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Efforts to Promote Voting by Mail May Help Ensure Strong Voter Turnout Among Both Young and Old Voters in Cuyahoga County's Fall 2020 Election

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Focus on Facts

Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs – Cleveland State University

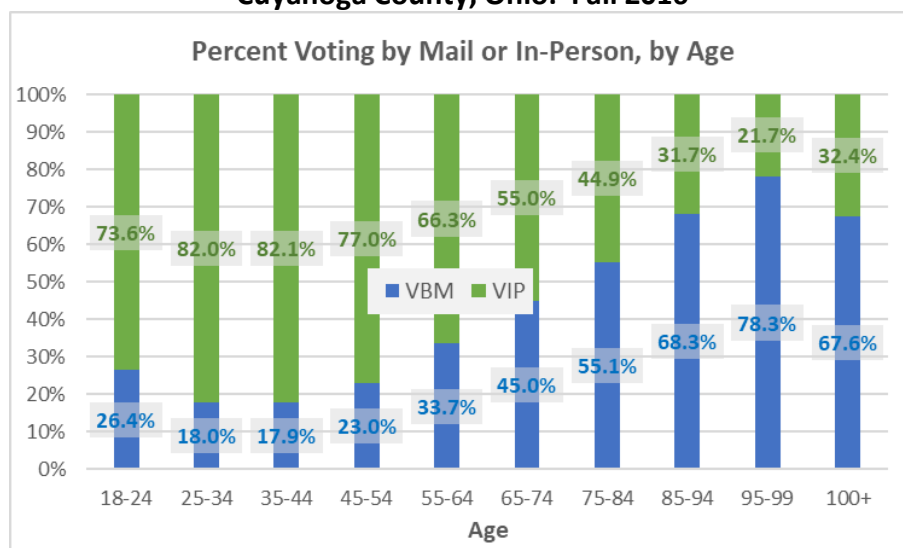
August 2020, No. 2.

"Efforts to Promote Voting by Mail May Help Ensure Strong Voter Turnout Among Both Young and Old Voters in Cuyahoga County's Fall 2020 Election"

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- Voting by mail (VBM) has been a well-established practice in the State of Ohio for many years before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Cuyahoga County's Fall 2016 election, for example, more than 193,000 voters (31.8% of all voters) chose the VBM option to cast their ballots.
- Individual voter records are confidential. Yet in a previous Focus on Facts I described a method to analyze publicly available voter records that produces reliable estimates to describe the demographics of who votes (race, age, neighborhood, etc.).¹
- Figure 1 reveals how the use of VBM varied by age group among Cuyahoga County voters in the Fall 2016 election. Among voters 65 and older, more than half (51.4%) used the VBM option. In addition, the highest proportional use of VBM among voters under the age of 55 was among the youngest voters, aged 18-24.

**Figure 1: Percent Voting in Person (VIP) vs. Voting by Mail (VBM), by Age
Cuyahoga County, Ohio: Fall 2016**



¹ See Salling, Mark, "Reliance on Voting by Mail Could Reduce Voter Turnout Among Black and Hispanic/Latino Voters in Cuyahoga County," Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs, Cleveland State University, Focus on Facts, August 2020, no. 1.



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- The VBM option may be even more important in the Fall 2020 election for ensuring high rates of voter turn-out among older voters since older voters may face greater health risks from exposure to COVID-19 at traditional neighborhood polling places.²
- The VBM option may also help to raise voter turn-out among the youngest voters, ages 18-24. Historically, younger persons of voting age have much lower voter turn-out rates than older persons.³ Concerns about COVID-19 risks could further reduce their participation rates. Yet the youngest voters in Cuyahoga County in 2016 were more willing to use the VBM option.
- While a statewide analysis would be more definitive, data from Cuyahoga County suggest that vigorous efforts to promote VBM in the upcoming Fall 2020 elections may help ensure high rates of voter turn-out among both young and old voters, while also reducing the risks to health from COVID-19.⁴

**Table 1: Persons Voting by Mail (VBM) and Voting in Person (VIP), by Age
Cuyahoga County, Ohio: Fall 2016**

| age | Voters | | Percent | | Distribution by Age | |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | VBM | VIP | VBM | VIP | VBM | VIP |
| 18-24 | 10,217 | 28,454 | 26.4% | 73.6% | 5.3% | 6.9% |
| 25-34 | 15,613 | 71,059 | 18.0% | 82.0% | 8.1% | 17.2% |
| 35-44 | 15,107 | 69,195 | 17.9% | 82.1% | 7.8% | 16.7% |
| 45-54 | 23,901 | 79,869 | 23.0% | 77.0% | 12.4% | 19.3% |
| 55-64 | 43,058 | 84,854 | 33.7% | 66.3% | 22.3% | 20.5% |
| 65-74 | 41,844 | 51,081 | 45.0% | 55.0% | 21.7% | 12.3% |
| 75-84 | 27,021 | 21,987 | 55.1% | 44.9% | 14.0% | 5.3% |
| 85-94 | 14,660 | 6,808 | 68.3% | 31.7% | 7.6% | 1.6% |
| 95-99 | 1,494 | 415 | 78.3% | 21.7% | 0.8% | 0.1% |
| 100+ | 230 | 110 | 67.6% | 32.4% | 0.1% | 0.0% |
| Total | 193,145 | 413,832 | 31.8% | 68.2% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| 18-64 | 107,896 | 333,431 | 24.4% | 75.6% | 55.9% | 80.6% |
| 65+ | 85,249 | 80,401 | 51.5% | 48.5% | 44.1% | 19.4% |

² “Older Adults”, **YOUR HEALTH**, June 25, 2020. [<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/older-adults.html>]

³ See “Historical Reported Voting Rates”, U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2015. [<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/time-series/demo/voting-historical-time-series.html>]

⁴ Arguments to improve election safety include “How to Save Elections from a Pandemic”, by Eric Cortellessa, **Washington Monthly**, April/May/June 2020. [<https://washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/april-may-june-2020/how-to-save-elections-from-a-pandemic/>]