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Too Many Ballots of Last Resort - Disparities in Provisional Ballot Use in Ohio's 2020 Election

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SUMMARY

Nearly 6 million Ohioans voted in the 2020 general election, a record turnout. However, amid a pandemic, the way Ohioans cast their ballots changed. Only 2.47 million people voted on Election Day, with the rest of voters utilizing vote-by-mail (VBM) and early-voting options. Of those 2.47 million voters, 154,675 were asked to cast a provisional ballot, and more than 24,000 ballots were ultimately rejected. This report analyzes the use and rejection of those provisional ballots. The trends surrounding provisional ballots in Ohio show increased use, increased rejection rates, and decreased cure rates. The provisional ballot system was originally designed to give voters an opportunity to prove their eligibility to vote rather than to be turned away. However, these trends, and previous research, fit with a larger pattern nationwide where nonwhite, young, and low-income communities cast a disproportionate share of provisional ballots. Provisional ballots are generally considered a "last resort" for voters who encounter a problem that prevents them from casting a regular ballot. Voters who go to the wrong polling location, don't appear in the poll book on Election Day, or are flagged for a signature mismatch may need to cast a provisional ballot. Election officials work to resolve the issue up to seven days after the election to ensure the provisional ballot is counted, if they find the voter was eligible to cast a ballot. High rates of provisional ballot use—and rejection—not only raise questions about the health of the election system but also reflect barriers to voters being able to cast a ballot that counts.

Despite 576,000 fewer people voting on Election Day in 2020 as compared to 2016, there were similar numbers of raw provisional ballots. The cure rate for provisional ballots declined. That rate is the frequency by which a ballot was "fixed" or "cured" by a voter before it could count. That process requires a voter to follow up in person with their elections supervisor at the county board of elections. Although the over 24,000 uncounted provisional ballots did not show the same demographic disparities as provisional ballot usage, it remains true that Black and Brown voters, young voters, and low-income voters experience higher rates of provisional ballot use in Ohio, so these voters shoulder a greater burden when casting their ballots.

We used two case studies to analyze provisional and VBM data at the precinct level. Findings in Cuyahoga and Franklin counties clearly show that the greater absentee ballot usage in the general election reduced overall provisional ballot use. Election Day voting, with face-to-face interaction between election workers and voters, is driving provisional ballot usage up for Black, Brown, young, and low-income voters in a way that voting by mail does not.

To fix this troubling trend, this report recommends that Ohio support VBM by creating automatic voter registration and an online absentee ballot request system, in order to further reduce provisional ballot usage. We also propose more training for poll workers, more data and transparency surrounding provisional ballot use in Ohio, and further research at the local and precinct level. In addition, we have previously called for increased voter education, among other things (Bricker and Gall). By adopting these measures, we can better understand, track, and ultimately reduce the cost of curing provisional ballots and the risk of rejected ballots falling disproportionately on traditionally disenfranchised communities.

Key Findings

- In 2020, in-person provisional ballot use and provisional ballot rejection rates increased, and cure rates declined.

- Race, age, and income are important factors for each of the last three major elections across Ohio.

    - Counties with a higher percentage of Black and Brown residents have higher provisional ballot use.
    - Counties with a higher percentage of young voters (age 18 to 24) have higher provisional ballot use.
    - Counties with higher median incomes have lower provisional ballot use.

- In case studies of Cuyahoga and Franklin counties, increased absentee voting reduced provisional ballot usage.

    - A 10 percentage point growth in vote-by-mail in Cuyahoga County, approximately 64,000 voters, would result in around 2,650 fewer provisional ballots, a 15% reduction.
    - In Franklin County, a 10 percentage point growth in VBM, approximately 64,000 voters, would result in around 2,670 fewer provisional ballots, a 13% reduction.

- In 2020, 24,369 provisional ballots went uncounted in Ohio. For context, in 2016, 22,470 votes decided a hotly contested statewide race for an Ohio Supreme Court seat (Shaffer). Pat Fischer and John O'Donnell each received over 2 million votes, yet the election came down to less than 1% of the voters (Ohio Secretary of State, "2016 Ohio Statewide Election Results").

Recommendations

- County and state officials must invest in expanding early-voting opportunities. Due to a 2006 Ohio law, early-voting and absentee ballot drop boxes are artificially restricted to one location per county rather than allocated based on usage or need. Authorizing multiple absentee ballot return locations and multiple early-vote locations in every county would allow more Ohioans to ultimately avoid using a provisional ballot by driving people to vote early. Registration and ballot issues would then be addressed prior to Election Day.

