

**Measuring Voter Engagement in Election Administration: How Much Do States Ask from
Local Election Officials?**

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In the 20 years since the 2000 presidential election, there has been a push toward more active engagement by election administrators in educating and reaching out to eligible voters. To date, however, there is not a systematic understanding of what the voter education statutes and policies that guide local election administrators look like across American states. Examining state-submitted voter education plans mandated by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 and state election statutes on voter education and outreach, this paper describes the variation in state guidance and mandates for voter education in the United States. This research is an important first step toward understanding how the laws that structure voter education and outreach ultimately shape voter engagement in American elections.

During the June 2018 primary elections in New York City, many voters showed up to their assigned polling location only to find it closed. Mistakenly believing they had a primary candidate to vote for, it was only after the fact they learned their polling site was not open for primary voting because their Congressional candidate was running uncontested. Many voters were “infuriated their time was wasted,” and fielded their complaints through Common Cause, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the American democracy (Offenhartz 2018). Susan Lerner, the director of the non-profit, pointed to New York’s lawmakers as a major and consistent source of voter confusion. “New York State does nothing to inform voters,” she noted. “We make it extraordinarily difficult to vote in this state... It’s not surprising that people are completely confused” (Offenhartz 2018).

Negative voter experiences rooted in poor information about elections—such as the closing of polling places—are not likely isolated incidents, but rather reflective of broader variation in information made available and advertised to the public about how to vote (Adona and Gronke 2018). While political parties, candidates, and advocacy groups like Common Cause often play a role in providing voters with the information needed for voting, in many cases they are not incentivized to inform *all* eligible voters of election procedures, but rather select supporters likely to cast ballots in favor of their candidates or issues. Significant gaps exist between who is contacted and informed by these political actors, as well as between voters and non-voters in terms of familiarity with the mechanics of voting (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Adona and Gronke 2018). Each election cycle there are prospective voters that face difficulties

finding answers to questions such as whether they are registered to vote, where they should turn out, and how to navigate changes to ballots and voting technology.¹

Changes in voting procedures and locations, as well general information about election processes—ideally—should be followed by efforts to educate *all* eligible voters, not just the ones thought to favor a given candidate or issue. This is especially important given that changes in election procedures increase information costs for voters, which can influence the likelihood of turnout among even regular voters (McNulty, Dowling, and Ariotti 2009). Integral in the efforts to educate and inform voters about election processes are election administrators: the state and local bureaucrats in charge of interpreting and implementing voter education policies to ensure the public is informed about elections (Kimball and Kropf 2006). Precisely *who* is responsible for voter outreach and what these activities involve, however, is not consistent from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. State legislatures are responsible for determining the “Time, Places, and Manner” of elections, and as such, they do not operate under a single set of rules for educating voters about elections.²

In this paper, we examine voter education and outreach policies across the United States, looking specifically at the extent to which states are statutorily involved with educating and informing the public about voting. To do so, we coded voter education plans states were mandated to submit as a part of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), looking for the kinds of activities states mentioned in their plans and identifying where responsibility was

¹ Inadequate information about the voting process is only one piece of the voter experience that can negatively impact voter engagement. Voting machine breakdown and power outages can leave polling places without access to electronic poll books or voting machines. Polling places can be short staffed, or staffed with undertrained poll workers, as well as inaccessible or difficult to find (Barreto, Cohen-Marks, and Woods 2009).

² U.S. Const. art. I § 4

directed for managing voter education. Important to note is that although states were required to submit a plan, the provision itself was not a mandate for states to necessarily adopt specific voter education policies in their state election codes. As such, we also examine the actual voter education and outreach policies codified in state election law. Within the state election codes, we focus specifically on three sources of variation: the question of whether states have “voter education” language in their statutes at all, the kinds of activities that are emphasized, and whether the responsibility for voter education lies on state-level election administrators, local election administrators, or a combination of both.

Not surprisingly given the highly decentralized nature of the administration of elections in the United States, we find there is substantial variation in whether or not states even mention voter education in their election codes, the types of activities that are discussed, and the level of government under which voter education is managed. Moreover, there is not significant overlap between the voter education plans submitted by states as a part of the Help America Vote Act and what is actually written in state election codes. Although this paper is descriptive in nature, we conclude by discussing potential explanations for the variation across states in their voter education policies. We consider ways to explore these potential explanations in future research, and also lay out our plans for examining the relationship between voter education policies and various aspects of voter engagement in elections.

