

# **Mail It In: An Analysis of the Peach State's Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic**

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The big news in Georgia elections this spring was supposed to have been the rollout of a new statewide voting system. The state spent \$104 million to outfit counties with a ballot marking system from Dominion Voting Systems. This system replaces the previous paperless Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) system that had been in place since 2001. While the new system was used in the 2020 statewide primary, the bigger news in the run up to the election centered around the potential effects of the Covid-19 coronavirus on the statewide primary.

Georgia, like all other states this spring, faced the unknown prospect of holding statewide elections in the face of a pandemic. Originally, Georgia was to hold two elections: a presidential preference primary on March 24<sup>th</sup> and a general primary on May 19<sup>th</sup>. Voting during the early voting period had commenced for the PPP when it was delayed and combined with the general primary scheduled for May 19<sup>th</sup>. The statewide shelter-in-place order in Georgia was in effect from April 2<sup>nd</sup> through May 1<sup>st</sup>. Following the extension of the governor's statewide health emergency declaration, the Secretary of State delayed both the PPP and the general primary until June 9<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

Although these primary elections were postponed during what was thought to be the worst of the outbreak, many voters remained wary of in-person voting. Absentee by Mail (ABM) balloting, unlike early or election-day voting, allows electors to cast a ballot without leaving their homes. In a public opinion poll of Georgia registrants from late April, 51.6% of respondents indicated they were *extremely* or *very worried* that they or someone in their family would be exposed to the Coronavirus.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In a statewide poll, two-thirds (66%) of Georgia registrants supported delaying the primary until June 9<sup>th</sup>. Source: SPIA Coronavirus Response Poll. University of Georgia. April 28, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Source: SPIA Coronavirus Response Poll. University of Georgia. April 28, 2020.

In addition to wary voters, election officials were also confronted with the inconvenient fact that the traditional cadre of election-day poll workers, many of them retirees, would likely be depleted due to the pandemic. This was a concerning factor given local elections are supported primarily by volunteers or short-term employees. As well, some typical polling places, such as churches, were not going to be available for use. Faced with the uncertainty of fewer operational polling locations on election-day and seeking to increase the ability of voters to use a form of voting not requiring human interaction, the Secretary took the unprecedented step of mailing an absentee ballot application to all 6.9 million active registrants in the state.<sup>3</sup> More than three-fifths (62%) of Georgia registrants, including majorities of Republicans, Independents, and Democrats supported this move by the Secretary of State.<sup>4</sup> It is notable that this action was taken by Georgia's Republican Secretary of State at a time when the national leader of the Republican Party, Donald Trump, was issuing statements that suggested ABM balloting would be fraught with issues, primarily the opportunity for voter fraud. Generally, however, there was bipartisan support both nationally and at the state-level for ABM voting.<sup>5</sup>

An elector in Georgia can cast a ballot in one of three ways: absentee by mail (ABM); early-in-person<sup>6</sup>; or at the precinct on election-day. Since 2005, voters in Georgia have been able to vote by mail without an excuse. ABM ballots are due by the close of polls (7:00 pm) on election-day. The state does not provide prepaid postage to return ABM ballots, however, voters do have the option to return ABM ballots in-person.

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<sup>3</sup>Absentee by mail applications were sent beginning April 27<sup>th</sup>, about six weeks prior to the June 9<sup>th</sup> election-day ([https://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/raffensperger\\_takes\\_unprecedented\\_steps\\_to\\_protect\\_safety\\_and\\_voter\\_integrity\\_in\\_georgia](https://sos.ga.gov/index.php/elections/raffensperger_takes_unprecedented_steps_to_protect_safety_and_voter_integrity_in_georgia)).

<sup>4</sup>Source: SPIA Coronavirus Response Poll. University of Georgia. April 28, 2020.

<sup>5</sup>Before the emergence of Covid-19, thirty-three states allowed no-excuse absentee voting or vote-by-mail, including Georgia. Five states (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington) already conduct their elections by mail-in-ballot. Some states like South Carolina and Alabama that normally require an excuse for ABM voting have relaxed this requirement during the pandemic.

<sup>6</sup>For statewide elections, the early in-person voting period is mandated to be 21 days.

