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A HOME RUN FOR TURNOUT?
AN ANALYSIS ON THE USE OF SPORTS FACILITIES TO INCREASE VOTER
TURNOUT

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the University Honors Program Requirements
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Abstract

In 2020, American voters turned out to cast ballots in record-breaking numbers. While many factors likely contributed to this increase in turnout, professional sports stadiums and arenas were used as polling locations for the first time. Did this first time use of sports facilities contribute to increased turnout in the 2020 election? I theorize that sports facilities increase turnout by decreasing the cost of voting and providing psychological motivations to vote. The research design employed to test this theory is a difference-in-differences model (DD) that compares 2016 and 2020 county vote totals while controlling for various demographic factors. The results indicate that the use of sports facilities as polling locations is not predictive of increased turnout.

Key Words: The Cost of Voting, Sports Facilities, Accessibility, Identifiability, Celebrity

A Home Run for Turnout?

An Analysis on the Use of Sports Facilities to Increase Voter Turnout

1. Introduction

All across the country, sports stadiums are being used as an essential tool in the nation's fight against complications created by COVID-19. Professional sports arenas and stadiums serve as more than a location to watch your favorite team play. Stadiums are closely linked to cities public transportation systems, and amidst a global pandemic, they have served as polling locations and vaccination centers because of their ability to accommodate social distancing requirements.¹ Despite COVID-19, nearly two-thirds of eligible American voters voted in the presidential election.² Amidst the shooting of George Floyd and economic uncertainty created by the pandemic, it's not surprising that voters decided to cast ballots in record numbers. However, the use of sports facilities as polling places was a unique development that may have played an important part in this record-setting turnout. In the 2020 presidential election, over 40 professional sports facilities served as polling locations, and they accounted for a total of 32 different counties.³ Professional athletes and sports organizations encouraged people to vote through various campaigns, leveraging the use of their platforms for awareness. Incomplete data suggests that over 300,000 votes were cast at professional sporting arenas and facilities.⁴ As

1 Dorfman, Jack. "'Not Just a Big Parking Lot': the Unique Benefits of Sports Venues Amid COVID-19." UCSD Guardian, January 24, 2021. <https://ucsdguardian.org/2021/01/24/not-just-a-big-parking-lot-the-unique-benefits-of-sports-venues-amid-covid-19/>.

2 DeSilver, Drew. "Turnout Soared in 2020 as Nearly Two-Thirds of Eligible U.S. Voters Cast Ballots for President," January 28, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/28/turnout-soared-in-2020-as-nearly-two-thirds-of-eligible-u-s-voters-cast-ballots-for-president/>.

3 Steinberg, Emma. "Stadiums Serving As Polling Sites for 2020 General Election." Sports Illustrated. Sports Illustrated, October 5, 2020. <https://www.si.com/sports-illustrated/2020/10/05/sports-stadiums-arenas-polling-centers-election-list>.

4 Beer, Tommy. "Report: Nearly 300,000 Americans Voted In Sports Arenas In The 2020 Election." Forbes. Forbes Magazine, November 13, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/11/13/report-nearly-300000-americans-voted-in-sports-arenas-in-the-2020-election/?sh=13ae18e6136a>.

political scientists continue to research ways to increase turnout, this paper will examine the use of stadiums as polling places to determine if there is a positive relationship between sports facilities and democratic participation.

2. Literature Review

While many voters cast ballots at arenas and stadiums during the 2020 election, it does not necessarily indicate that stadiums had a causal effect on increasing turnout. However, findings from previous literature indicate there are several reasons to expect a causal relationship between turnout and the use of professional sports facilities as polling locations. The soundest support is found primarily from research on the cost of voting and celebrity influence.

Anthony Downs classically theorized that the “cost” of voting can affect turnout. The cost of voting is not necessarily financial, but rather, a broad category of obstacles that voters must be willing to accept in order to participate in an election. Waiting times, poll accessibility, the ability to get off work, and transportation are all factors that exemplify a potential increase or decrease in the “cost” of voting. As Downs (1957) persuasively argued, “the returns from voting are usually so low that even small costs may cause many voters to abstain (274). Down’s research has prompted numerous studies (Haspel, Moshe, and Knotts 2005; Karp and Banducci 2000; Goodman and Stokes 2020) that attempt to identify the “costs” of voting in order to bring costs down and increase turnout. Of particular importance to this research, we turn to literature on how polling locations impact the cost of voting.

Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003) found that there is a nonlinear relationship between a voter’s proximity to their polling place and turnout. Distance increasingly suppressed turnout for suburban voters who had to travel 2-5 miles to vote. Interestingly, the negative effects of

distance weren't as dramatic for rural voters who had to travel 6-10 miles to vote (Ibid).

Nevertheless, the finding that distance can influence turnout seems sensible; after all, it is quite burdensome to ask voters to take time out of their day to drive to a polling location when family, school, and everyday responsibilities demand constant attention. Gimpel and Schuknecht are not alone in their findings as their work has been supported by additional research (Brady, Henry, and McNulty 2011; Brady and McNulty 2011). For example, a slightly more recent study (Brady and McNulty 2011) demonstrated how turnout reduced in Los Angeles County when its number of polling places were cut by 64%. The decrease in turnout was partially attributed to an escalation of voting costs created by increasing the distance citizens had to travel to get to the polls. While distance is a potential cost of voting, it represents only one of many costs that can be created by differences in location.

Throughout the course of an election, voters must possess knowledge on how to find their polling location. In one study, McNulty and Brady (2011) suggest that knowledge acquisition costs have a greater impact on lowering turnout than transportation or "distance" costs. These costs are significant because polling places are not always easy to identify. For instance, one survey demonstrates that, during one election, roughly 20% of polling places in Los Angeles County did not have addresses clearly displayed (Baretto, Cohen-Marks, and Woods 2009). Additionally, polling places can shift location for any number of reasons. The same study highlighted how polling locations changed for 187 out of the 1,700 voting precincts in Los Angeles County—potentially forcing 150,000 voters to find a new polling location (Ibid). For unenthusiastic or infrequent voters, the mere inconvenience of attaining this information may be costly enough to discourage participation. Consequently, it appears that voters must know how to both identify their polling place and locate it.

The accessibility of a polling place is another cost which could potentially affect voter turnout. Accessibility encompasses a list of distinct attributes. Polling sites may lack accessibility if public transportation routes are restricted or if parking is limited. Another component of accessibility is whether or not a polling site is handicap accessible. Other components of accessibility may include the technology used for voting machines and access to quality assistance from poll workers. As a component of precinct quality, accessibility was determined to have an impact on voter turnout (Baretto 2009). Other studies, however, have determined that components of accessibility (i.e. parking) may not actually impact turnout (Stein and Vonnahme 2012). Nonetheless, accessibility is undoubtedly a contributory component to the cost of voting, and it likely influences turnout to varying degrees.

While many voters cast early ballots, election day voting accounts for a significant number of all votes cast. To encourage voting on the day of an election, several states have implemented the use of voting centers. Traditionally, registered voters are required to vote at a particular polling location. Election Day Voting Centers (EDVCs) are an exception to this practice and are accessible to voters regardless of their assigned voting precinct (Stein and Vonnahme 2012). EDVCs have a modest effect on increasing voter turnout. The explanation for this observed relationship is that EDVCs provide flexibility, offer greater accessibility, and allow for easier identification as they are larger and based in population-dense areas (Ibid). While EDVCs have distinct qualities that impact accessibility, search costs, and distance costs, they also offer an additional quality by means of flexibility. States have not widely implemented the use of EDVCs, but their use has increased over the last decade.⁵ For example, California passed

⁵ Vote Centers. Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vote-centers.aspx>.

legislation allowing for the use of EDVCs in 2017, and accordingly, arenas and stadiums turned into EDVCs on November 3rd, 2020.⁶

Research devoted to the cost of voting has led to the implementation of legislation that has had mixed results on increasing turnout. For example, Motor Voter and early vote programs have been implemented nationwide to reduce voting costs and increase turnout; however, the impact of these measures has often been negligible (Stein and Vonnahme 2012). While the implementation of EDVCs have had a seemingly positive effect on turnout, the impotence of other initiatives demonstrates the need for analysis of voter motivation. Accordingly, this section will also review literature on peer pressure and celebrity influence and their impacts on the psychological motivations of voting.

