

Analysis of NOVA (Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates) voter results in the 2018 Cuyahoga County General Election. Including: Voter turnout (registration vs. vote-by-mail) and demographic differences; improving quality control; vote-at-jail; and outcome of GOTV effort. Version Sept. 10, 2019

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INDEX:

Introduction.....p.1
Overall conclusions and recommendations.....p.2
Summary of results.....p.3
Methods.....P.4
Detailed results.....P.6
Appendix:
Review of literature on VBM and low-income voting.....p.16
Further planned studies.....p.17

INTRODUCTION

In the run-up to the November 2018 General Election, NOVA built on the results of its activities in 2016¹ and 2017² in an effort to improve voter turnout (percent of registered voters who voted), especially in its major target population of under-represented voters. These included college students, low-income Cuyahoga County residents, and detainees of Cuyahoga County jails although for purposes of comparison, it also included voters from mixed-income populations. Because of the difference in demographics, the results from each of these groups are treated separately.

NOVA’s research and analyses were designed to answer several practical questions:

- As seen at times in previous elections, did voter registration (VR) alone, with its personal contact, increase turnout compared to that of the precincts where NOVA voters lived?
- Did Vote-by-Mail (VBM), which NOVA volunteers strongly encouraged in 2018, increase turnout, and was the turnout with VBM greater than with VR alone? (See Appendix for background)
- Did age-matched comparisons of NOVA voter turnout to the turnout of voters’ precincts uncover different outcomes?
- Was NOVA able to decrease the percentage of low-income VBM applications rejected (mostly due to non-updated home address) observed in 2017?

¹ <https://nova-ohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/LESSONS-LEARNED-FROM-NOVA-VOLUNTEER-EFFORTS-2016.pdf>

² <https://nova-ohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NOVA-TURNOUT-ANALYSIS-REPORT-2017.pdf>

- Did an intensive GOTV text and telephoning effort in 2018 produce increased turnout?
- Was voter turnout of detainees in county jails affected by the Board of Elections date of delivery of ballots?
- Did increased turnout by NOVA VR or VBM represent only the selection of voters with higher propensity to vote, rather than a direct effect on voting behavior? (Results on this and the previous question are deferred pending further analysis -- see Appendix)

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In low-income populations, voter registration (VR) alone by NOVA volunteers increased (age-matched) turnout by 9 percentage points, whereas vote-by-mail (VBM) with or without registration, produced an increase of 22 percentage points. The 9 percentage point increase in turnout is similar to that obtained by other non-profits³. Therefore, at a minimum, while it is well worth the effort expanding volunteer VR in future elections, VBM should be the first choice offered. Based on our findings, somewhat older populations will be more amenable to the greater convenience of VBM. In addition, routinely looking up the registration status of all voters applying for VBM or making every VBM application include a VR (even if it is redundant) was found to greatly reduce rejections of VBM applications from low-income voters because of prior flawed registration status. Since phone conversations with low-income voters appears to have increased turnout of VR but not VBM voters, at least phone outreach to VR voters would be worthwhile in future elections.

In mixed income populations, volunteer VR increased overall turnout by 22 percent and VBM by 23 percent, but at some registration locations, VBM turnout exceeded that from VR. In this population, the rates of VBM rejection in previous years had been low. Therefore, voter lookup or additional VR with each VBM application is necessary only if voters say they have not registered or have moved without updating their registration. Phone calls to mixed-income VR voters actually had a small negative effect, compared to left messages, so continuing this practice may not be advisable.

In collegiate student populations, turnout of NOVA VR and VBM voters was 12-17 percentage points higher than a comparable suburban youth population. However, in the contested election of 2018, VBM provided no greater student turnout than VR, in contrast to producing greater turnout in the less contested 2017 election. Hence, it may be important to offer VBM to college students in 2019 whereas simple voter registration may suffice in 2020.

In County jails, the turnout of voters who had submitted vote-at-jail applications and who also received ballots was 79% (compared to 49% turnout of their comparable home-precincts) -- a very striking outcome. However, about 45% of vote-at-jail applicants never received ballots from the BOE, most likely because the voter status had changed (e.g. out on bail, or conviction for felony) in the 3 weeks between application and delivery of ballots. The BOE could substantially further increase this productive use of Vote-at-Jail ballots by supplying ballots close to the date of receipt of applications, treating the received ballots as provisional until after the election in order to eliminate ineligible ballots from inmates convicted of felony in the interval between application and election day.

³ nonprofitvote.org/engaging-new-voters

SUMMARY

Voter population and method of analysis

In the run-up to the November 2018 General Election, NOVA volunteers obtained and we were able to track 2171 vote-by-mail (VBM) applications with or without voter registrations, and also 1312 Voter Registrations (VRs) only. Over half of these were obtained at “low-income sites” such as food banks, ODJFS, and MetroHealth. The remainder were from “mixed-income sites” such as suburban libraries or grocery stores, from college students mainly at Cleveland State University, or from county jail detainees awaiting trial. At low and mixed income sites, voter turnout (% VRs or VBMs who voted) of NOVA-contacted individuals was compared to that of age-matched turnout of precincts where the voters lived, and all comparative differences were statistically significant unless stated otherwise.

Low-income voters:

Summing results from all the different low income locations, and with age adjustment of the reference precincts, **NOVA VR increased turnout by 9 percentage points above the 44% precinct turnout, while NOVA VBM (with or without registration) increased turnout by 16 percentage points. At all locations, turnout of NOVA VBM clients was significantly greater than that of NOVA VR clients.**

Without age adjustment, 3 of the 4 low-income groups with VR only showed no increase in turnout compared to their precincts, whereas VBM turnout was still significantly greater.

