

ANALYSIS OF NOVA VOTER REGISTRATION/OUTREACH RESULTS ON VOTING IN NOV. 2014

Feb 15, 2015, Norman Robbins, NOVA Research Director, with the assistance of Nora Kancelbaum and Kate Greenfield

Background: From August to October 6, 2014, NOVA volunteers and partners at various agencies registered, filled out vote-by-mail forms, and/or obtained verbal pledges to vote from 1,288 Cuyahoga and 46 non-Cuyahoga residents. The following analysis was done on 1250 outcomes of the Cuyahoga county interactions, after excluding the non-Cuyahoga registrations and also 38 individuals whose registrations were problematic.

With the help of State Voices, the voters serviced by NOVA were matched against Cuyahoga County files to determine which of them voted on Nov. 4, 2014, and to determine the ward in which they voted.

Results:

Turnout (percentage of registered voters who actually voted):

As general background information, we calculated turnout for the City of Cleveland alone (26%), for individual Cleveland wards (16 to 44%), for non-Cleveland cities of Cuyahoga County (47%), and for the county as a whole (39%).

A single overall turnout for all NOVA interactions was not useful because some sites included subgroups with widely varying locations and turnouts. Where possible (as in the case of high schools, food pantries and elementary school parents), we combined data from similar sites in order to have a sufficient number to estimate turnout.

The results of groups in which there were at least 19 total interactions are presented in the following table. A method described in the Appendix was used to estimate the “reference” or comparison group for voters contacted by NOVA at different sites.

Table 1. Turnout at sites where more than 18 registrations were obtained (Statistically significant differences from turnout of the reference group are in underline bolded)

Site of NOVA registration (# that voted/# that NOVA contacted)	Turnout (95% confidence Interval)	Computed reference group	Reference Group Turnout
6 High Schools (5/52)	10%	City of Cleveland youths, 18-30 years old	11%
Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) (51/198)	26% (20-32)	Based on turnout of registered voters' wards	26%
Cleveland State University (CSU) (66/193)	34% (28-41)	Cuyahoga County youths, 18-30 years old	14%
Parents at 3 elementary schools (13/38)	34% (21-50)	Based on turnout of registered voters' wards	21%
Dave's super market on Payne (42/76)	55% (44-66)	Based on turnout of registered voters' wards	24%
Benefit Bank (labelled “foodbank”) (18/92)	20% (13-29)	Based on turnout of registered voters' wards	31%
23 food pantries (73/168)	43%	Wards too geographically diverse for computation of reference turnout	Likely less than 43% in the reference population
County Jail (126/361)	35%	“	Likely less than 35% in the reference population
Cleveland Heights library (12/19)	63%	“	--

At two sites (High Schools and ODJFS), turnout by NOVA-contacted individuals was similar or identical to that of the reference group, and at another site (Benefit Bank), turnout (20%) was less than that of the reference group.

At many of the other sites, turnout was higher than that of the reference group. Turnout of students at CSU (34%) was far higher than that of youths of similar ages (18-30 years old, 14% turnout) and also higher than that of the same age group in all cities of Cuyahoga County excluding Cleveland (16%). Turnout at the Cleveland Heights library was also high (63%), but the small data set and the diverse geographic location of the NOVA registrars preclude any strong conclusion.

In addition to CSU students, customers of Dave’s Supermarket showed a striking increase in turnout compared to the reference group. Turnout from food pantries may have been high but a reference group could not be derived, while Benefit bank clients appeared to turn out less than the reference group.

Effect of phone calls and vote-by-mail assistance on voter turnout

Data from 5 sites (food pantries, Dave’s market, County jail, CSU and ODJFS) provided sufficient numbers to determine whether phone calls or vote-by-mail assistance increased turnout. The statistical analysis used 2x2 contingency tables and chi-square Fischer tests of significance. None of the 5 sites showed any statistically significant effect of volunteer phone calls on voter turnout. Also, none of these groups with the notable exception of the county jail showed any effect of “vote-by-mail” on likelihood of voting vs. non-voting. As expected in the case of the county jail, the vast majority of those who voted used vote-by-mail (118 of the 129 who voted). Also, no effect of phone calls or vote-by-mail was found when all data from all sites (in which at least 18 registrations were obtained) were pooled for statistical analysis.