Under the right circumstances, citizens are willing to listen to celebrities on political matters. Celebrities have the ability to raise the salience of particular issues and redirect the media's agenda by spotlighting issues (Archer, Cawston, Matheson and Geuskens 2020). Evidence suggests that celebrities can also directly motivate political action. Even when controlling for the social impact of the Black Lives Matter movement, Towler, Crawford, and Bennett (2020) were able to find a causal relationship between support for celebrity athlete, Collin Kaepernick, and increased political activism. Additionally, it was determined that Oprah was responsible for 1 million voters casting a vote for Obama in the 2008 general election (Garthwaite and Moore 2008). For whatever reason, celebrities can motivate citizens to take political action. Most Americans report that they are not influenced by celebrities (Becker 2013). While these survey responses may be imprecise due to a self-report bias, it does demonstrate that citizens do not always care about celebrity involvement in politics. For instance, celebrity

6 Vote Centers. Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/vote-centers.aspx>.

advocacy may be supported by citizens for noncontentious issues, but people do not typically view celebrity advocacy as favorable for contentious topics (Ibid). Furthermore, research indicates celebrities only maintain some level of credibility when engaging fans (Crawford 2020).⁷ Other moderating effects of celebrity influence seem to relate to political affiliation and voter frequency. Research suggests that Democrats and first-time voters are more likely to be influenced by celebrity involvement than Republicans and frequent voters (Becker 2013). Regardless of limitations on celebrities' political influence, it's not controversial to say that celebrities possess a certain degree of influence.

Several factors may influence the psychological motivations of an individual decision to vote. Some of the earliest political science research suggested that people vote to fulfill a sense of civic duty—a conviction which helps voters overcome perceived voting costs. More recently, however, research indicates that individuals may vote to satisfy a need of belonging (Bali, Lindon, and Winder 2020). A need for belonging can typically be satisfied through voting according to party identification (Ibid). However, perhaps this sense of belonging can be satisfied by means other than partisan identification. For example, Facebook increased voter turnout by using networks to encourage voter participation (Haenschen 2016). Evidently, networks and identities can have a meaningful effect on turnout.

3. Theory

After careful consideration of psychological motivations and the cost of voting, previous literature provides ample justification for expecting a relationship between turnout and the use of

⁷ Archer, Alfred, "Celebrity, democracy, and epistemic power."; Jackson, David J., and Thomas IA Darrow. "The influence of celebrity endorsements on young adults' political opinions." *Harvard international journal of press/politics* 10, no. 3 (2005): 80-98.

sports facilities as polling locations. The justifications will be examined based on their individual merit, but given the totality of evidence, I offer the following hypothesis:

H1. Counties using professional sports stadiums as polling locations will have higher turnout than counties that do not.

Sports facilities may increase turnout through any number of ways. Professional sports facilities are centralized in population-dense areas and are accounted for by public transportation. These facilities are also constructed with the purpose of accommodating thousands of fans and are likely more accessible than precinct-based polling locations. Additionally, out of the all the counties that used sports facilities as voting places, 20 out of 32 of them used the facilities as EDVCs to offer voters greater flexibility. All of these attributes indicate that sports facilities may increase turnout by lowering the cost of voting for county residents. However, I suggest that identifiability and team support provide the best explanation for expecting a positive relationship between the use of sports facilities as polling locations and voter turnout. Even for residents who do not support their hometown team, it's my belief that these citizens will possess knowledge about the location of these facilities. Since search costs have been identified to be more significant than transportation costs, I suggest that sports facilities will primarily reduce voting cost and increase turnout through identifiability.⁸

Additionally, I theorize that team endorsement of voting will motivate and drive turnout. Leading up to the general election, professional sports teams made a concerted effort to advertise the accessibility of their facilities as polling locations. Two particular social powers could be at play. First, the celebrity athletes conscripted to advertise this development may exert significant influence over the public. I believe the best environment exists for testing a relationship between

⁸ Brady, Henry E., and John E. McNulty. "Turning out to vote"

celebrity endorsement and team get out the vote efforts. Turnout will be analyzed from counties where the sports facilities reside, and thus, it's assumed that our analysis will be reviewing a fan-dense population. This is an important precaution as it has been noted that celebrities may only have influence over their own fans (Jackson and Darrow 2005).