- County officials must create robust ballot cure processes that include voter education and ballot alert systems that allow voters an opportunity to simply and easily correct a ballot. Counties should be permitted to accept a ballot curing process electronically. Currently, voters has seven days after the election to report to the county board of elections and provide any verification needed to ensure their ballots counts. However, sending verification over email or via text message, where appropriate, would save voters time and money, as well as help resolve potential issues in a more timely manner. The more time voters have to fix a problem with their ballots and the easier that process is, the less likely their ballots will be rejected.

- County and state officials must create an infrastructure to support widespread VBM use across the state, including electronic ballot applications. In order to request a ballot currently, Ohio voters must fill out an online request form which generates a PDF. That PDF in turn needs to be printed and mailed to their county board of elections. Ohio should adopt electronic ballot applications which skip unnecessary steps, avoid reliance on the post office, and allow voters to send their information using the internet directly to the county board of elections.

- Ohio should enhance poll worker training on voting regulations to ensure appropriate provisional ballot use.

- The state must collect and publish data on why, under election law, a voter is asked to use a provisional ballot. Ohio must begin to collect reasons for provisional ballot use and make the data publicly available to ensure full transparency and allow researchers to further investigate disparities in usage rates.

- County-level analyses are critical to understanding statewide trends, but precinct-level analyses help us understand the dynamics at play within cities and counties. Additional research is needed at the more granular precinct level to further understand the relationships between race, age, income, and provisional ballot usage and rejections. Additionally, the interactions between voters and poll workers that lead to disparate use of provisional ballots should be studied.

- Jurisdictions must invest in VBM infrastructure, widespread no-excuse absentee voting, and voter education. They must also create robust ballot cure processes that include voter education and ballot alert systems that allow voters an opportunity to correct a faulty ballot. Better systems and informed voters reduce provisional ballot usage and rejections.

CASTING, REJECTING, AND CURING PROVISIONAL BALLOTS IN OHIO

Ohioans and voters across the country turned out in record numbers despite the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Ohio secretary of state, nearly 6 million Ohioans voted in the 2020 general election. Turnout was 74%. The last time turnout was that high was the 1992 general election, when turnout hit 77% (Ohio Secretary of State, "Voter Turnout in the General Elections").

Overall, early in-person and absentee voting rose to record levels, and Election Day voting fell to record lows. Table 1 shows some of these trends.[1] Ohioans made greater use of early voting (EV) in 2020, with 22.5% voting early as compared to 11.9% in 2016, a total increase of more than 680,000 voters. Voting by mail (VBM) in 2020 also increased, accounting for 36.1% of the 5.97 million ballots cast (Ohio Secretary of State, "2020 Official Elections Results"). The total number of voters using VBM increased by more than 940,000 from 2016, when only 21.7% of voters made use of the option. Predictably, with the large increase in 2020 voters preferring EV and VBM options, Election Day voting fell drastically, from 66.48% in 2016 to 41.36% in 2020. While 2.47 million Ohioans voted on Election Day, this move away from Election Day represents a seismic shift in preferred voting methods, with more than 1.26 million voters changing how they voted from 2016 to 2020.

Of the 2.47 million people who voted on Election Day in 2020, 154,675 were asked to cast a provisional ballot. Over 24,000 of those provisional ballots were ultimately rejected. The provisional ballot system was designed to give voters an opportunity to prove their eligibility to vote rather than get turned away. But we see troubling patterns in provisional ballot usage rates that suggest a larger problem in the system.

Most[2] provisional ballots are used during in-person voting when a voter's eligibility to vote is questioned or unclear. Some of the reasons why a voter might be required to cast a provisional ballot include signature mismatch "in the opinion of the precinct officers," the voter already requested an absentee ballot, registration mailings to the voter were returned as undeliverable, the voter had insufficient or no identification, or the voter's name does not appear on the poll list for that precinct (Ohio Secretary of State, "Provisional Voting"). In most cases, the voter must provide additional information to the county board of elections so that the board can confirm the voter's eligibility and the validity of the ballot cast. Voters who do not provide acceptable identification during in-person voting and vote by provisional ballot have until seven days after Election Day to return to the board of election with proof of identification.

In this report, we examine the overall use of provisional ballots, focusing on initial ballot rejection and cure rates and the variation in use across racial and ethnic groups, age groups, and income brackets. Case studies from Cuyahoga and Franklin counties help illustrate the highly localized nature of these problematic trends that statewide analyses can obscure and show that increased voting by mail reduces provisional ballot usage in meaningful ways.