Accordingly, for a number of reasons, the Secretary of State sought to shift how voters might cast ballots, from in-person (early or election-day) to absentee by mail (in Georgia it is not possible to conduct an all-mail election as Georgia's election code requires in-person voting to be an option for any election). While no-excuse ABM balloting has been available to Georgians for fifteen years, most voters in the state cast their ballots using an in-person method. For example, during the 2016 general ABM ballots accounted for only 5.0% of all votes cast. For the 2018 general, this figure stood at 5.7%. Since the object of study for this manuscript centers on the 2020 primary, we also provide ABM turnout comparisons for the 2016 and 2018 statewide primaries in Figure 1. As a percentage of total ballots cast, absentee by mail ballots accounted for 3.5% in 2016 and 2.4% in 2018. Based on these figures, shifting a considerable percentage of the vote in Georgia away from in-person voting methods would be a tall order.

The Coronavirus pandemic and Georgia's response produces a number of avenues to explore. First, did making it easier to vote absentee by mail by sending registrants an application help to shift the method by which voters cast their ballots? Two, did voters in areas of the state harder struck by the pandemic turn to ABM balloting at higher rates? Three, did the facilitated opportunity to vote ABM potentially increase overall turnout in the 2020 primary?

### **Voting During Unusual Circumstances**

Before discussing the answers to these specific questions, it is important to explore what we know about absentee voting and voting under unusual conditions, generally, to inform our expectations. Unfortunately, the literature relating to voting during a pandemic is limited at this point in time. However, this research, as well as the extant research on absentee voting can help us gain some insight into what we might expect to find in the 2020 Georgia primary.

Given the lack of availability for certain polling places as a result of the pandemic, precinct locations did change during the primary election period. In terms of potential influence, Brady and McNulty (2001) found that changing polling locations can impact turnout in a negative manner. However, if voters are informed of the change in advance, it may actually increase the use of absentee voting.

This notion of the informed voter, particularly during a pandemic, is critical. Voters do respond to the information they are given related to the nature and scope of an emergency. If the information being offered suggests a serious threat, voters will respond by acting accordingly. The implication drawn from the research of Bursztyn et al. (2020) is that information can influence behavior. While these researchers looked specifically at the consumption of information about the virus from two differing news/opinion shows on Fox News (one clearly sounding the alarm and other dismissive of the risk) and the subsequent outcomes to viewers relating to Covid-19, their work is also informative for election administration. When states take a clear and early stance on the risks involved in voting in-person and promote ABM voting, more voters are likely to utilize that option. If messages are mixed, voters may have more uncertainty regarding risk and therefore a decreased likelihood of voting by mail.

Voter attitudes regarding the security of their ABM vote, particularly if it will make its destination and be counted, are also important to consider. Menger and Stein (2020) look at how mail-in ballots are returned, either by postal service or in-person, and find that trust in the Postal Service was the main determinant of whether Colorado voters mailed in their ballot. Other research suggests that simply adding drop boxes may increase turnout as they allow those who wish to vote absentee to do so without utilizing the mail to send in their ballot (Collingwood et al. 2018).

Voters who have a preference to take in all possible electoral information prior to casting a ballot are more likely to return their ABM ballot in-person or vote at their precinct on election-day. Pre-pandemic research by Stein and Vonnahme (2012) suggests that voters who vote in-person on election-day have greater confidence that their vote will be accurately counted versus those who cast a ballot by mail. Finally, voters who have used absentee by mail voting previously are also more likely to use this same method in the future, as research has demonstrated there is a preference among voters to continue using methods with which they are familiar (Alvarez, Levin and Li, 2018).

While research has suggested that people may differ in their preference for voting method (in-person versus absentee by mail), there is some evidence that ABM voters are not that different from polling place voters in terms of demographics and partisanship. Barreto et al. (2006) surveyed absentee voters and compared this group to in-person voters for a 2003 recall election and found no significant differences between these two groups. Whether such a finding would hold in the case of a global pandemic is very much an open question.