Mixed-income voters:

Summing results from all mixed-income locations, and with age adjustment, **NOVA VR increased turnout by 22 percentage points (from 47% turnout to 69%) , while NOVA VBM (with or without registration) increased turnout by 23 percentage points (from 57% to 80%).**

Without age adjustment of the precinct reference groups, VR alone increased turnout by 15-19 percentage points, and VBM increased turnout by 25-28 percentage points, and significantly greater than VR only.

Age differences in NOVA voters who chose VBM:

At all but one location, **the mean age of the VR-only voters was lower than that of VBM voters by at least 8-10 years.** This may indicate that the convenience of VBM voting appeals more to older than younger voters. In addition, the age-adjusted turnout results show that even in comparison to their age-peers, the opportunity of voting by mail offered by chance meetings with NOVA volunteers increases the likelihood of voting.

Reducing rejections of applications for VBM compared to the past:

In 2017, NOVA found that 15% to 21% of VBM applications were rejected by the BOE in low income registration locations. To reduce the number of rejections, NOVA volunteers either looked up voters' registration status and where necessary issued new registrations or routinely registered or re-registered all VBM clients. Probably as a result, **the rejection rate in 2018 for VBM applications from low-income clients fell to about 10%.** In mixed income locations, the rejection rate was already <1% in 2017, and 2-5% in 2018. However, at CSU the rejection rate was 10% (as it also was in 2017), so that a protocol similar to that of low-income voters may be called for in the future.

College voters (mostly Cleveland State U.):

Turnout in this group was 57% for VR only and 62% for VBM, and the difference between VR and VBM was not significant. The comparable numbers for 2017 were 18% VR turnout and 35% VBM (with and without VR), which were significantly different, perhaps because of the low level of interest in an off-year. In this group, the diversity of student domiciles (home vs. Cleveland neighborhoods) made it unsuitable for precinct comparisons. Therefore, turnout of 18-28 year old voters in the 5 wealthiest suburban cities of Cuyahoga County was used for comparison (assuming most of these voters would be in college, graduate school or in early career). **NOVA collegiate VR and VBM voter turnout significantly exceeded that of the suburban group by 12 and 17 percentage points, respectively.**

Voting at county jails:

The largest and only statistically valid results at county jails were those from 267 inmates who filed applications for vote-at-jail ballots during the first week of October. Unfortunately, the ballots were not delivered by the BOE until just before election day, and by that time 120 (45%) ballots were never received by inmates for apparently a wide variety of reasons (e.g. they had been released in the interim or may have been convicted and incarcerated) which require further investigation. **Turnout of those that did receive vote-at-jail ballots was 79%, which was much greater than that of reference precincts.** The BOE procedures should be changed so that ballots are delivered at the earliest possible time after receipt of approved applications. Concern that some of these ballots might be completed and returned by people convicted of felony and serving a sentence before election day could be addressed by treating all inmate ballots as “provisional” in the sense that they would all be reviewed before final acceptance to reject those no longer eligible on election day

GOTV: NOVA encouraged voters by making two to three rounds of phone calls (to VR and VBM clients, respectively), sending text messages to voters who had a likely cell phone number found in the database service NGP VAN Inc., and sending postcards to those where phone numbers were not available or were non-functional. Since NOVA had decided not to do randomized control studies, the only tests of efficacy of GOTV were comparisons of turnout of voters who conversed with NOVA volunteers vs. those who only were left a message. There were conflicting outcomes of phone calls to VR voters: in low-income voters, conversation was associated with significantly higher turnout than that of clients only left a message, but the opposite result was found in mixed-income VR voters. With VBM clients, the differences between conversation and message were not significant. One hypothetical explanation is that the process of VBM itself, e.g. receiving a ballot in the mail with instructions on how to submit, had already maximized the number of voters who might turn out, whereas personally delivered information on how and where to vote in person was important for low-income voters, but perhaps even a nuisance for mixed-income voters.

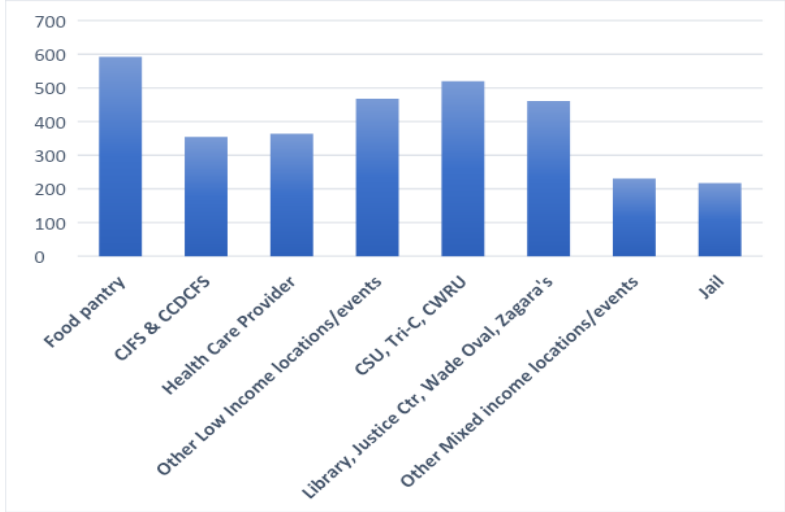
METHODS

In the fall of 2018, NOVA volunteers assisted a total of 4,004 Northeast Ohio residents with either registration (VR), registration and sign up for vote by mail (VBM), or for some residents already registered, with signing up for VBM only. Several rounds of exclusions were applied for this analysis to arrive at a population for whom voter turnout data was available, valid, and reflected a successful application. A total of 755 were initially excluded because they lived outside of Cuyahoga County, their