Table 1: Vote Method by Year

General Election	2016	2018	2020
% Turnout	71.33%	55.79%	73.99%
% Early Voting	11.87%	9.54%	22.52%
% VBM	21.65%	20.82%	36.11%
% Election Day	66.48%	69.64%	41.36%

[1] Full table with raw numbers is available in the Appendix.

[2] A person can vote provisionally before Election Day at designated places if they have moved their residence to a different precinct but have not updated their voter registration.

VALID, REJECTED, AND PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

Table 2 shows the total number of provisional ballots, the percent of total ballots that were provisional, and the percent of in-person ballots that were provisional across the 2016, 2018, and 2020 general elections.

Although the overall rate and number of provisional ballots in Ohio dropped slightly between 2016 and 2020, provisional ballots made up a greater share of in-person ballots in 2020 than 2016. In terms of all ballots, the percent of provisional ballots decreased from 2.76% to 2.59%. The slight rate decline from 2016 represents only 290 fewer voters. Looking at ballots cast in person while excluding VBM ballots reveals an increase in the rate of provisional ballot use from 3.53% in 2016 to 4.05% in 2020. So even though there were about 576,000 fewer in-person votes in 2020 than in 2016, there were similar numbers of raw provisional ballots. The data for in-person ballots reflects a concerning increase in the usage of provisional ballots in the 2020 election.

Provisional ballot use decreased in the 2018 midterm election to 2.24%, but it is typical to see dips in provisional ballot usage in midterm elections. The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) proposes that one main reason for this is the type of voter that shows up for midterm and general elections. "Midterm elections with lower turnout likely have more regular and experienced voters casting ballots. Presidential elections are higher-profile races with higher turnout and are more likely to have first-time or infrequent voters who have less experience with the voting process and may experience more challenges," (U.S. Election Assistance Commission).

Table 3 shows the total number of provisional ballots that were initially rejected, the initial rejection rate, the total number of provisional ballots that were cured by voters, and the percent of provisional ballots that were initially flagged for rejection that were ultimately cured and counted in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 general elections.

The number and rate of provisional ballot rejections also increased in 2020. Of the over 154,000 provisional ballots cast, 24,369 were rejected. The rate of rejections grew from 14.83% in 2016 to 15.75% in 2020. Like overall usage, provisional ballot rejections were lower in the 2018 midterm but still accounted for over 12,000 votes. Additionally, the provisional ballot cure rate fell from 85.18% in 2016 to 84.25% in 2020. Taken together, the trends show increased use, increased rejection rates, and decreased cure rates.

The exceptional focus brought to the 2020 general election due to the COVID-19 pandemic and presidential politics created never-before-seen pressure on the entire electoral system. A record number of Ohioans turned out to vote despite the challenges, and a record number chose to cast their vote in different ways. Still, over 24,000 votes went uncounted in Ohio in 2020. For context, in 2016 only 22,470 votes decided a hotly contested statewide race for an Ohio Supreme Court seat (Shaffer). Pat Fischer and John O'Donnell each received over 2 million votes, yet the election came down to less than 1% of the voters (Ohio Secretary of State, "2016 Ohio Statewide Election Results").

Table 2: Provisional Ballot Use

Year	# Provisional	Overall % Provisional	In Person % Provisional
2016	154,965	2.67%	3.53%
2018	100,960	2.24%	2.83%
2020	154,675	2.59%	4.05%

Table 3: Provisional Ballot Rejections and Ballot Cures

Year	# Rejected	% Rejected	# Cured	% Cured
2016	22,978	14.83%	131,987	85.18%
2018	12,080	11.97%	98,880	88.11%
2020	24,369	15.75%	130,306	84.25%

[3]Acceptable proof of identity includes Ohio driver's license, military IDs, state or other photo ID cards, the last four digits of the voter's Social Security number, or bills and statements showing the voter's name and current address.

VARIATION IN PROVISIONAL BALLOT USE AND REJECTIONS

There is significant variation in the process and use of provisional ballots among counties. While bound by statewide laws and regulations, county officials have enormous discretion regarding implementation and use of provisional ballots. Such county-level discretion inevitably leads to some variation in the amount of provisional ballot use and rejections. However, persistent patterns of provisional ballot use that relate to race, ethnicity, age, and income reveal patterns of troubling disparities.

Previous research finds a relationship between young, low-income, and nonwhite voters and higher instances of provisional ballot use and lower acceptance rates. Counties in Ohio with a higher Black population had a lower rate of accepting provisional ballots in the 2004 and 2006 general elections (Steigleder 2007). Alvarez and Hall found higher rates of provisional ballot use in counties with a higher nonwhite population in Ohio for the 2008 general election (2009). These studies show that younger populations and counties with universities face higher provisional use and lower acceptance rates. They also demonstrate long-term and consistent patterns.

