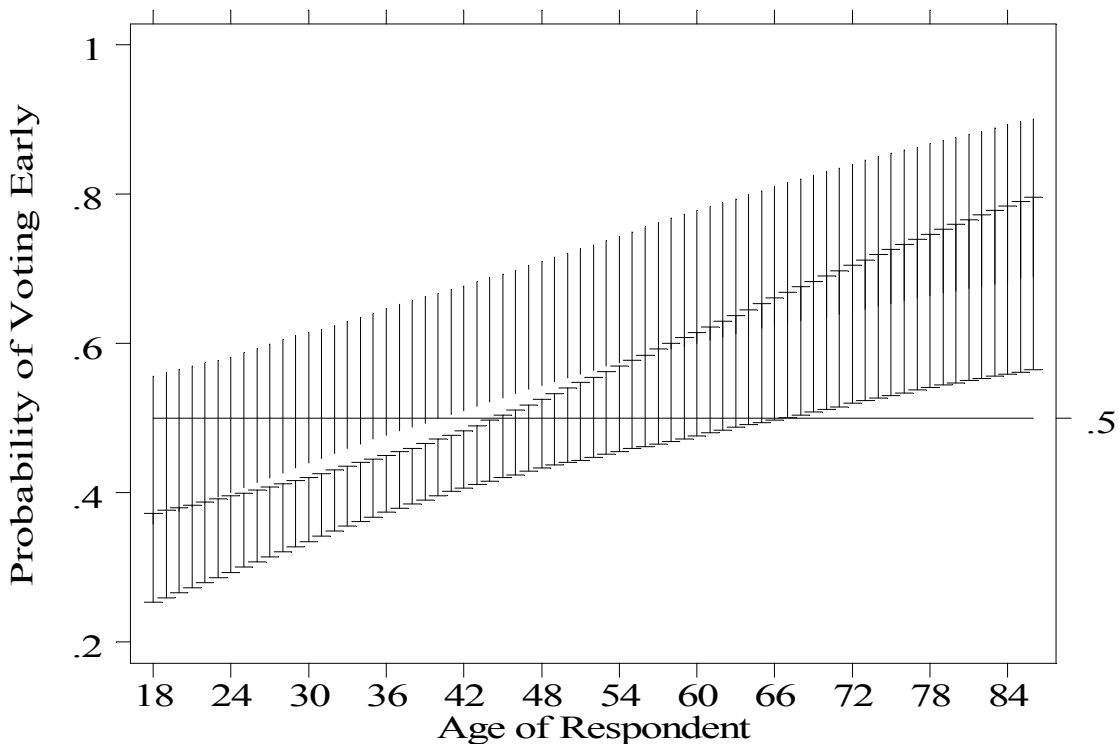
Discussion

Voting early is an election reform with many supporters. Its advocates claim that it will increase turnout and improve the quality of democratic decision making. We suspect there are other reasons—elections officials like early voting because it is cheap to administer and results in a more accurate count, while parties and candidates like early voting because it provides them a way to efficiently target voters.

In this paper, we took a look at Florida's experience with early voting in the 2004 presidential election. We took both an administrative view and a behavioral view. Florida election officials were under a microscope after the 2000 election, and early voting was adopted in part to avoid some of the election-day chaos from that time. How did Florida's election officials fare in 2004? Unfortunately, the answer was not very well. Like other states, such as nearby Georgia and North Carolina, Florida elections officials vastly underestimated the popularity of early voting and provided far too few early voting stations. Ironically, as a result, early voting was *not* a convenient way to cast a ballot—it required more travel than to the polling place, and long lines were commonplace. In many respects, then, it's surprising that we found as many differences between early voters and day of election voters as we did, since Florida made it so hard to vote early!

