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An Examination of Efforts to Encourage the Incidence of Early In-Person Voting in Georgia, 2008

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ABSTRACT

In this article we examine the effect of efforts on the part of election administrators in Georgia to compel registrants to cast ballots early in-person during the 2008 presidential election. We incorporate data collected from a survey of Georgia election administrators into a multivariate model designed to explain early in-person turnout at the county level. Our results indicate that county election officials who attempted to increase early in-person voting through advertising and outreach were successful. In addition, early in-person turnout was positively linked to voter convenience. Most previous research has examined non-precinct voting from the perspective of the consumer (voter). Our work demonstrates the need to also explore this area from the standpoint of producers (election officials) who are charged with implementation of policy. If election officials want to promote early voting, our findings indicate they should utilize a wide range of formats to familiarize their voting population with this option. In addition, careful thought should also be given to the number of early voting sites, their locations, and hours of operation if the goal is to get a sizable segment of the electorate to vote prior to the date of the election.

Recent years have witnessed efforts to facilitate political participation by expanding the period during which voters can cast a ballot. An increasing number of states now permit casting ballots weeks prior to Election Day.[1] These opportunities go well beyond traditional mail absentee voting, which is available only to registrants with an acceptable explanation for their absence from the precinct on Election Day. The most extreme change from the tradition occurs in Oregon, which has adopted vote-by-mail, effectively ceasing to operate polling stations. Short of this alternative, a wide range of states now employ some mixture of early in-person voting in combination with more liberalized mail absentee balloting.

While much academic work has focused on the effects of non-precinct voting from the standpoint of the consumers—the voters—we examine early in-person voting in Georgia from the standpoint of the producers—county election administrators. Using the results of a survey and a model to explain early in-person voting at the county level, we analyze election administrators' efforts to increase turnout prior to the 2008 general election. In addition, we examine the convenience of early voting using two access-related measures. We find that efforts by election administrators to encourage early in-person voting and increase convenience correlated with heightened participation during the weeks prior to Election Day. Viewed from a resource utilization perspective, decisions made by election administrators can affect the efficiency and effectiveness of U.S. elections.

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[1]Gronke et al. (2007) report that by 2006 twenty-seven states had instituted some variant of early in-person voting.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Non-precinct voting, including early in-person voting, is not new. A body of scientific research has accumulated around the study of these expanded options for voting and their effects. Much of the earlier scholarship focused specifically on the ability of early in-person voting to stimulate turnout. Researchers expected that allowing voting at times other than Election Day would increase convenience and therefore promote turnout. Early scholarly research on this topic found a positive, but very modest, relationship between the implementation of early in-person voting and turnout (see Neeley and Richardson 2001; Stein and Garcia-Monet 1997). Subsequent research, however, has discounted the positive relationship between early in-person voting and turnout. For example, Gronke et al. (2007) find no significant relationship between states with early in-person voting and turnout.

Other research has analyzed the potential of early in-person voting to alter the composition of the electorate. Berinsky (2005) finds that recent electoral reforms have aggravated the existing socioeconomic leaning of the American electorate. Stein's (1998) study also finds evidence of bias in terms of both partisan identification and strength of partisanship when comparing early voters to Election Day voters.

Finally, research on early in-person voting has focused on other potential benefits such as improved accuracy in tabulating votes and potential cost savings. In regard to the former, a number of researchers have found that the implementation of various forms of non-precinct voting, including early in-person voting, does result in increased accuracy as it relates to counting votes (see for example Alvarez et al. 2008; Cal Tech/MIT Voting Technology Project 2001; Hanmer and Traugott 2003). The verdict is still out, however, on whether early in-person voting saves money (see Gronke et al. 2007 for a short discussion on this matter).[2]

While early in-person voting may not produce gains in terms of actual cost savings, it is possible that this alternative may produce other types of efficiencies for both voters and election administrators. Given the high turnout anticipated in the 2008 presidential election, election officials became aware of the potential for precincts to be overwhelmed on Election Day, especially in densely populated areas. No election official wanted to be connected with a situation analogous to 2000, or face a situation where precincts became inundated, creating long lines for voters. Little research, however, has examined early in-person voting from the vantage point of election administrators and their decisions concerning resource allocation.

