CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Divergent Electoral Policies: Why Some States Increase Ballot Access

Kelly B. Smith [iD], David Hill and Slavina Ancheva

Political Science, Stetson University, DeLand, FL, USA
Corresponding author: Kelly B. Smith, email: ksmith33@stetson.edu

Abstract

Why have some states adopted policies expanding ballot access while others have restricted access to the ballot? Since the 1990s, some states have been adopting policies restricting access to the ballot such as requiring identification. At the same time, states have been adopting a variety of registration reforms that lower the barriers to registration and voting. Using an original, 45-state dataset, we examine state innovation within the policy domain of electoral reforms in US states. We find reforms have an independent and, sometimes, negative effect on the innovation of states in electoral reforms. Next, we use dyad analysis to examine the spread of a single policy: automatic voter registration. We find that the propensity to innovate both within and across a state makes the spread of automatic voter registration more likely. Our paper contributes to the broader understanding of why states adopt electoral reforms.

Keywords: voting reform; electoral politics; ballot access; policy innovation; automatic voter registration

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for convenient voting procedures, and states responded by either changing rules to implement, expand, or make mail-in balloting easier (NCSL[a] 2020). Some estimates suggest "85% of the electorate [could] effectively vote by mail without an excuse" in the 2020 election (Pildes 2020). Several states, including Texas and Kentucky, dramatically expanded their early voting periods (Pildes 2020). There was pushback from the Trump Administration and from many Republicans arguing that expanding mail-in voting could lead to widespread fraud; however, despite those concerns and claims made after the election, there was no evidence of systematic voter fraud in the 2020 election (Balsamo 2020).

Controversy over access to the ballot has been around since the founding of the Republic. Reforms to either restrict or expand voting across the history of the US have generally come at the state level. In recent years, many states have enacted Voter ID laws, which have the effect of restricting access to the ballot (NCSL[b] 2017). The

implementation of Voter ID laws across the country generated a great deal of media attention. During this same time period, however, many states—including some states that implemented Voter ID laws, such as West Virginia and Washington—were implementing a variety of reforms to make registration and voting easier. This paper seeks to understand what factors influence whether or not a state adopted electoral reforms between 2001 and 2019.

We draw from two literatures to provide theoretical insight into why and how states innovate with electoral reforms. First, we employ the electoral reform literature to understand how within-state political dynamics affect the likelihood of adopting reforms that expand access to the ballot. Second, we use the policy diffusion literature to assess the role of policy learning on the spread of electoral reforms across states. Although individual states pursued a number of innovative electoral reforms in the 2000s, the policy diffusion literature provides leverage for understanding why so many states adopted reforms during this time period. Policies aimed at electoral reform have the potential to influence which citizens participate in our democracy. Therefore, it is critical to understand how states acting as laboratories of democracy may shape democracy itself.

Why do states innovate in a policy domain and how does state innovation affect the spread of a single policy? We use a broad approach to explain why states innovate within a single policy domain. Our novel 45-state, 19-year dataset includes the adoption of nine ballot and voting access reforms including election-day registration (EDR), same-day registration (SDR), automatic voter registration (AVR), portability, pre-registration, online registration, early voting, mail voting, and all-mail voting.[1] To answer why states adopt ballot reforms, we use regression with state fixed effects on the number of reforms adopted by states from 2001 to 2019. We find across-state learning and within-state politics can affect whether states adopt reforms to expand access to the ballot. States may be more or less likely to adopt reforms depending on the reforms of their neighbors. To address our second question, we use dyad analysis to assess the diffusion of a single reform: AVR. We find that traditional measures of diffusion do not account for the spread of AVR. Rather, states that are more innovative in electoral reform more broadly are more likely to adopt AVR and states that are more innovative are also more likely to be learned from. State innovation in electoral reforms varies across states, may be influenced by neighboring policies, and states that innovate in electoral reforms are more likely to adopt new reforms such as AVR.

Registration and Voting Reforms in the States
Election Day Registration

In the post-war era, the first major reform to make registration and voting easier was EDR, implemented first by Maine in 1973, followed over the next 2 years by Minnesota and Wisconsin (NCSL[c] 2020). EDR eliminates the closing date to place one's name on the registered voter rolls and allows a citizen to register and cast a ballot on Election Day at the polling place. In the mid-1990s, three other states, Idaho, New Hampshire, and Wyoming, adopted EDR. In contrast to the first three

---

[1]See Supplementary Material for definitions of the reforms.

states, they did so in order to avoid having to implement the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) (Hanmer 2009). Between 2005 and 2019, 15 additional states adopted EDR (NCSL[c] 2020). All of those states, except for Connecticut, also adopted SDR, in which citizens are allowed to register and vote on the same day, bringing the total to 21 states and the District of Columbia with SDR and/or EDR (NCSL[c] 2020).

1993 National Voter Registration Act, a.k.a. "Motor Voter"

In 1975, Michigan became the first state to allow citizens to register to vote when they acquire or renew a driver's license or motor vehicle registration. Across the 1980s and the early 1990s, 29 states adopted "motor voter" procedures. Between 1984 and 1992, 10 states adopted policies providing the opportunity to register at certain public agencies (Knack 1995). In 1993, President Clinton signed these reforms into federal law as the NVRA. NVRA mandated that all states allow residents to register to vote at motor vehicle offices, public libraries, state agencies, and military recruiting offices.[2] The idea behind "motor voter" begins with the premise that voluntary registration increases the costs associated with voting and therefore, plays a role in low turnout (Fullerton and Borch 2008; Hill 2006; Jackman 1987; Powell 1986; Vonnahme 2012). Therefore, making the opportunity to register available to as many people as possible —through policies such as "motor voter"—should increase the proportion of the electorate registered to vote, and thus increase turnout.

Early Voting, No-Excuse Absentee, All-Mail Elections

While EDR and "motor voter" are aimed at easing the inconvenience of registration, other policies attempt to make the act of voting more convenient. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, eight states implemented early voting programs that allowed citizens to cast an in-person ballot up to three weeks prior to election (NCSL [d] 2020).[3] During this time, six states allowed citizens to cast no-excuse absentee ballots (Stein 1998). Since then, states have continued to expand early voting and no-excuse absentee ballot voting options (NCSL[d] 2020; NCSL[e] 2020). In 2000, Oregon moved to all-mail elections, where a ballot is automatically mailed to every eligible voter meaning that no request or application is necessary to receive a ballot. In the last decade, Oregon was joined by Washington, Colorado, Hawaii, and Utah in its efforts to expand no-excuse absentee ballot voting options (NCSL[e] 2020). Several other states have provisions that allow for certain statewide or smaller jurisdiction elections to be conducted by mail (Cemenska et al. 2009; NCSL[e] 2020),[4] and since 2000, another 11 states have provided their residents the option to vote by mail.[5]

---

[2]North Dakota was exempted from the NVRA mandate because it does not require residents to register to vote.

[3]Information on the adoption of reforms is in Supplementary Material.

[4]Due to the limited scope of these elections, these states are referred to in the Supplementary Material as "Mail Voting" as opposed to the more expansive "All Mail Voting" for the previously mentioned five states.

[5]Although this paper does not include the reforms adopted specifically for the 2020 election in its dataset, 27 states expanded absentee/mail voting eligibility or decided to mail applications or ballots to eligible voters during the 2020 election (NCSL[a] 2020).

Pre-Registration

During the last three decades, 24 states implemented laws that allow individuals to register before they turn voting age, known as pre-registration (NCSL[f] 2019), which has been linked to increased voter turnout (Holbein and Hillygus 2016, 2017). Although Missouri and Hawaii had pre-registration as early as 1993, all other states that adopted pre-registration did so in the 2000s, with most doing so after 2010 (NCSL[f] 2019). While there is variation among states regarding the age individuals must be to pre-register, all of these states have adopted legislation aiming to register individuals before they turn 18. While Voter ID laws being challenged in court have received nationwide media attention, pre-registration has faced its own court litigation in places like North Carolina (NCSL[f] 2019).