To our knowledge, this is the first effort to describe what variation in state voter education policies look like from state to state on a comprehensive, national level in the United States. Ultimately this paper represents an important step in a broader project that aims to create a database of voter education and outreach policies across the United States at state and local levels and examine the effects of these policies on voter engagement. The goal of this project is

threefold. One, in line with previous research suggesting that the reasons for law adoption can affect its downstream effects once implemented, we look to explain variation in the adoption of voter education policies at the state level (Hanmer 2009). Two, we look to assess how variation in both the definition of and mandate for voter education in state statutes affects the efforts of state and local election officials in the voter education and outreach process. Finally, and most importantly, we want to examine how variation in voter education and outreach policies influence voting outcomes such as turnout, over and under voting, and overall voter confidence in election outcomes.

Background: Information Access and Election Administration

There is a wide range of information voters need in order to vote and have their vote counted accurately, including registration deadlines, the documents needed to register, locations of polling places, the identification needed to vote, and how to properly mark a ballot so one's vote is counted (Hasen 2005; Adona and Gronke 2008). Voters may face significant barriers to accessing this information and, in some cases, have limited or no information about the voting process. Challenges in accessing this information ultimately limits the ability of voters to successfully register and cast a valid vote (Merivaki 2019, Merivaki and Smith 2016).

There are two ways voters can become informed about election processes. One, information gathering can be voter directed, with individuals seeking out information online or by contacting election administrators. Two, it can be election administrator directed, with administrators themselves taking active steps to improve voter access to information and reach out to them directly about elections. While many voters report receiving e-mails, phone calls, or flyers informing them about election processes from political candidates, party organizations, and advocacy groups, the strategic conduct of these political actors is not designed to reach every

eligible voter. Absent activities by election administrators, then, there may be disparities among which eligible voters are receiving information about the process of voting (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck 2013; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).³ Election administrators thus play a vital role in potentially reducing the voter engagement and participation gap between those who are regularly contacted by political campaigns with information about how to vote, and those who are left out in the cold come election time (Mann and Bryant 2019).

Established evidence on voter education and outreach by state and local governments is largely anecdotal and centers on certain types of activities and events specific to particular election cycles, rather than examining the scope and breadth of these policies across jurisdictions and over time. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that illustrates the kind of variation we expect to find when examining voter education and outreach policies across the United States through state statutes and HAVA plans.

One type of voter education that is both voter and election administrator directed are the use of government websites that contain election information. The development and maintenance of these websites has become an important part of election administrators' voter education efforts. This is because Americans tend to seek information about elections online, often looking to elections websites managed through their states or localities (Adona and Gronke 2018; Street et al 2015). There is variation, however, in the usability and accessibility of state government websites more generally. Virginia, for instance, was ranked 1st overall its state government website's usability and accessibility, whereas Louisiana scored last. Overall, only 29% of states meet website usability and accessibility standards, meaning a strong majority of states need

³ It is important to note that election administrators are not necessarily a panacea in information access for voters. There is evidence that partisan elected election administrators are biased in their implementation of certain election laws (Kimball, Kropf, and Battles 2006).

improvements to provide their voters with adequate service and information about elections. Some states have been more active than others in adopting legislation to improve their online presence (Castro and McLaughlin 2018). These efforts reflect states' interest in facilitating access to the information displayed on their elections' website, and are also consistent with the emphasis in HAVA placed on modernizing voting technology and access to information about elections (Hale and Slaton 2008; Alvarez and Hall 2005).

There is also the matter of the usability—and presence—of *local* government websites, where many voters might look for information specific to their jurisdiction. Given that information seeking on the part of voters signals their propensity to vote in an upcoming election, variation in website availability and usability suggests that at minimum, seeking and locating information may be a challenge for prospective voters depending on where they live.

Ultimately, although the availability of an elections website—at least at the state level—is more or less expected in contemporary American elections, websites may not be sufficient for lowering the barriers to obtaining voting information. Not every voter has Internet access. Even if they do, they may not seek out information on what is needed to vote in time to participate in an upcoming election (Street et al 2015). This is particularly relevant for states that have earlier voter registration deadlines, those that do not allow voters to register to vote online, and those without Same Day voter registration.