data could not be found in the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections (BOE) voter file, or they requested VBM and could not be found in the BOE absentee file (presumably because their applications for VBM had been rejected). An additional 42 were excluded from our analysis because they were obtained at miscellaneous locations that did not fit in with the major location categories on which our analyses were based (see next paragraph). Unless otherwise noted, graphs and material presented in this report referring to turnout levels will refer to the remaining 3,207 Cuyahoga residents who were assisted by NOVA volunteers, which collectively will be referred to as “NOVA-assisted voters”. The data will be presented separately for vote by mail voters (VBM) (both those who also registered with NOVA and those who were already registered), and for the remaining group who were registered by NOVA but did not sign up for VBM (VR-only). Unless otherwise noted, VBM voters who did not receive a ballot in the mail, per the Board of Elections DIMS file, were excluded from turnout analyses. Also, in setting up for GOTV telephone calls, the VAN system⁴ was helpful.

Major locations where NOVA volunteers contacted Cleveland area residents included food pantries; Cuyahoga Job and Family Services center (CJFS) and Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS); low-income health care providers such as Metro Hospital lobby; other low income locations/events, such as open-house events for parents at Cleveland Schools, festivals, and low-income housing developments; academic locations (Cleveland State University or CSU, Tri-C Community College locations, and Case Western Reserve University or CWRU); mixed income locations such as Cleveland and Cleveland Heights Libraries, Wade Oval festivals, the Justice Center, and Zagara’s grocery store; other mixed-income locations/events such as festivals and churches; and Cuyahoga County, Bedford, and Euclid Jails. These locations were divided into 8 categories for analysis purposes, each having at least 200 NOVA-assisted voters (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of Voters Assisted according to NOVA Location Category



We further combined four low-income categories (Food pantries, health care providers, CJFS and CCDCFS, and other low income locations/events) and two mixed-income location categories (Library,

⁴VAN (Voter Activation Network) is an integrated platform for voter engagement which includes a database of registered voters in Ohio. Access to the VAN system was provided to NOVA by Ohio Voice (www.ohvoice.org).

Justice Center, Wade Oval, Zagara's; and other mixed income locations/events), in order to provide overall turnout results for our target population of residents in low-income neighborhoods, as well as the other residents we served in locations where incomes were mixed. We did not include the Jail locations or the academic locations in our overall turnout analyses, but rather we treated them as special cases and included separate sections in this report for these groups.

We obtained the voter registration file from the BOE by downloading it from the County website on December 4, 2018. This file included the final voter turnout data for the November 2018 election. NOVA data was matched to the BOE data by using the voter's name, year of birth, and address. We calculated the percent of NOVA assisted voters who voted (turnout) according to the two categories, VBM and VR-only. We also calculated turnout for a comparison population of all voters living in the same precincts as the two groups, weighted according to the precinct make-up of the NOVA groups (precinct comparison).

Younger voters have lower turnout rates than older voters (e.g. see Fig.2, footnote 1), so it's important that our comparison population is similar in age to our NOVA-assisted voters. In order to account for the possibility that the age-makeup of the NOVA-assisted voter groups was different than the precinct comparison groups, we created a second set of precinct comparison groups that were weighted according to the precinct AND age make-up of the NOVA groups (precinct-age comparison). To achieve this age adjustments, both the NOVA-assisted voter groups and the full population of registered voters in Cuyahoga county were grouped by precinct and age based on year of birth vs. 2018: 18-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, and 80+. For each age category within each precinct, turnout rates were calculated. Then the weighted average of these turnout rates was calculated based on the number of NOVA-assisted voters from each age-precinct combination to serve as the precinct-age comparison. The age adjustment seeks to correct for any differences between comparison groups that might be due to age differences and age-related propensity to vote.

We performed statistical assessments using the exact binomial test for each NOVA group. This tests the null hypothesis that the observed turnout among NOVA assisted voters was equal to the precinct comparison turnout and identified differences between NOVA voters and their precinct comparisons in each location category. We also performed two-sample tests of proportions to identify differences between NOVA VBM and VR-only groups in each location category. We indicated statistical significance at an alpha level of 0.05 and results are presented without p-value adjustment for multiple comparisons (all p-values available upon request).