Portability

Portability is an electoral reform that allows registrants who move anywhere within a state to transfer their registration and vote on Election Day. While NVRA requires states to permit voters who move *within* a local election jurisdiction without updating their voter registration to be allowed to vote on Election Day (McDonald 2008, 497), it does not necessarily require states to permit this for voters who move *outside* their local election jurisdiction. Several states allowed portability in the 1990s, and five have adopted the process since the turn of the century. EDR, in essence, is another policy that continues to allow statewide portable registration, with the new added benefit of allowing first-time voter registration on Election Day (Brennan Center [a] 2017; Cha and Kennedy 2014; McDonald 2008; Skaggs and Blitzer 2009).

Online Registration

Online voter registration is one of the most recent and widespread electoral reforms. When this policy is in place, voters fill out an online form rather than a paper application to register to vote (NCSL[g] 2020). Arizona was the first state to adopt online voter registration in 2002 and it has spread rapidly across the United States (NCSL[g] 2020; Project Vote 2017; Yu 2019). Today, almost all US states have online voter registration (NCSL[g] 2020) which in some studies has been shown to increase turnout (Yu 2019). Given the novelty of this reform, much less work has been done on the adoption of online registration, although Hicks, McKee, and Smith (2016b) find that online voter registration has even more bipartisan support for its adoption than AVR.

Automatic Voter Registration

Used widely around the democratic world, AVR is a system in which the state takes the responsibility to add a citizen's name to the registration rolls when that person comes of voting age. In 2015, Oregon became the first state to implement an AVR system (NCSL[h] 2020; Oregon State Legislature 2015). The policy adopted by Oregon makes two major changes to voter registration. First, it transforms the system of voluntary registration from an "opt-in" system, in which individuals had to choose to place their name on the list of registrants, to an "opt-out" system meaning that eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are automatically registered

to vote unless they decline or "opt out" of the registration (Brennan Center [b] 2020). Second, AVR automatically updates information in the voter rolls once it is changed at another state agency, like the DMV. According to a Pew study, one in eight registrations nationwide contains errors or outdated information, such as an incorrect address (PEW 2012). The added benefit of automatically updating information electronically is that it saves officials time and money, thereby making the process more efficient. Following Oregon, another 19 states and the District of Columbia have adopted AVR systems (NCSL[h] 2020).

Seeking Explanations for the Adoption of Reforms

The two decades since 2000 have seen a dramatic increase in the adoption and implementation of registration and voting procedures that seek to make registration and voting more convenient for potential voters. We turn to the literature on policy diffusion—the spread of policies across governments—to provide explanations for why states choose to adopt convenient registration and voting procedures. Policies can spread through different mechanisms, one being policy learning which is when policymakers learn from other governments' policy, adapt, and use it for their state (Shipan and Volden 2008, 2014).

We provide two contributions by applying insights from policy diffusion to the spread of electoral reforms. First, we examine why states innovate in a policy domain. Scholarship on policy diffusion has often studied the spread of a single policy or numerous policies across domains. Although this can provide important insights into how policy spreads, it may prevent us from forming broader theories as to how policy ideas within a domain spread across states. Therefore, rather than examine a single electoral reform, we ask why states adopt reforms within a policy domain. Second, we analyze policies within a policy domain that is not typically the subject of policy diffusion studies. Scholarship has focused on the diffusion of smoking legislation (Shipan and Volden 2006, 2008, 2014), lottery policies (Berry and Berry 1990), welfare policies (Karch 2007), as well as others. By examining the spread of electoral policies, we may expand the types of policies studied by diffusion scholars.

While to our knowledge studies have not focused exclusively on the diffusion of electoral reforms, many have examined the adoption of electoral policies with most focusing on the adoption of restrictive Voter ID laws (Bentele and O'Brien 2013; Biggers and Hanmer 2017; Hale and McNeal 2010; Hicks et al. 2015; Hicks, McKee, and Smith 2016a; Rocha and Matsubayashi 2014), and a few examining the adoption of reforms facilitating access (Bali and Silver 2006; Biggers and Hanmer 2015; Hicks, McKee, and Smith 2016b).[6] Of these works, four included variables to measure the percentage of neighbors having the policy in question in place (Bentele and O'Brien 2013; Biggers and Hanmer 2015, 2017; Rocha and Matsubayashi 2014). None of these studies found the percentage of neighbors had a significant or substantive effect on adoption of reforms.

---

[6]The major exception is Hale and Brown (2020) who examine the spread of electoral innovations. Hale and Brown (2020) make an important contribution by highlighting the importance of professionalization in electoral administration in the spread of reforms. Because of data availability, testing the role of professionalization is beyond the scope of this paper.

Although other scholarship has assessed the geographic spread of a single electoral reform, our work examines how multiple electoral reforms may spread across states. This provides an opportunity to explore the role of policy characteristics on the spread and adoption of electoral reforms. Electoral reforms may spread differently than other policies commonly studied by diffusion scholars. These reforms directly affect people's ability to participate in the democratic process and therefore, people may be more likely to be invested in whether these reforms are passed. Voting reforms may also be less complex than other types of policies which could lead many to have more formed attitudes. Therefore, these policies may be more salient than other types of policies and more likely to diffuse across US states (Nicholson-Crotty 2009).

Policy learning is an important mechanism in the spread of policies across governments (Gilardi 2010; Shipan and Volden 2008, 2014; Volden 2016). States may be more likely to adopt electoral reforms when they learn about the reforms tried in other states, particularly if those reforms are successful (Volden 2006). States may face pressure by citizens to adopt voting reforms as nearby states make registering and voting easier (Pacheco 2012). Therefore, we expect that states whose neighbors have adopted electoral reforms will be more likely to adopt reforms.

> **Policy Learning Hypothesis:** *States with neighbors who have adopted electoral reforms will be more likely to adopt electoral reforms.*

The Policy Learning hypothesis may be conditioned by the electoral reform itself. Examining state innovation within a policy domain allows us to assess the role of each policy on the likelihood of state innovation. States may learn from other states, but could that learning look different based on the electoral reform? Generally, we expect that across-state learning facilitates the adoption of policy, especially when the policy is successful (Volden 2006). However, this may not always be the case. For example, states may learn from other states' policy failures and abandon policies (Volden 2016). Examining why states adopt reforms within a policy domain may provide insight into state innovation more generally.

Electoral policies also have the potential to directly influence which candidates are elected. Elected officials, then, may have a particular interest in electoral reforms that could provide an advantage in their or their party's re-election efforts. Electoral considerations affect the spread of policies across states (Karch 2007). Re-election interests coupled with the salience of the policy may result in particularly partisan and contentious politics surrounding the adoption of electoral policies (Bali and Silver 2006; Bentele and O'Brien 2013; Biggers and Hanmer 2015, 2017; Hale and McNeal 2010; Hicks et al. 2015; Hicks, Mckee, and Smith 2016a, 2016b; Rocha and Matsubayashi 2014).

This may, however, be conditioned by the electoral competition in the state. Scholarship has found that partisan support for restrictive Voter ID policies among Republican legislators was greater in competitive states than in non-competitive states (Bentele and O'Brien 2013; Hicks et al. 2015; Hicks, Mckee, and Smith 2016a, 2016b;). Hicks, McKee, and Smith (2016b) found that the effect of electoral margin on Democratic legislator support for online registration was conditioned by whether or not the Democrats were in the minority. Therefore, it is likely that legislators in electorally competitive states may be less likely to support policies that provide greater access to the ballot if they believe there is a partisan advantage to doing

so. Therefore, we expect within-state party control in highly competitive states to predict a state's likelihood of adopting voting reforms.