NON-PRECINCT PLACE VOTING IN THE PEACH STATE

Georgia was not among the first states to promote early voting, but it has recently greatly expanded opportunities in this area. In 2004, the state authorized advanced voting for the week prior to Election Day. The 2008 election cycle ushered in the much longer 45-day window for casting a ballot, with the period prior to the advanced voting week referred to as early voting. In most counties, early voting can take place only at the office of the registrar (some urban counties have multiple registrars' offices). The early voting period for the 2008 general election began on September 22nd and ended on October 24th. The week before the election (October 27–31, 2008) constituted the advanced voting period.[3] Some counties did open additional voting sites and/or increase their hours of operation for the advanced voting period. During the advanced voting period, polling sites can be expanded to include any governmental building within the county. Election officials certainly differentiate between the early and advanced voting periods and the law does treat these as separate activities. It is unlikely that most voters, however, recognize the difference since they can cast a ballot in-person

[2]In our survey, almost three-quarters of Georgia election administrators (73.5%) reported that implementation of early in-person voting had resulted in increased costs for their counties. Just over half of the counties that responded (61%) budgeted funds to advertise the ways to cast a ballot before Election Day. Two large, urban counties made substantial investments of $300,000 and $50,000, respectively. To put these expenditures in perspective, the first county had a budget of $11 million for its election operation while the latter's election budget was $5.4 million. Excluding these two outliers, the mean for the remaining 46 counties that reported the amount spent to promote early voting was $1,064. These increases usually constituted less than one percent of total budgets, with the largest increase being 4.3%. In a total of three counties the increase allocated for early/advanced voting amounted to more than two percent of 2008 operating budgets.

[3]Advanced voting can occur during the week before an election, although not on the Monday before a Tuesday election.

prior to Election Day during either time period. Georgia's election configuration for 2008 is presented graphically in Figure 1.

Despite little experience with voting prior to Election Day, the opportunities offered Georgians in 2008 met with unprecedented success as 45.3% of the 3.9 million votes cast came from those who voted early in-person. Another 7.6% of the vote came from mail absentee voters. The election officials in many Georgia counties who set about aggressively implementing the new program contributed to this successful effort.

Prior to the 2008 general election, voter registration rates in Georgia had risen to historic levels. The Obama campaign began registering voters in late 2007 in preparation for Georgia's presidential preference primary set for early February. The Obama operatives anticipated that their candidate would run well with black voters. With Georgia being among the first states with a sizeable black electorate, the Peach State provided an opportunity to overtake Hillary Clinton, the acknowledged front-runner in the pre-primary betting. Efforts to sign up new voters continued until early October, when eligibility to vote in the general election ended.[4]

While new registrants often have poor follow-through and do not show up to vote, the presence of the charismatic Obama atop the Democratic ticket prompted expectations of a record turnout.[5] The remarkable enthusiasm shown in the February presidential primary, when more Georgians voted than in most general primaries held in the summer, alerted election officials to the potential for unprecedented interest in the November contest. Election officials realized that if this newly mobilized electorate actually came to the polls, many urban and suburban precincts had neither the personnel nor the voting machines to handle the onslaught.[6]

We interviewed Gary Smith, Chief Registrar and Chair of the Board of Elections in Forsyth County, in order to learn the strategy he employed for the 2008 general election. Forsyth County is an Atlanta-area exurban county with almost 100,000 registrants. Smith expressed his concern that resources, namely electronic voting machines and poll workers, would not keep up with demand on Election Day and that precincts would be overwhelmed. In an effort to prevent such a scenario, Smith executed a plan to increase in-person early voting through a concerted advertising campaign. The county operated five sites during the advanced voting period and implemented an online system where registrants could check wait times at these sites. Smith's efforts paid off as early in-person voting accounted for 64% of the Forsyth County turnout. Prior to Election Day, Smith shifted resources (voting machines, poll workers) to precincts where greater numbers of registrants had not yet voted.[7]

Like Forsyth, election officials in many other counties initiated efforts to encourage voters to tally their preferences prior to November 4th in order to avoid long lines on Election Day. Election administrators used a variety of approaches in order to promote early in-person voting. Information about the opportunity to cast an early vote appeared in local newspapers, in utility bills, and on local cable channels. Some communities ran public service announcements on the radio and elsewhere the local newspaper carried stories about early voting. Election officials made presentations on the early voting option before civic associations, religious groups, political parties, to neighborhood groups, and at schools. Announcements were also placed in prominent places in government buildings and libraries, on billboards, and on county Web sites. In some counties, announcements also appeared in newsletters distributed by homeowners' associations. Anecdotal evidence, therefore, indicates that administrators can influence the level of early voting. This article evaluates that claim systematically.

