Early Voting, Absentee Voting, and Voting by Mail

Is Giving Voters More Options a Good Idea?

Charles Stewart III
MIT
Election Day

Source: Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement, various years
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Flavors of Pre-Election Day Voting

• Traditional classifications
  – Absentee voting
    • Excuse required
    • No-excuse
      – Permanent
  – Early voting
    • How many sites?
    • How many days?
Flavors of Pre-Election Day Voting

• Traditional classifications
  – Absentee voting
    • Excuse required
    • No-excuse
      – Permanent
  – Early voting
    • How many sites?
    • How many days?

• New complications
  – Vote-by-mail
  – Early voting by other means
  – Vote centers
The map shows the states that allow no-excuse absentee voting, early voting, early voting AND no-excuse absentee voting, all-mail voting, and states with no early voting: excuse required for absentee voting. The states are color-coded according to these categories. The source of the map is the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) website: [http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State(s)</th>
<th>No-excitb absentee voting</th>
<th>Early voting</th>
<th>Early voting AND no-excitb absentee voting</th>
<th>All-mail voting</th>
<th>No early voting: excuse required for absentee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AK, CA, HI</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT, OR, UT, WA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN, NM</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TN, TX</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Permanent absentee voting (8)

Source: Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement
2004

Source: Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement
Source: Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement
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Source: Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement
Who Uses Early and Absentee Voting?
## Who Uses Early and Absentee Voting?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Election Day</th>
<th>Early In-Person</th>
<th>Absentee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Excludes “traditional” states and all-mail states

Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2012
Who Uses Early and Absentee Voting?

Interest in News/Public Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Election Day</th>
<th>Early In-Person</th>
<th>Absentee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the time</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only now and then</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly at all</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Excludes “traditional” states and all-mail states

Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2012
Who Uses Early and Absentee Voting?  
Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Election Day</th>
<th>Early In-Person</th>
<th>Absentee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Excludes “traditional” states and all-mail states
Source: Cooperative Congressional Election Study, 2012
Policy Considerations

- Convenience
  - Societal expectations
- Security
- Costs
- Quality election administration
- Equity
Some Resources

• NCSL (Google “NCSL Early Voting”)
• Early Voting Information Center (EVIC) @ Reed College: earlyvoting.net

• E-mail me: cstewart@mit.edu