> **Party Competition Hypothesis:** *States with Republican-controlled legislatures and Republican governors in electorally competitive states will be less likely to adopt reforms that make registration and voting easier.*

Why do states innovate in electoral reforms? We expect that states may be more or less likely to innovate in electoral reforms due to both inter-state and intra-state pressures. Using the policy diffusion literature, we expect that states will be more likely to innovate when their neighbors innovate. However, this may depend on the electoral reform itself. We also expect that party control, conditioned by electoral competition, may influence whether states adopt electoral reforms.

Data and Methods for the Adoption of Electoral Reforms

To assess why states adopt voting reforms, we created a novel dataset containing state-level variables for 45 states from 2001 to 2019.[7] The dependent variable is a composite measure of the number of expansive electoral reforms a state has in a given year. This includes nine potential reforms including EDR, SDR, portability, AVR, pre-registration, early voting, vote by mail, online registration, and all-mail voting. States received a one for each reform adopted.[8] The variable ranges from 0 to 8 with a mean of 1.96 and standard deviation of 1.59. Because states can adopt anywhere between 0 and 9 reforms, we utilize a regression with state-fixed effects.[9] One way to model policy diffusion of components of policies is through ordinary least squares regression (Boehmke 2009). OLS regression, rather than a count model, is more appropriate because our data violate assumptions of negative binomial and Poisson models. Adopting electoral reforms may make it more likely for states to adopt other reforms thereby violating the assumption that the events are independent.[10] Due to

---

[7]Due to data availability, 45 states are included in the analysis. The five states that are not included are Alaska, Hawaii, Louisiana, Nebraska, and North Dakota. North Dakota was excluded due to the lack of a registration requirement. Alaska and Hawaii due to the lack of neighbors. Louisiana is missing the electoral competitiveness measure for all years. Four other states are missing certain years of the electoral competitiveness measure (Alabama 2000/01/04/05/08/09/12/13/16/17; Maryland 2000/01/04/05/08/09/12/13/16/17; Mississippi 2001/02/05/06/09/10/13/14/17/18; New Jersey 2005/06).

[8]We used the NCSL dataset to determine the year of adoption. We verified these dates using further communication with NCSL, Secretary of State or State Legislature websites of the respective state, data from previous literature (such as Biggers and Hanmer 2015; Burden et al. 2014; Cemenska et al. 2009; Cha and Kennedy 2014; Rocha and Matsubayashi 2014; Skaggs and Blitzer 2009), data from other organizations such as the Brennan Center for Justice or PEW Charitable Trust, newspapers, and media outlets. For details, see the Supplementary Material.

[9]Although we look at nine possible reforms, the maximum for this variable is eight because our system of coding does not allow for a state to have both portability and EDR. Previous literature, such as McDonald (2008), makes a distinction between EDR and statewide portability. Although EDR implies that a state also has statewide portability, we found it important to account for the different reasons why a state might adopt either reform. Therefore, even if a state has portability prior to adopting EDR, once it adopts EDR, portability is then coded as 0. Since the two reforms cannot be coded as 1 at the same time, the maximum number of reforms possible at once is 8.

[10]Williams, Richard. "Models for Count Outcomes (Teaching Notes)," https://www3.nd.edu/~rwilliam/stats3/CountModels.pdf, last updated March 14, 2021. Boehmke (2009) states that linear regression or event

the panel nature of the data, a regression with state-fixed effects is the most appropriate way to estimate the number of reforms a state has in a given year.[11]

We are able to expand our understanding of how learning can affect the spread of policies by analyzing multiple policies in a single domain. We include a measure of the fraction of neighbors with each of the electoral reforms to see the independent effect of each policy on the adoption of electoral reforms more broadly. We include the fraction of neighbors with EDR, SDR, AVR, portability, vote by mail, online registration, and with all-mail voting. The proportion of neighbors with a policy is often used to measure diffusion (Berry and Berry 1990; Karch and Cravens 2014; Shipan and Volden 2006) and, more specifically, learning (Shipan and Volden 2008). States may also be influenced by neighboring policies that can restrict registration or voting. Therefore, we include a measure of the fraction of neighbors with strict and non-strict Voter ID policies.

We expect both within-state and across-state political and policy dynamics to affect the likelihood of states adopting registration reforms (Berry and Berry 1990). We include the party control of the legislature and executive branch. We expect that states controlled by Republicans will be less likely to adopt vote-expanding reforms in electorally competitive states (Biggers and Hanmer 2015; Hicks, McKee, and Smith 2016b). In order to test the Party Competition hypothesis we also include Holbrook and Van Dunk's (1993) measure of electoral competition. The measure is based on district-level competition and ranges from 0 (indicating no competition at all) to 100 (indicating a perfectly competitive electoral environment) (Holbrook and Van Dunk, 1993).[12]

For the adoption of electoral reforms, characteristics of the state electorate and the propensity towards innovation may be particularly important. States that have adopted a Voter ID policy may be less likely to adopt electoral reforms. States may be more likely to adopt electoral reforms if they have a larger voting-eligible population (VEP), a more educated population, or more resources to implement the reforms. At the same time, states with a larger proportion of minority residents may face pressure to make registration and voting more difficult (Bentele and O'Brien 2013; Biggers and Hanmer 2017; Hale and McNeal 2010; Hicks et al. 2015; Hicks, Mckee, and Smith 2016a, 2016b).[13] Therefore, we include a measure of whether the state has a Voter ID policy, government administration spending as a

---

count models can be used, although poisson and negative binomial models are often more appropriate. This would lead us to a poisson model. However, our data violate assumptions of the poisson model. As Boehmke (2009) notes the poisson model assumes "the rate of occurrence of events is constant within time periods" (237). Our data would violate that assumption because "states that adopt multiple components in the same year are likely to do so at the same time" (237).

[11]Unlike Boehmke (2009) we are examining different policies in a domain rather than components of a single policy. Therefore, some of the models discussed in Boehmke (2009) may not be appropriate in this analysis.

[12]The authors acquired the data for the Holbrook and Van Dunk Measure from Carl Klarner (https://www.klarnerpolitics.org/). The version of the dataset is more recent than the one currently available at Harvard's Dataverse. Klarner, Carl, 2018, "State Legislative Election Returns, 1967–2016: Restructured for Use." Harvard Dataverse. V1 https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/DRSACA, UNF:6:hjXo+znmhZCoZ5P4c-Mo7Yw==[fileUNF].

[13]Rocha and Matsubayashi (2014) found that the presence of a large black population mitigated the probability of Republican controlled governments to adopt voter ID laws.

proportion of total state expenditures, percent of residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher, the VEP as a proportion of the total population, the percent of Black residents, and the percent of Hispanic residents.[14] Following Boehmke (2009), we also include the log of the number of reforms not adopted by a state.[15] Our measures of government administration, education level, and minority population are lagged by 1 year.

Results

The results of our model can be found in Table 1. Model 2, the full model, demonstrates the importance of examining why states adopt policies within a domain. States may be learning from their neighbors when adopting electoral reforms, but different policies within the domain have different effects on state innovation. The model shows some support for our Policy Learning hypothesis. The only electoral reform that had a positive effect on state innovation was EDR. States with a greater proportion of neighbors with EDR are associated with the adoption of 0.49 more electoral reforms than states with fewer neighbors with EDR.

Model 2, however, suggests that some states may be learning to not adopt certain policies from their neighbors. States with a greater proportion of neighbors with portability policies are associated with adopting 0.34 fewer reforms than states with fewer neighbors that have portability policies. Similarly, states with a greater proportion of neighbors with AVR and all mail voting are associated with adopting 0.40 and 1.32 fewer reforms, respectively. Overall, when a state is surrounded by more neighbors that have portability, AVR, and all mail voting, the state adopts fewer electoral reforms. This suggests that innovating in the electoral reform domain is affected by neighboring states and that reforms within a policy domain may have different effects on state innovation. Innovation within a policy domain, then, may be dependent upon the spread of specific reforms and the characteristics of those reforms. Indeed, some reforms may actually reduce state innovation.