One finding that seems to be routinely confirmed is that sending out the ABM ballot request forms does increase their use and, subsequently, turnout in an election. Earlier research had suggested there was not a positive effect as individuals still had to make the effort to apply to receive an ABM ballot (Fitzgerald, 2005). When groups and parties focus on GOTV campaigns, sending absentee ballot request forms directly to voters themselves (or otherwise make it easier to request an ABM ballot) there is a noted increase in participation through absentee voting (Hassell 2017). Moreover, when states encourage the use of no-excuse ABM voting and election-day registration, there is a positive effect on election turnout (Larocca and Klemanski 2011). Thus, given the extraordinary effort to encourage safe participation during the pandemic

through ABM voting, the expectation would be that Georgia primary participation, certainly in terms of absentee voting, should be higher.

Stewart's (2020) recent report utilizing the partially complete results from Florida's March primary (which took place before a statewide shelter-in-place order was invoked), suggests that voting by mail use had increased as a result of the pandemic and concerns about public health safety. People who voted in-person on election-day in the 2016 primary were less likely to have voted in the 2020 presidential primary. Conversely, those who voted by mail previously were more likely to have participated in 2020. The early Florida primary results suggest that first-time voters were more likely to vote by mail than any other method. Stewart also found that the biggest shift from in-person voting in 2016 to ABM voting in Florida was among Republicans. Perhaps not surprisingly, voters over 60 were more likely to vote by mail. Finally, Stewart found the group least likely to vote in 2020 were those under the age of 30 who voted in-person in the 2016 general election.

So, what do we know about voting under unusual circumstances and the use ABM balloting? The actions of the state can matter, particularly given the attitudes and likely behavior of voters in these unusual circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>One final area of interest may be whether the pandemic had an impact on electoral outcomes rather than process or turnout. There is again only limited analysis in this area. Leininger and Schaub (2020) found German voters in affected areas believed that incumbents would have more impact on soliciting support from higher levels of government. These voters correspondingly cast their support for the dominant party in local elections. While this question is not one pursued in this paper, the role of the pandemic and the government's response to it, will certainly be a factor in explaining vote choice.

## **Voting Absentee by Mail in the 2020 Primary**

This section examines the behavior of Georgia voters during the 2020 statewide primary.<sup>8</sup> As noted, the Secretary of State mailed out ABM ballot request forms to all 6.93 million active registrants in the state. Looking at Table 1, the state received approximately 1.61 million requests for absentee by mail ballots. Of these, voters returned approximately 1.23 million ABM ballots during the 2020 statewide primary. As of this writing, 1.15 million ABM ballots had been accepted for tabulation. It should be noted that most of the difference between returned and accepted ballots is not due to the county election officials rejecting ballots. Instead, the lion's share of these ballots were canceled when the voter chose to vote in person, either early or on election-day. To summarize, an unprecedented number of ABM ballots were requested by Georgians during the 2020 primary. Almost one quarter of the ABM ballots requested, however, were never returned. Five percent of ABM ballots requested were not cast for a variety of reasons, including voters deciding to physically head to the polls.

<Table 1 about here>

How does 2020 ABM usage compare to previous primaries? Looking at Figure 1, one can see in 2020 that absentee by mail ballots accounted just over half (53%) of all ballots cast. This represents a twenty-two-fold increase compared to ABM usage in 2018 and a fifteen-fold increase over the 2016 primary. Whether voters were reacting to the pandemic, the actions promulgated on the part of the SOS, or some combination of the two is difficult to untangle. It is clear that a disproportionate number of Georgia voters utilized ABM voting in the 2020 primary.

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<sup>8</sup>Although the Presidential preference primary and the general primary were combined, some voters had already cast early or ABM ballots in the PPP. General primary voters who had not previously voted in the PPP could vote in the presidential nomination process. The analyses presented in this manuscript are based only on participation in the general primary.



In an attempt to gain some leverage on this question a subsequent section of this manuscript will attempt to decompose ABM voters in 2020 by their previous voting behavior.

<Figure 1 about here>

Before moving on to more detailed analyses, we compare turnout in the 2020 primary to the two preceding primaries in 2018 and 2016. Turnout in general varies from cycle to cycle based on a number of factors. Chief among these are the offices on the ballot, whether these races are contested and in which party primary. Looking at Figure 2, turnout in the 2020 primary, measured as the number of votes cast as a percentage of registrants, was 29.5%. Comparatively, turnout in 2018 was 17.9% and 16.1% in 2016.