There are, of course, other activities in which election administrators can engage to inform voters about election processes, such as airing advertisements notifying voters about how to register, any changes in voting requirements, and important election deadlines. In the lead up to the 2018 general midterm elections in Indiana, for example, the Secretary of State's office used money from the state budget to air election ads aimed at voter outreach. The ads included

information about how to register, polling locations, and issues pertaining to election security. The latter component was added as a means to “boost voter confidence” in the wake of Russian meddling in the United States’ 2016 Presidential Election (Smith 2018).⁴

One prominent voter education issue election administrators have to navigate is informing voters of changes that are made to voting requirements. This has become particularly pertinent in the wake of states adopting stricter voter identification laws in recent years. Opponents of these laws argue they disproportionately limit access to the ballot by certain groups, particularly low-income and minority voters (Hajnal, Lajervardi, and Neilson 2017). Obtaining identification in and of itself may be a barrier to voting, but a lack of information about what is required in the first place is another issue voters may face that election administrators can address through voter education and outreach efforts. After it adopted a strict voter identification law in 2011, for example, state election officials in Mississippi invested heavily in training, providing local election officials with the resources needed to educate voters about how to acquire the identification needed to vote in the wake of the law change (Le Coz 2014).

These examples from Indiana and Mississippi illustrate similar efforts to educate voters about election processes. However, election administrators in these states are not governed by the same kinds of statutes in their state election codes. Indiana has an established voter education outreach fund with the purpose of “receiving, holding, and disbursing funds for education and outreach to citizens concerning voter rights and responsibilities, including voter identification

⁴ Voter education efforts by official government entities are not without partisan controversy. For example, Indiana Democrats questioned Republican Secretary of State Connie Lawson’s use of taxpayer dollars on the ads given that she herself was running a campaign for re-election at the same time (Smith 2018).

requirements.”⁵ Mississippi’s election code, on the other hand, does not contain information either suggesting or mandating that local election officials inform voters about these kinds of changes. The state’s codes contain guidance for informing voters about “day-of” voting processes, including how to operate electronic voting equipment and properly casting a ballot.⁶ However, there is no statutory guidance, mandates, or funds pertaining to processes for informing voters of changes like the new identification requirements passed by the state in 2011, nor does it allocate funds for broader voter education and outreach efforts like Indiana. And even though Indiana does allocate funds for a voter education and outreach efforts that may include information on voter identification, these efforts are not *required* by the state in their election codes.

Ultimately, while anecdotal evidence may give us some insight into different voter education efforts across the United States, we don’t have a systematic means of comparing and evaluating how different policies—or lack thereof—ultimately shape voter engagement. This makes it difficult to get a sense of, on average, the policies that work and the policies that do not work for improving voter turnout, the accuracy of ballots cast, and overall public confidence in the United States’ electoral system. Given that voters still report confusion about election processes—ranging from the registration processes, to what identification is needed, to the availability of new voter conveniences—it is important to understand what approaches and policies work and where more effort or changes are needed (Adona and Gronke 2018). For that, however, we first need a to establish what voter education and outreach policies look like across

⁵ I.C. § 3-6-3.7-4(a) {2013}

⁶ Miss. Code Ann. § 23-15-37; § 23-15-474; § 23-15-531.7;. § 23-15-613

the United States. For this, we turn to our examination of voter education plans submitted as a part of the HAVA mandate, and state statutes pertaining to voter education and outreach.

State Voter Education Policies: A Bird's Eye View

In this section, we address what voter education and outreach activities look like from the perspective of what is asked of state and local election administrators by their state governments, looking both at voter education plans submitted by states in response to the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) and state election codes. To examine patterns and variation in the HAVA plans, we coded the original voter education plans submitted by states and the District of Columbia. For state election codes, we conducted searches for the terms “voter education” and “outreach” to determine the presence and scope of voter education policies across the states. In both the HAVA plans and the election codes, we coded for one, at which level of government (state or local) the primary responsibility of voter education and outreach lay, and two, what activities were mentioned as a part of the plans and policies. For state election codes, our initial coding involved searching through the codes to verify whether or not a given state made any mention of voter education or outreach activities as a part of government responsibilities. We also considered whether or not the statutory language indicated an activity was “required” or a “suggestion” in state election codes.

We first provide an overview the HAVA provisions pertaining to voter education and outreach and of the range of activities outlined by states in their submitted HAVA plans. We then discuss what state statutes actually outline in terms of voter education and outreach by election administrators, looking at whether these terms are mentioned at all, where responsibility lies, the types of activities the states undertake as a part of their efforts, and what is required by state governments. Although HAVA required states to *submit* plans for voter education, the Act

did not contain a mandate for the adoption or implementation of these plans. There are, as a result, significant gaps between what states submitted as a part of their voter education and outreach plans, and what is ultimately written in state election codes.