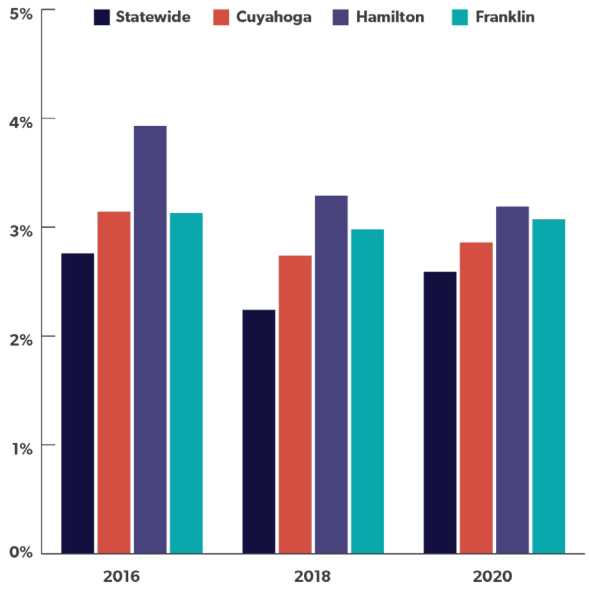
Studies focusing on other U.S. states show that demographics are important factors in understanding provisional ballot use and rejection rates. Predominantly white counties cast fewer provisional ballots and see more of those ballots eventually counted than nonwhite areas (Baybeck and Kimball 2008, Kimball and Foley 2009, McGinn and Debbage 2015). There is also evidence that age and education have a meaningful impact, with older and more highly educated areas casting fewer provisional ballots (McGinn and Debbage 2015).

Overall the previous research shows provisional ballot use and rejection trends in Ohio fit with a larger pattern nationwide where nonwhite, young, and low-income communities cast a disproportionate share of provisional ballots.

PROVISIONAL BALLOT USE AND DEMOGRAPHICS

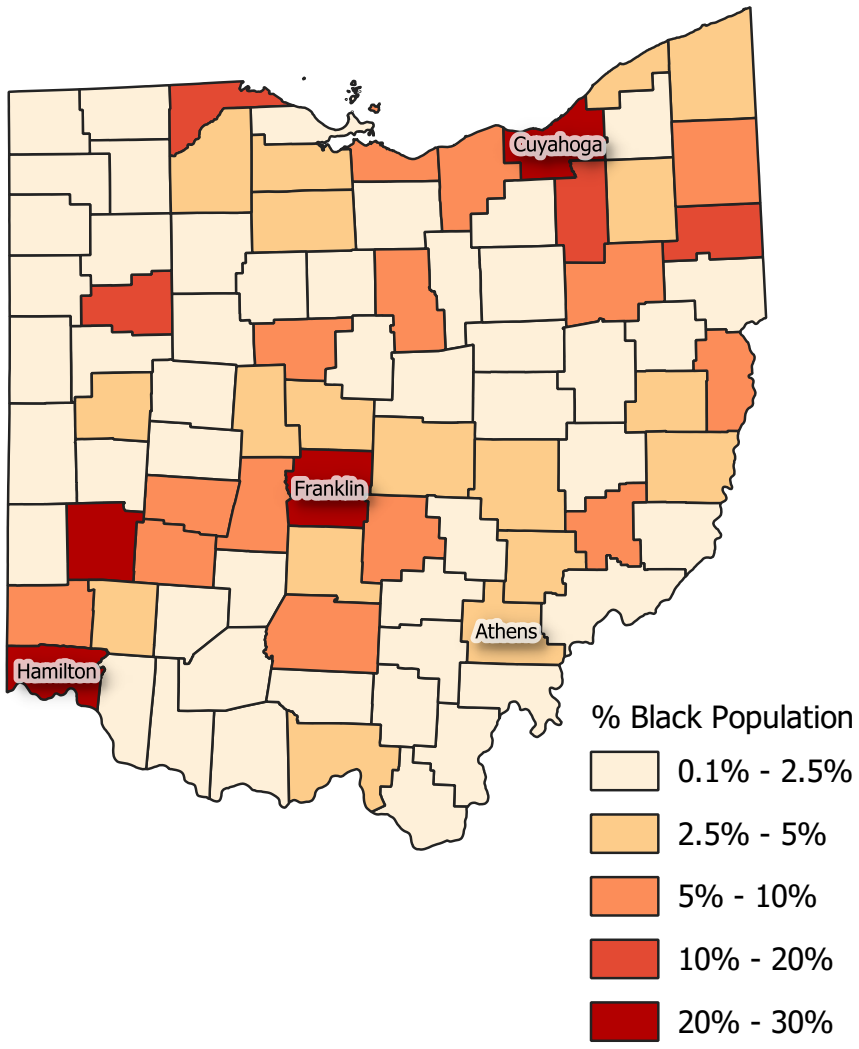
Chart 1 shows the provisional ballot usage rate across 2016, 2018, and 2020 statewide and in Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton counties. All three counties consistently exceed statewide rates of provisional ballot use. The statewide usage rate of provisional ballots for 2020 was 2.59% compared to 2.86% in Cuyahoga, 3.07% in Hamilton, and 3.19% in Franklin. If Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton had the same provisional usage rate as Ohio's statewide rate of 2.59%, it would have resulted in 7,500 fewer provisional ballots in those three counties, a 15% reduction.