Second, professional sports organizations may be closely tied to the locals' sense of belonging. Fans are able to form an "intimacy at a distance" with celebrities; these relationships are formed in a way similar to how friendships are made (Archer, Cawston and Matheson 2020). This research would seem to indicate that celebrity athlete endorsement of voting could lead to increased turnout in a way analogous to how Facebook leveraged networks to motivate turnout. Additionally, the mere novelty of voting in a sports arena may impact a voter's decisions to turnout. Not everyone has the disposable income to frequently access their teams' stadiums or arenas, and COVID-19 has created an environment where many fans seek normalcy and community. A Facebook page for Green Bay Packers fans demonstrated that most of its users were substituting stadium events with social media interaction—deflecting their frustration of not being able to gather in-person by posting memes.⁹ Because of these frustrations, voting rights activists believe this is the most opportune time to transform arenas and stadiums into polling locations.¹⁰

It should be noted that there may be a relationship between celebrity influence and a decrease in "search" costs. For this reason, I believe both factors that have been identified—team

9 Beckelhimer, Lisa. "No Stadium, No Sports Bar: The Challenges of Substituting Digital Fandom for In-Person Gathering for Cheeseheads."

10 Smith, Allan. "Welcoming Voters, Not Fans: Sports Teams Push for Stadiums to Become Polling Sites." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, September 8, 2020.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/welcoming-voters-not-fans-sports-teams-push-stadiums-become-polling-n1239459>.

support and identifiability—are not solely independent of each other. Instead, I believe both factors are complementary forces that have the potential to impact turnout.

Get out the vote campaigns are not particularly contentious as all political parties share a certain responsibility to vote. Professional athletes wanted arenas and stadiums to be poll-accessible, and a nonpartisan advisory board helped carry out the execution of this vision.¹¹ Research demonstrates that celebrities have very little influence in changing behavior when addressing highly salient or contentious issues (Becker 2013). Since this campaign was bipartisan in nature, it stands to reason that celebrities will likely motivate both Republicans and Democrats to vote. However, in general, it has been found that Republicans are less likely to listen to celebrities (Ibid). Therefore, I also offer hypothesis 2:

H2. The effect of sports stadium usage on turnout will be stronger for Democratic voters than Republican voters.

4. Methodology

Sixty-four voting counties were selected for the sample and voting totals were compared between the 2016 and 2020 presidential election. In 2020, 32 of these counties used professional sports facilities for voting locations while the other 32 counties did not. For the 32 counties that did not use stadiums as polling locations, they were selected from the top 150 most populated counties in the nation and were predominately selected from states that were already represented in the sample. Out of all the sample cases, 60 out of 64 counties occupy spots within the top 150

¹¹ NBA, MLB, NFL, NHL Teams To Make Arenas Available As "Election Super Centers", August 14, 2020. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/nba-mlb-nfl-nhl-teams-to-make-arenas-available-as-election-super-centers-301112429.html>.

most populated counties in the nation.¹² This procedure was employed to populate the sample with consistently urban counties. The goal is to determine if these voting locations caused an increase in turnout when compared with 2016 totals.

4.1 Data Sources

For the independent variable, use of sports facilities, this information was gathered through an amalgamation of news articles, secretary of state websites, and city websites. For the dependent variable, vote totals were gathered from the NY Times via the Associated Press. The control variables gathered for this study were collected from data provided by the Census Bureau and American Communities Survey. It should be noted that this study used demographic data from 2019. Unfortunately, 2020 data was not available at the time of this research.

4.2 Variables

For the first test, the dependent variable was denoted as Vote Sum—the difference between 2020 and 2016 vote totals for both major parties per county. The subsequent tests labeled the dependent variables as Republican Sum and Democrat Sum. These variables only focused on vote totals per party. The independent variable in all three studies was labeled as Arena, and it denoted the use of professional sports facilities as polling places with a 1 and 0 respectively. The counties selected for this study have stably remained as some of the most populated counties in the nation. However, a few of the counties selected for analysis have either grown or shrunk significantly. Accordingly, the first control variable, Population Sum, accounts for the difference in estimated population of each county between 2016 and 2019.

12 “US County Populations 2021.” Largest Counties in the US 2021. Accessed February 27, 2021. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties>.

