Early Voting and Informed Voters in America

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Over 30% of votes in the 2008 US election were cast before election day. Early voting was introduced to enhance democracy, intended to increase the size and diversity of the voting public, and to improve the efficiency of election administration. But early voting carries risks to the democratic quality of elections. This article shows that in some elections these risks materialised in some elections in 2008. Early voting requires choices to be made before campaigns have ended, missing potentially crucial information. Early voters sometimes differ in their voting compared to election-day voters because they have voted early. In some electoral contexts these differences include more wasted votes and more undervotes.

More voters are casting their votes in advance of election day. In national elections in 2010 in the UK, Australia and Sweden there were surges in the numbers voting early either in person or by post. The United States also witnessed a sharp increase in 2008, where over 30 per cent of votes were cast early, double the proportion just eight years earlier. If that rate of increase persists, over half the vote will be cast early in the 2016 US presidential election.

The introduction of early voting in the US has transformed the meaning of ‘election day’. Voting ends the on the standard election day but is no longer confined to it. In some states it is spread over several weeks. Efforts by campaign teams to get out the vote, once confined to the hours immediately before and during the opening of the polls, have become similarly protracted. No longer is there a national uniformity to the day of the vote. In some states it remains restricted to election day. Others allow it to start several days or weeks before. Nor do voters necessarily go to the polls. They may have chosen to vote from home, returning their ballots by post. In some localities there are no polls to go to, public polling places having been abolished, replaced by a universal system of postal voting.

Until the 1970s early voting was confined to those absent from home on election day or unable to attend the polls because of illness or infirmity. Eligibility was then widened in an attempt to boost turnout. Further impetus to early voting came from the election day inefficiencies exposed in 2000 when there were long queues, inaccurate registers and faulty voting equipment in some areas. By 2008, 38 of the 50 states offered one or more of no-excuse postal votes, in-person early voting or mail-only ballots. (Hereinafter all these forms will be referred to as early voting). Though the impact of early voting on turnout has been meagre it has advantages for voters, campaigners and election administrators. Voters benefit from voting at a convenient and place. Campaigners stagger get-out-the-vote efforts over a period longer than a single day. Election officials face less intense pressures and lower risks of error in conducting the voting process.

These benefits aside, little attention has been given to the dangers of early voting. It encourages voting on incomplete information. Early voters vote before campaigns end, excluding themselves from later influences that may have affected their choice had they waited for election day. Campaigns have both incremental and singular effects and an early voter dilutes the impact of the former and entirely misses some of the latter. Several authors have mentioned this problem without exploring it.[[1]](#endnote-1) The evidence provided in this article, drawn from US elections in 2008, is that early voting can make a difference to voting choice and, in contests of low salience, whether choices are even made.

We begin by summarising the findings about the effects of campaigns on voters’ knowledge and voting choices. We then illustrate sources of information and potential influence which early voters missed in the 2008 presidential election. This confirms that early voters had access to a different campaign to those who waited until election day to vote. We then provide examples from other contests where early voting had an impact, leading to differences in candidate preference, wasted votes and undervoting. Although all the evidence is drawn from the United States it is likely that at least some of the effects of early voting will be present in other countries.

**Campaign events, effects and outcomes**

Voters become more informed as campaigns progress. Information supply and demand grow during a campaign. The news media devotes more coverage to the campaign as election day nears. Paid media advertising becomes more plentiful. Voters become more attentive as the campaign nears its end. Voters are initially hazy about the issue stances of candidates. Over time uncertainty diminishes. As uncertainty declines, there is a growth in the use of issues to evaluate the candidates and to distinguish between them.[[2]](#endnote-2) Misperceptions of candidates’ positions decline. [[3]](#endnote-3) Knowledge of candidates’ qualities-- such as competence, integrity and empathy—increases as campaigns progress. Gains in information enable voters to introduce more considerations into their judgments about the candidates. Information gains are greatest, Just and her associates found, from late September to late October.[[4]](#endnote-4) Gains in information help to explain why some of those still to decide are affected by campaigns. Some have their existing party allegiances activated. A smaller number are persuaded. Amongst this group are those without party allegiances and others persuaded to defect from the party they identify with. Some influences on the vote flow from repeated activities such as advertising and campaign visits from candidates.[[5]](#endnote-5) Others are produced by discrete events such as national conventions and presidential debates.[[6]](#endnote-6)