Variation in Voter Education and Outreach Activities: HAVA Submitted Plans

Following the controversial 2000 presidential election debacle in Florida, problems with the United States' election system were largely defined in terms of voting technology. Emphasis was also placed on modernizing voter registration and implementing a failsafe for voters who were not able to verify their eligibility on Election Day in the form of provisional ballots (Kropf and Kimball 2012). These issues were taken up with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) (Hale and Slaton 2008). But an overlooked aspect of HAVA was its provision pertaining to voter education and outreach, specifically section 254(a)(3) of the Act asking that states submit plans outlining voter education programs that help them comply with Title III of the act.⁷ (Alvarez and Hall 2005, 564). This title lays out voting system standards, including a section indicating that states may meet certain compliance requirements by establishing a voter education program specific to their chosen voting system that notifies each voter of the effect of casting multiple votes for an office.⁸

State submitted HAVA plans are not necessarily specific as to which activities voter education programs entail (Alvarez and Hall 2005). "Education" largely revolved around familiarizing election officials and voters about new voting technology, such as electronic voting. The most precise mention of voter education comes in Section 295 of HAVA, where the

⁷ Pub. Law 107-252 § 254(a)(3); 42 USC § 15405 reads (a) In general—the State plan shall contain a description of each of the following... (3) How the state will provide for programs for voter education, election official education and training, and poll worker training which will assist the State in meeting the requirements of Title III.

⁸ Pub. Law 107-252 § 301(a)(1)(B)(i); 42 USC § 15481

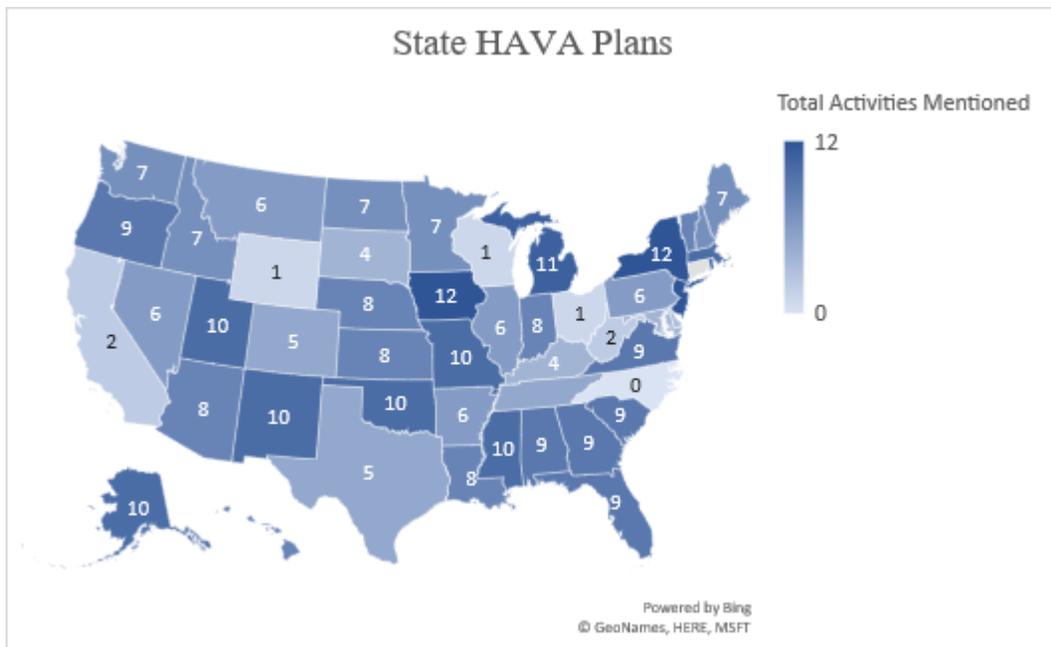
Election Assistance Commission (EAC) is tasked with offering grants to the states to implement student and parent mock elections in order to “promote voter participation in American elections.” Section 101(c) of the Act states that part of the HAVA funds should also be allocated to educate “voters concerning voting procedures, voting rights, and voting technology.” While these terms capture broad aspects of the election process, they hardly establish an operational definition of “education” and “outreach.” It is not clear, for example, whether information about candidates—particularly those in down ballot races—should be captured in the terms laid out by HAVA (Adona and Gronke 2018).