Political science research has demonstrated that demographics can routinely predict differences in turnout. Surveys show that whites reportedly turnout in higher levels than African Americans (Fraga 2016). While these differences may be attributed to variance in socioeconomic status, it's likely that race is a predictive variable itself (Ibid). For this reason, control variables were used to control demographic changes in each county. BAC Sum represents the difference in African American population per county between 2019 and 2016. Additionally, AAC Sum represents the difference in Asian American population between 2019 and 2016, and H Sum represents the difference in Hispanic population through the same years. For socioeconomic controls, Income Sum represents the difference between median income for counties in 2016 and 2019.

Control variables were also added for the demographic characteristics of age, gender, education level, and population density. While women have turned out to vote at increasing rates, they are still less politically active than men (Kittilson 2016). Male Sum %, the control variable for gender, accounts for changes in the percent of the population that can be identified as male. Furthermore, while scholars debate the significance of educational attainment on turnout, evidence suggests a strong association may exist (Sondheimer, Milstein and Green 2010). Education Sum represents the difference in the total number of residents who achieved an education level at a bachelor level or higher.

Age has been identified as a factor that influences turnout, and a recent study demonstrates that the age-turnout gap may be increasing (Smets 2012). The control variable, Age Sum, represents the 2019 and 2016 difference between the median age of citizens residing in each county. Finally, while political scientists remain skeptical about population density and its effect on turnout, socio-psychological forces related to density may minimally impact turnout

(Pruess 1981). Therefore, Population Density Sum measures the difference in population density between elections by county.

4.3 Empirical Model

In order to test the proposed hypotheses, a difference-in-differences (DD) analysis was employed for three separate tests. This is an especially important precaution as turnout for 2020 was especially high while turnout in 2016 was particularly moderate.¹³ The difference-in-difference method employed should control for the differences in the environment surrounding each election. Controlling for demographic changes, the comparison may provide evidence in support of the belief that sports facilities increase turnout when used as polling locations. The method is also preferable to a standard cross-county comparison because it eliminates the possibility that certain counties turnout at different rates due to unaccounted social factors (i.e. battleground states may increase turnout). Therefore, the difference-in-differences approach further supports the integrity of the research by limiting the number of intervening variables that could invalidate or interfere with results.

5. Results

Each test was run according to the process outlined in the methodology. The graphics and output results addressed in each subsection demonstrate the statistical evidence (or lack thereof) of a causal relationship between professional sports facilities and their impact on increasing turnout.

¹³ Steinberg, Emma. “Stadiums Serving As Polling Sites for 2020 General Election.”; DeSilver, Drew. “Turnout Soared in 2020”

5.1 Test 1

The first multivariate model returned a promising R Square value of 0.693. Accordingly, nearly 70% of variation in vote totals was explained by the independent and control variables. The full model results hold as statistically significant with a number well below the 0.05 standard used for statistical analysis. Unfortunately, while the entire model returns positive results, the individual factors are much less promising.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>		<i>Significance F</i>
Multiple R	0.83220893	1.9213E-10
R Square	0.6925717	
Adjusted R Square	0.63456636	
Standard Error	87850.5049	
Observations	64	

Figure 5.1.1

After reviewing the outputs for individual variables, it's apparent that very few of the the factors themselves impact the model significantly. In fact, Education Sum was the only variable with a P-value below 0.05. This does not entirely suggest that all other variables fail to explain the difference in Vote Sum. There may be an issue of collinearity here as Population Sum may align too closely with the other factors measuring population (BAC Sum, Population Sum, etc.). However, the P-value for the Arena variable was well above 0.05. This result cannot be explained by possible collinearity. From these results, it appears that the use of sports facilities in 2020 did not cause an increase in turnout for the overall voting population of the counties selected. In sum, Hypothesis 1 received no support from the model provided in Test 1.

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	-642.97261	37048.7188	-0.0173548	0.98621875	-74953.292	73667.3467
Arena	-4271.1471	23700.8596	-0.1802106	0.85767449	-51809.051	43266.7571
Population						
Sum	0.33377308	0.46527103	0.71737343	0.47629367	-0.5994424	1.26698858
Male Sum						
%	-10434419	14623695.6	-0.7135282	0.4786493	-39765838	18896999.5
Age Sum	3252.75906	12623.5597	0.25767368	0.79765663	-22066.895	28572.4133
BAC Sum	-0.1237105	1.38381377	-0.0893983	0.92910239	-2.8992895	2.65186838
AAC Sum	1.86450955	1.33211548	1.3996606	0.16744117	-0.8073757	4.53639483
H Sum	0.92103144	0.77893973	1.18241683	0.24231794	-0.6413238	2.48338669
Education						
Sum	3.12629147	0.46615996	6.70647794	1.3381E-08	2.191293	4.06128994
Income						
Sum	-1.9149447	3.50414432	-0.54648	0.58702942	-8.9433681	5.11347878
Population						
Density						
Sum	-127.6073	96.6651984	-1.3200955	0.19247632	-321.49313	66.2785389