DATA AND METHOD

Our research is designed to study efforts by county-level election officials to increase levels of early in-person voting. We attempt to address two primary research questions: Did a more comprehensive effort to get voters to cast ballots

[4]In Georgia, citizens must register 30 days prior to the date of the election in order to be eligible to participate.

[5]Wolfinger and Hoffman's (2001) study of the Motor Voter law demonstrates that simply making registration *costless* is no guarantee that individuals registered in this manner will actually turn out to vote.

[6]Prior to the 2002 election, the state implemented a uniform system for voting so that all counties utilize the same direct recording electronic voting equipment, the Diebold AccuVote-TS.

[7]Gary J. Smith. In-Person Interview. January 2009. Cumming, Georgia.

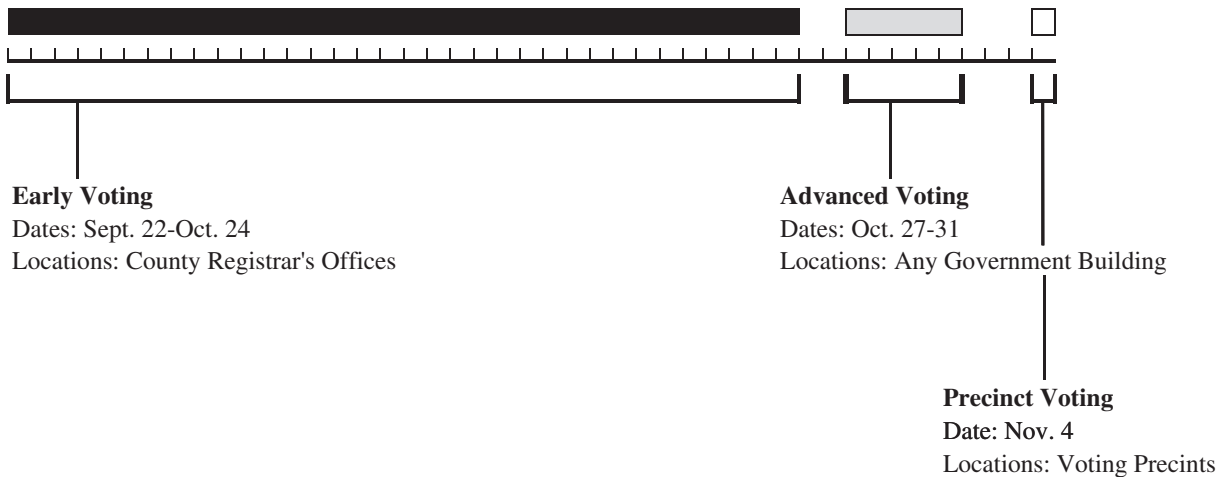

FIG. 1. Georgia's Election Configuration, 2008. Tick marks denote days.

in-person before the election result in a larger share of the electorate voting prior to Election Day, and was early voting more prevalent in counties in which the process could be considered more convenient?

Our research relies on a survey of election officials responsible for administering early in-person voting in Georgia's 159 counties. Valid responses were secured from administrators in 117 of Georgia's 159 counties for a 73.6% response rate.[8] Our sample of counties responding to the survey closely mirrors the characteristics of all 159 counties in the state. Table A, located in the Appendix, compares mean responses for various indicators between our sample, non-responding counties, and the full set of counties for the state. Examination of Table A reveals a remarkable degree of congruence between sample and statewide means for these two groups. The largest difference can be found for the mean number of hours available for early voting: 294.4 for our sample compared with a statewide figure of 290.9. Non-responding counties had thirteen fewer hours available for early voting and three percent more early votes cast. The non-responding counties had slightly lower median household incomes, and higher percentages of black registrants and high school graduates. The two sets of counties had equivalent numbers of early voting sites and older voters.

Of the 117 counties in our sample, the share of the voters who cast ballots in-person before Election Day ranged from a low of 13.4% to a high of 72.2%. In eleven counties, more than 60% of the ballots came from voters who voted early in-person. More than half of the ballots were cast prior to Election Day in forty-seven counties. At the other extreme, in only five counties did fewer than 30% of the voters cast ballots prior to Election Day. Early voting proved most popular in a number of small, rural counties such as Turner, Schley, Dawson, and Rabun. The other counties that saw voters heavily utilizing the early voting option were suburban, the most populous being Forsyth County (93,359 registrants; 75,561 voters) where 63.9% of the ballots were cast in-person before Election Day. All of the counties with early voting at levels below 30% were non-metropolitan counties located in south Georgia. Two large metropolitan Atlanta counties, Gwinnett and Cobb, had about one-third of their votes cast in-person during the early voting period. Early in-person turnout in Fulton County, the state's most populous county with almost one million residents, was 36.9%, while in the remaining mega-county, DeKalb, 47% of registrants voted early.