Our own examination of state HAVA plans reveal the kind of variation one would expect given the United States’ decentralized system of elections. In response to HAVA’s recommendations about voter education and outreach programs, all states’ plans did include a “voter education” section, but less than half expanded beyond an ambiguous statement about the importance of voter education in American elections. On the one hand, for example, is a state like Colorado, with a plan indicating that “the Secretary of State will reach out to its electorate, election staff, and local election officials with an effective program of election education and outreach.” The state’s plan does not outline what an “effective program” entails. New York’s HAVA voter education plan, on the other hand, committed to creating a “voter education and outreach campaign” that included a list of activities that all 62 County Boards of Elections were expected to implement, such as developing a county elections website, posting information about elections through radio, television, and social media advertisements, and providing election information in Braille for blind voters.

Figure 1 displays the number of activities listed for each state based on their HAVA plans. A handful of states list at least 10 activities. The most common of activities mentioned

across states is “outreach” (30 states), and distributing election information in print (32 states). Only 8 states mention that information about candidates is a part of their voter education plans. 18 states explicitly mention voting technology availability for public demonstration or information about voting technology as a part of their plans. Only 7 states mention the term “mock election,” for which they could apply to receive funds from the EAC.⁹

Figure 1: States’ HAVA Voter Education and Outreach Plans



There are three states that outline only one activity in their HAVA plans. Ohio mentions voter outreach, and Wisconsin and Wyoming discuss information about voting technology for disabled voters. Only two states—Iowa and Washington State explicitly mention that election officials will put up information kiosks at public events like county fairs with voter

⁹ Alaska, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Vermont, and West Virginia are the states that mention “mock elections” in their HAVA plans.”

information.¹⁰ This is curious given that public events provide opportunities to reach different types of voters, and are often attended by third party groups who conduct voter registration drives.¹¹ This suggests that community engagement may not have been a part of election officials' responsibilities following the passage of HAVA.

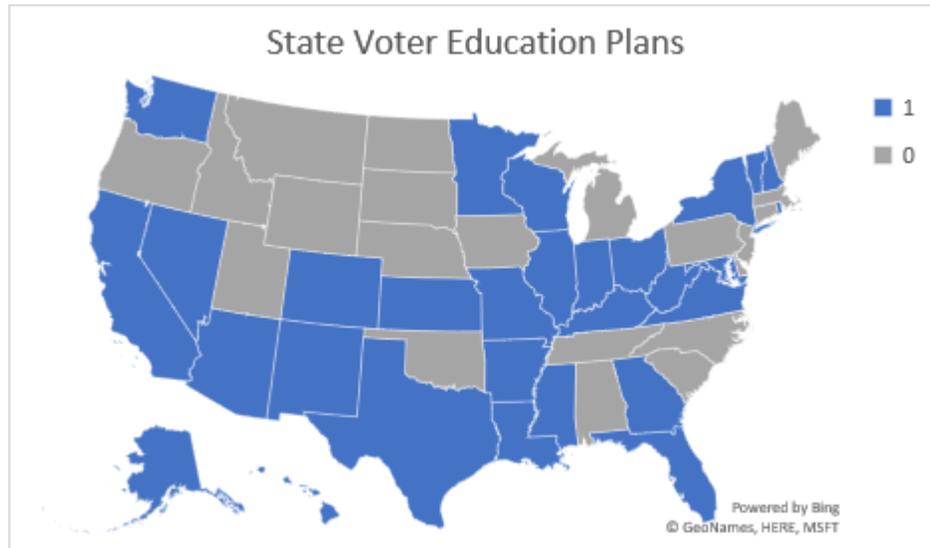
Variation in Voter Education and Outreach: State Election Codes

Although HAVA mandated states submit voter education plans and offered funds for certain activities, states remain the primary actors responsible for government directed voter education (Hale and Slaton 2008). Absent mandates and clear guidelines about what constitutes meaningful voter education and outreach efforts, it is reasonable to expect variation in what states consider vital elements of voter education to adopt and implement. Given the dizzying array of election jurisdictions in the United States, we first map out variation across the states simply based on whether they include the terms “voter education” in their state election code, which is shown in Figure 2. Compared to figure 1, where all states more or less at least committed to adopting a voter education plan on paper, 29 states currently have at least some mention of voter education in their state statutes.