In addition to the staged campaign events of conventions and debates of every recent presidential election, some contests have included dramatic occurrences external to the campaign. Though the events have been distinctive they have in common their close proximity to election day. Two weeks before election day in 1960 Kennedy intervened on behalf of the imprisoned Martin Luther King, helping to secure his release. On the Friday before election day 1968 President Johnson announced a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. The following day the prospects for peace were damaged by the refusal of the South Vietnamese government to join peace talks in Paris. A week before the 1972 election Secretary of State Henry Kissinger announced ‘peace is at hand’ in Vietnam. Less than a week prior to election day 2000 the news media reported that George W. Bush had a twenty-four year old conviction for drunken driving. The weekend before the 2004 election a new tape from Osama bin Laden was broadcast, threatening new attacks on the United States unless there were changes to foreign policy.

Though some voters’ minds have been made up months in advance, there is considerable fluidity to voting choices and some minds are changed during the campaign. The panel study of the 2000 election found that nearly 45 per cent of voters shifted their preferences during the campaign, moving either between candidates or between a candidate and undecided. Changes in preference were particularly numerous after the conventions and the debates and in the final week before election day. At some point in the campaign 53 per cent had supported Bush and 53 per cent had supported Gore. [[7]](#endnote-7)

In possibly five of the 14 elections 1948-2000 those who decided after the conventions swung the election to the eventual winner (Campbell 2001).[[8]](#endnote-8) This swing occurred over several weeks but in most cases had to persist through the last week of the campaign to be sufficient to decide the election (see Table 1). In these elections all but a few absentee voters had to await election day to vote. (The 2000 election has been removed from this analysis because over 10 per cent of votes were cast early.) This delay until election day enabled voters to switch preferences or decide to abstain in the light of late campaign developments. For example, Kennedy’s intervention over King’s imprisonment earned the endorsement of the previously Republican Martin Luther King Senior, who promised to deliver many more black votes. Subsequent shifts towards Kennedy amongst black voters were possibly decisive in winning several competitive states by narrow margins and to capture an Electoral College majority. [[9]](#endnote-9)

(Table 1 about here)

Early voting has curbed the flexibility for voters to change their minds. Encouraged by campaigns and election authorities, and wanting to avoid the inconveniences of election day, substantial numbers put their choice beyond recall by voting early. In 2008 close to a third of the voters had removed themselves from the possibility of being influenced by the continued impact of incremental effects or late events by voting early. In-person early voting had begun in states including Iowa and Wyoming by the time of the first presidential debate (26 September). By the time of the second and third debates in-person voting was underway in twelve and thirteen states respectively. Twenty-four states were voting in-person before Colin Powell endorsed Obama sixteen days before election day.[[10]](#endnote-10) Early voters could view fewer of the campaign ads than election-day voters as they cut off a supply which increases as election day nears. During the period when early voting was taking place the number of ads being broadcast were unequally divided between the two major party candidates. Every week from 1 September until the final week the better-funded Obama campaign had a considerable advantage in the number of ads broadcast. Only in the final week did McCain gain parity.[[11]](#endnote-11) Early voters could also access fewer news stories than election-day voters. Not only did coverage of the campaign intensify, it also became the dominant news item, overtaking stories about the financial crisis. [[12]](#endnote-12)

Those voting well in advance of election day, who have most foreshortened their campaign experience, were a tiny proportion of the national electorate in 2008 but a more substantial minority in particular states. In most presidential battleground states the scale of voting two or three weeks early far exceeded that for the nation as the campaigns mobilized voters to secure their support as quickly as possible where it mattered most. In Ohio television viewers were told ‘Starting September thirtieth every day is election day’. Obama attended ‘Early Vote for Change’ rallies in states including Colorado, Florida and North Carolina where supporters were reminded that they could go to vote when the rally ended. Television ads, some featuring Matt Damon and Natalie Portman, urged an early vote for Obama in several states. Table 2 records the incidence of early voting in the battleground states as documented in state and national surveys.