In 2020, the U.S. Senate seat held by David Perdue is on the ballot. In the Republican primary, Perdue was unopposed. The Senate nomination on the Democratic ballot was contested. In 2018, the gubernatorial nomination for the Democrats and Republicans were both contested as were the contests for Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of State, among others. In 2016, Republican Senator Johnny Isakson found himself in a contested primary and the race to decide the Democratic Senate nominee was also contested. Given this, it is interesting to note that the 2020 primary, which featured notably less competition at the top of the ticket, saw a turnout rate 11.7-points and 13.5-points higher when compared to 2018 and 2016 respectively.

<Figure 2 about here>

### **Who Voted Absentee by Mail in Georgia's 2020 Primary?**

In this section we compare 2020 ABM primary voters to previous primary voters. From the state's voter registration file, we collected data on the age, sex, race, and party<sup>9</sup> of ABM

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<sup>9</sup>Georgia is an open primary state—primary voters choose to vote a Republican, Democratic, or non-partisan ballot.

voters in order to create a profile of Georgia ABM voters from the 2016, 2018, and 2020 statewide primaries.<sup>10</sup> In terms of age, voters 65 years of age and older constituted 73% of ABM voters in the 2016 and 2018 primaries. The average age of ABM voters from these two primaries was 71. As related to race and sex, two-thirds of ABM voters were white and just over three-fifths were female. Finally, a slight majority of ABM voters in 2018 (56%) and 2016 (52%) choose to cast a Republican ballot as compared to a Democratic ballot. Prior to 2020, the average Georgia primary voter could be described as elderly, white, female, and Republican.

In 2020, there was a noticeable shift in the age of the ABM electorate. The average age for those voting absentee by mail dropped eleven years, from 71 to 60. The percentage of ABM voters in the 45 to 64 age category almost doubled from 2018 to 2020 (18% to 34%). Racially, the percentage of white and black ABM voters was essentially constant across these three primary cycles. As well, female voters continued to dominate the ranks of ABM voters, comprising 57% in 2020. Breaking with the past pattern, Democrats, at 52%, now comprised a slight majority of 2020 primary voters. The composition of the 2020 primary electorate, as compared to the two previous statewide primaries, was markedly younger and slightly more likely to be Democratic. This shift is one indication that the surge in ABM balloting in 2020 certainly changed the composition of the ABM electorate in terms of age and party, but not particularly so as related to sex and race.

<Table 2 about here>

Having examined the average profile of an ABM voter and the manner in which this profile has shifted, we now analyze the previous behavior of 2020 primary voters. Looking at Table 3, one may note that only 33.0% of 2020 ABM primary voters cast a ballot (by any

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<sup>10</sup>In addition to historical copies of the state's voter registration database, we also utilized absentee voter files and voter history files compiled by the Georgia SOS.

method) in the 2016 primary. Almost half (46.5%) did not vote and another 21% were not registered to vote in 2016.<sup>11</sup> Only 41% of those who voted ABM in the 2020 primary also turned out in the 2018 primary, with half (48.4%) again not participating and another 11% not eligible. The noted patterns are even more pronounced if we eliminate those who were not eligible to participate (registered) in 2016 and 2018. Making this adjustment, more than half of 2020 ABM voters who were eligible in 2016 and 2018 did not vote (58.5% and 54.3%, respectively). This analysis is an indication that a substantial component of the 2020 ABM primary electorate in Georgia were not typical primary voters. While we cannot categorically state that the efforts on the part of the SOS (mailing an absentee application form to all active registrants) caused ABM turnout to increase, there is certainly circumstantial evidence to point in this direction.

<Table 3 about here>

We next decompose the behavior of those 2020 ABM voters who also cast a ballot in the 2016 and/or the 2018 statewide primaries. Figure 3 plots the voting method utilized by these electors in these previous primaries. As is evident, almost all votes in these contests were cast in-person. Of those 2020 ABM voters who also voted in the 2016 primary, 34% voted early in-person and 61% voted at their precinct on election-day. For the 2018 primary, the in-person figures are 30% early and 66% on election-day. Conversely, only 5% and 4% of 2020 ABM voters cast a ballot using this method in 2016 and 2018, respectively. These findings clearly demonstrate that even among typical primary voters (based on past behavior), virtually all switched from an in-person mode of voting to voting absentee by mail in 2020.