¹⁰ For example, the Arkansas Secretary of State's Election FAQ website includes a question about registering to vote at a County Fair, suggesting the activity of third-party voter registration drives, but not election administrators: <https://www.sos.arkansas.gov/elections/voter-information/voter-registration-faqs> .

¹¹ For example, Rock The Vote encourages individuals and groups to organize 4th of July events or attend county fairs: <https://www.rockthevote.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/field/voter-registration-how-to.pdf> .

Figure 2: Voter Education Mentions Across the States



Beyond the simple question of whether or not states incorporate at least a mention of voter “education” or “outreach” in their election codes, we identified three main sources of variation in terms of how these terms are used and discussed. One is the question of whether or not a given state provides an operational description of what is meant by voter education by outlining specific activities. Two is the question of whether or not voter education and outreach is required—for example—a statute that says “election administrators *shall* engage in voter education activities,” or more of a recommendation—for example, a statute that says “election administrators *may* engage in voter education activities.” Finally, is the question of on whom the responsibility lies: state level election administrators, local administrators, or shared responsibility between both.

In terms of whether or not states provide an operational description of what is meant by “voter education” and “outreach”, many states offer at least some examples of what activities are associated with these terms. Minnesota’s election code, for example, discusses educating

elementary and secondary school students about voting.¹² Some state codes list activities that correspond to informing voters about specific election reforms, like the implementation of Ranked Choice Voting in Colorado.¹³ Similarly, Washington State has a specific outreach plan for voters with disabilities to educate them about their vote by mail program.¹⁴ Wisconsin has a statute governing outreach to voters who may need assistance in requesting and obtaining identification.¹⁵ A few states, however, do not explicitly elaborate on what voter education and outreach involves in the state statutes. In its discussion of the allowable expenses incurred by voter registrars, for example, Virginia lists “voter education” as a reasonable expense, but does not further elaborate on what is meant by voter education and whether it is mandated by the state.¹⁶

In terms of the extent to which voter education and outreach efforts are *required* or *recommended*, we look to whether statutes use the words “may” or “shall” in their language. Rhode Island’s election code, for example, indicates that the Secretary of State “*shall* identify communities within the state in need of electoral process education by outreaching community organizations.” The code is then specific on what the electoral process education looks like, indicating it “*shall* consist of instruction on how a person may become a candidate for electoral

¹² Minn. Stat. § 204B.27-7

¹³ Colo. Rev. Stat. § 1-7-1003(b) reads: A local government that conducts an election using a ranked voting method shall conduct a voter education and outreach campaign to familiarize electors with ranked voting in English and in every language in which a ballot is required to be made available pursuant to this code and the federal “Voting Rights Act of 1965”, 52 U.S.C. sec. 10101 et seq.

¹⁴ Wash. Rev. Code § 29A 04-223

¹⁵ Wis. Stat. §7.08.12 reads: In addition to its duties...the [Election Assistance] Commission will...engage in outreach to identify and contact groups of electors who may need assistance in obtaining or renewing a document that constitutes proof of identification for voting and provide assistance to the electors in obtaining or renewing the document.

¹⁶ Va Code Ann. § 24.2-111

office and how a person registers and votes for candidates for electoral office.” The code also requires the Secretary of State to provide this education throughout the state of Rhode Island.¹⁷ Similarly, the Georgia’s election codes state “It shall be the duty of the State Election Board” to conduct a voter education program about how to cast absentee ballots and polling place ballots, emphasizing the proper identification needed for voting.¹⁸ In some states, there are voter education activities mentioned as mandates, and others as recommendations. In Washington State, for example, the Secretary of state *may* allocate funds for voter education, but local election administrators are *shall* conduct outreach to voters with disabilities.¹⁹ Louisiana’s election statute states that the Secretary of State “*shall* prescribe uniform rules, regulations, forms, and instructions as to standards for effective nonpartisan voter education.”²⁰ In Wisconsin, the election assistance commission “*may* conduct or prescribe requirements for voter education programs to inform electors about voting procedures, voting rights, and voting technology”, but it “*shall* conduct an educational program” on the effects of overvoting for paper and absentee ballots.²¹

Table 1 shows the number of activities mentioned in the context of specific voter education or outreach statutes.²² The most common voter education activities are using print media to educate voters about elections and using statewide websites to disseminate information.