(Table 2 about here)

In 2008 the Obama campaign was the more successful in encouraging supporters to vote early, capitalizing on their lead in the polls and the enthusiasm of their supporters. In many battleground states the election-day challenge to McCain was insurmountable such was the scale of Obama’s lead amongst early voters (see Table 3 for the Obama advantage in early votes at least one week before election day). Amongst those who decided how to vote in the final week-- the only one of the campaign in which the two sides were equal in advertising—McCain won as many votes as Obama. However, not only did Obama have a 53-46 per cent edge amongst those deciding earlier but around a quarter of these decisions were beyond recall having already voted.[[13]](#endnote-13)

(Table 3 about here)

**Decisive late information**

Where late influences affect voting occur they will produce differences in the preference of early and late voters. An example of this possibility being realised in practice comes in the 2008 Texas Democratic presidential primary. The Texas primary was held on 4 March, a month after Super Tuesday where Obama had carried most states to become the frontrunner. His advantage over Hilary Clinton strengthened with decisive wins in all of the next ten contests, enabling him to take the lead in pledged delegates. Texas, and the simultaneous Ohio primary, was potentially critical in resolving the contest. Bill Clinton publicly admitted that a win for Obama in either state would bring the contest to an end.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Polls published less than a week before election day showed the Texas contest to be a virtual deadheat. Then the Clinton campaign raised the salience of Obama’s inexperience. The ad ‘3 a.m.’ shows sleeping children while the voiceover announces that a phone is ringing in the White House, ‘something’s happening in the world’. It notes that one candidate (unnamed) knows the military and world leaders and has already been tested. The voiceover asks ‘Who do you want answering the phone?’ while Hilary Clinton, holding a phone, is pictured for the first time. The ad received extensive press attention. Both candidates proceeded to address experience in their campaign speeches and an Obama ad was deployed to rebut the charge of inexperience. In addition to the heightened salience of experience, Obama’s campaign was also troubled by new stories the day before the election about his connections to Tony Rezko, who was about to go on trial for bribery and fraud.

Unlike any other state, Texas makes public the early vote totals, allowing a precise count of the divergence in preferences between early and late voters. Obama led Clinton by 3% amongst early voters but trailed by 9% amongst the election-day voters. Clinton’s greater strength amongst the more numerous late voters was sufficient to secure a narrow victory (see table 4). Defeat in Texas prevented Obama from bringing the nominating contest to a close. Clinton survived to compete in all of the remaining states, prolonging the contest for a month and delaying the process of reconciling the supporters of the rival candidates

(Table 4 about here)

Early and election-day voters in Texas had access to different information. Early voting finished on Friday 29 February, the first day the ‘3 a.m.’ ad aired. At most, approximately a fifth of early voters could have been aware of the ad and the increased salience of experience in the campaign. [[15]](#endnote-15) None of these early voters could have been aware of the news stories which emerged on 3 March, raising new concerns over Obama’s connections to Tony Rezko. In contrast, all election-day voters could have had access to both of these late insertions into the campaign agenda.

Whilst the new agenda cannot be proven to have decided the contest, there is supportive evidence for a decline in Obama’s support and a growth in Clinton’s in the closing days of the campaign and that this, rather than a more effective mobilization of existing support by the Clinton campaign, overturned Obama’s advantage amongst early voters. First, the Obama campaign’s internal polls showed their candidate’s support waning in the closing days. Second, exit polls showed Clinton with a 2-1 advantage amongst the 21 per cent of voters who decided in the last 3 days. Amongst voters who decided earlier, Obama had a 1 per cent lead. Thirdly, the value of experience, an asset to Clinton in every primary, was of more importance in Texas than in most states voting earlier in the schedule. In 22 state exit polls before Texas, experience averaged 22 per cent as the top characteristic in choosing a candidate. In Texas 27 per cent assigned it priority. Clinton won 91 per cent of these voters.

**Wasted votes**

In nearly all elections those listed as candidates on the ballot are contenders for office. However, in presidential nominations candidate attrition occurs during the primary season. Losing candidates are winnowed out by lack of success, media attention and money. Candidates withdraw, reducing the field of active contenders for voters in states later in the schedule. In these later states ballot papers printed before withdrawals occurred present a range of choice which has been reduced, overtaken by events. They are a flashback to who the active contenders were not who they are on the day of the election. In 2008, for example, Biden and Dodd withdrew from the Democratic contest immediately after the Iowa caucuses. Yet their names remained on the ballots in many of the primaries which were to follow.

Candidates who have withdrawn do attract support from election-day voters. Some may be unaware of their candidate’s withdrawal. Others may be diehard supporters, displaying continuing loyalty. Others may be protest voters, expressing dissatisfaction with the remaining active candidates. All such votes are wasted in the sense that they are neither contributing to decide who will win the primary nor the distribution of delegates between the active contenders.