The survey asked election administrators to identify which of fifteen outreach strategies they utilized to promote early in-person voting. Information available from the Office of the Georgia Secretary of State was used to augment our survey of election administrators. From this agency we collected data

[8]Two letters printed on university letterhead were mailed (February 16, 2009, and March 3, 2009) to the appropriate election administrator in each county asking them to complete an online version of the survey. Respondents were also given the option of requesting a hardcopy version of the survey as well. We also called administrators in all counties that failed to respond to prior written requests to take the survey.

for each county on the number of early voting sites, the number of advanced voting sites, and the days and hours of operation for these sites. In addition, we obtained data on black registration, total turnout, and early in-person voting turnout.[9] We also collected data on television advertising expenditures for the presidential campaigns by the media market. Finally, a number of control variables relating to county education, income, and age-related characteristics came from the U.S. Census.

To test our research questions we formulated a multivariate model with counties as the unit of analysis. Our dependent variable is operationalized as early in-person voting as a percentage of total turnout. As the size of the electorate between counties in Georgia can vary enormously, we make use of ordinary least squares (OLS) and weight each observation (county) by total voter turnout. We calculate robust standard errors to mitigate known problems related to heteroskedasticity.[10]

One of the chief variables of interest is a count measure that ranges from zero to fifteen designed to capture the total number of early voting outreach activities undertaken in each county. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these measures is .83, indicating a high degree of internal consistency between these survey items. We hypothesize a positive relationship between this variable and the percentage of the vote tallied in a county during the early in-person voting period.

Previous research has identified convenience as one of the chief factors related to the prevalence of early in-person voting (see for example Dubin and Kalsow 1996; Neeley and Richardson 2001; Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003; Gimpel et al. 2006). While convenience is a fairly broad term, we conceptualize it in terms of the time and effort required for a registrant to cast a vote during the early voting period. The fear of long wait times or geographically remote locations for sites may be two factors that make this form of voting less convenient. The degree of convenience should, therefore, be positively related to early in-person turnout.

We construct two measures in order to capture the convenience factor as it relates to early voting. The first of these measures accessibility to polling sites within counties. As most counties operated a single site prior to the week before the election, we focused on the number of sites available during the advanced voting period.[11] The number of sites that were open during that last week ranged from one to seven, with one being the modal value. In a small county a single site might suffice while in larger counties, convenience would require multiple sites. To make this variable more reflective of convenience across counties we constructed the following ratio:

$$[\text{Square Miles}/\text{Number of Sites}]/100$$

where the size of the county measured in square miles is divided by the total number of voting sites during the advanced voting period and the result is divided by 100.[12] This ratio, which measures the approximate geographic area per voting site, should be inversely related to early in-person turnout.

We created a second measure of convenience designed to capture potential wait times. For each county we calculated the total number of hours available for early in-person voting by multiplying the number of sites in a county by the total hours of operation. Thus, if County A had one polling place for the five weeks of early voting which was open for eight hours a day, the number of hours available during this period would total 200. In addition, if County A maintained two sites for the five days of advanced voting and each of these

[9]While early and advanced voting are distinct and, as noted earlier, occur at different points prior to the election, the state does not maintain separate figures for the two periods. Consequently in this article we use *early in-person voting* to refer to all ballots cast in-person during the 45-day period prior to November 4th. It does not include absentee voting by mail.

[10]It would be ideal to include a lagged measure of the dependent variable (Early In-Person Voting/Total Turnout) from a previous election cycle in the model in order to establish a baseline for early in-person voting within a county. Unfortunately, the Georgia Secretary of State has no data for the number of early in-person votes cast at the county-level prior to 2008 (there is no statutory requirement that early in-person votes be separated from absentee votes cast by mail ballot. Both of these methods are technically considered *absentee* voting in Georgia). Even if this data were available, comparing early in-person voting in 2008 with prior elections would not be straightforward. As indicated, Georgia only implemented early in-person voting beginning with the 2004 election. Additionally, early in-person voting prior to 2008 occurred during the week prior to the election, whereas in 2008 the period was extended to 45 days.

[11]In our sample, three counties operated two polling places prior to the week before the election and two counties maintained three sites. During the advanced voting period twenty-six counties operated multiple voting sites.