It may be that states are more concerned about adopting risky policies. Risky policies might be ones that most depart from current practice, which can result in implementation struggles and potential policy failure (Cohen and Moffitt 2009). Policies may be riskier when opponents can mobilize significant political and constituent backlash. Portability may be less favorable to election administrators who have less control over the voter rolls and may make states hesitant to adopt and implement similar policies. AVR and all-mail voting may be risky because they can result in the harshest political consequences. In the case of AVR and all-mail voting, opponents have utilized salient and non-complex criticisms against these reforms, especially fraud and security concerns (Norwood 2018; Vasilogambros 2019). This has led to significant elite-driven constituent backlash and political polarization

---

[14]Due to data limitations, we control for professionalization by including government administration spending (Hale and Brown 2020). Although more spending does not necessarily mean more professionalization, the state investing in administration is an important step in professionalization. This is a general measure called governmental administration from the US Census Annual Survey of State Government Finance. It includes "the functions of Financial administration, Judicial and legal, and General public buildings; and activities of the governing body, office of the chief executive, and central staff services and agencies concerned with personnel administration, recording, planning, zoning, and the like" (US Census).

[15]We subtracted the number of adopted reforms by nine and added one before logging the variable.

Table 1. Regression with state fixed effects on adoption of voting reforms

	Model 1	Model 2
	coefficients	coefficients
Independent variables		
State political variables		
Divided legislature	−0.06	−0.06
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Independent governor	−0.0002	0.09
	(0.10)	(0.097)
Republican legislature	−0.01	−0.26**
	(0.09)	(0.09)
Electoral competitiveness	0.001	0.003
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Republican legislature × Electoral competitiveness	0.001	0.004*
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Republican governor	0.12	0.16*
	(0.07)	(0.07)
Republican governor × Electoral competitiveness	−0.003	−0.005*
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Restrictive electoral reforms	0.15***	0.05
	(0.03)	(0.04)
Logged number of reforms not adopted	−5.85***	−5.37***
	(0.06)	(0.07)
Neighbors		
Fraction of neighbors w/EDR		0.49***
		(0.15)
Fraction of neighbors w/SDR		−0.11
		(0.14)
Fraction of neighbors w/portability		−0.34*
		(0.17)
Fraction of neighbors w/AVR		−0.40**
		(0.13)
Fraction of neighbors w/Preregistration		0.13
		(0.09)
Fraction of neighbors w/Early voting		0.11
		(0.09)
Fraction of neighbors w/Vote by mail		−0.20
		(0.11)
Fraction of neighbors w/Online registration		0.003
		(0.07)
Fraction of neighbors w/All mail voting		−1.32***
		(0.26)
Fraction of neighbors w/Non-strict photo ID		0.13
		(0.08)
Fraction of neighbors w/Strict photo ID		0.11
		(0.09)
State characteristics		
Government administration		−3.66**
		(1.38)
% residents with a bachelor's degree or higher		0.02*
		(0.01)
Voting eligible population/Population		−3.64*
		(1.48)
Percent of black population		−0.03*
		(0.02)
Percent of hispanic population		0.06***
		(0.02)

(Continued)

Table 1. (*Continued*)

	Model 1	Model 2
	coefficients	coefficients
Time		−0.02
		(0.01)
Time squared		0.002**
		(0.001)
Constant	13.89***	14.86***
	(0.15)	(1.15)
sigma_u	0.29	0.76
sigma_e	0.25	0.22
rho		
	0.58	0.92
Observations	776	776
Number of state	45	45
R-squared (within)	0.94	0.955
F(9,722)/*F*(27,704)	1,261.04	549.38
Prob > *F*	0.00	0.00

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. OLS model with state fixed effects.
 Abbreviations: AVR, automatic voter registration; EDR, election-day registration; SDR, same-day registration.
***$p < 0.001$;
**$p < 0.01$;
*$p < 0.05$.

(Taddonio 2020). Given the politicization of these reforms that have the potential to significantly increase ballot access, states may be more hesitant to pursue reforms when their neighbors are adopting the most progressive ballot access reforms.

Party control of the executive branch affects the adoption of electoral reforms in electorally competitive states, but in interesting ways. This provides some support for our Party Competition hypothesis. We expected Republican-controlled legislatures and executive branches in electorally competitive states to be less likely to adopt reforms making it easier to vote. States that have both competitive elections and a Republican governor are associated with adopting 0.005 fewer reforms. However, when electoral competitiveness is 0, having a Republican governor is associated with adopting 0.16 more electoral reforms than a Democratic governor. This demonstrates that the electoral competitiveness in the state is important for the effect of party on adopting electoral reforms. The effect, however, is small. At an electoral competitiveness rate of 35 and 55, the marginal effects of adopting electoral reforms with a Republican Governor are 1.961 and 1.958, respectively. For Democratic or Independent governors, the marginal effects of adopting electoral reforms at the same levels of electoral competitiveness are 1.957 and 2.046. In states with high levels of electoral competition, the party of the governor may matter for adopting electoral reforms.

The interaction between electoral competitiveness and Republican-controlled legislatures is positive; however, it is quite small. At an electoral competitiveness rate of 35 and 55, the marginal effects of adopting electoral reforms with a Republican legislature are 1.901 and 1.987, respectively. It seems that the conditional effect of electoral competition may be different for legislatures as Republican-controlled legislatures are slightly more likely to adopt reforms in states with greater electoral competition. These results provide limited support for the Party Competition

hypothesis. As electoral competitiveness increases, states with Republican governors adopt fewer electoral reforms and states with Democratic or Independent governors adopt more electoral reforms. However, the effect of electoral competition and party control of the legislature is in the opposite direction. Both of these effect sizes are quite small.

Certain state demographic characteristics may be important for the adoption of electoral reforms. The percent of Black residents in the state has a small negative effect on the adoption of electoral reforms; however, states with larger Hispanic populations adopt more electoral reforms. This finding is partly consistent with Biggers and Hanmer's (2015) analysis that found the size of the Hispanic population was positively related to the adoption of early and no-excuse absentee voting while the size of the Black population had no significant effect.

The results suggest that learning may affect state innovation in the domain of electoral policy. Our study is unique in that we are able to examine why and under what conditions states will innovate in a policy domain. By focusing on a group of electoral reforms, our analysis investigates innovation more broadly, rather than state experimentation with a single policy or variations of a single policy. However, while an important step in diffusion research (Kreitzer and Boehmke 2016), we may miss important nuances of the spread of electoral reforms by examining the policy domain rather than a single policy.[16] To further investigate the role of policy learning and within-state political dynamics on the likelihood of adopting electoral reforms, we conduct dyad analysis to predict the spread of AVR.

Automatic Voter Registration

Assessing the adoption of electoral reforms more broadly provides an opportunity to examine the role of within and across-state innovativeness on the adoption of a single policy. AVR is an appropriate policy to examine because it is one of the newest and most innovative electoral reforms. AVR is similar to other registration reforms in that it attempts to expand registration with the added benefit of shifting the responsibility of registration from the potential voter to the government agency. Furthermore, AVR may provide insights into the diffusion of future electoral reforms because of its fairly recent development and diffusion, thereby being better representative of the current political context than registration reforms that diffused decades ago. From the analysis above, AVR does have across-state effects on policy adoption. Therefore, AVR may help us better understand how a single electoral reform spreads across states.