Wasted votes are more likely where early voting is permitted. Early voters may choose a candidate who withdraws after they vote. Where the withdrawal occurred prior to their casting a vote, they will have had less time to learn of the withdrawal than election-day voters. Moreover, early voters are less likely to be using their vote as a protest than an election-day voter because they have (or believe they have) their preferred choice still in contention. Wasted votes were more likely to exceed the winner’s margin of victory in states with early voting than those which confine the vote to election day.[[16]](#endnote-16) In the 2008 there were three of the former and one of the latter (see Table 5). Of the three in early voting states, Missouri provided a rare win for Obama in a large election battleground state, helping to demonstrate he was electable.[[17]](#endnote-17) The wasted vote was double his winning margin. On the Republican side, two of the wins which sustained Huckabee’s candidacy, Tennessee and Louisiana, were obtained in early voting states where his lead over McCain was smaller than the wasted vote. The one primary where wasted votes exceeded the margin of victory in the absence of early voting was New Mexico, which proved of negligible importance amongst the twenty-four contests on Super Tuesday.

(Table 5 about here)

**Undervoting**

One response to the shortage of information in low salience elections is to rely on party allegiances to discriminate between candidates. So early voters, for whom campaign information is scarcer than for election-day voters, can resort to straight-ticket voting. This is particularly likely for early voters because they tend to be more partisan and their voting more strongly related to party identification than those who vote later. We confirm this below using data from two Texas counties which publish counts of those choosing the straight-ticket ballot option. In both, the more Republican Tarrant County (Fort Worth) and more competitive Harris County (Houston), straight-ticket voters are a greater proportion of early than election-day voters (see Table 6).

(Table 6 about here)

Straight-ticket voting is only a solution to information scarcity in partisan elections. In nonpartisan elections, primaries and votes on ballot propositions voters need other cues to make a choice. Early voters, being untypically aware and informed, are likely to be better equipped than most to make choices in the absence of partisan cues. Early voters are therefore not likely to be undervoters—those who vote for a high profile offices but do not mark the ballot for a lower office contested simultaneously. These lower level office present a greater information challenge than higher ones, winnowing out less informed voters unable to make a choice who consequently roll off (undervote). Wattenberg et al likened the ballot paper to a SAT test, as questions become harder, fewer attempt them. [[18]](#endnote-18)

Contrary to expectation, in some contexts, early voters roll off in greater proportions than election-day voters. This unexpected behaviour was first detected by Dubin and Kaslow amongst absentee voters in California ballot propositions.[[19]](#endnote-19) The same characteristic is evident in these Texas counties when partisan and nonpartisan local elections coincide. Early voters roll off less than election-day voters in every partisan contest. In simultaneous local non-partisan elections contests and ballot propositions it is the early voters who undervote in greater proportions (see Table 7).

(Table 7 about here)

Dubin and Kaslow attributed this behaviour to the opportunity costs of voting. They surmised that absentee voting appealed to busy people. Being busy, they would have less time to complete their ballots. However, this is empirically and logically unconvincing. As the authors showed, the elderly were over-represented among absentee voters so time seems a constraint for fewer absentee than election-day voters. Second, given the opportunity to complete the ballot over several weeks at a time of their choosing, the busy absentee voter is less constrained than their election-day counterpart. The latter has to visit a polling place between set hours on a single day, may have waited in a queue to vote and may feel pressured to vote quickly by the queue behind them.

A more plausible explanation is that early voting exaggerates the problem of information gathering for low visibility contests when they coincide with partisan elections. Being more partisan, early voters are particularly attentive to the partisan contests. They are also more exposed to information about contests involving parties. In 2008 larger proportions of early voters were likely to have received printed materials, phone calls, e-mails and personal contacts from campaigns than election-day voters (see Table 8). As spending was so much higher in the election for president than in other contests, it is likely that these contacts emanated disproportionately from the presidential campaigns. Media coverage is also dominated by the presidential campaign.

(Table 8 about here)

Generally well informed about the partisan presidential campaign, the early voter has less to go on in making choices in nonpartisan elections and votes on ballot propositions. In low visibility contests information is scare for all voters. It is even scarcer for early voters because they miss the information which becomes available after they have voted. For example, in 2008 there were sixteen items--news stories or opinion pieces-- about any of the local propositions in the Fort Worth area published in the local *Fort Worth Star Telegram* between 1 September and election day, 6 made the front page of the paper’s Metro section. Six of these items, including three on the front page, appeared after early voting began.