At the behavioral level, our results supported in the whole our theoretical expectations. Older voters, Cuban Americans, and women voted earlier, *ceteris paribus*. Political information showed a curvilinear relationship with early voting, with respondents in the middle range of information showing the highest rates of early voting. Finally, party affiliation and party contacts did not operate as we expected, although reported contact by non-partisan groups did increase early voting rates.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, we found that voters who trusted local government, and those who had confidence in the integrity of their ballot, were more likely to avail themselves of the opportunity to vote early. While we are heartened by this result, the implications do have a darker side. Trust in government is not particularly high in America; in fact, many have documented a 30 year fall in Americans faith in their governing institutions.

Consider now the impact of widespread ballot irregularities, as occurred in Florida in 2000, and seemed to have occurred in Ohio in 2004. By one measure reported here, these irregularities may take up to a generation for their effects on voting behavior to recede. But that is not the only impact—as the Pew Center for the People and the Press showed in late 2003, the 2000 election also delivered a hammer blow to trust in government *in general*. Thus, a botched election will *both* decrease a citizen's confidence that their ballot will be accurately counted and decrease their overall faith and trust in government.

For two elections in a row, the American election system has been severely criticized. While heroic efforts are being made to replace outdated machinery, streamline voter registration systems, and ease access to the ballot, unless state and local governments can both revive the citizenry's overall faith in government and avoid election breakdowns in the future, these reforms will do little to restore Americans faith in their election system.

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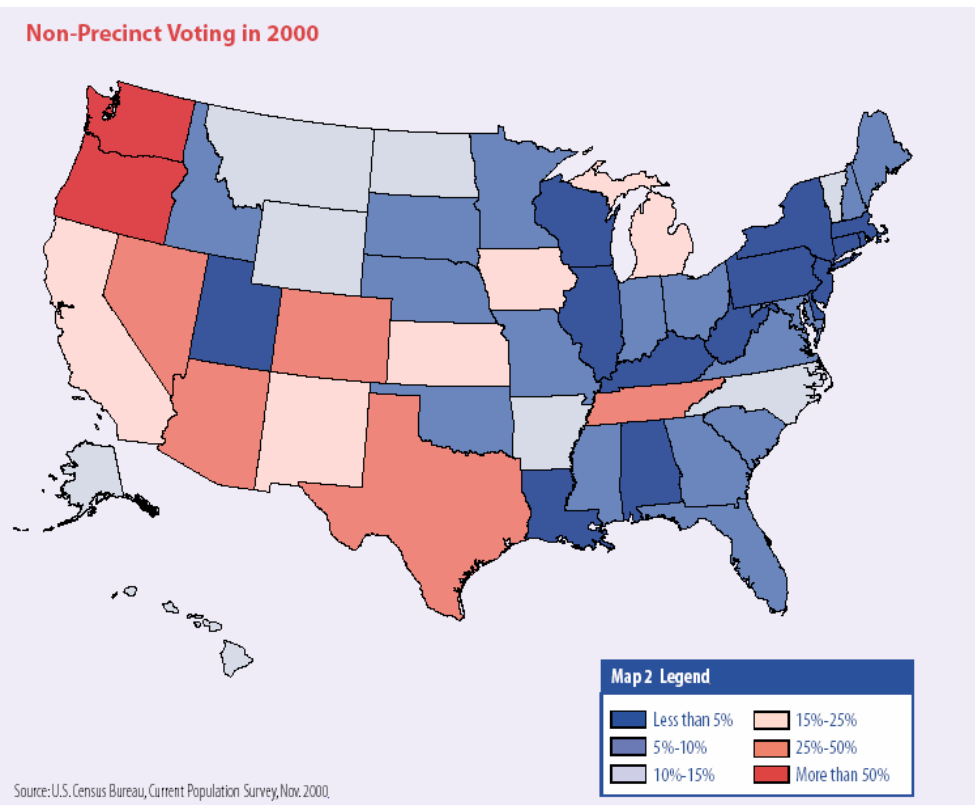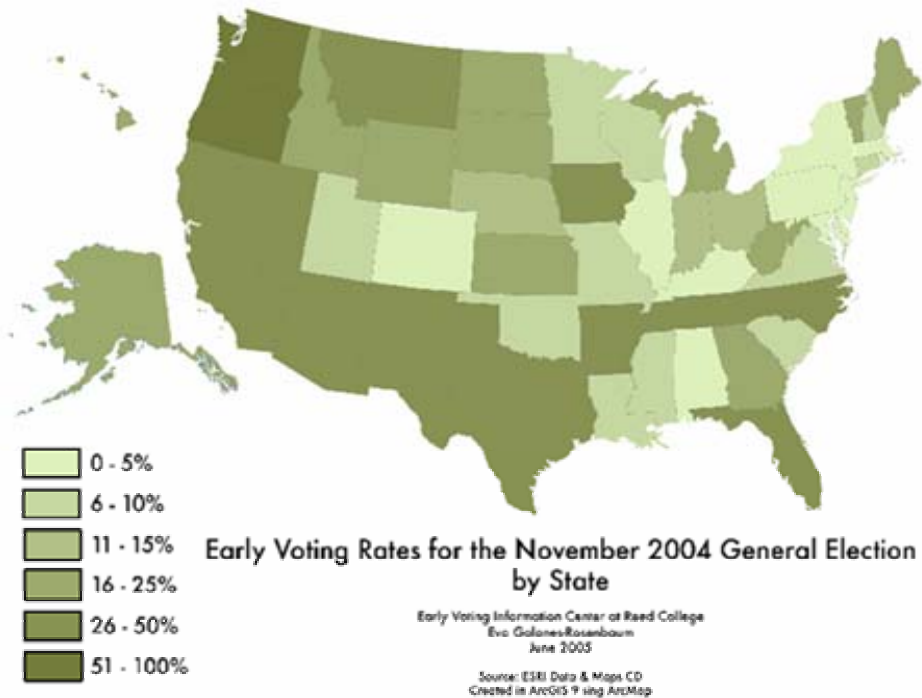Magleby, David B. "Participation in Mail Ballot Elections". *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 40,
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Appendix A: Early Voting in 2000 and 2004