<Figure 3 about here>

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<sup>11</sup>Eligibility to participate in the 2016 and 2018 primaries based on registrants whose date of registration was 30 days prior to the 2016/2018 primary election date.

## Absentee by Mail Voting and the Coronavirus Pandemic

In this penultimate section we will attempt to shed some light on the relationship, if any, between the prevalence of the coronavirus and ABM utilization rates. More specifically, was the noted increase in ABM voting in the 2020 primary driven by localized Coronavirus conditions? For this analysis we use Georgia's 159 counties as the unit of analysis. On this metric there is a considerable amount of variation, with ABM voting ranging from a low of 16.1% in Laurens County to a high of 66.0% in Talbot County [mean=.47; s.d.=.07].

Data were collected on the cumulative number of Coronavirus cases and reported deaths as of the primary election-day (June 9<sup>th</sup>).<sup>12</sup> Using county population estimates from the 2018 ACS we created two primary variables of interest: Coronavirus Cases per 1,000 and Coronavirus Deaths per 1,000. Our dependent variable is the percentage of absentee by mail votes out of total votes cast in the 2020 primary.

In addition to these primary variables of interest we include a number of other control variables. From the voter registration database we calculate, at the county-level, the percentage of *Female* registrants; the percentage of registrants *30 to 44* years of age; *45 to 64* years of age, and *65 years* of age and older; and the percentage of *Black* and *Other Minority* registrants. We also include a measure of logged population *Density* to control for county urbanity. The models presented are estimated using OLS regression with robust standard errors clustered by county.<sup>13</sup>

Looking at Table 4, there is no statistical relationship between the number of Coronavirus cases and ABM utilization rates at the county-level. ABM voting is related to population density with voters in more urban counties more likely to rely on this voting method. The only other relationship of statistical note concerns age where the percentage of registrants 65 and older is

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<sup>12</sup>Source: USA Facts (<https://usafacts.org/>).

<sup>13</sup>Models are weighted by the number of ABM ballots cast.

positively related to the percentage of ABM ballots cast. In terms of impact on the number of voters choosing to vote absentee by mail there is no apparent statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that voters were responding to the overall rate of infection in their county.

<Table 4 about here>

The bivariate relationship between county ABM utilization rates and Coronavirus deaths per 1,000 residents is presented in Figure 4. Counties are represented by hollow circles graphed proportional to the number of ABM ballots casts. The least squares line is also plotted and visually it is possible to discern that the slope is just slightly positive, indicating that as Coronavirus deaths rise ABM balloting also increases. It is also evident that the slope on the least squares line is very gradual, an indication, at best, of a weak relationship between these two factors. Model 2 of Table 4 subjects the relationship between Coronavirus deaths and ABM utilization rates to a more rigorous multivariate test.

<Figure 4 about here>

Unlike the variable measuring the cumulative infection rate, here we do see the presence of a positive, statistically significant relationship with ABM voting. This effect, however, is modest. Coronavirus deaths per 1,000 ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 3.4, with a mean of .32 and a standard deviation of .56. A county with the mean number of Coronavirus deaths could expect to see a contribution of 1.1% to the overall percentage of ABM ballots cast. If one increases the Coronavirus death rate by two standard deviations, the ABM ballot percentage would increase by 3.9-points to 5.0%. The surge in ABM balloting in the 2020 primary is, in part, related to the virus-related circumstances that voters found themselves. But, the noted increase on this metric is only, in part, explained by this factor. In Model 2, black registrants

were less likely than white registrants to rely on ABM voting. Conversely, those residing in more urban counties were more likely to vote absentee by mail.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The immediate aftermath of the primary in Georgia was colored by problems that surfaced on election-day. Long lines were reported, especially in metro-Atlanta counties. Again, the June primary was the first statewide election to see implementation of the state's new voting system. In fairness, only about ten of 159 counties reported election-day issues, but the problem was exacerbated by the fact that a number of the most populous counties (Fulton, Cobb, Gwinnett, and DeKalb) were in this group of ten (Niesse et al. 2020).

