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Analysis of Median Household Income Differences between Election Day-VBM and EIP Voters

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Do White, African American, and Hispanic/Latino EIP Voters Differ from Election Day and Vote by Mail Voters in Income?

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Summary

Analysis of early in-person (EIP) voting in 2008 in Cuyahoga County shows that African-American, white, and Hispanic voters who used EIP voting had significantly lower incomes than members of those same groups who voted on election day or by mail. This result applies to those voting EIP on weekdays, extended weekday hours, weekends, and the three days before election day.

Previously we reported that nearly 20,000 EIP votes in Cuyahoga County were cast during hours and days that are now prohibited by state legislation or Secretary of State Directive. Many times this number would be prohibited statewide and disproportionately affect low-income voters if the present results apply at least to most other large urban counties. Once again, we point out that the so-called uniform rules for times and dates of early in-person voting do not have a uniform effect on all voting citizens. To the previously reported category of African-Americans who are disproportionately negatively affected, we now add lower income citizens – African American, white, and Hispanic.

Background

Our previous report, "Racial and ethnic proportions of early in-person voters in Cuyahoga County, General Election 2008, and implications for 2012"², provided evidence that in Cuyahoga County, during the period of early in-person (EIP) voting in 2008, African Americans were disproportionately represented (56%) at all the different time periods (weekends, business hours, after-hours, last three days before the election) compared to their representation amongst all voters (24%).

However, in discussions with urban residents of Cuyahoga County, many people pointed out that in addition, many black AND white people who were working full-time, had low income, and had to use public transportation could not vote in-person during the 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. business hours of the Board of Elections, nor could many get there in time to vote in the weekday extended hours to 7 p.m. This group would have preferentially voted during the four weekends available in 2008 prior to October 1st or during the weekend which included the Saturday through Monday before the Tuesday election -- a weekend now excluded by Ohio state legislation.

Given these anecdotes, and the present controversy over the value of having weekend hours for EIP, we investigated whether there was, in addition to African American voters, a disparity of income between

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² Available at

http://urban.csuohio.edu/publications/center/northern_ohio_data_and_information_service/Racial_and_ethnic_proportions_of_early_in-person_voting.pdf and also at www.nova-ohio.org.

white or Hispanic voters who voted on election day or by mail (VBM) or used EIP voting in one form or another.³

Results

We report on differences in income between: 1) election day / VBM and all EIP voting by race and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity, and 2) differences in income between election day / VBM voters and voters in four periods of EIP voting by race and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

1) Differences in Income for Election Day/ VBM versus EIP Voting for Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos

An analysis of variance shows that three income measures – average household income, median household income, and per capita income –were all lower for persons who voted early and in-person in Cuyahoga County in the 2008 general election than for those who voted by mail or on election day.. Table 1 shows the median family incomes estimated for the racial/Hispanic ethnicity groups who voted EIP or on election day or by mail. Statistically different incomes (at the 95 percent confidence level) are shown as bold and highlighted. The incomes for all three categories of race/ethnicity were lower for those voting during EIP opportunities.

Household incomes with a white householder voting EIP were estimated to make approximately \$6,000 (8% to 10%) less per year than whites voting on election day or by mail. African American and Hispanic/Latino households with less income also disproportionately voted in EIP times. Differences are all statistically significant. White voters voting early had median household incomes that were almost 10 percent less than white voters voting on election day or by mail.

These results confirm that EIP voting opportunities were important to whites with lower incomes, as well as for blacks and Hispanics with lower incomes.

Table 1: Median Household Income Comparisons between Election Day / VBM and EIP Voting by Race/Hispanic Ethnicity

| | White | | African American | | Hispanic/Latino | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|
| | Election day / VBM | EIP | Election day / VBM | EIP | Election day / VBM | EIP |
| Median Family Income | \$60,802 | \$54,833 | \$47,207 | \$39,664 | \$59,337 | \$53,059 |
| Difference | \$5,969 | | \$7,542 | | \$6,278 | |
| Percent less income | 9.8% | | 16.0% | | 10.6% | |

³ We use income and race/ethnicity estimates from the Census Bureau’s 2006-2010 American Community Survey. A key assumption in this analysis is that voting by different income and racial/ethnic groups in any census block group was proportionate to their estimated proportions in that block group.

2) Differences in Income of Election Day / VBM Voters versus Periods of EIP Voting for Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos

Table 2 provides comparisons in estimated median household income by race/ethnicity for each of four periods of EIP voting with median household income of persons voting on election day or by mail. Again, statistically different incomes (at the 95 percent confidence level) are shown as bold and highlighted.