0 - 5%
6 - 10%
11 - 15%
16 - 25%
26 - 50%
51 - 100%

Early Voting Rates for the November 2004 General Election by State

Early Voting Information Center at Reed College
Eva Galanes-Rosenbaum
June 2005

Source: ESRI Data & Maps CD
Created in ArcGIS 9 using ArcMap

Non-Precinct Voting in 2000

Map 2 Legend

Less than 5%	15%-25%
5%-10%	25%-50%
10%-15%	More than 50%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Nov. 2000.

Survey weights

We constructed two sets of survey weights. The first set of weights is for use in analyzing the overall election results. For the general election, polling places were randomly selected such that every registered voter in the county had an equal probability of selection. More specifically, polling locations were randomly selected after being assigned numbers (from a cumulative probability distribution) that corresponded to the proportion of the electorate that was eligible to vote at each location.

In regards to early voting, weights are employed to discount the value of each early voter in our survey such that they appropriately reflect their makeup in the entire voting electorate. This weight is calculated by creating a weight 'x' such that dividing the proportion of early voters in the county voting population by the proportion obtained in our survey we can solve for 'x'. Other weights for each category of each weighting variable are created in the same manner. Other weights used to create the variable "weight5" include party identification (weighted using party registration), race, sex, and age. These weights should be applied to all analyses because despite the random selection of respondents, the sample obtained was biased towards youth and Democratic identifiers. The weighting system is validated by the highly accurate results generated for the presidential, senate and especially the (non-partisan) mayoral race, for which weighted estimates provide results well within the margin of error.

A second weight was developed to account for differences in interview rates across early voting sites. Since we had no way to determine the probability that any voter would chose a particular location at which to vote, polling places were selected from a uniform distribution, such that each site had an equal probability of selection. Weights were then constructed using the algebra described above with the actual proportion of the early vote at each location being divided by the proportion of our sample that was obtained from each early voting location.

<div align="center">

University of Miami Exit Poll
Your participation is voluntary. We greatly appreciate your assistance!