At this writing a full postmortem has yet to be conducted, but the issues reported appear to be less about the new voting equipment functioning properly, as opposed to the unfamiliarity among at least some poll workers with setup and use of the equipment. These counties also struggled to retain their cadre of experienced poll workers in the midst of the pandemic and were forced to hire individuals inexperienced with working in elections. These new poll workers also appear to have received inadequate training related to the new system. While it is true that that no poll workers had actual experience with the new system prior to the June primary, it is also true that seasoned poll workers, understanding the basic mechanics of the electoral process in Georgia, were in a much better position to deal with putting the new ballot-marking system in place.

In-person election-day issues aside, what can be gleaned concerning ABM voting in the 2020 statewide primary? First, the state's efforts to shift votes from in-person methods to ABM appears to be a qualified success. In a state where about 95% of ballots were typically cast in-

person, just over half of the votes in the 2020 statewide primary were ABM votes. This fact was also true for voters who cast ballots in previous primary elections in 2016 and 2018. These habitual primary voters, 95% of whom had voted in-person previously, switched to ABM in 2020.

We now have some empirical evidence to buttress the position that voters did respond, in part, to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic in their localized area. This finding alone, however, cannot explain the large surge in ABM voting. Outside of actual effects on the ground, the pandemic most likely did shape the response of many voters who, again, expressed high levels of anxiety concerning potential exposure. At least part of the increase in ABM balloting then is due to perceptions related to the pandemic, although this relationship is essentially not possible to measure empirically with available data.

Also of note is the fact that overall turnout was up by almost 12-points over the 2018 primary. In this study we documented a large percentage of 2020 ABM voters who were eligible, but did not participate in the 2016 or 2018 statewide primaries. It is also clear that the population of ABM voters diverged from previous elections, especially in terms of age and to a lesser degree partisanship. Some evidence exists then that ABM voting may have helped to increase the probability that some subset of registrants who did not typically vote in primaries decided to participate in 2020.

Turnout is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon making it problematic to infer that the state sending ABM applications to all active registrants was the primary causal agent driving the overall increase in turnout. Logically it follows, however, that this step contributed to the noted uptick for turnout in this election. The key may be to view the ABM application process in 2020 primary and its interaction with the pandemic, which certainly increased the likelihood of

voters using this no or low contact voting method. It certainly is a fact that more Georgians, faced with the pandemic, were going to vote ABM in the primary. The distribution of absentee ballot applications certainly facilitated this trend. What is impossible to disentangle empirically is the degree to which ABM voting was boosted by the SOS mailer given every registrant received this treatment effect.

No one knows what the effects of the pandemic will be in November. Georgia does have no-excuse absentee by mail balloting available to voters and this will be the case in the 2020 general election. The 2020 primary election does demonstrate that a sizable proportion of the vote could be cast using this method, particularly those who utilized the method in the primary. To be on the safe side, county election officials should begin preparing now to deal with the potential for an increased number of ABM ballots in the presidential election in November.



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Table 1. ABM Ballot Statistics, 2020 Statewide Primary

<b>ABM Category</b>	<b>Totals</b>	<b>As a Percent of Requested</b>
Ballots Requested	1,609,019	----
Ballots Returned	1,233,181	76.6%
Ballots Accepted (Counted)	1,145,496	71.2%

Source: Georgia SOS 2020 Absentee Voter File.

Table 2. Characteristics of ABM Primary Voters

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	3.8%	3.9%	7.6%
30-44	4.4%	4.5%	11.7%
45-64	18.6%	18.3%	34.1%
65+	73.2%	73.3%	46.7%
Mean	71.2	70.6	60.0
<b>Race</b>			
White	67.9%	64.6%	63.1%
Black	28.9%	29.3%	26.7%
Other	3.2%	6.0%	10.2%
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	36.9%	38.2%	42.5%
Female	63.1%	61.8%	57.4%
<b>Party Primary</b>			
Republican	56.3%	51.9%	45.6%
Democrat	42.7%	45.8%	52.2%
Non-Partisan	1.0%	2.3%	2.2%

Source: Georgia SOS 2016, 2018, 2020 Absentee Voter File; 2016, 2018, 2020 Georgia Voter Registration Database.