The study of policy diffusion began with efforts to understand state innovativeness generally (Walker 1969). There has been more recent attention to state innovation as a more general trait (Boehmke and Skinner 2012) and what causes a state to innovate in the first place (Parinandi 2020). However, studies on state innovation tend to examine many policies across multiple domains. Examining the adoption of innovations within a policy domain and the adoption of a single policy provides leverage

---

[16]Kreitzer and Boehmke (2016) examine pooled event history analysis to study diffusion. However, because we are studying all electoral policies that make is easier to register or vote, the policies are in a single domain and we would expect similar variables to influence their adoption (123). OLS regression with fixed effects is appropriate to predict state innovation more broadly.

for how the propensity to innovate within a policy domain could affect the spread of a single policy.

States may be more likely to adopt a new policy when they already have the propensity to innovate. Having already adopted reforms in a policy domain may reduce the risk of adopting a new policy. Additionally, prior innovations in a policy domain may raise the salience of an issue, thereby increasing the likelihood of adopting a new policy (Nicholson-Crotty 2009). Especially if initial reforms were successful, lessons learned from a previous reform may help states innovate further. In essence, states may learn from themselves (Smith 2022).

> **Within State Innovation Hypothesis:** *States that are more innovative in electoral reforms will be more likely to adopt AVR.*

States may also be more likely to learn from a state that is considered an innovator within a policy domain. Similarities across states and characteristics of leading states can affect whether states adopt new policies or abandon policies (Volden 2006, 2016). When other states are leading innovators in a policy domain, they may be more likely to be a source of policy lessons for other states because they may be seen as more reliable. Therefore, we expect states to learn from more innovative states.

> **Acro-State Innovation Hypothesis:** *States are more likely to learn from another state and adopt AVR when that state is more innovative in a policy domain.*

Party support for reforms may affect their spread. Hasen (2012) writes about the increase in partisan 'voting wars' surrounding electoral reform during the last two decades. However, Mann et al. (2020) recognize that more Democratically controlled states have passed the reform and that there are partisan gaps in public support for AVR, with Democrats supporting AVR more than Republicans. Nevertheless, despite the claims about bipartisan support, we expect states with Republican-controlled legislatures to be less likely to adopt AVR.

> **Party Politics Hypothesis:** *States with unified Republican governments are less likely to adopt AVR.*

Electoral competition, or lack thereof, may be an important consideration in adopting AVR. In states with low levels of electoral competition, politicians, no matter the party, may be more likely to adopt AVR. If a state is largely controlled by one party without much electoral competition, adopting AVR may register voters who are likely to vote with the dominant party. This may reduce concern among politicians that adopting AVR could affect electoral outcomes. However, it may be riskier for politicians to pursue a policy that creates an opt-out registration system in electorally competitive states because it may change the partisan makeup of voters. Therefore, we expect states with low levels of electoral competition to be more likely to adopt AVR.

> **AVR Electoral Competition Hypothesis:** *States with less electoral competition will be more likely to adopt AVR.*

History of AVR

Twenty states and D.C. have adopted AVR, and nine adopted the reform prior to the 2018 elections (NCSL[h] 2020). In our analysis, we include 18 states as having

adopted AVR because our dataset extends until 2019 and New York and Virginia did so in 2020 (New York State Senate 2020; Virginia State Legislature 2020). Across these states, there are differences in terms of the process through which the policy was enacted.

Most states that have adopted AVR have done so through legislation. In 2015, Oregon—a state that had already experimented with and implemented a wide variety of reforms—became the first state to adopt AVR in 2015 along partisan lines (Oregon State Legislature 2015). Republican legislators in Oregon expressed concerns that the new legislation would lead to ID theft and raised worries about the privacy of citizens (Mapes 2015). Democrats countered that ID theft would not be a concern because people would still have to present proof of citizenship at the time of interaction with the DMV; in terms of privacy, there would be protections in place for police officers and domestic violence victims (Mapes 2015). These arguments are common in states that adopted AVR along partisan lines with Democrats supporting the reform and Republicans opposing it.

West Virginia was the first state to adopt AVR with broad bipartisan support— they were able to do so because the law was a combination of stricter voter identification laws and automatic registration (Marra 2016). Vermont, Illinois, Washington, and Massachusetts also adopted AVR with bipartisan support (Illinois General Assembly 2017; Massachusetts Legislature 2018; Vermont General Assembly 2016; Washington State Legislature 2018). Other states that adopted AVR through legislation include Rhode Island, Maryland, New Jersey, and Maine (NCSL [h] 2020).[17]

Legislative procedure is not the only way that AVR has been adopted. In Georgia, Colorado, and New Mexico, AVR was implemented through administrative procedures at the Department of Motor Vehicles (AJC 2016; Brennan Center [c] 2020; NCSL[h] 2020). In both Colorado and New Mexico, these administrative procedures were subsequently followed up by legislation which further cemented the AVR system (Hernandez 2019; Office of the Governor New Mexico 2019). Colorado and New Mexico also have a strong tradition of electoral reform innovation, albeit with Colorado leading the charge compared to New Mexico. Connecticut also adopted AVR through administrative procedure, although it was through an agreement between the Secretary of State and the Department of Motor Vehicles (Secretary of the State of Connecticut 2016).

AVR has also been approved by referendum. In November 2016, Alaska voters approved Ballot Measure 1, which automatically registers eligible individuals to vote when they apply for a Permanent Fund Dividend—a program specific to Alaska— unless they opt out. The ballot measure was approved by 63.7% of the voters and was the first case where the public had the option to directly vote on AVR through a referendum (Alaska Department of Revenue 2018). Michigan and Nevada have also adopted AVR through referendums (NCSL[h] 2020).

AVR has spread to almost half of the states. In 2019, AVR was brought to the forefront when it was adopted by House Democrats as part of a broad electoral reform package in the US Congress, H.R. 1, the "For the People Act," which included campaign finance reform and provisions tackling gerrymandering (Kolinovsky

---

[17]Although not included, District of Columbia Council passed B21-01924 in November and it was signed into law on December 1st (Kurzius 2016).

2019). However, due to the partisan nature of these reforms the bill was not heard on the Senate floor and was largely seen as symbolic in nature. At the state level, red and blue states alike are adopting AVR, although some along partisan lines and others with bipartisan support. Many of the states that paved the way to wider spread of AVR, namely Oregon and California, are electoral reform innovators themselves. This leads to several questions: Why did AVR, a sweeping reform, spread across the states? What was the role of policy learning, state innovation, and partisan politics in the adoption of AVR? We take up these questions below.

AVR Data and Methods

We use a logistic regression with state dyads as the unit of analysis to examine the spread of AVR. Prominent diffusion studies have used dyad analysis to assess policy diffusion because it conceptualizes state-to-state relationships (Nicholson-Crotty and Carley 2018; Volden 2006, 2016). In dyad analysis, each state has the potential to learn from each of the other 49 states meaning that each state could adopt the same policy as each of the other states. We can think of the adopting state (State A) as having an opportunity to learn from another state (State B) after State B has adopted the policy. The unit of analysis, then, is the StateA-StateB dyad. Each dyad is coded as a one if learning occurs meaning State A adopts the policy after State B has adopted the policy.

   The first state to adopt AVR was Oregon in 2015. Therefore, our dataset extends from 2016 (the first-year learning could occur) to 2019. Following Nicholson-Crotty and Carley (2018), we exclude all state dyads after the adopting state adopted the policy and initial adopters as they did not have an opportunity to learn from other states (Oregon and California).[18] From 2016 to 2019, we have a total of 6,540 state dyads. Of those dyads, 2.75% learned from each other so that State A adopted AVR after State B had adopted the policy.

   To test the Within and Across State Innovation hypotheses, we include a measure of state innovativeness for both State A and State B in the electoral reform policy domain. This includes the number of electoral reforms (*excluding AVR*) that State A has adopted and the number of electoral reforms (*excluding AVR*) State B has adopted.