Chart 1: Provisional Ballot Usage



State and countywide numbers can obscure more-localized problems. Precinct-level data provide granularity for a deeper analysis. Our similar analysis for the 2018 general election in Franklin County found that voters in communities with the most Black voters were 2.44 times more likely to cast a provisional ballot than voters in communities with the most white voters. Voters in communities with the highest percentage of young voters were 4.79 times more likely to cast a provisional ballot than voters in communities with the lowest percentage of young voters (Brickner and Gall).

Map 1: Black Population in Ohio



These patterns are not coincidental or trivial. Map 1 shows the percentage of the Black population by county. Cuyahoga County, home to the city of Cleveland, has the highest percentage of Black residents in Ohio at 29.6%. Hamilton County follows at 25.6%, and Franklin, home to the state capital of Columbus, has a Black population of 22.6%. Collectively, these three counties represent over 60% of Black residents in Ohio.

Athens County also has a consistently high provisional ballot use rate, ranking first in the state in 2020 and 2018 and ranking second in the state in 2016. Although the population is around 91% white, Athens is home to Ohio University. Residents age 18 to 24 make up 29.2% of the population, the highest in the state.

Chart 2: Provisional Ballot Usage Rate in Counties

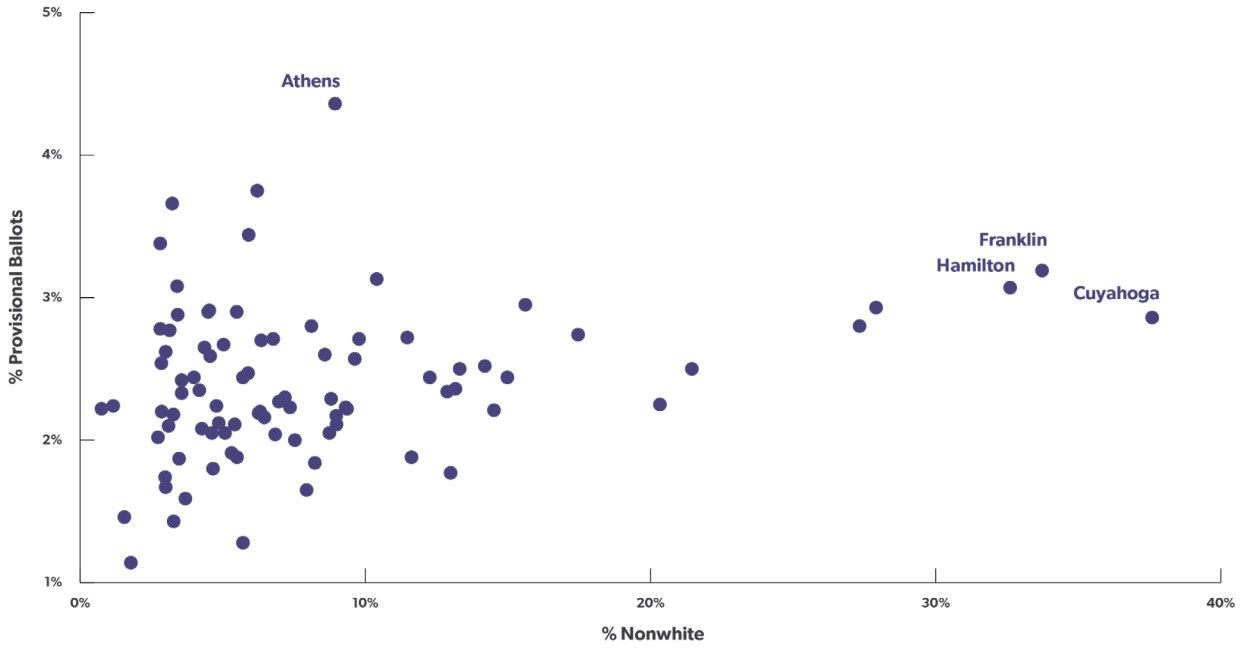


Chart 2 is a scatterplot showing the relationship between the percent of the nonwhite population along the bottom axis and the rate of provisional ballot use along the y-axis. Cuyahoga, Hamilton, and Franklin counties are highlighted and clustered together as areas with high rates of provisional ballot use and the highest rates of nonwhite populations. Athens County, also labeled in the scatterplot, has the highest rates of provisional ballot use and, as previously mentioned, the highest rate of populations age 18 to 24.