¹⁷ R.I. Gen. Laws § 17-6-13

¹⁸ Ga. Code Ann. § 21-2-31

¹⁹ Wash. Rev. Code § 29A.04.470; § 29A.04.223

²⁰ La. Stat. Ann. § 18:1-1

²¹ Wis. Stat. §5.05.12

²² There are some states—like Connecticut, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Vermont—that do not explicitly include the terms “voter education” and / or “voter outreach” in their election statutes, but nevertheless outline activities related to the kinds generally associated with voter education, such as providing sample ballots, issuing statewide voter education guides, or providing information about absentee voting. This ambiguity illustrates how loosely “voter education” may be understood and used statutorily.

Eleven states explicitly mention voter education in the context of educating voters on absentee voting and eight instruct election officials to inform voters about provisional ballots. Only eight states include voting technology in their voter education sections, considerably fewer compared to the HAVA plans submitted by states. The term “outreach” is far less clearly defined in state statutes. States mostly include the term in conjunction with voter education, and don’t generally specify the activities associated with it. While ten states mention the term outreach in their statutes, only three—New York, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin—include a specific activity like voter registration drives as a part of their outreach states.

Table 1: Voter Education and Outreach Activities

Activities	Number of States
<i>Ballot Information</i>	
Statewide Voter Guide	10
Candidate Information	5
Ballot Measures	5
Sample Ballots	9
<i>Voting Methods</i>	
Absentee Voting Information	11
Provisional Ballot Information	8
Voting Technology Information	9
Voting Technology Demo	3
Disabled Technology	9
<i>Dissemination of Information</i>	
Educational Videos	3
Seminars	5
Mock Election	0
Kiosk	0
Print	13
Radio	4
TV	4
Social Media	3
Website	13
Mail	9
Hotline	2

PSA	4
For the blind materials	3
Multilingual materials	3
<i>Outreach</i>	
Voter Drives	2

Compared to the state HAVA plans, there are a number of state statutes put the responsibility of voter education implementation on local election officials. Table 2 allows for comparison between the responsibilities as outlined in state submitted HAVA plans, and what is written in state election codes in states that discuss voter education. In only four of the thirty states (Kansas, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island) does the Secretary of State remain as the authority on voter education and outreach. In some places like Georgia, Kentucky, and Washington D.C., the creation of statewide election boards who oversee implementation of election laws—including voter education programs—represent institutions states have created since the adoption of HAVA to help administer election. By and large, however, the responsibility over education and outreach is unclear, shared, or falls under the jurisdiction of local election officials.

Table 2: Authority Responsible for Voter Education and Outreach

Responsibility-HAVA plan	State	Responsibility-Election Code
Shared	Alabama	
Lt. Governor & Director of Elections	Alaska	Director of Elections
Secretary of State	Arizona	Board of Supervisors
Secretary of State	Arkansas	
Shared	California	Shared
	Colorado	LEOs
	Connecticut	
Shared	Delaware	
Shared	Florida	Shared

Secretary of State	Georgia	State Election Board
Chief Elections Officer	Hawaii	Chief Elections Officer
Secretary of State	Idaho	
Shared	Illinois	Shared
Shared	Indiana	Shared
Shared	Iowa	
Secretary of State	Kansas	Secretary of State
	Kentucky	State Boards of Elections
Secretary of State	Louisiana	Secretary of State
Secretary of State	Maine	
Local Boards of Elections	Maryland	<i>Unclear</i>
Shared	Massachusetts	
Shared	Michigan	<i>Unclear</i>
Secretary of State	Minnesota	Shared
Shared	Mississippi	LEOs
Secretary of State	Missouri	Election Authority
Secretary of State	Montana	
Shared	Nebraska	
Shared	Nevada	City/County Clerk
	New Hampshire	Secretary of State
Secretary of State	New Jersey	
Secretary of State	New Mexico	County Clerk
County Boards of Elections	New York	County Board of Elections
	North Carolina	
Shared	North Dakota	
Secretary of State	Ohio	
	Oklahoma	
	Oregon	
Shared	Pennsylvania	
Secretary of State	Rhode Island	Secretary of State
Secretary of State	South Carolina	
Shared	South Dakota	Attorney General
Secretary of State	Tennessee	
Secretary of State	Texas	Shared
Lt. Governor	Utah	
Secretary of State	Vermont	Town Clerk
Secretary of State	Virginia	General Registrar
Secretary of State	Washington	Shared
	West Virginia	LEOs
	Wisconsin	Shared
	Wyoming	