[12]We divide these two measures of voter convenience by 100 in order to produce regression coefficients of approximately the same magnitude as those for the other variables in the model.

sites were open eight hours a day, the total number of hours generated during the advanced voting period would be 80, for a grand total of 280 hours.[13] In the forty-five days prior to the election, the number of hours in which a person could have cast a ballot ranged from a low of 180 to a high of 1,005, with a mean of 294.4 hours and a standard deviation of 106.8.

In order to standardize these calculations, we need to take into account the number of registrants within each county, which can greatly vary. The number of registrants in our sample ranges from fewer than 2,000 to more than half a million. Two hundred hours might prove quite sufficient in a county with few registrants, but inadequate for a more populous county. Therefore, we develop a measure that better reflects the availability of times for early voting, by dividing the number of registrants measured in hundreds by the number of hours available to vote or:

$$\text{Number of Registrants [100s]}/\text{Total Early In-Person Hours}$$

Values on this measure range from .057 to 9.02 with a mean of .943 and a standard deviation of 1.37. This measure shows that counties varied by allowing as few as one hour of early voting per 900 registered voters to as much as one hour per 17.5 voters. On average, officials provided one hour of early voting per 100 registrants. The expectation is that the lower the ratio of voters per hour of operation, the higher the proportion of votes that will be cast in-person prior to Election Day.

Individuals who made up their minds about their preferred candidate well before the election should be more likely to take advantage of early in-person voting. As the first black candidate nominated for president by a major party, Barack Obama had a special appeal for African American voters and they flocked to the polls. Statewide figures showed that while African Americans constituted 30% of Georgia's registered voters and cast 30% of the total vote, they accounted for 35% of the votes cast early. We anticipate that the size of the black electorate should be positively related to the proportion of early ballots.

Finally, we include a measure designed to capture campaign dynamics related to the presidential contest. Stein and Vonnahme (2010) report that both the Republican and Democratic Parties have made efforts to mobilize their followers during the early voting period. In an attempt to control for this, we created a measure of total spending for television advertising by the McCain and Obama campaigns and the Republican and Democratic National Committees for each Designated Market Area (DMA) in Georgia.[14] Counties within DMAs with higher levels of advertising should experience increased levels of early in-person voting. In addition, we include controls for median household income, the percentage of the population with a high school degree or higher, and the proportion of registrants over 65 years of age.

FINDINGS

Table 1 lists the types and frequencies of outreach efforts designed to advertise in-person early voting. As one might expect, the number of options pursued varied widely from county to county. Six counties made no effort to encourage early in-person voting, while one county used all fifteen approaches. The mean number of county outreach techniques was 6.5, with a standard deviation of 3.5 and a mode of three.

The results of our multivariate model are presented in Table 2. One of our primary variables of interest, *Outreach Efforts*, was positively and significantly related to the percentage of a county's vote cast early in-person. For each outreach effort undertaken, the model predicts turnout in the early voting period will increase by approximately four-tenths of a percentage point. Figure 2 plots the predicted values for early voting turnout for the *average* county across the range (0–15) of outreach efforts reported.[15] The figure shows that for those counties which made no attempts to publicize early voting the predicted value for early voting turnout would be 41.1%, while turnout for those counties utilizing

[13]Only two counties surveyed had any weekend voting and those hours were included in their totals.

[14]This total dollar figure was divided by 1,000. Total advertising expenditures ranged from a low of $375 in the Dothan, AL, DMA to a high of $3,458,491 in the Jacksonville, FL, DMA with the average across all eleven DMAs at $827,334. These data were collected by Daron Shaw, Department of Government, University of Texas.

[15]Predicted values for the early voting turnout were produced using *Clarify 2.0*. The values for all other variables in the model were set at the mean.

Table 1. Types of Outreach Efforts Used by County Election Administrators to Promote Early In-Person Voting

Outreach Mode	*Frequency*	*Percent Using Method*
Local Newspaper Announcement	105	89.7%
Local Newspaper Article	105	89.7%
Information Placed in Government Buildings	70	59.8%
Information on County Website	63	53.8%
Local Radio Announcement	55	47.0%
Presentations to Civic Clubs	50	42.7%
Presentations to Political Parties	48	41.0%
Presentations to Religious Groups	48	41.0%
Billboards or Signs	43	36.8%
Announcement in Public Schools	42	35.9%
Announcement on Local Cable	41	35.0%
Presentations to Neighborhood Groups	31	26.5%
Presentations at Schools	29	24.8%
Announcements in Community/ Homeowner's Association Newsletters	19	16.2%
Announcement in Utility Bills	11	9.4%

Notes: Sample Mean: 6.5; Sample Standard Deviation: 3.5

all fifteen reported outreach efforts would be estimated to be 47.1%, a six percentage point increase. This result indicates that those county election officials who attempted to increase early voting turnout through advertising and outreach succeeded in shifting turnout away from Election Day precinct voting.