</div>

P# ____ I#___ B

[A] Are you: 1 □ Male   2 □ Female

[B] Did you have any trouble using the voting machine today?
 1 □ Yes   2 □ No

[C] Are you confident your vote will be counted?
 1 □ Yes   2 □ No

[D] Is this the first time you have voted?
 1 □ Yes   2 □ No

[E] No matter how you voted today, do you usually feel that you are a:
 1 □ Strong Democrat   4 □ Republican
 2 □ Democrat   5 □ Strong Republican
 3 □ Independent   6 □ Something else

[F] On most political matters, do you consider yourself:
 1 □ Liberal   2 □ Moderate   3 □ Conservative

[G] Regardless of how you voted today, which candidate do you think would say anything to get elected president?
 1 □ Only Kerry 3 □ Both would
 2 □ Only Bush   4 □ Neither would

[H] Which two issues were most important in your vote for president today? (Check two.)
 1 __ The war in Iraq   6 __ The economy/jobs
 2 __ National security   7 __ Social security
 3 __ Cuba policy   8 __ Health care
 4 __ Education   9 __ Immigration
 5 __ Israel   10 __ Other_____

[I] What is the major reason we invaded Iraq?
 1 □ To bring Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 terrorists to justice.
 2 □ To eliminate weapons of mass destruction.
 3 □ To gain control of Iraqi oil.
 4 □ To distract voters from domestic problems.
 5 □ To bring democracy to the Middle East.
 6 □ Don't know

[J] Do you trust the Miami-Dade County government to do the right thing:
 1 □ Just about always   4 □ Never
 2 □ Most of the time   5 □ Don't know/can't say
 3 □ Only some of the time

[K] As far as you know, was Saddam Hussein involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks?
 1 □ Yes   2 □ No

[L] Were you contacted by any political party about the campaign this year?
 1 □ Democrats   4 □ Other

 2 □ Republicans   5 □ No
 3 □ Both major parties

[M] How were you contacted? (Check all that apply.)
 1 □ Phone   4 □ In-person on the street
 2 □ Direct mail   5 □ Other
 3 □ In-person at home

[N] Did any other groups or organizations contact you about the election this year? (Check all that apply.)
 1 □ Religious   6 □ Haitian
 2 □ African-American   7 □ NRA
 3 □ AARP   8 □ Neighborhood
 4 □ Student   9 □ Other
 5 □ Hispanic   0 □ No

[O] How were you contacted? (Check all that apply.)
 1 □ Phone   4 □ In-person on the street
 2 □ Direct mail   5 □ At a meeting/congregation
 3 □ In-person at home 6 □ Other

[P] Do you get most of your political information from:
 1 □ National TV news   5 □ Friends
 2 □ Newspapers   6 □ Other _____
 3 □ Radio   7 □ Local TV news
 4 □ Internet   8 □ Don't care about it

[Q] If you said national news, which broadcast or cable station do you watch most often?
 1 □ NBC   5 □ PBS   9 □ Telemundo
 2 □ CBS   6 □ Fox News 10 □ Univisión
 3 □ ABC   7 □ CNN   11 □ Other
 4 □ MSNBC   8 □ CNBC

[R] How often do you watch national television news?
 1 □ Every day   3 □ 4-5 times a week
 2 □ 1-3 times a week   4 □ Never

[S] Are you: 1 □ White   4 □ Haitian
         2 □ Black   5 □ Other
         3 □ Hispanic/Latino

[T] What is your family's ethnic origin?
 1 □ Cuba   3 □ Colombia   5 □ Nicaragua
 2 □ Haiti   4 □ Puerto Rico 6 □ Other

[U] Did either presidential candidate attack the other unfairly in their advertising?
 1 □ No   3 □ George Bush
 2 □ John Kerry   4 □ Both did

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→→   →→   Please Turn Page   →→   →→

</div>

[V] Which of your relatives first immigrated to the US?
  1 □ I was   3 □ A grandparent
  2 □ My mother or father   4 □ Other

[W] When did this person come to live in the USA?
  1 □ Before 1969   4 □ Between 1990 & 1999
  2 □ Between 1970 & 1979   5 □ After 2000
  3 □ Between 1980 & 1989   6 □ Not applicable

[X] Was the decision to invade Iraq to remove Saddam
     Hussein from power:
  1 □ A good idea that worked out well.
  2 □ A good idea that did not work out well.
  3 □ A bad idea.