The four periods of EIP voting analyzed here are: 1) the three days before the election (including after 6pm on the Friday before the election); 2) the four weekends prior to the weekend before the election; 3) the weekday after-hours of EIP voting; and 4) EIP weekday voting during business hours.

Significant differences with election day / VBM voters in income are found for each EIP voting period for all racial/ethnic populations, except for weekend Hispanic/Latino voters. Though Hispanic/Latino voters on election day or by mail had higher incomes than those voting on the four early weekends, the difference is not statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. Aside from that one exception, election day / VBM voters had significantly higher incomes than EIP voters in every period of EIP voting in 2008 - regardless of race or Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. White EIP voters with lower incomes took significant advantage of all four such periods - as did lower income African Americans.

These differences strongly suggest that EIP voters of all three racial/ethnic groups had lower incomes than those racial/ethnic group voters voting on election day or by mail.

Table 2: Income Comparisons between Election Day / VBM and Periods of EIP Voters by Race/Hispanic Ethnicity

| Voting Time Comparison | | Median Household Income | Difference | Percent Difference |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| White | Election day / VBM | \$60,801 | \$11,563 | 19.0% |
| | 3 days before & after 6pm | \$49,238 | | |
| African American | Election day / VBM | \$47,206 | \$9,824 | 20.8% |
| | 3 days before & after 6pm | \$37,382 | | |
| Hispanic/Latino | Election day / VBM | \$59,337 | \$12,312 | 20.8% |
| | 3 days before & after 6pm | \$47,024 | | |
| White | Election day / VBM | \$60,801 | \$4,814 | 7.9% |
| | 4 weekends | \$55,987 | | |
| African American | Election day / VBM | \$47,206 | \$5,976 | 12.7% |
| | 4 weekends | \$41,230 | | |
| Hispanic/Latino | Election day / VBM | \$59,337 | \$1,281 | 2.2% |
| | 4 weekends | \$58,056 | | |
| White | Election day / VBM | \$60,801 | \$7,130 | 11.7% |
| | early after-hours | \$53,670 | | |
| African American | Election day / VBM | \$47,206 | \$7,090 | 15.0% |
| | early after-hours | \$40,116 | | |
| Hispanic/Latino | Election day / VBM | \$59,337 | \$7,718 | 13.0% |
| | early after-hours | \$51,619 | | |
| White | Election day / VBM | \$60,801 | \$3,695 | 6.1% |
| | early business hours | \$57,106 | | |
| African American | Election day / VBM | \$47,206 | \$7,122 | 15.1% |
| | early business hours | \$40,084 | | |
| Hispanic/Latino | Election day / VBM | \$59,337 | \$4,683 | 7.9% |
| | early business hours | \$54,654 | | |

Discussion/Conclusion

Analysis of the population of voters in Cuyahoga County has shown that African-American, white, and Hispanic voters who used EIP voting had significantly lower incomes than members of those same groups who voted on election day or by mail. That includes those voting early in-person on weekdays, extended weekday hours, weekends, and the three days before election day.

Though we don't have results of a survey, we suspect that these results reflect the fact that low-income voters have less flexible work or child care commitments. Therefore, they benefit from a variety of extra hours to vote in person, whether during an occasional weekday, extended after-hours, or weekends.

Also, all three of these lower income racial/ethnic groups appear to want to use early in-person rather than absentee voting by mail, even though they were sent applications in 2008. The two-step process of applying for and then later casting a ballot is more off-putting to some than others. Furthermore, based on antidotal evidence, we suspect that part of this preference is due to concern that a mailed ballot may not be counted. In a sense, placing the ballot into the ballot box is more reassuring, and has the traditional feel for the act of voting, as opposed to posting it in the mail. In fact, though voters may not

be aware of the actual probability that their vote won't be counted, in 2008 (in Cuyahoga County), between serious disqualifying errors in 1.6% of VBM applications and 2.6% of ballots, a voter who used the vote-by-mail process had 1 chance in 25 that their application or ballot would not count. This rate of disqualification was significantly higher than the chance that an election day vote would be marked as provisional and be rejected, which was 1.8% in 2008.

This result extends our previous analysis in that it shows that a wider category of voters than only African-Americans would be negatively affected by cutting weekends and the three pre-election days for EIP voting. In particular, in 2008, about 19,000 citizens voted in Cuyahoga County during hours that, at the time of this writing (Aug. 27, 2012), have been excluded by legislation or Sec. Husted's Directive 2012-35. This and the previous report indicate that disproportionately, these 19,000 voters would have been African American and/or low-income black, white, or Hispanic citizens.

Once again, we point out that the so-called uniform rules for times and dates of early in-person voting do not have a uniform effect on all voting citizens. To the previously reported category of African-Americans who are disproportionately negatively affected, we now add lower income citizens – African American, white, and Hispanic.