We used a linear regression model to further explore the relationship between race, age, income, absentee ballot usage, turnout, and provisional ballots at the county level for the past three federal general elections.[4] We modeled the percentage of provisional ballots used in a county and consider race, age, income, voting method, and turnout as possible explanations. Regression models allow us to control for these multiple factors at once.

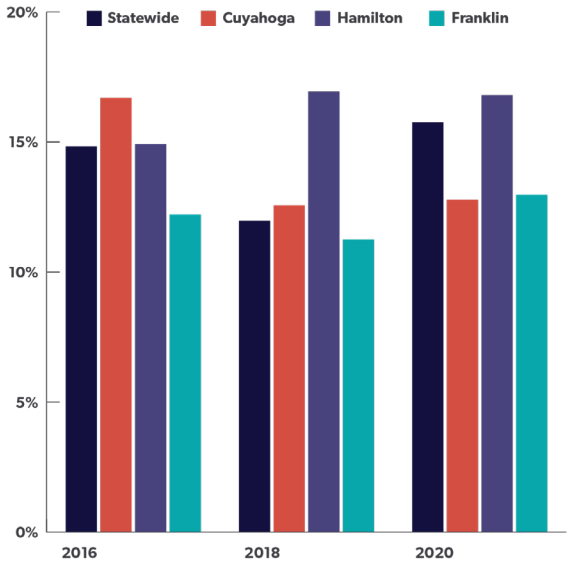
At the county level, race, age, and income are important factors in provisional ballot use across all three recent major elections. Counties with a higher percentage of nonwhite residents use a higher percentage of provisional ballots. Additionally, counties with more young voters (age 18 to 24) use more provisional ballots. Lastly, higher median incomes result in lower provisional ballot use. These patterns are clearly not isolated to the 2020 general election. And the stress and onus of provisional ballot usage weighs on some communities more heavily than others.

[4]The model uses the percent of provisional ballots out of all ballots as the dependent variable. The percent of nonwhite residents, the percent of residents age 18 to 24, the county's logged median income, the percent of ballots cast by mail, and percent turnout at the county level are the independent variables, with fixed effects for year. A table with full regression results is available in the Appendix.

PROVISIONAL BALLOT REJECTIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Provisional ballot rejection rates also vary by county. Chart 3 shows the percent of provisional ballots that were rejected across 2016, 2018, and 2020 statewide and in Cuyahoga, Franklin, and Hamilton counties. Rejection rates are more erratic than usage rates. Cuyahoga County exceeded the statewide rejection rate by 1.86 percentage points in 2016. Yet in 2020, the rejection rate in Cuyahoga fell to nearly 3 percentage points below the statewide average due to advocacy and a concerted effort to reduce provisional ballots.[5] Provisional rejection rates in Franklin County climbed steadily from 2014 through 2018 (Brickner and Gall) and were a full 5 percentage points above the statewide rates. Hamilton's rejection rate remained relatively stable between 11% and 13% for all three years.

Chart 3: Percent of Provisional Ballots Rejected



Unlike usage, we find little evidence at the county level that provisional ballot rejections are statistically correlated with race, ethnicity, age. We can make several useful inferences from the two findings.

First, provisional ballots are used almost exclusively during in-person voting. Voters must physically present themselves to poll workers in order to gain access to their ballots. Voter eligibility can be challenged under state code R.C. 3505.20, which outlines several scenarios of ineligibility, including citizenship, state or precinct residency, and age. There is significant leniency written into the code. The voting location manager can ask "other questions… as are necessary to determine" eligibility. "If a person challenged refuses to answer fully any question … or if for any other reason a majority of the precinct election officials believes the person is not entitled to vote," then the person may vote by provisional ballot (Ohio State).

We can't account for what is happening in the face-to-face interactions that drive usage for Black, Brown, younger, and low-income voters. Unfortunately, the state publishes data detailing reasons for provisional ballot rejections but not usage. Both, as illustrated in this report, are critical to understanding the impact of provisional ballots in our communities. The Ohio secretary of state must direct counties to collect and publicly report reasons for provisional ballot use so that future research can investigate the dynamics at play in usage as well as ballot rejection. However, regardless of the reason for requiring a voter to cast a provisional ballot, the onus is always on the voter to provide additional materials in all rejection scenarios.