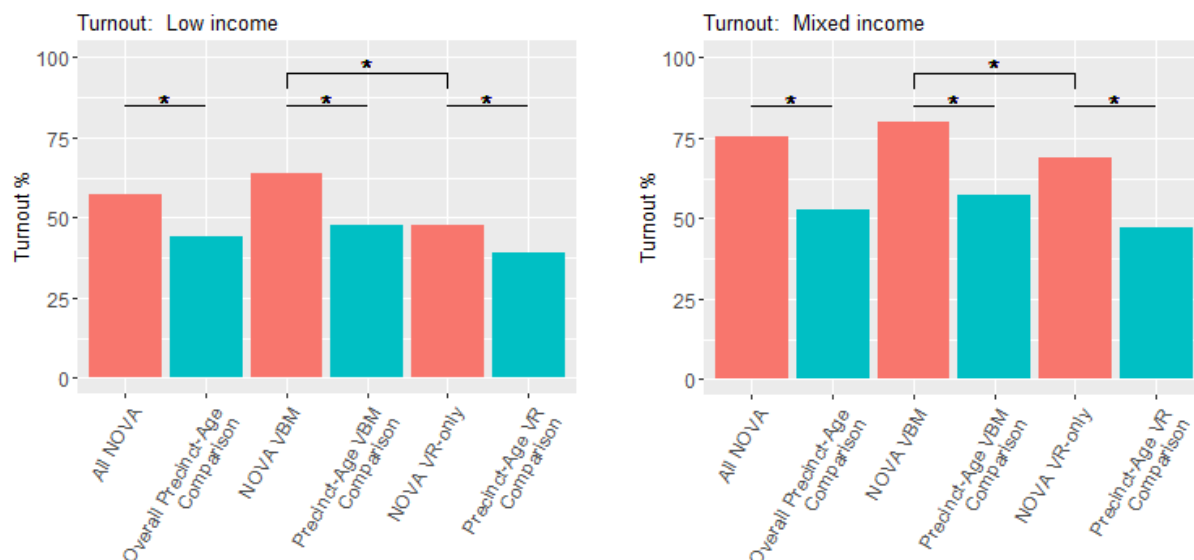
DETAILED RESULTS

Turnout

In past NOVA research reports, we generally presented turnout results using only precinct comparison groups (not allowing for age differences). However, in our current analysis we found that the results based on the precinct comparison groups differed somewhat from the results based on the precinct-age comparison groups, especially for locations where we might expect the NOVA-assisted voters to have a slightly different age makeup than their precinct neighbors (for example we expect that CJFS and CCDCFS tend to have slightly younger clients than the general population in their precincts). For this reason, we will describe the results using the precinct-age comparisons, but we included the precinct comparison results in the tables to be consistent with past reports.

Overall, the NOVA-assisted voter turnout exceeded the precinct-age comparison, whether VBM or VR-only, both in the combined four low-income categories and in the combined two mixed-income locations. For the combined low-income categories, the NOVA-assisted voters had 57% turnout vs. 44% among the precinct-age comparison. For the combined mixed-income categories, NOVA-assisted voters had 75% turnout, compared to 53% turnout among the precinct-age comparison. These statistically significant differences held when the VBM or VR-only groups in both income categories were separately compared to their precinct-age comparisons (see Figure 2). The voter turnout in the precinct-age comparison groups (44% for low-income and 53% for mixed income) illustrates the lower turnout in low-income areas in general.

Figure 2: 2018 Voter Turnout at low-income and mixed income locations, overall (combined VR and VBM) and among VBM and VR-only groups separately, with precinct-age weighted comparison.
 * indicates statistically significant difference.



The benefits of VBM were evident when comparing turnout among the NOVA VBM group to the NOVA VR-only group in both income categories (low-income: VBM-64%, VR-only-48%; mixed-income: VBM-80%, VR-only-48%), with the VBM effect being greater among low-income voters (see Figure 2). As with the precinct comparisons, these differences were statistically significant.

Within the 6 specific location categories, the VR-only voters at all registration locations showed significant increases in turnout compared to their precinct-age comparison groups (see Figures 3 and 4 and Table 1). VR-only voters who registered at food pantries, low income health care providers, and other low-income locations/events all showed an increase of around 9 percentage points over their precinct-age comparisons. VR-only voters who registered at CJFS and CCDCFS had a slightly smaller increase of 5.6 percentage points. VR-only voters at both mixed-income locations had significant increases in turnout of over 20 percentage points compared to the precinct-age comparison.

Figure 3: 2018 Voter Turnout at low-income locations among VBM and VR-only groups, with precinct-age weighted comparison. * indicates statistically significant difference.