   We include similar independent variables in the logistic regression as we did in our fixed effects model on state innovation. We include a measure of whether states are neighbors and the fraction of neighbors with AVR to assess learning. These are common measures in diffusion studies (Shipan and Volden 2008; Volden 2016) and our prior analysis suggests that having neighbors with AVR may make it less likely for states to adopt AVR. We also include whether any neighbor has a Voter ID policy as well as whether the state itself has a Voter ID policy. The Party Politics hypothesis expects that states with unified Republican governments will be less likely to adopt AVR. We include the political similarity between State A and State B in terms of whether they both have unified Republican or unified Democratic governments (Volden 2006, 2016).

---

[18]Following Nicholson-Crotty and Carley (2018), we include an alternative model that includes only dyads where the leading state (State B) adopted the policy. In this model, being a neighbor is associated with a lower likelihood of adopting AVR. The effect of the State B variables on learning are sensitive to this change.

We also include the absolute difference between investment in government administration and electoral competitiveness between State A and State B. We include state demographic data that is specific to State A including party control and the minority population. These State A specific characteristics may affect whether State A learns from State B. Finally, we include data specific to State B including party control of state B and electoral competitiveness in State B. These characteristics of State B may condition learning and affect whether State A learns from State B.

Results

The results of the logistic regression on the spread of AVR are in Table 2, which presents the coefficients and odds ratios. The analysis suggests that the spread of AVR is affected by state innovation in an entire policy domain more so than innovation with AVR itself. Model 3, the final model, supports both the Within and Across State Innovation hypothesis. States are more likely to adopt AVR when they are more innovative in electoral reforms. The odds ratios of Model 3 suggest that states with more electoral reforms are about 65% more likely to adopt AVR. However, it is not just the propensity of State A to innovate that can affect the spread of a single policy. The propensity of State B to innovate in the domain of electoral reforms also makes it 27% more likely that State A will learn from State B. Innovation within an entire policy domain may be influencing the adoption of specific policies.

The model demonstrates mixed support for the Party Politics hypothesis. The similarity of party control between states is not statistically significant in predicting adoption of AVR in Model 3. However, when State A is under unified Democratic control it is about 9.6 times more likely to adopt AVR than a state under divided government. Party control also affects whether State B is learned from. When State B is under unified Republican control, it is about 63% less likely to be learned from by State A. Party control of the state likely provides a cue to other states whether the policy is a red or a blue policy. This supports the argument that the adoption of AVR is likely a partisan one. Although some states, such as West Virginia, adopted AVR under bipartisan support, AVR's diffusion story may be marked by partisan struggle.

The results do not support our Electoral Competition hypothesis. The competitiveness within states does not have a statistically significant effect on adopting AVR. However, the difference in electoral competition between State A and State B may be an important factor in adopting AVR. As the difference in electoral competition between State A and State B grows, State A is about 4% more likely to adopt AVR. This is a small but statistically significant effect.

The results do not support that states are learning from their neighbors when deciding whether to adopt AVR. This traditional measure of diffusion is not as important in the spread of AVR as the general propensity to innovate by State A and State B. The spread of single reforms, then, may also rely on learning from innovation within a policy domain more generally. The characteristics of State A and State B can affect the adoption of policies. It seems the broader propensity to reform by both State A and State B is a more important cue in adopting AVR. It may be less risky for State A to adopt a sweeping reform, such as AVR, when they have already adopted a number of electoral reforms. State A may have more confidence that AVR will work or they may become more familiarized with reforms in a policy domain as they

Table 2. Logistic regression on state dyads for adoption of AVR

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	coefficients	Odds ratios	coefficients	Odds ratios	coefficients	Odds ratios
Independent variables						
State dyad characteristics						
Neighbor	−0.58	0.56	−0.62	0.54	−0.61	0.54
	(0.37)	(0.21)	(0.40)	(0.22)	(0.36)	(0.195)
Same unified republican control	−2.93***	0.05***	−2.11***	0.12***	−0.46	0.63
	(0.92)	(0.05)	(0.41)	(0.05)	(0.43)	(0.27)
Same unified democratic control	2.32***	10.18***	1.37***	3.92***	−0.05	0.95
	(0.499)	(5.08)	(0.28)	(1.10)	(0.42)	(0.396)
Difference gov. administration	0.12	1.12	0.20**	1.23**	0.16	1.17
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.099)
Diff. electoral competitiveness	0.02	1.02	0.03*	1.03*	0.04***	1.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
State A characteristics						
Fraction of neighbors with AVR			0.36	1.44	0.26	1.298
			(1.52)	(2.18)	(1.57)	(2.04)
State A innovation			0.47***	1.597***	0.50**	1.65**
			(0.14)	(0.23)	(0.16)	(0.27)
Neighbors have voter ID policy			0.497	1.64	0.57	1.76
			(0.67)	(1.11)	(0.71)	(1.25)
State A has voter Id policy			−1.42**	0.24**	−1.48**	0.23**
			(0.50)	(0.12)	(0.54)	(0.12)
Electoral competitiveness			0.02	1.02	0.03	1.03
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Unified republican government			0.04	1.04	−0.33	0.72
			(0.83)	(0.87)	(0.86)	(0.62)
Unified democratic government			1.74***	5.68***	2.27***	9.67***
			(0.47)	(2.69)	(0.51)	(4.94)
Percent black			0.05	1.05	0.05	1.05
			(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Percent hispanic			0.05*	1.05*	0.05**	1.06**
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
State B characteristics						
State B innovation					0.24***	1.27***
					(0.03)	(0.04)
Unified republican government					−0.99***	0.37***
					(0.27)	(0.10)
Unified democratic government					0.66	1.93
					(0.36)	(0.70)
Electoral competitiveness					0.02**	1.02**
					(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	−3.84***	0.02***	−7.75***	0.0004***	−9.98***	0.00005***
	(0.42)	(0.01)	(1.50)	(0.001)	(1.94)	(0.0001)
Observations	6,540		6,540		6,540	
Log pseudolikelihood	−767.1196		−642.771		−596.933	
Wald chi2(5)/(14)/(18)	37.72		292.35		1,879.69	
Prob > chi2	0		0		0	
Pseudo R^2	0.0692		0.2201		0.2757	

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Forty-four state clusters; standard errors clustered on State A.
Abbreviation: AVR, automatic voter registration.
***$p < 0.001$;
**$p < 0.01$;
*$p < 0.05$.

continue to innovate within that domain. Innovation by State B is also an important cue for State A. State A is more likely to adopt AVR when State B is an innovator in electoral reforms. This suggests that states considered to be leaders may need to be leaders in an entire policy domain, not just in the innovation of a single policy.

Conclusion

This paper presents a novel analysis of the adoption and spread of electoral reforms across the US states. From examining the adoption of multiple electoral reform policies, our results suggest that states learn from the policies of their neighbors when innovating in electoral reforms. Our analysis of a single electoral reform, AVR, suggests that state innovation in electoral reforms is important for the spread of AVR across states. We find states that are more innovative are more likely to adopt AVR and states that are more innovative are more likely to be learned from by other states.

We make two broad contributions to the understanding of state innovation and electoral reforms. First, we extend both the diffusion and electoral reform literature into new territory by contributing further to our understanding of how and why electoral reforms may spread across the US. Second, rather than focus on a single reform, we examine why and under what conditions states innovate in the policy domain of electoral reforms. This provides leverage to examine how individual reforms may have different effects on state innovation.

This paper raises new avenues for future research. First, conducting dyad analysis on other, less sweeping electoral reforms may provide further insight into why states adopt electoral reforms. Research could examine whether we see similar effects on the spread of other less sweeping registration and voting reforms. Second, future research should continue to study the spread of voting and registration-restricting reforms. This paper focuses on reforms that expand ballot access. However, as is well-documented, states have also been adopting reforms that restrict access to the ballot. More research should be conducted exploring whether or not, to what extent, and how states learn from other states about policies to restrict access. Third, policy entrepreneurs may play a role in the spread of electoral policies. Although outside the scope of this paper, future research could use qualitative methods to examine whether and how policy entrepreneurs contributed to the spread of these policies.