Second, since we do not see the same racial disparities in provisional rejections, we can infer that cure policies are working. That means the board of election's staff is working to ensure ballots can be validated. While heartening to see the cure process corrects for some of these issues, it remains true that Black, Brown, young, and low-income voters shoulder the burden when voting in person.

Providing additional documentation to election officials may require the voter to acquire new documents, find transportation to the board of elections, and take off time from work. There is a rich body of academic literature and litigation showing the "cost" of these additional requirements and the disproportionate impact on minority communities. They are not mere impositions. Rather, they create hurdles and fees that have a direct lineage back to literacy tests, poll taxes, and the systematic voter suppression efforts that still remain (Johnson; Ross).

In order to provide more equitable access to the ballot, the state of Ohio and each county election office have a responsibility to deliver comprehensive training that covers the technical details of voting, voter registration, and polling-place administration.

Lastly, more research is needed. County-level analyses are critical to understanding statewide trends, but precinct-level analyses help us understand the dynamics at play within cities and counties. Additional research is needed at the more granular precinct level to further understand the relationships between race, ethnicity, age and provisional ballot usage and rejections.

[5]All Voting is Local spoke with director of the Cuyahoga BOE Tony Perlatti.

CASE STUDIES

Cuyahoga and Franklin Counties

Two case studies begin to do just that. The rate of provisional ballots in Franklin County stayed relatively steady between 2018 and 2020. There was no large increase in the rate of provisional ballot usage in spite of the increased voter interest, voter confusion, and difficulties staffing and training poll workers amid a global pandemic. This hopeful finding led us to scrutinize the role that increased absentee ballot use played. Does absentee voting and removal of the face-to-face contact lead to a detectable decline in provisional ballot usage?

To answer this question, we examined precinct-level data for Cuyahoga[6] and Franklin[7] counties. We considered the effects of race, age, income, voting method, and turnout on provisional ballot usage at the precinct level.[8] In both counties, higher mail ballot use decreases provisional ballot use, and the relationship is statistically significant. Based on the model, a precinct that increased its mail ballots by 10 percentage points would reduce the percentage of provisional ballots by 0.42 percentage points. For context, a 10 percentage point growth in vote-by-mail in Cuyahoga County, approximately 64,000 voters, would result in around 2,650 fewer provisional ballots, a 15% reduction. In Franklin County, the numbers look very similar to that of Cuyahoga County. A 10 percentage point growth in VBM, approximately 64,000 voters, would result in around 2,670 fewer provisional ballots, a 13% reduction. The precinct-level results for Cuyahoga and Franklin clearly show that increased absentee voting reduces provisional ballot use.

The results at the precinct level for both counties also show that Black and Brown populations are associated with using more provisional ballots; i.e., areas with a higher nonwhite population see an increase in provisional ballot usage. Modeling Cuyahoga and Franklin counties separately shows stronger effects in Cuyahoga County.

As for young voters, a model with both counties shows that areas with more young voters cast more provisional ballots. However, the model for Franklin County shows stronger effects and a clear positive relationship between young voters and provisional ballot usage. Franklin County is home to 15 colleges and over 125,000 residents age 18 to 24. The precinct-level results largely confirm what we find demographically at the county level, with nonwhite and younger areas seeing higher provisional ballot usage, albeit the relationships are not as strong.

As we've shown, investing in VBM options and expanding ways to vote can lessen the disparate impact on minority and young populations. Reducing the use of provisional ballots also relieves the cure process work for election officials and volunteers. County officials must invest in VBM infrastructure, widespread no-excuse absentee voting, and voter education. County officials must also create robust ballot cure processes that include voter education and ballot alert systems that allow voters an opportunity to simply and easily correct a ballot.

Voters support these measures. A new poll by Strategies 360 and the Voting Rights Lab showed that an overwhelming majority, 74% of voters, believed that voters should have the ability to cast VBM ballots in future elections (Waldron). Seventy percent of respondents support no-excuse absentee voting which allows voters to request a VBM ballot for any reason, and two-thirds of the survey respondents believe voters should be allowed to cure their ballots (Waldron).

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[6]Cuyahoga publishes data for its 975 precincts. For this analysis, only the 2020 general election is considered. Data include provisional ballot usage but not rejections or rejection reasons. Link: https://boe.cuyahogacounty.gov/en-US/election-results-history.aspx.

