

**SUMMARY: NOVA (Northeast Ohio Voter Advocates) voter results in the 2018 Cuyahoga County General Election.** Oct. 2, 2019 (See detailed 2018 election analysis at [NOVA-Ohio.org/research](http://NOVA-Ohio.org/research))

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## INTRODUCTION

In the run-up to the November 2018 General Election, NOVA built on the results from 2016 and 2017 in an effort to improve voter turnout (percent of registered voters who voted), especially in its major target population of under-represented voters. Of the 4004 voters contacted (some from other counties), 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. The turnout of NOVA-contacted voters (adjusted for known age effects on voting) was compared to that of the weighted home precincts of the NOVA voters. Also turnout of voters receiving only voter registration was compared to that of voters who NOVA helped to apply for VBM (with or without registration). All the differences described below were statistically significant. See Figure 1.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**In low-income populations, simple voter registration (VR) 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 with registration alone is similar to that obtained by other non-profits<sup>1</sup>. 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) reduced rejections of VBM applications from low-income voters by about 50%.** Also, since phone conversations with low-income voters (compared to leaving a message) appears to have increased turnout of VR but not VBM voters, phone outreach to low-income VR voters would be worthwhile in future elections. In addition, perhaps because of the small numbers involved, we saw no “burst” of VBM ballot submissions in the days following NOVA’s phone calls.

**In mixed income populations, volunteer VR increased overall turnout by 22 percent and VBM by 23 percent.** Also, 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. Finally, phone conversations with mixed-income VR or VBM voters did not improve turnout compared to those who were left a message, so there is no evidence that phone calls made a difference.

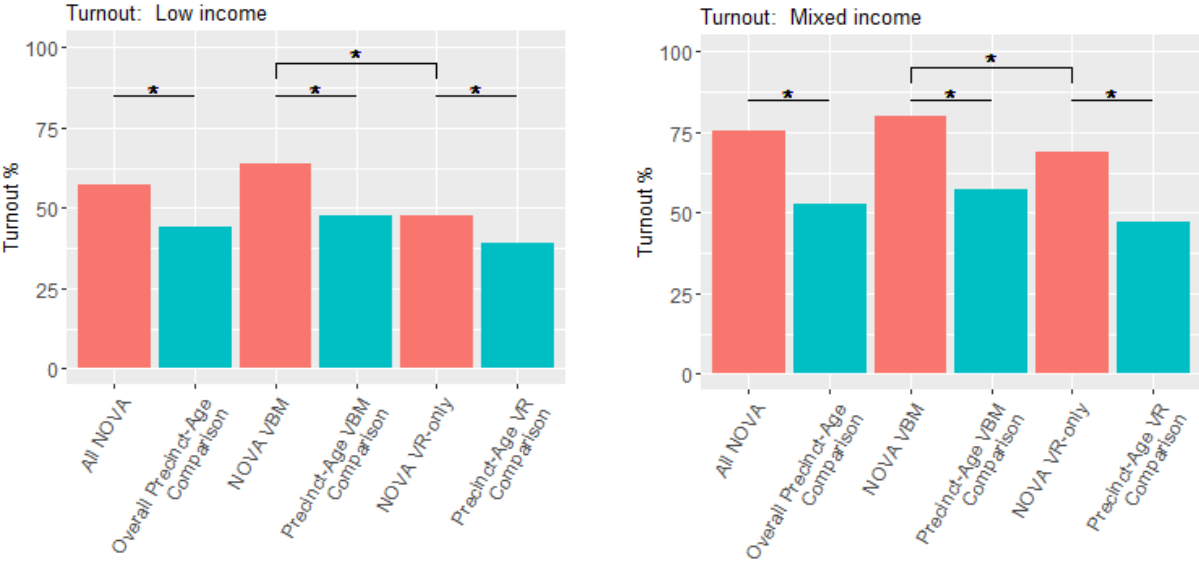
**In collegiate student populations, turnout of NOVA VR and VBM voters was 12-17 percentage points higher than a comparable suburban youth population.** However, in the contested election of 2018, VBM

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<sup>1</sup> [nonprofitvote.org/engaging-new-voters](http://nonprofitvote.org/engaging-new-voters)

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.



**Figure 1: 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**