**Conclusion**

This preliminary investigation into a neglected aspect of early voting suggests some unintended consequences of a reform designed to enhance the democratic quality of elections by increasing the size and diversity of the voting public and the efficiency of election administration. The evidence of this article is that early voting generates effects which detract from democratic quality—promoting voting necessarily ignorant of late campaign developments and, in particular electoral contexts, increasing wasted votes and undervoting. Some of these effects may be confined to features of American elections which have few counterparts elsewhere, such as primaries and simultaneous partisan and nonpartisan contests. However, the risks of missing late influences either in a campaign or in events external to it, are a danger of early voting everywhere.

Whatever its dangers it seems unlikely that the tide of early voting will recede. Voters, campaigners and election administrators all find its convenience attractive. The role for further study is to provide additional evidence about early voting—its forms and duration and the salience of different types of elections-- to enable lessons to be learned about how to minimize its risks whilst retaining its advantages.

Table 1 Decisive Effect of Late-Deciding Voters, 1948-2000 (%)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Voters deciding in last week | | | Winning margin |
| Total | Winner’s plurality | Winner’s gain in votes over opponent |
| 1948 | 13 | 69 | 7 | 4 |
| 1960 | 12 | 43 | 5 | 0.2 |
| 1968 | 21 | 6 | 1 | 0.7 |
| 1976 | 24 | 12 | 3 | 2 |

Source: American National Election Studies, 1948-2004Table 2 Early Voting in Battleground States, 2008

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | % Voted |
| *Three weeks early* |  |
| Georgia | 18 |
| Iowa | 14 |
| New Mexico | 10 |
| Ohio | 12 |
| US\* | 2 |
|  | |
| *Two weeks early* |  |
| Florida | 13 |
| North Carolina | 14 |
| Wisconsin | 10 |
| US | 10 |
|  | |
| *One week early* |  |
| Colorado | 59 |
| Florida | 44 |
| New Hampshire | 10 |
| Nevada | 51 |
| North Carolina | 39 |
| Ohio | 22 |
| Pennsylvania | 12 |
| US | 18 |

\*20 days early

Source: Roper, Survey USA, Gallup, AP-Yahoo

Table 3 Obama Advantage in Early Votes, Battleground States 2008 (%)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State | Total early vote one week  before election | Obama lead amongst early voters | Share of remaining voters needed by McCain to win† | Obama’s final winning margin |
| Colorado | 44 | 18 | 57.2 | 9 |
| Florida | 44 | 7 | 57.3 | 2 |
| Iowa \* | 32 | 40 | 60.4 | 9 |
| Nevada | 51 | 23 | 69.6 | 23 |
| New Hampshire | 10 | 18 | 52.3 | 9 |
| North Carolina | 39 | 26 | 60.8 | 1 |
| Ohio | 29 | 28 | 59.3 | 4 |
| Pennsylvania | 12 | 43 | 53.5 | 11 |
| Virginia | 13 | 44 | 54.1 | 6 |
| Wisconsin \* | 19 | 27 | 53.2 | 13 |

\*Six days before election

† To obtain 50.1 per cent of total vote

Source: Marist, Roper, Survey USA

Table 4 Early and Election Day Voting, Texas Primary 2008 (%)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Early Voters  (44.8) | Election-day Voters  (55.2) | Total Vote  (100) |
| Obama | 50.5 | 44.8 | 47.4 |
| Clinton | 47.8 | 53.4 | 50.9 |
| Diff. | -2.7 | + 8.6 | +3.5 |

Source: http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/forms/enrrpts/2008dp.pdf

Table 5 Wasted votes and winning margins, 2008 primaries

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| State (Party) | Winning margin (%) | Wasted vote (%) | Winner |
| *Early voting* | | | |
| Missouri (D) | 1.6 | 3.2 | Obama |
| Tennessee (R) | 2.7 | 4.0 | Huckabee |
| Louisiana (R) | 1.3 | 7.3 | Huckabee |
| *Election-day voting only* | | | |
| New Mexico (D) | 0.8 | 2.8 | Clinton |

Source: http://www.thegreenpapers.com/P08/

Table 6 Straight-ticket voting by time of vote, 2000-2008 (%)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Early voters | Election-day voters |
| Tarrant County | | |
| 2000 | 60.1 | 54.5 |
| 2002 | 62.1 | 51.7 |
| 2004 | 65.9 | 60.5 |
| 2006 | 51.9 | 47.5 |
| 2008 | 63.2 | 57.9 |
| Harris County | | |
| 2000 | NA | NA |
| 2002 | 56.4 | 54.1 |
| 2004 | 65.7 | 63.1 |
| 2006 | 48.6 | 47.2 |
| 2008 | 63.6 | 59.9 |