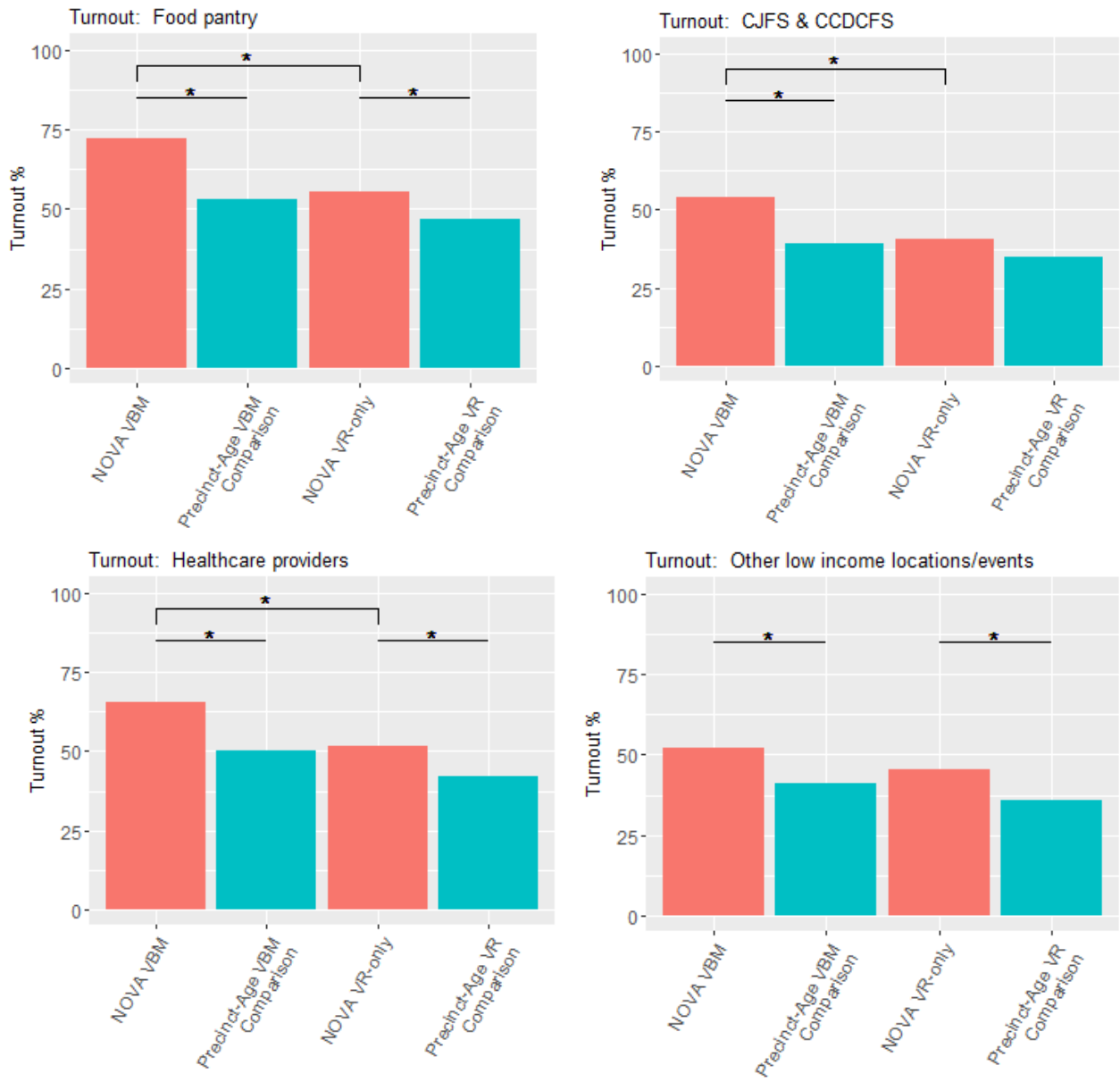


Figure 4: 2018 Voter Turnout at mixed income locations among VBM and VR-only groups, with precinct-age weighted comparison. * indicates statistically significant difference.

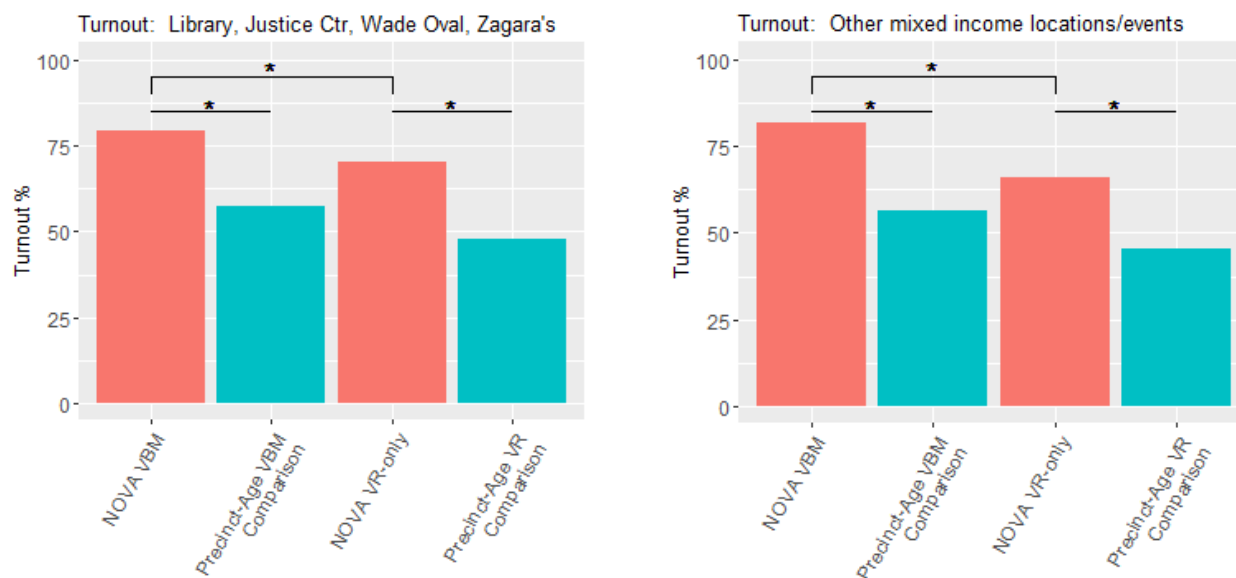


Table 1: 2018 Voter Turnout at major locations among VR-only and VBM groups, with precinct and precinct-age matched results for comparison.

Group	Total #	voted	NOVA turnout %	precinct turnout for comparison	precinct age-matched turnout for comparison
VR Only					
Low Income: Food Pantry	170	94	55.3	44.1*	46.9*
Low Income: CJFS and CCDCFS	175	71	40.6	41.0	35.0*
Low Income: Health Care Providers	110	57	51.8	44.0	42.2*
Low Income: Other Low-Income Locations/Events	267	121	45.3	43.6	35.8*
Mixed Income: Library, Justice Ctr, Wade Oval, Zagara's	185	130	70.3	51.0*	47.8*
Mixed Income: Other Mixed Income Locations/Events	106	70	66.0	51.4*	45.4*

VBM						
Group	Total #	voted	NOVA turnout %	precinct turnout for comparison	precinct age-matched turnout for comparison	NOVA VBM vs. VR-only
Low Income: Food Pantry	422	304	72.0	43.2*	52.9*	**
Low Income: CJFS and CCDCFS	179	97	54.2	43.9*	39.4*	**
Low Income: Health Care Providers	254	167	65.7	46.2*	50.2*	**
Low Income: Other Low-Income Locations/Events	201	105	52.2	41.4*	41.2*	
Mixed Income: Library, Justice Ctr, Wade Oval, Zagara's	276	219	79.3	54.6*	57.5*	**
Mixed Income: Other Mixed Income Locations/Events	125	102	81.6	53.3*	56.2*	**

*Statistically significant difference between the NOVA-assisted voters and the comparison group.