References

Alaska Department of Revenue. 2018. "Automatic Voter Registration." *Alaska Department of Revenue Tax Information*, October 8, 2018. https://pfd.alaska.gov/Automatic-Voter-Registration.

AJC Atlanta News Now. 2016. "*Automatic Registration Leads Surge in New Georgia Voters.*" *AJC Atlanta News Now, February 3, 2020.* https://www.ajc.com/news/state–regional-govt–politics/automatic-registration-leads-surge-new-georgia-voters/97PMHrv8anlB66TfKdlUtK/.

Bali, Valentina A., and Brian D. Silver. 2006. "Politics, Race, and America State Electoral Reforms after Election 2000." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 6 (1): 21–48.

Balsamo, Michael. 2020. "Disputing Trump, Barr Says No Widespread Election Fraud." *AP NEWS*, December 28, 2020. https://apnews.com/article/barr-no-widespread-election-fraud-b1f1488796c9a98c4b1a9061a6c7f49d.

Bentele, Keith G., and Erin O'Brien. 2013. "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access Policies." *Perspectives on Politics* 11 (4): 1088–116.

Berry, Frances Stokes, and William D. Berry. 1990. "State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations: An Event History Analysis." *American Political Science Review* 84 (2): 395–415.

Biggers, Daniel R., and Michael J. Hanmer. 2015. "Who Makes Voting Convenient? Explaining the Adoption of Early and No Excuse Absentee Voting in the American States." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 15 (2): 192–210.

Biggers, Daniel R., and Michael J. Hanmer. 2017. "Understanding the Adoption of Voter Identification Laws in the American States." *American Politics Research* 45 (4): 560–88.

Boehmke, Frederick J. 2009. "Approaches to Modeling the Adoption and Diffusion of Policies with Multiple Components." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 9 (2): 229–52.

Boehmke, Frederick J. and Paul Skinner. 2012. "State Policy Innovativeness Revisited." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 12 (3):303–329.

Brennan Center [a]. 2017. "*VRM in the States: Portability.*" *Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University of Law, December 28, 2020.* https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/vrm-states-portability.

Brennan Center [b]. 2020. "*Automatic Voter Registration, a Summary.*" *Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University of Law, December 28, 2020.* https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/automatic-voter-registration-summary.

Brennan Center [c]. 2020. "*Policy Differences of Automatic Voter Registration.*" *Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University of Law, December 28, 2020.* https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/policy-differences-automatic-voter-registration?_ga=2.157571773.685551969.1609170907-1301978540.1595581026.

Burden, Barry C., David T. Canon, Kenneth R. Mayer, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2014. "Election Laws, Mobilization, and Turnout: The Unanticipated Consequences of Election Reform." *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (1): 95–109. doi:10.1111/ajps.12063 (January 29, 2020).

California State Legislature. 2015. "*AB-1461 Voter registration: California New Motor Voter Program.*" *California Legislative Information, December 28, 2020.* https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB1461.

Cemenska, Nathan, Jan E. Leighley, Jonathan Nagler, and Daniel P. Tokaji. 2009. "*Report on the 1972–2008 Early and Absentee Voting Dataset.*" *Submitted to The Pew Charitable Trusts as part of Non-Precinct Voting in the States: An Extensive Dataset of State Laws and Related Resources.* https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2009/nonprecinctlaws197220081pdf.pdf?la=en&hash=026F2B266BB6F265FD0924E35A3FE709AA0F7AF9.

Cha, J. Mijin, and Liz Kennedy. 2014. "*Millions to the Polls Practical Policies to Fulfill the Freedom to Vote for all Americans: Permanent & Portable Voter Registration.*" *Demos.* https://www.demos.org/sites/default/files/publications/Millions%20to%20the%20Polls%20Permanent%20and%20Portable%20Voter%20Registration.pdf.

Cohen, David K. and Susan Moffitt. 2009. *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fullerton, Andrew S., and Casey Borch. 2008. "Reconsidering Explanations for Regional Convergence in Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States, 1956-2000." *Sociological Forum* 23 (4): 755–85.

Gilardi, Fabrizio. 2010. "Who Learns from What in Policy Diffusion Processes." *American Journal of Political Science* 54 (3):650–666.

Hale, Kathleen, and Ramona McNeal. 2010. "Election Administration Reform and State Choice: Voter Identification Requirements and HAVA." *Policy Studies Journal* 38 (2): 281–302.

Hale, Kathleen, and Mitchell Brown. 2020. *How We Vote: Innovation in American Elections*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Hanmer, Michael J. 2009. *Discount Voting: Voter Registration Reforms and their Effects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hasen, R. L. (2012). *The voting wars: From Florida 2000 to the next election meltdown*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Hernandez, Esteban L. 2019. "*Colorado's Automatic Voter Registration Could Become a Little More Automatic.*" *Denverite, December 28, 2020.* https://denverite.com/2019/04/10/colorados-automatic-voter-registration-could-become-a-little-more-automatic/.

Hicks, William D., Seth C. McKee, Mitchell D. Sellers, and Daniel A. Smith, 2015. "A Principle or a Strategy: Voter Identification Laws and Partisan Competition in the American States." *Political Research Quarterly* 68 (1): 18–33.

Hicks, William D., Seth C. McKee, and Daniel A. Smith. 2016a. "The Determinants of State Legislator Support for Restrictive Voter ID Laws." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 16: 1–21.

Hicks, William D., Seth C. McKee, and Daniel A. Smith. 2016b. "A Bipartisan Election Reform? Explaining Support for Online Voter Registration in the American States." *American Politics Research* 44 (6): 1008–36.

Hill, David. 2006. *American Voter Turnout: An Institutional Perspective*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Holbein, John B., and Sunshine Hillygus. 2016. "Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science.* 60 (2): 364–82.

Holbein, John B., and Sunshine Hillygus. 2017. "Erratum to "Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout"." *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (2): 505–7.

Holbrook, Thomas M. and Emily Van Dunk. 1993. "Electoral Competition in the American States." *American Political Science Review* 87 (4): 955–962.

Illinois General Assembly. 2017. "*Public Act 100–0464. SB1933 Enrolled." Illinois General Assembly, December 28, 2020.* https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/100/PDF/100-0464.pdf.

Jackman, R. W. (1987). "Political Institutions and Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies." *American Political Science Review* 81 (2): 405–23.

Karch, Andrew. 2007. *Democratic Laboratories: Policy Diffusion Among the American States*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.

Karch, Andrew, and Matthew Cravens. 2014. "Rapid Diffusion and Policy Reform: The Adoption and Modification of Three Strikes Law." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 14 (4): 461–91.

Knack, Stephen. 1995. "Does "Motor Voter" Work? Evidence from State-Level Data." *The Journal of Politics* 57 (3): 796–811.

Kolinovsky, Sarah. 2019. "*House Democrats Pass Major Voters' Rights Bill, But the Road Ends There." ABC News*, January 14, 2020. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/house-democrats-pass-major-voters-rights-bill-road/story?id=61557402.

Kreitzer, Rebecca J., and Frederick J. Boehmke. 2016. "Modeling Heterogeneity in Pooled Event History Analysis." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 16 (1): 121–41.

Kurzius, Rachel. 2016. "*D.C. Council Unanimously Passes Automatic Voter Registration Law." DCist, October 8, 2018.* http://dcist.com/2016/11/dc_council_passes_automatic_voter_r.php.

Mann, Christopher B., Paul Gronke, and Natalie Adona. 2020. "Framing Automatic Voter Registration: Partisanship and Public Understanding of Automatic Voter Registration." *American Politics Research* 48 (6):693–699.

Mapes, Jeff. 2015. "Sweeping 'New Motor Voter' Bill Clears Oregon Legislature on Partisan Vote." *OregonLive.com*, September 19, 2018. https://www.oregonlive.com/mapes/index.ssf/2015/03/sweeping_new_motor_voter_bill.html.