Table 3. Past Behavior of 2020 Primary Voters

	<b>2016 Primary</b>	<b>2018 Primary</b>
Voted	33.0% [377,478]	40.6% [465,387]
Did not Vote	46.5% [532,702]	48.4% [553,936]
Not Registered	20.5% [234,764]	11.0% [125,641]
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,144,944</b>	<b>1,144,944</b>

Source: Georgia SOS 2016, 2018, 2020 Absentee Voter File; 2016, 2018, 2020 Georgia Voter Registration Database; 2016, 2018, 2020 Georgia Voter History Files.

Table 4. ABM Utilization Rates in the 2020 Georgia Primary

	Model 1	Model 2
Coronavirus Cases per 1,000	.0002 (.0019)	----
Coronavirus Deaths per 1,000	----	.0346* (.0158)
Logged Density	.0278* (.0112)	.0289** (.0104)
Percent Black	-.1741 (.0917)	-.2178* (.0936)
Percent Other Minority	-.2014 (.1713)	-.1808 (.1615)
Percent Age 30 to 44	.5968 (.5546)	.8076 (.6083)
Percent Age 45 to 64	.4998 (.6063)	.6638 (.6245)
Percent Age 65+	.7976* (.3845)	.8357 (.4056)
Percent Female	1.3092 (1.2373)	1.8540 (1.2207)
Constant	-.7809 (.7321)	-1.200 (.7078)
R <sup>2</sup>	.26	.26
N	159	159

Notes: Entries are OLS regression coefficients with clustered standard errors in parentheses.

DV: Percentage of votes cast as Absentee by Mail.