**Statistically significant difference between the NOVA VBM group and NOVA VR-only group.

Turnout of VBM voters from all location categories was significantly greater than that of their precinct-age comparison groups (Table 1, VBM). At low-income locations, this increase in turnout ranged from 11 to 19 percentage points, with the greatest difference at Food Pantries and the smallest at “other low income locations”. Among the mixed-income locations the increases ranged from 22 to 25 percentage points.

Comparing the NOVA VBM group to the NOVA VR-only group among each location category, all of the low-income categories except the “other” group had at least a 13 percentage point significant increase in turnout among the VBM group compared to the VR-only group. Both mixed income categories also had significant increases in turnout among the VBM group (see NOVA VBM vs. VR-only column in Table 1). These age-adjusted turnout results show that even in comparison to their age-peers, the opportunity of voting by mail offered by chance meetings with NOVA volunteers increases the likelihood of voting.

The results changed slightly when we did not adjust for age differences between the NOVA voters and the precinct comparison (see Precinct turnout comparison column in Table 1). The non-age adjusted VR-only differences for all low income locations were smaller and not statistically significant, except at Food Pantries. On the other hand, the non-age adjusted differences for VBM voters were smaller but still significant at CJFS and CCDCFS, and remained the same or increased at the other low-income locations, compared to the age-adjusted differences. These differences suggest that the age makeup of VR-only and VBM voters differed at some locations.

Table 2: Mean Age of 2018 NOVA-Assisted Voters, according to Registration Location and Voting Method

Group	VR-Only Mean Age	VBM Mean Age	Difference (VBM minus VR-only)
Low Income: Food Pantry	50.5	59.4	8.9*
Low Income: CJFS and CCDCFS	38.6	41.1	2.5
Low Income: Health Care Providers	43.4	51.8	8.4*
Low Income: Other Low-Income Locations/Events	36.2	46.3	10.1*
Mixed Income: Library, Justice Ctr, Wade Oval, Zagara's	41.0	49.8	8.8*
Mixed Income: Other Mixed Income Locations/Events	37.9	55.5	17.6*

*Statistically significant difference between VR-only and VBM mean age.

At every location (with the exception of CJFS/CCDCFS), the mean age of the VR-only voters was lower than that of VBM voters by at least 8-10 years (Table 2). This may indicate that the convenience of VBM voting appeals more to older than younger voters.

Rejected VBM Applications

In 2017, NOVA found that 15% to 21% of VBM applications were rejected by the BOE in low income registration locations. The reasons for rejection were either that the person was not registered, or that they were registered at a different address than the one given on the VBM application. For this reason, in 2018 NOVA instructed its volunteer registrars to look up the VBM applicant's registration on the County BOE website to determine whether their registration needed to be updated, or if that were not possible, to re-register the voter along with the VBM application, regardless of the voter's belief about their registration status. Most but not all volunteers were able to carry out this new procedure.

These efforts seemed to be somewhat successful in most low-income locations. Compared to results in 2017, VBM rejection rates for most low-income locations declined markedly (Table 3), whereas at mixed income locations, the already low rejection rate found in 2017 was more or less unchanged. At collegiate locations, the somewhat higher rejection rate, probably related to change-of-address issues in highly mobile youth, was unchanged from 2017.

Table 3: VBM Rejection Rates

Registration location	# of VBM applications	# Rejected	% Rejected in 2018	% Rejected in 2017
Low Income: CJFS and CCDCFS	199	20	10.1	21
Low Income: Food pantry	453	31	6.8	All other low income locations: combined 15
Low Income: Health Care Providers	279	25	9.0	
Low Income: Other Low Income locations/events	238	37	15.5	
			combined 9.6	
Mixed Income: Library, Justice Ctr, Wade Oval, Zagara's	290	14	4.8	All mixed income locations: <1%
Mixed Income: Other mixed income locations/events	127	2	1.6	
CSU, Tri-C, CWRU	300	31	10.3	13

Turnout at Jail Locations

Inmates of the Cuyahoga County, Euclid, and Bedford Jails who were not currently serving a felony sentence of incarceration were registered and/or signed up for VBM by NOVA volunteers. Most of this group applied for Vote-at-Jail ballots (VAJ). These ballots were delivered by the Board of Elections to the jail prior to the election, and if the person was still incarcerated and had not received a felony conviction at the time of the Board officials' visit to the jail, they could complete the ballot.

Table 4. Results of NOVA program at county jails (Cuyahoga Residents only). N/A, numbers of voters too small for evaluation.

Type of ballot , NOVA registration	# requested or registered	# received at the jail or at home	# not received at the jail nor at home	# who voted	turnout of those who received ballots in jail	turnout of precinct comparison (age adjusted)
Vote-at-jail	267	145 at jail 2 at home	120	115 at jail 1 at home	79%	34%
Vote by Mail	40	34	6	2	N/A	N/A
Voter Registration only	36	1 at home 2 at jail	N/A	4	N/A	N/A

In 2018, NOVA assisted 365 voters at 3 jails (most from the Cuyahoga County Jail), of whom 343 were residents of Cuyahoga County and who could be found in the December BOE voter file. 145 (54%) of those requesting a Vote-at-Jail ballot received a ballot in jail, while 120 (45%) did not. Turnout of the NOVA VAJ applicants who did receive ballots was 79%, compared to 34% age-adjusted precinct turnout.

