

Review of Vote Centers Study by the Bowen Center for Public Affairs

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Data Analysis

A study by the Bowen Center for Public Affairs of Indiana Vote Centers anticipated to be published soon sought to answer two questions: 1) “Do Vote Centers increase voter turnout?” and 2) “Do Vote Centers save money?” In order to accomplish this, the Center analyzed data from Tippecanoe and Wayne counties in the 2007 Municipal Elections and the 2008 Primary and General Election in the same two counties and Cass County. The study compared traditional precinct-based voting with Vote Centers, using “control counties.”

Do Vote Centers increase voter turnout?

The findings reveal that, overall, the existence of Vote Centers do not, by themselves, increase voter turnout. Other factors, such as highly competitive electoral contests and well-financed and organized get-out-the-vote operations have much more to do with attracting more people to the polls. However, the data did suggest a major advantage of Vote Centers pertained to satellite absentee voting. By permitting registered voters to vote prior to Election Day at any Vote Center site—and by locating the satellite absentee voting sites at high traffic areas such as grocery stores and shopping malls—a substantial number of registered voters will take advantage and vote early. In two of the counties this surge in absentee voting reduced the pressure on polling sites on Election Day.

Voters who showed up at the Vote Centers on Election Day were asked to complete a voluntary questionnaire about their experiences. On the whole, the vast majority of voters were satisfied with the Vote Centers. Those who expressed some degree of dissatisfaction generally were those who had long wait times to vote. A key recommendation is that Vote Centers must be set up and provisioned in such a way to ensure the efficient processing of voters.

Do Vote Centers save money?

The data on the costs of holding elections clearly show that Vote Centers save money. Every jurisdiction, on a cost-per-vote basis, showed substantial savings over traditional precinct-based voting. The bulk of the savings are found in direct labor costs.

The costs evaluated by the Bowen Center were: part-time labor, overtime, poll workers, Election Day workers, traveling board, set-up crew, satellite absentee workers, meals, absentee ballot direct costs, printing poll books, provisional ballot costs, rent, equipment transportation, printing/ mailing postcards, and training. There are also several one-time or start-up costs associated with Vote Centers such as computer equipment and electronic poll book development/purchase. (NOTE: In all three Vote Center counties, the County Election Board used retired computer equipment already purchased by the county and slated for disposal).

Tippecanoe County saved, on average, between 20 and 25 percent per election using Vote Centers instead of traditional precinct-based voting. Additionally, the county states that if not for Vote Centers, additional voting systems would have needed to be purchase to prepare for the high-turnout 2008 Primary and General Elections. Cass County saved over 50 percent using the Vote Centers model. Additional savings in voting system purchases have been estimated to be

over \$500,000. Estimates for the control counties also show substantial savings potential for each election cycle.

Voter Support

Voter satisfaction with Vote Centers in each of the three Vote Center counties was very high. Of those voters who chose to participate in the survey over 80 percent preferred Vote Centers to traditional precinct-based voting. On average, Vote Centers voters also spent less time waiting to vote than nationally reported.

Model Specs

In order to assist election administrators who are considering adopting Vote Centers to replace their traditional precincts, the Bowen Center proves the basics of a model within the report. The model is based on the Indiana experience and is designed to provide an overview as well as a roadmap for implementing Vote Centers across America.

NOTE: The data and conclusions in the Vote Center study in Indiana are the sole responsibility of the authors of the study and the Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University. The study was financially supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The Pew Charitable Trusts are in no way responsible for the analysis or the conclusions.