Our two measures of polling place convenience for early voting were also significant predictors of turnout. Both the ratio of square miles per voting site and the number of registrants per hour of early voting were negatively related to turnout. Not surprisingly, as either of these ratios increases, the convenience to voters, in terms of geographic proximity and/or access times, diminishes. Among the controls included in the model presented in Table 2, median household income is significantly and positively related to voting early as is the percentage of black registrants in the county. Affluence may be linked to individuals with more flexible schedules, thus making early voting a more convenient option for this group. The higher incidence of early in-person turnout among black registrants may have been linked to the excitement generated by the Obama candidacy. Our measure of presidential campaign advertising was also a significant determinant of increased early in-person turnout at the county-level. Overall, our model explains 59% of the variation in early voting turnout among Georgia counties in the 2008 general election.

Table 2. Model to Explain Early In-Person Turnout in Georgia, 2008

	Coefficient	*Standard Error*
Outreach Efforts	.0040**	.0015
Square Miles per Early Voting Site	−.0180**	.0052
Registrants per Early Voting Hours	−.0327**	.0041
% Black Registered	.1562**	.0504
% 65 and Older	.5157	.3297
% High School Graduate	.3109	.1795
Median Household Income	.0035**	.0011
Presidential Campaign Advertising	.000026**	.0000098
Constant	.1772	.1196
Adjusted R^2	.59	
N	117	

Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01.
Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with robust standard errors.
County observations are weighted by the number of total registrants.

Comparing the relative effects of our two measures of voter convenience along with our outreach indicator is not a straightforward task. The geographic size and number of registered voters for each county affect changes in our convenience-based indicators. The effects related to increasing the number of early voting sites or adding hours during the early voting period will, therefore, vary county by county. In order to help the reader understand how policy changes may impact early voting turnout, we have selected Gwinnett County for purposes of illustration.

Gwinnett County is part of the Atlanta metropolitan statistical area (MSA) and is contiguous to DeKalb and Fulton Counties. During the 2008 election cycle Gwinnett contained just over 383,000 registrants, of whom 30.5% voted early in-person. Using the actual values for Gwinnett County, the model predicts a 31.79% early voting rate. Figure 3 shows how much early voting would have been predicted to increase if officials had undertaken additional activities in Gwinnett County. If Gwinnett had increased the number of early voting sites by one, from five to six, the model estimates that early voting would have increased by .21%. Likewise, if the early voting sites in the county had been open an additional hour during the advanced voting period (for a total of seven additional hours), early voting turnout would have increased by half a percentage point (.53%). Finally, if election officials had utilized one additional outreach