In order to understand why there was such a high rate of non-returned ballots, we used DIMS file data to determine that VAJ ballots were not delivered by the BOE until the first week in November, even though all NOVA voter registrations and VAJ applications were collected by October 3 and were entered on the BOE database by October 9. The case findings on a sample of 20 of these instances of non-delivery of ballots were individually reviewed, and in at least 2 cases, the inmates had left jail on bail, and 6 were still apparently in jail, awaiting trial. The status of the remaining 12 required further investigation. Further analyses of all 120 undelivered ballots will be necessary (see Appendix), but it would be helpful if the BOE could deliver the ballots within a few days after receiving applications, rather than waiting until the week before election day (See Conclusions and Recommendations).

Although only small numbers of jail voters chose VBM or VR, the turnout in these groups appeared to be low compared to the 79% turnout of successfully delivered VAJ ballots (Table 4).

Collegiate voters (mostly Cleveland State U. but including Cuyahoga Community College and CWRU): Turnout in this group was 57% for VR only and 62% for VBM, the two results being statistically the same. Also, the diversity of student domiciles (home vs. Cleveland neighborhoods) made it unsuitable for precinct comparisons. Instead, the 2018 voting record of 18-28 year olds in the 5 wealthiest suburbs in Cuyahoga County⁵ was taken as the reference population, assuming that most of these individuals would be in college or in early careers or be equivalent to graduate students at CSU. Turnout of the collegiate group with VR or VBM was greater than that of the suburban group by 12 or 17 percentage points, respectively (Table 5).

Table 5. Turnout of collegiate groups (mostly Cleveland State U., but some from Cuyahoga Community College and Case Western Reserve University)

Group	Total #	voted	NOVA turnout %
VR	251	142	56.6*
VBM	269	167	62.1*
18-28 year old suburban	1658	744	44.9

*Significantly different from 18-28 year old wealthiest suburban group (p<0.001)

Analysis of Get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign

NOVA encouraged voters by making two to three rounds of phone calls, sending text messages, and sending postcards. Three rounds of phone calls were made to those who completed a VBM application

⁵ Hunting Valley, Gates Mills, Bratenahl, Bentleyville, Moreland Hills, and Pepper Pike

and provided a phone number and two rounds of phone calls were made to those who completed a VR application and provided a phone number. Phone calls to those completing VBM helped answer any questions a person may have. These calls took place on October 16-17th, 2018 (Round 1 VBM); Oct. 23-24th, 2018 (Round 2 VBM); and Oct. 30th, 2018 (Round 3 VBM). Phone calls to those doing VR were to remind them the election is around the corner and to help with any questions a person may have. These calls took place on Nov 1st, 2018 (Round 1 VR) and Nov 3rd, 2018 (Round 2 VR). All together, phone calls were made to 2,188 unique individuals.

The six codes the NOVA board and volunteers recorded were “cnv” (had conversation), “lm” (left a message on the answering machine/voicemail), “nh” (voter not home, did not answer), “dnc” (voter refused to talk and/or asked to “do not contact” in the future), “wn” (wrong number, phone disconnected), “bl” (no call was made, because the person already voted or we found their phone is disconnected in a previous round of phone calls).

In the following analysis of GOTV phone calls, people were grouped as “Had conversation” box if they conversed with a NOVA volunteer in at least one round of phone calls. If a voter had been left a message (i.e., a voicemail) but had no conversation in any of the 3 rounds, the voter was grouped as “Left message”. Other codes were infrequent, and might imply voter problems (e.g. phone disconnected), and therefore were not analyzed.

People who voted prior to the first phone call from NOVA were not included in the analysis. This includes VBM records before October 16th, 2018 and VR records before November 1st, 2018. Text messages provided another conduit for encouraging people to vote. Text messages were sent to 1,457 unique individuals.

Postcards were sent to people who did not provide a phone number. They were also sent to people who completed VBM who had a code of ‘wn’ (i.e., “wrong number”) after attempting to call them on 10/24/18. These were sent on three dates in October 2018 (Oct 22, 24, and 31). People were not included in the following analysis if they voted prior to NOVA sending the postcard. Postcards were sent to 914 unique individuals

Table 6. Turnout of clients Nova clients (GOTV phone calls vs Weighted BOE).

Type	Location	GOTV	N in group	# NOVA Voted	% NOVA Voted	% Weighted BOE Voted	Significance Levels
							NOVA Had Conversation vs NOVA Left Message
VR	Low-income sites	Had conversation	228	122	54%	41% *	***
		Left message	162	74	46%	39% ns	
	Mixed-income sites	Had conversation	82	50	61%	49% *	***
		Left message	75	55	73%	46% *	
VBM	Low-income sites	Had conversation	370	205	55%	48%*	ns
		Left message	207	119	58%	48%*	
	Mixed-income sites	Had conversation	111	79	71%	55%*	ns
		Left message	90	63	70%	58%*	

*Statistically significant difference between the NOVA-assisted voters and the comparison group. “ns” not significant.

***Statistically significant difference between the NOVA VBM group with conversation compared to NOVA VBM group that was left a message. “ns” not significant.

Table 6 presents the results of NOVA’s GOTV efforts through phone calls. The data is divided by the type of application (VR only or VBM) and by income groups of NOVA clients.