Limited or vague state guidance likely results in variation in administrative practices and the discretion exercised by election administrators at the local level. On the one hand, the efforts of local election officials with voters may be scarce. On the other hand, there are jurisdictions that are active and innovative in their work to inform voters about the elections process. For example, Marion County, Florida’s Supervisor of Elections—a state where local and state officials share responsibilities for voter education—initiated a “High School Voter Registration Challenge” to increase the rates of youth prospective voters that received national recognition (Staff Report 2019). King County in Washington, another state with shared responsibilities between state and local election administrators, offers competitive grants to local non-governmental organizations to conduct voter education and outreach to underrepresented voters about the voting process in King County. The outreach efforts included information on voter eligibility, how vote-by-mail works, and general education on the democratic process.²³

Discussion and future steps

This paper represents a first important step in establishing what voter education and outreach policies looks like across the United States and the impact of these different voter policies on voter engagement and behavior. Like most other aspects of United States elections, there is substantial variation in the amount and scope of policies across American states. While each state was required to submit a plan for voter education and outreach as a stipulation of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), not all states ultimately have voter education statutes as a part

²³ King County, Washington Elections, Voter education Fund:
<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/elections/education-and-outreach/voter-education-fund.aspx>.

of their election codes. Moreover, the activities and details of these activities—both suggested and mandated—by state election codes vary immensely from state to state. In this section we discuss possible explanations for the three areas of variation we identified in our examination of state submitted HAVA plans and voter education statutes. We conclude by proposing the next steps for formally explaining this variation and examining the impact of voter education and outreach policies across the states on voter behavior.

First, perhaps the most notable variation across the states is that between those that make at least some mention of voter education in their statutes, and those that make no mention of it at all. To explore why this is the case, it will be important to examine pieces of voter education legislation that were proposed but ultimately failed in a given state government, as well as evaluate the extent to which local jurisdictions take responsibility for these activities in the absence of mandates and guidance from state governments. There may be certain states with strong traditions of highly decentralized election administration where the ins and outs of administering elections—including voter education—are left almost entirely up to localities. It is also important to note that a lack of statutory guidance or requirements pertaining to voter education does not mean that there are *no* voter education programs administered by state and local governments. It may be, however, that states determined there was not a need for statutory changes that mandated voter education programs.

Second, among the states that do discuss voter education in their statutes, variation in the clarity with which these activities are discussed also needs further explanation. For states without clearly defined voter education activities it may be that an anticipation of a need for discretion and flexibility in the implementation of voter education programs led legislators to propose changes that were purposefully vague in order to allow local jurisdictions flexibility in how they

administered their voter education programs. Such discretion is often useful for street-level bureaucrats with varying capacities and resources that are administering programs passed at higher levels of government. At the same time, variation in the mandates and guidance provided by state election codes—particularly in terms of the specificity pertaining to voter education activities—may create challenges in uniform implementation across local jurisdictions within a given state.

Finally there is the matter of variation in the delegation of authority for voter education and outreach. Undoubtedly the centralization (or lack thereof) of administrative authority over voter education programs will have different implications for the activities undertaken by local election administrators and voters themselves. On the one hand, states that primarily delegate responsibilities to local election administrators may be allowing them flexibility and leeway to implement voter education policies as best fits their jurisdiction. On the other hand, variation in whether there is a strong centralized authority governing voter education raises the question of the extent to which voters that live in different jurisdictions in a given state have access to voter education programs that are of similar quality.

Our next steps will be to one, to examine what impact the variation in state submitted HAVA plans and voter education and outreach statutes actually have on the efforts of state and local governments educate voters about election processes. An important component of this research will involve examining any websites maintained by local election administrators across the United States to see what types of voter education and outreach information or activities are mentioned on these sites. We also plan on reviewing whether local election administrators maintain an active social media presence to advertise and promote information to voters about elections.

We are ultimately interested in understanding what effect different voter education policies—and the ways in which they are detailed and structured—have on voters themselves. Beyond the important question of the extent to which different approaches affect voter turnout, we are also interested in understanding the impact of these policies on over voting, under voting, and overall voter confidence in the electoral process. While cross-sectional data on voter education and outreach policies across the United States can give us bird's eye view of what different practices look like, understanding the consequences of the various voter education and outreach policies addressed in this paper on actual voter behavior will also require more fine-grained data collection and analysis at the sub-state level that accounts for variations in the policies and practices of local election administrators.

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