NOVA volunteer hours per vote cast

In order to compare the “productivity” of NOVA volunteer efforts at different registration sites, we divided the number votes cast at each site by the total number of volunteer hours spent at each site, assuming 2 hours per day per volunteer (Table 2). Data were available for 7 of the 9 sites listed in Table 1.

Table 2. NOVA Volunteer hours per vote cast

Site	NOVA Volunteer hours	Votes Cast	Votes cast per volunteer hour
ODJFS	46	51	1.11
CSU	38	66	1.72
Elem. School parents	10	13	1.30
Dave’s market	48	42	0.88
Food pantries	76	73	0.96
County Jail	42	126	3.00
Cleveland Hts. Library	12	12	1.00

At 4 sites, about one vote was cast per volunteer hour; the most productive site was the County Jail (3 votes per volunteer hour), followed by CSU and Elementary school parents (1.7 and 1.3 votes cast per volunteer hour, respectively).

Summary:

Although turnout at high schools and at ODJFS was low but comparable to control populations, turnout at other major sites where NOVA registered voters was 10 to 31 percentage points higher than for Cleveland as a whole or than the corresponding reference group. Even more pronounced was the increased turnout by CSU students registered by NOVA, from 14% in the youth reference group to 34% in the CSU group.

These data raise the question of why certain groups of voters (at Dave's supermarket or parents of elementary school students or at food pantries) turn out more than others (e.g. ODJFS), even when compared to their ward reference groups. If we can identify the cause for this disparity between locations, we might consider one or both of the following: 1. Target our registration to groups that have shown good turnout in response to NOVA's efforts; or 2. Ponder the differences between populations or our approach, in an effort to devise new methods or approaches that might increase turnout in groups with average turnout.

The higher turnout of NOVA-contacted voters, when it occurred, could be a real effect of personal interaction raising the probability of voting, or it could be simply that only self-selected interested individuals took the time to interact with NOVA volunteers. The data do not allow us to choose between these interpretations. However, even if the second of the two explanations were correct, it would still mean that NOVA activities allowed this self-selected group to register or vote by mail more than it would have without NOVA intervention.

For the most part, neither volunteer phone calls nor distribution of or assistance with vote-by-mail forms enhanced turnout in any of the larger subgroups analyzed. The one exception was the County Jail, where use of vote-by-mail forms and setting aside a time and place for completion of ballots greatly enhanced the likelihood of voting.

The sites yielding the most votes cast per volunteer hour were the county jail, CSU, and elementary school parents. The results at the County Jail are easily explained because of the maximal convenience and encouragement of voting. CSU students may have been a category of potential voter just a little too busy to register without the encouragement of volunteers. The elementary school parents were attending a school bond discussion, so the motivation for registering and voting was much greater. The lower productivity sites, such as ODFS, will need additional measures in the future to increase voter engagement.

APPENDIX: Method for estimating expected "reference" turnout in voters registered at different sites.

Turnout in the November 2014 election was calculated for Cleveland's 17 wards and for East Cleveland Ward 4 and Cleveland Heights Ward 4, from individual voter data supplied by the Cuyahoga Board of Elections. Next, for each NOVA registration site (e.g. CSU, ODJFS, etc.), the individual wards of the voters contacted (not just those who voted) was determined, so that one could calculate the fraction of voters from each ward. Only wards that contributed more than 5% of the voter data for any site were considered, and together such wards accounted for 50-73% of all the voters at any site. For instance, at Dave's supermarket, Cleveland wards 10, 5, 6, 7, and 9 contributed .06, .13, .05, .25 and .12, respectively of all the voters contacted by NOVA volunteers, or a total of 0.61 of the total number of voters. In the final calculation, these fractions (.06, .13, etc.) were corrected by $1/0.61$ as if these 5 Wards represented 100% of the contacted voters, and the resulting fraction times the turnout of each ward, summed for all 5 wards, was taken as the estimated "reference" turnout for the given site (Dave's supermarket, in this example).

These calculations required three major assumptions: 1) that for each ward, individual precinct differences in turnout within a ward could be disregarded; 2) that the incomplete sample of wards (representing 50-73% of the voters at any site) still provided a reasonable estimate of turnout in the entire group, even though it did not take into account small numbers of voters from a wide variety of other wards not included in the calculation (because they were less than 5% of the voters' wards); and 3) that other demographics within a ward, e.g. race or age, could be disregarded in calculating the "expected" turnout of the reference group. Given these major assumptions, only very big differences between actual turnout and "reference group" turnout can be considered significant.