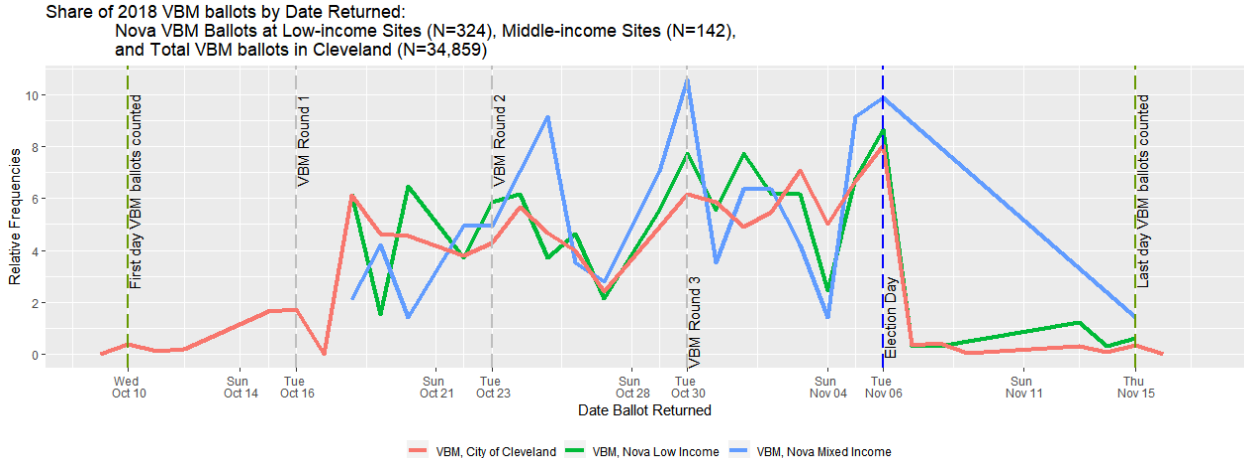
The first three numeric columns show the number of records in each group along with the count and percentage of NOVA clients who voted. The next two columns use a weighted average from the Board of Elections’ Registration file to show the count and percentage of those who voted. As explained in detail in the Methods section, the weighted average consists of a voter’s precinct and age group, and allows for comparisons to be made against the NOVA population.

Binomial tests were used to evaluate significance. As expected from the turnout analysis described earlier in this report (e.g. Figure 2), NOVA VR & VBM voter turnout exceeded that of the age-weighted voter precincts. However, there were conflicting outcomes of phone calls to VR voters: in low-income voters, conversation was associated with significantly higher turnout than voice messages, but the

opposite result was found in mixed-income VR voters. The differences between conversation and message only were not significant when evaluating turnout of VBM clients.

A graphic presentation (Fig. 5) was developed to see if there were bursts of daily submissions to the Board of Election 3-4 days after each round of phone calls. NOVA low-income and mixed-income voter data were compared to that of the entire city of Cleveland voters which served as a surrogate for a low-income population which had mostly not received phone calls. The data for each group (low-income, mixed-income and city of Cleveland) in Figure 5 are expressed as percent of all ballots received. As expected, the NOVA data, based on only 124 or 324 ballots, show more deviations than the Cleveland data based on 34,859 ballots. Taking this into account, there were no obvious bursts of NOVA ballot submissions 2-4 days after each round of phone calls, nor major differences in the submission pattern of NOVA low-income voters vs. Cleveland-wide voters. The mixed-income pattern also showed no obvious effect of NOVA phone calls.

Figure 5. Daily VBM ballot submissions to the Board of Elections (each day expressed as percent of total submissions)



APPENDIX

Review of literature on VBM and low-income voter turnout

Earlier studies have addressed effects of VBM in statewide elections in other states, but there has been limited focus on the role of VBM for increasing turnout in inner city populations. Southwell analyzed effect of mandatory VBM in 44 elections in Oregon vs earlier elections conducted at polls, and concluded that VBM increased turnout as much as 7% in special elections, but had much smaller or no effect in major elections such as presidential election years (Southwell, Social Science Journal 46:211-217, 2009). Other studies have reported that VMB increases turnout primarily among more affluent and likely voters, rather than bringing previous non-voters into the turnout pool (Karp & Banducci, Political Behavior 22:223-239, 2000). One difficulty with establishing the effects of VBM on general turnout is that most studies have been performed with aggregated data collected in Oregon or other locations that switched from polling place based voting to mandatory VBM, with comparisons therefore performed between different elections before and after the switch in voting method. This approach makes it

difficult to control for election-to-election differences in which voter subpopulations were motivated to turn out due to varying issues on ballots or feelings about specific candidates.

To our knowledge the studies conducted by NOVA in the greater Cleveland area to understand the impact of VBM are unique in combining (1) internal control comparisons to quantify the impact of encouraging use of VBM, and (2) a focus on underserved inner city populations where socioeconomic issues are known complications of voting at polling places. Studies described in this report provide strong evidence that VBM increases turnout across high and low socioeconomic brackets, and across all age groups of voters.

Potential additional studies

- Question: are NOVA turnout results in part due to self-selection of voters with higher propensity to vote, based on their past history and demographics? Analysis: Compare voter propensity using VAN, of NOVA-assisted voters, including VR vs. VBM comparisons
- Question: Would earlier delivery of Vote-at-jail ballots to inmates have led to higher number of inmates successfully voting? Analysis: Complete review of requested and undelivered/unreceived vote-at-jail ballots at the Cuyahoga county jail, detailing counts of people eligible in jail, eligible and released from jail, and ineligible at the time of ballot delivery
- Question: are there gender differences in VR and VBM turnout in low-income residents?
- Question: Is some of increased NOVA VR turnout due to registering or updating registration in the same year as the general election? Analysis: Age-adjusted comparison of NOVA VR voters with non-NOVA voters from the same precinct who either newly registered or updated their registration in the same election year (2018).