Marra, Ashton. 2016. "*Tomblin Signs Voter ID, Automatic Voter Registration Bill." West Virginia Public Broadcasting, September 26, 2018.* http://www.wvpublic.org/post/tomblin-signs-voter-id-automatic-voter-registration-bill#stream/0.

Massachusetts Legislature. 2018. "*Bill H.4834: An Act Automatically Registering Eligible Voters and Enhancing Safeguards against Fraud." The 191st General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.* https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H4834.

McDonald, Michael P. 2008. "Portable Voter Registration." *Political Behavior* 30: 491–501.

NCSL[a]. 2020. "*Absentee and Mail Voting Policies in Effect for the 2020 Election." National Conference of State Legislatures, December 28, 2020.* https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-mail-voting-policies-in-effect-for-the-2020-election.aspx.

NCSL[b]. 2017. "History of Voter ID." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id-history.aspx.

NCSL[c]. 2020. "Same Day Voter Registration." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx.

NCSL[d]. 2020. "State Laws Governing Early Voting." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/early-voting-in-state-elections.aspx.

NCSL[e]. 2020. "Voting Outside the Polling Place: Absentee, All-Mail and other Voting at Home Options." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx.

NCSL[f]. 2019. "Preregistration for Young Voters." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/preregistration-for-young-voters.aspx.

NCSL[g]. 2020. "Online Voter Registration." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-or-online-voter-registration.aspx.

NCSL[h]. 2020. "Automatic Voter Registration." *National Conference of State Legislatures*, December 28, 2020. https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration.aspx.

New York State Senate. "Senate Bill Establishes an Electronic Personal Voter Registration Process." *New York State Senate*, December 28, 2020. https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2019/s8806.

Nicholson-Crotty, Sean. 2009. "The Politics of Diffusion: Public Policy in the American States." *The Journal of Politics* 71 (1): 192–205.

Nicholson-Crotty, Sean, and Sanya Carley. 2018. "Information Exchange and Policy Adoption Decisions in the Context of U.S. State Energy Policy." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 18 (2): 122–14

Norwood, Candice. 2018. "As Automatic Voter Registration Gains Momentum, States Grapple with Question of Duplicates." *Government Technology*, January 14, 2021. https://www.govtech.com/civic/As-Automatic-Voter-Registration-Gains-Momentum-States-Grapple-with-Question-of-Duplicates.html.

Office of the Governor New Mexico. 2019. "Gov. Lujan Grisham Enacts Same-Day, Automated Voter Registration." *Office of the Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham*, December 28, 2020. https://www.governor.state.nm.us/2019/03/27/gov-lujan-grisham-enacts-same-day-automated-voter-registration/.

Oregon State Legislature. 2015. "*House Bill 2177" Oregon State Legislature, February 25, 2020* https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2015R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/HB2177/Enrolled.

Pacheco, Juliana. 2012. "Social Contagion Model: Exploring the Role of Public Opinion on the Diffusion of Anti-Smoking Legislation Across American States." *Journal of Politics* 74 (1): 187–202.

Parinandi, Srinivas. 2020. "Policy Inventing and Borrowing among State Legislatures." *American Journal of Political Science* 64 (4): 852–68.

Pew Center on the State's Election Initiatives. 2012. "*Pew: One in Eight Voter Registrations Inaccurate; 51 Million Citizens Unregistered." The PEW Charitable Trusts.* https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases-and-statements/2012/02/14/pew-one-in-eight-voter-registrations-inaccurate-51-million-citizens-unregistered.

Pildes, Richard. 2020. "*Early and Mail-In Voting for 2020 Election Expands Dramatically Despite Legal Fights." The Wall Street Journal, December 28, 2020.* https://www.wsj.com/articles/early-and-mail-in-voting-for-2020-election-expands-dramatically-desite-legal-fights-11604052000.

Powell, G. B., Jr. 1986. "American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective." *American Journal of Political Science* 80 (1): 17–43.

Project Vote. 2017. "*Online Voter Registration in the States." Project Vote, December 28, 2020.* http://www.projectvote.org/wp-content/uploads/Online-Voter-Registration-in-the-States.pdf.

Rocha, Rene R., and Tetsuya Matsubayashi. 2014. "The Politics of Race and Voter ID Laws in the States: The Return of Jim Crow?" *Political Research Quarterly* 67 3: 666–79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24371900. Accessed August 23, 2020.

Secretary of the State of Connecticut. 2016. "*Memorandum of Understanding Between the Office of the Secretary of the State of Connecticut and the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles Regarding the Execution of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993." NCSL.* https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/Elections/DMV.SOTS.pdf.

Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2006. "Bottom-Up Federalism: The Diffusion of Antismoking Policies from U.S. Cities to States." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (4): 825–43.

Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2008. "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (4): 840–57.

Shipan, Charles R., and Craig Volden. 2014. "When the Smoke Clears: Expertise, Learning and Policy Diffusion." *Journal of Public Policy* 34 (3): 357–87.

Skaggs, Adam, and Jonathan Blitzer. 2009. "*Permanent Voter Registration." The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law.* https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Report_Permanent-Voter-Registration.pdf.

Smith, Kelly B. 2022. "Laboratories of Bureaucracy: How Bureaucrats Learn across States in Setting Early Childhood Education Standards." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 52(4): 553–578.

Smith, Kelly, David Hill, and Slavina Ancheva. 2022. "Replication Data for: Divergent Electoral Policies: Why Some States Increase Ballot Access." UNC Dataverse. V1. https://doi.org/10.15139/S3/7TDTGW.

Stein, Robert M. 1998. "Early Voting." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62 (1): 57–69.

Taddonio, Patrice. 2020. "How Associating Mail-in Ballots with Voter Fraud Became a Political Tool." *PBS Frontline,* January 14, 2020. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/how-associating-mail-in-ballots-with-voter-fraud-became-a-political-tool/.

United States Census Bureau. Glossary. https://www.census.gov/glossary/. Accessed June 23, 2022.

Vasilogambros, Matt. 2019. "Glitches in California Embolden Automatic Voter Registration Foes." *PEW Trusts*, January 14, 2021. https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2019/10/17/glitches-in-california-embolden-automatic-voter-registration-foes.

Vermont General Assembly. 2016. "*H.458 (Act 80): An Act Relating to Automatic Voter Registration through Motor Vehicle Driver's License Applications." Vermont General Assembly.* https://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2016/H.458.

Virginia State Legislature. 2020. "HB 235 Voter Registration; Automatic Voter Registration." *Virginia's Legislative Information System*, December 28, 2020. https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?201+sum+HB235.

Volden, Craig. 2006. "States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children's Health Insurance Program." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2): 294–312.

Volden, Craig. 2016. "Failures: Diffusion, Learning, and Policy Abandonment." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 16 (1): 44–77.

Vonnahme, Greg. 2012. "Registration Deadlines and Turnout in Context." *Political Behavior* 34:765–79.

Walker, Jack L. 1969. "The Diffusion of Innovations among American States." *The American Political Science Review* 63(3):880–899.

Washington State Legislature. 2018. "HB 2595" *Washington State Legislature*, February 27, 2020. http://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/2595-S2.SL.pdf.

Yu, Jinhai. 2019. "Does State Online Voter Registration Increase Voter Turnout?" *Social Science Quarterly* (Wiley-Blackwell) 100 (3): 620–34.

Author Biographies. Kelly B. Smith is an assistant professor of political science at Stetson University. Her research focuses on public policy and state politics.

David Hill is an associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of political science at Stetson University.

Slavina Ancheva graduated Summa Cum Laude from Stetson University with a B.A. in political science and a B.S. in economics. She currently works at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium, as a policy adviser focusing on digital and tech legislation.