[Y] Abortion should be:
  1 □ Always legal   3 □ Usually illegal
  2 □ Usually legal   4 □ Always illegal

[Z] Do you support or oppose a Constitutional Amendment to ban
     gay marriage?
  1 □ Support   2 □ Oppose   3 □ No opinion

[AA] Over the next year do you expect your personal financial
      situation to:
  1 □ Get better   2 □ Get worse   3 □ Stay about the same.

[BB] Should it be legal or illegal for Americans to buy
      prescription drugs from Canada and other countries?
  1 □ Legal   2 □ Illegal   3 □ No opinion

[CC] Economic sanctions on Cuba should be:
  1 □ Tightened further   3 □ Eased somewhat
  2 □ Kept the same   4 □ Eliminated entirely

[DD] The ban on travel to Cuba should be:
  1 □ Tightened further   3 □ Eased somewhat
  2 □ Kept the same   4 □ Eliminated entirely

[EE] Do you or anyone in your household own a gun?
     1 □ Yes   2 □ No

[FF] Over the next year do you expect the nation's
      economy to:
  1 □ Get better   2 □ Get worse   3 □ Stay about the same

[GG] Which party holds a majority in the U.S. Congress?
  1 □ Democrat   2 □ Republican   3 □ Don't Know

[HH] Which state does Senator John Kerry represent?
  (Write in) _____

[II] Whose responsibility is it to determine whether or not a law is
     constitutional?
   1 □ Congress   2 □ President   3 □ Supreme Court

[JJ] Do you speak a language other than English at home?

  1 □ Yes   2 □ No

[KK] What was the last grade of school you completed?
  1 □ Didn't complete high school   4 □ College grad
  2 □ High school grad.   5 □ Postgrad study
  3 □ Some college/AA degree

[LL] Do you consider yourself:
  1 □ Catholic   3 □ Evangelical   5 □ Muslim
  2 □ Protestant   4 □ Jewish   6 □ Other

[MM] How often do you attend religious services?
  1 □ Several times a week   4 □ A few times a year
  2 □ Once a week   5 □ Never
  3 □ Once or twice a month   6 □ Don't know

[NN] When it comes to power in Miami-Dade County   politics,
   do you think that the Cubans have:
1 □ Too much   2 □ The right amount   3 □ Too little

[OO] I think that immigrants (check all that apply):
 1 □ Do important jobs that others don't want to do
 2 □ Use too many public services
 3 □ Make the cultural life of Miami more interesting
 4 □ Make Miami a worse place to live

[PP] In the presidential election, did you just vote for:
  1 □ John Kerry   9 □ Other: Who? _____
  2 □ George Bush   0 □ Did not vote for president
  3 □ Ralph Nader (Ind.)

[QQ] In the election for Senator, did you just vote for:
  1 □ Betty Castor   9 □ Other: Who? _____
  2 □ Mel Martinez   0 □ Did not vote for Senator

[RR] In the election for County Mayor did you vote for:
  1 □ Carlos Alvarez   9 □ Other
  2 □ Jimmy Morales   0 □ Did not vote for Mayor

[SS] Do you support or oppose stricter gun control laws?
  1 □ Support   2 □ Oppose

[TT] How old are you?   (Write in) _____

[UU] 2003 total family income:
  1 □ Under $15,000   4 □ $50,000-$74,999
  2 □ $15,000-$29,999   5 □ $75,000-$99,999
  3 □ $30,000-$49,999   6 □ $100,000 +

[VV] When hiring, do you think employers in Miami:
  1 □ Prefer people from my racial and ethnic group
  2 □ Discriminate against people from my racial and
      ethnic group.
 3 □ Treat most people the same

<div align="center">The End. Thank You!</div>