Source: Tarrant County Elections Center, <http://www.tarrantcounty.com/evote/site/default.asp>; Harris County Clerk’s Office, <http://www.harrisvotes.com/>

Table 7 Undervoting, local nonpartisan elections and ballot propositions, 2004-2008 (%)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Early voters | Election-day voters |
| Tarrant County | | |
| Propositions  (N=33) | 29.0 | 23.2 |
| Harris County | | |
| Propositions  (N=10) | 27.1 | 24.9 |
| Nonpartisan elections  (N=22) | 46.9 | 42.3 |

Source: Tarrant County Elections Center, <http://www.tarrantcounty.com/evote/site/default.asp>; Harris County Clerk’s Office, <http://www.harrisvotes.com/>

Table 8 Campaign information sources and contacts, 2008

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Information source/contact | Early voters | Election-day voters |
| Watched ads and news stories | 82 | 75 |
| Received printed materials in the mail | 69 | 53 |
| Contacted to vote just before election | 64 | 48 |
| Received phone calls from campaign | 58 | 50 |
| Received emails | 40 | 33 |
| Received knock on door from campaign | 25 | 17 |

Source: Democracy Corps

1. For example, J. Fortier, *Absentee and Early Voting: Trends, Promises, and Perils*, American Enterprise Institute, 2006, p.61. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. R. Alvarez, *Information and Elections*, Michigan University Press, 1997. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. S. Feldman and P. Conover, ‘Candidate Perception in an Ambiguous World: Campaigns, Cues and Inferences

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4. M. Just, A. Crigler, D. Alger, T. Cook, M. Kern and D. West, *Crosstalk: Citizens, Candidates and the Media in a Presidential Campaign*, 1996, p.206. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. D. Shaw, ‘The Effect of TV Ads and Candidate Appearances on Statewide Presidential Votes, 1988-96’, *American Political Science Review*, 93 1999, 345-61. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. T. Holbrook, *Do Campaigns Matter?*, Sage 1996, D. Hillygus and S. Jackman, ‘Voter Decision Making in Election 2000: Campaign Effects, Partisan Activation and the Clinton Legacy’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 47, 2003, 583-96. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Hillygus and Jackman, pp. 586-7 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. J. Campbell, ‘When Have Presidential Campaigns Decided Election Outcomes?’, *American Politics Research* 29, 2001, 437-60.

   9 T. White, *The Making of the President 1960*, Jonathan Cape, 1962, pp.385-7.

   10 These numbers, based only on in-person voting, underestimate the incidence of early voting. Many states do not publish dates for the issuance of absentee ballots. But for those that do, it is common for ballots to be sent out at least four weeks before election day.

   11 M. Franz and T. Ridout, ‘Political Advertising and Persuasion in the 2004 and 2008 Presidential Elections’, *American Politics Research*, 38, 2010, 303-29.

   12 D. Owen, ‘Media in the 2008 Election: 21st Century Campaign, Same Old Story’, in L. Sabato (ed), *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama Won the White House*, Longman, 2009, p.172.

   13 MSNBC exit poll, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26843704/>

   14 D. Balz and H. Johnson, *The Battle for America 2008*, Viking, 2009, pp.192-3.

   15  This estimate is based on daily counts of early votes in the state’s 15 largest counties. In these counties 80.8% of early votes were cast before 29 February. These counties accounted for 69.3% of the state’s total early vote. Texas Secretary of State, Elections and Voting Information, <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/earlyvoting/2008/index.shtml>

   16 Wasted votes are those cast for candidates who were active contenders at the start of 2008 but then withdrew: (Democrats) Joe Biden, withdrew 3 January; Chris Dodd, 3 January; Bill Richardson, 9 January; Denis Kucinch, 24 January; John Edwards, 30 January. (Republicans) Duncan Hunter, 19 January; Fred Thompson, 22 January; Rudy Guiliani, 30 January; Mitt Romney, 7 February; Mike Huckabee, 4 March.

   17 D. Plouffe, *The Audacity to Win*, Viking, 2009, p.172.

   18 M. Wattenberg, I. McAllister and A. Salvanto, ‘How Voting is Like Taking a SAT Test: An Analysis of American Voter Rolloff’, *American Politics Quarterly*, 28, 2000, 234-50.

   19 J. Dubin and G. Kaslow, ‘Comparing Absentee and Precinct Voters: Voting on Direct Legislation’, *Political Behavior*, 18, 1996, 393-411. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
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