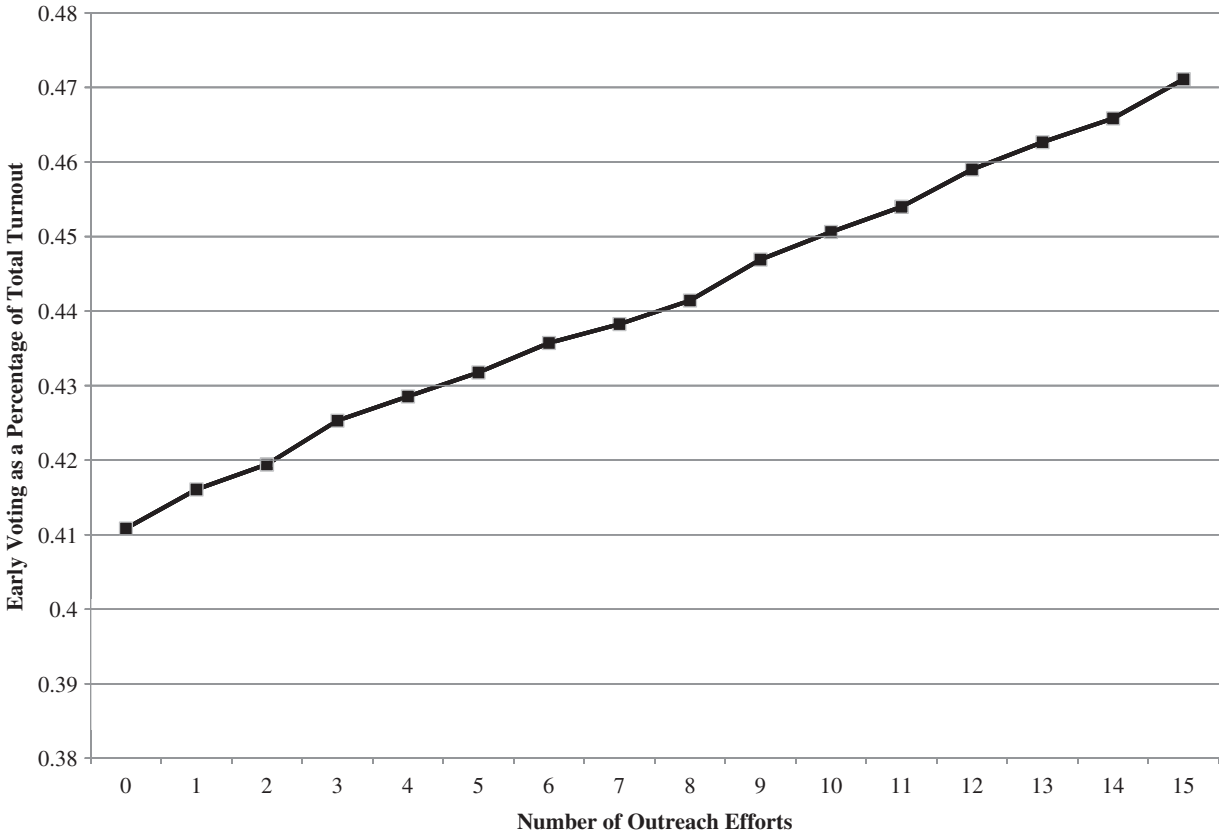

FIG. 2. Outreach Efforts and Early Voting Turnout.

effort (moving from 14 to 15), early voting would have increased by .34%.

Opening and staffing an additional early voting site is likely the most expensive option, and doing so would have yielded the smallest increase in turnout. The one outreach technique not utilized by Gwinnett involved billboard advertising, not a cheap proposition in a large urban county. Increasing the hours of operation for early voting sites, on the other hand, appears to be the most cost-effective measure for boosting turnout during this period. Again, we should note that while informative, these comparisons specifically relate to Gwinnett County and the relative impact of these changes would vary when examining other counties.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Previous work has found that many voters value the opportunity to cast ballots prior to Election Day. Efforts in 2008 by Georgia election officials to encourage early in-person voting paid off. Despite less experience with an extended period of in-person early voting than other states, a plurality of Georgians voted using this method. In fifty-six counties, a majority of voters used the early in-person option. In another nineteen counties, a plurality used this approach.[16]

As reported earlier, 45.3% of votes in Georgia during the 2008 general election were cast early. We do know that far fewer Georgians have exercised this option since the 2008 presidential election. In the 2008 statewide run-off that occurred in December of 2008, 18.2% of votes were cast early in-person. Likewise, in the 2010 summer primary election, only 15.0% of all votes were early votes. In the lead up to the 2010 general election, 30.3% of the total vote came in early. While it is tenuous

[16]These figures are based on the state's 159 counties. Among the 117 counties for which we have survey data, a majority voted early in forty-seven and in another fourteen counties a plurality voted early in-person.