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01

Figure 1. ABM Votes as a Percentage of Total Primary Turnout

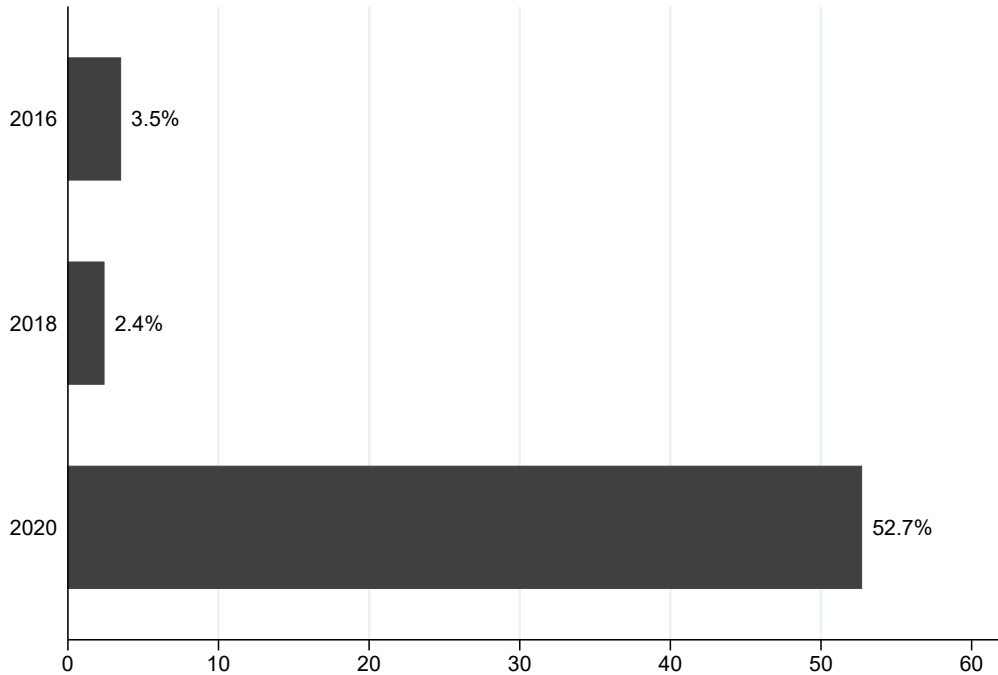


Figure 2. Primary Turnout

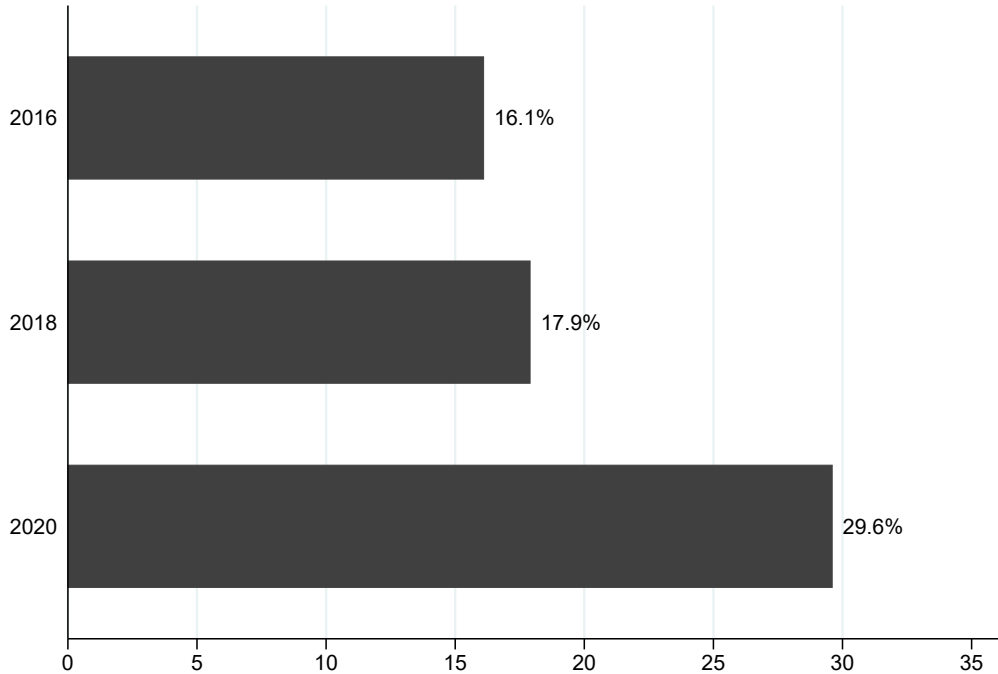


Figure 3. Previous Voting Method-2020 Primary Voters

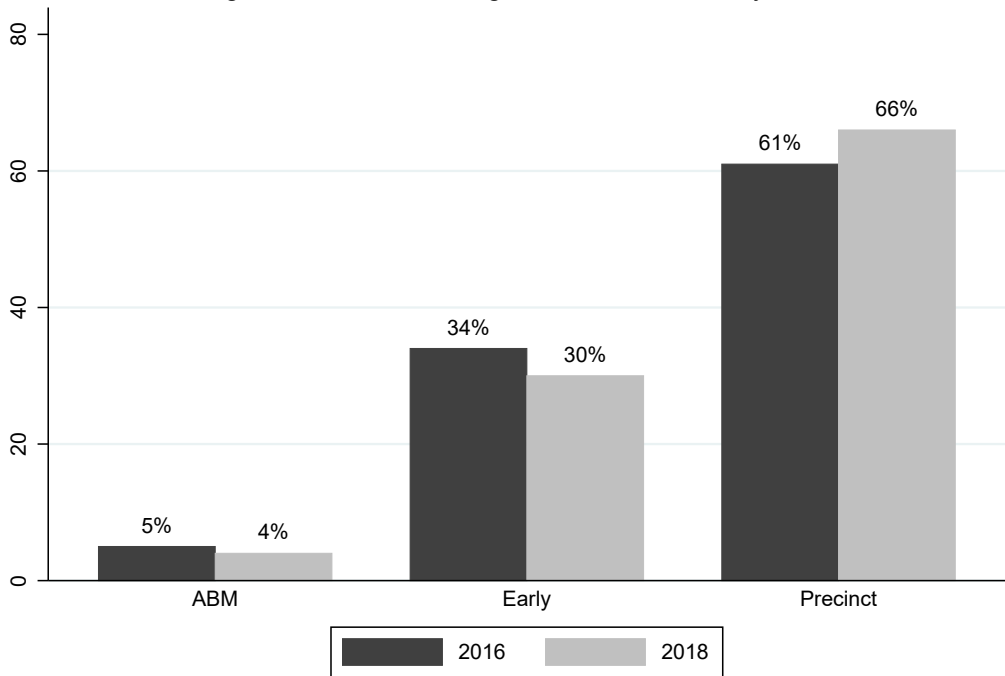




Figure 4. ABM Usage by Covid Deaths