[7]Franklin County publishes data for its 884 precincts. For this analysis, only the 2020 general election is considered. Data include provisional ballot usage but not rejections or rejection reasons. Link: https://www.vote.franklincountyohio.gov/election-info?year=2020.

[8] The linear regression model uses the percent of provisional ballots out of all ballots at the precinct level as the dependent variable. The percent of nonwhite residents, percent of residents age 18 to 24, logged median income, percent of ballots cast by mail, and percent turnout all at the precinct level are the independent variables. A table with full regression results for each county separately and combined is available in the Appendix.

Conclusion

Despite record turnout in Ohio's 2020 general election, provisional ballot use, rejections, and cure rates remained problematic both at the county level and looking deeper at precincts in Cuyahoga and Franklin counties. Usage and rejection rates rose while cure rates declined. Additionally, we see continued evidence that Black, Brown, young, and low-income areas are disparately impacted by the need to use a provisional ballot. Finally, findings in Cuyahoga and Franklin counties at the precinct level provide strong empirical evidence for the expectation that greater absentee ballot use decreases provisional ballot use.

In order to change these challenging patterns, we propose a number of actions. Ohio needs to increase early-voting opportunities by adding more early-voting locations and allowing counties to have more than one drop box location per county. If voters can more easily engage with the voting process sooner, they can remedy problems before needing to cast a provisional ballot. To make VBM and the cure process easier and more accessible, Ohio should allow voters to submit VBM ballot requests online and allow voters to cure ballots through electronic means. More poll worker training and clearer regulations would also help to reduce confusion about provisional ballot use when voters go to the polls. And lastly, collecting more data at the precinct level and including data about why voters are asked to cast provisional ballots, even when the ballots are eventually cured and counted, would create a better understanding of the provisional ballot process in Ohio.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Vote Method by Year

General Election	Turnout	% Turnout	Early Voting	% Early Voting	VBM	% VBM	Election Day	% Election Day
2016	5,607,641	71.33%	665,461	11.87%	1,214,169	21.65%	3,728,011	66.48%
2018	4,503,116	55.79%	429,709	9.54%	937,547	20.82%	3,135,860	69.64%
2020	5,974,121	73.99%	1,345,625	22.52%	2,157,544	36.11%	2,470,952	41.36%

Table A2: Vote Methods across Urban and Rural Counties for 2016, 2018, and 2020

	2016		2018		2020	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Turnout	2,153,748	3,453,893	1,753,112	2,750,004	2,256,447	3,717,674
Early Vote	209,291	456,170	130,358	299,351	342,932	1,002,693
VBM	528,336	685,833	414,989	522,558	963,137	1,194,407
Election Day	1,416,121	2,311,890	1,207,765	1,928,095	950,378	1,520,574
% Turnout	70.66%	71.76%	55.88%	55.74%	72.24%	75.1%
% Early Vote	9.72%	13.21%	7.44%	10.89%	15.2%	26.97%
% VBM	24.53%	19.86%	23.67%	19%	42.68%	32.13%
% Election Day	65.75%	66.94%	68.89%	70.11%	42.12%	40.9%

Table A3: Provisional Ballot Use at the County Level

County-Level Provisional Usage for 2016, 2018, and 2020 General Elections

	% Provisional	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*p*
Intercept	10.155	**<0.001**
% Nonwhite	0.028	**<0.001**
% Age 18-24	0.093	**<0.001**
Median Income (Logged)	-0.664	**0.015**
% Absentee Ballots	-0.006	0.397
% Turnout	-0.019	0.158
Observations	264	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.495 / 0.482	

Note: Fixed effects for year omitted.

Table A4: Provisional Ballot Use at the Precinct Level in Cuyahoga and Franklin

Precinct-Level Provisional Usage for the 2020 General Election in Cuyahoga and Franklin Counties

	Cuyahoga County		Franklin County		Both Counties	
Predictors	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*	*Estimates*	*p*
Intercept	5.090	<0.001	7.456	<0.001	6.076	<0.001
% Nonwhite	0.003	0.043	0.003	0.089	0.002	0.069
% Age 18-24	-0.002	0.700	0.023	<0.001	0.019	<0.001
Median Income (Logged)	0.351	0.012	0.205	0.161	0.288	0.005
% Absentee Ballots	-0.043	<0.001	-0.045	<0.001	-0.042	<0.001
% Turnout	-0.059	<0.001	-0.075	<0.001	-0.066	<0.001
Franklin					-0.191	0.003
Observations	975		883		1858	
R^2 / R^2 adjusted	0.522 / 0.519		0.652 / 0.650		0.573 / 0.572	

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