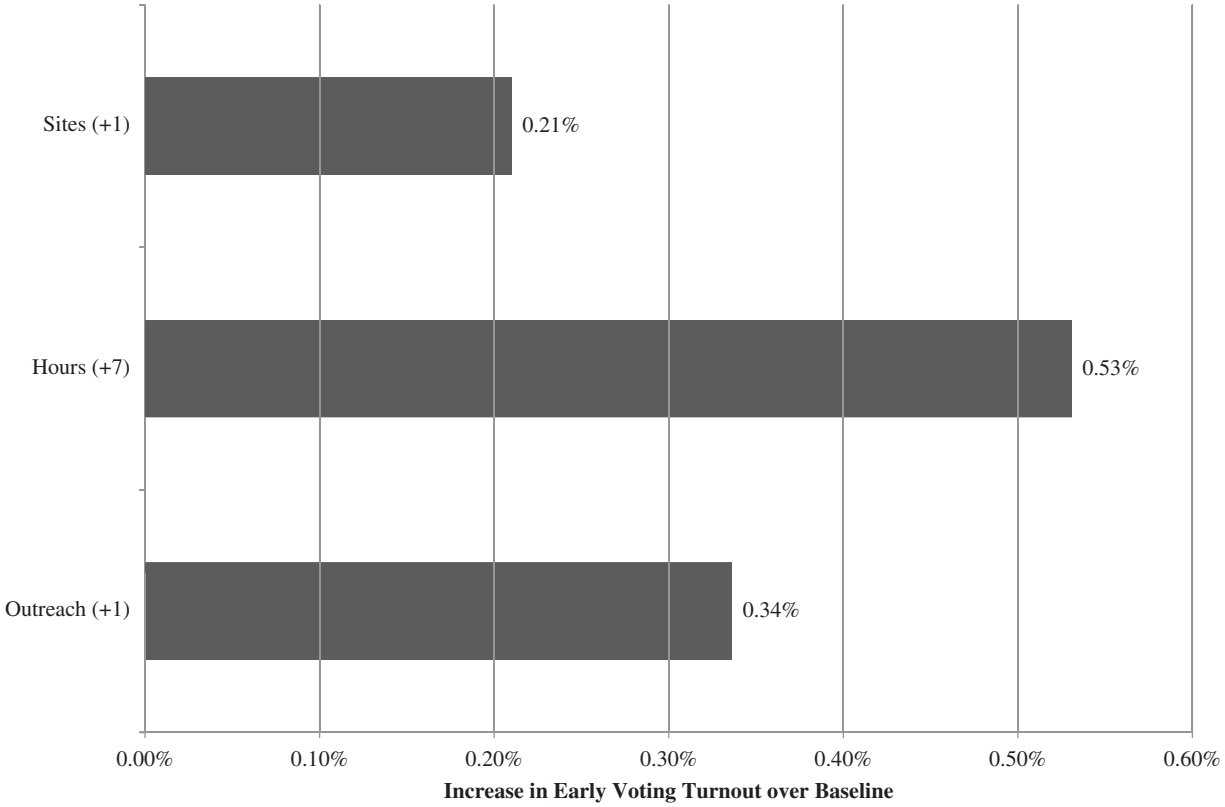

FIG. 3. Gwinnett County Early Voting Turnout.

to generalize across different types of elections, efforts on the part of county election officials to increase in-person turnout during the early voting period do appear to have had some effect in 2008. The 2008 run-off, 2010 summer primary, and 2010 general election were characterized by a notable lack of outreach and advertising regarding early in-person voting.

Early in-person voting is a relatively recent incarnation in Georgia and the state may need to consider alterations to the current statutory language and administrative implementation to find the best possible mix to maximize non-precinct turnout. Such tweaking should include changing the law to allow early voting sites in non-governmental locations, which would increase flexibility in locating sites with better geographical access. In addition, most early voting sites operating during the 2008 general election were open only during weekday business hours. Adding hours in the evening and/or on the weekend might also correlate with convenience and, in turn, increase turnout prior to the date of the election.

Our research clearly indicates that efforts by election administrators can increase early in-person turnout. In addition, making early in-person voting more convenient, in terms of location and hours, also results in higher early turnout. These findings should provide guidance to other jurisdictions contemplating a program to encourage early in-person voting. If election officials want to promote early voting, they should utilize a wide range of formats to familiarize their voting population with this option.

In closing, careful thought must be given to the number of early voting sites, their locations, and hours of operation if the goal is to get a sizable segment of the electorate to vote prior to Election Day. It is in the largest urban counties located in the Atlanta metropolitan area (Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Cobb) where the greatest possibility may exist to shift resources away from precinct voting on Election Day. Such a shift cannot be accomplished, however, without a concomitant increase in efficiency within the early voting period. If election administrators can produce efficiency gains

during the early voting period in terms of geographic accessibility and reasonable wait-times, then it may be possible to consolidate Election Day precincts or create vote centers (which could be used by any voter within a county regardless of their residence). Through careful planning and implementation it may even be possible one day to accommodate the sometimes competing goals of access and convenience with economic efficiency.

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(Appendix follows →)

APPENDIX

Table A. Mean Comparison Among Sample Counties, Counties Not in the Sample, and All Georgia Counties

	Sample	*Not in Sample*	*All Counties*
Early Voting Sites	1.5	1.5	1.5
Total Early Voting Hours	294.4	281.2	290.9
% High School Graduates	34.5	36.0	34.9
Median Household Income	$37,517	$36,116	$37,147
% Black Registration	25.5	28.9	26.4
% 65 and Older	12.5	12.5	12.5
% Early Voters	46.6	49.7	45.3
N	117	42	159