Figure 5.1.2

5.2 Test 2

Test 2 employed Republican Sum as the independent variable and it returned equally promising results for the model in its entirety. The model had slightly more predictive weight in demonstrating a relationship between the use of sports facilities and increased turnout. The R Square value was 0.692 with a significance value well under 0.05. Unfortunately, the results of this test fail to demonstrate that the independent and control variables have significant explanatory value themselves.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>		<i>Significance F</i>
Multiple R	0.83212037	1.9443E-10
R Square	0.69242431	
Adjusted R Square	0.63439117	
Standard Error	39279.0178	
Observations	64	

Figure 5.2.1

In Test 2, Education Sum is the only variable to return a P-value under the 0.05 target. Similar to Test 1, an issue of collinearity may undermine the real significance of the control variables. However, the unique variable, Arena, once again failed to fall below the 0.05 threshold as an individual variable. The presence of sports facilities as polling locations did not appear to increase turnout among Republican voters. While these results are underwhelming, they cannot invalidate Hypothesis 2 without being compared to the results presented in Test 3.

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	-14972.177	16564.928	-0.903848	0.37016606	-48197.215	18252.8609
Arena	-4086.2659	10596.9395	-0.3856081	0.70133035	-25341.035	17168.503
Population Sum	0.02526162	0.20802828	0.12143361	0.90380684	-0.3919903	0.4425135
Male Sum %	-7794144	6538430.27	-1.1920513	0.23855139	-20908574	5320286.33
Age Sum	4888.03988	5644.14542	0.8660372	0.39037337	-6432.6822	16208.7619
BAC Sum	-0.6489104	0.61871979	-1.0487952	0.29903156	-1.8899051	0.59208438
AAC Sum	0.69210916	0.59560486	1.16202739	0.25043056	-0.5025229	1.88674122
H Sum	1.09995945	0.34827333	3.15832241	0.00261969	0.40141162	1.79850728
Education Sum	1.2808824	0.20842573	6.14551007	1.0614E-07	0.86283333	1.69893146
Income Sum	-0.4272645	1.56674509	-0.2727083	0.78613716	-3.5697572	2.71522823
Population Density Sum	-71.587928	43.2201733	-1.6563545	0.10355947	-158.27662	15.1007616

Figure 5.2.2

5. Results 5.3 Test 3

For the final test, the results return a lower R square value (0.651) and significance value than tests 1 and 2. Nevertheless, the entire multivariate model was statistically significant and predicative of voter turnout for Democrats in 2020.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>		<i>Significance F</i>
Multiple R	0.80459435	5.6442E-09
R Square	0.64737206	
Adjusted R Square	0.58083849	
Standard Error	56202.0156	
Observations	64	

Figure 5.3.1

Interestingly enough, none of the individual variables returned significant P-values for Test 3. Again, collinearity may potentially moderate the significance of some of the control variables. Regardless of this speculation, there is once again no support for the theory that sports facilities increase Democrat turnout when they are used as polling locations. Neither Democrat nor Republican turnout rates were affected by the presence of sports facilities as polling locations. After reviewing results from Test 2 and Test 3, it becomes clear that statistical evidence does not exist for Hypothesis 2.

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>
Intercept	14329.2044	23701.7724	0.60456257	0.54804924	-33210.531	61868.9394
Arena	-184.8812	15162.5319	-0.0121933	0.99031718	-30597.069	30227.3064
Population						
Sum	0.30851145	0.29765531	1.03647218	0.30468785	-0.2885095	0.90553241
Male Sum %	-2640275.4	9355451.86	-0.2822178	0.77887564	-21404936	16124384.7
Age Sum	-1635.2808	8075.87273	-0.2024897	0.84030924	-17833.43	14562.8686
BAC Sum	0.52519982	0.88528942	0.59325211	0.55553575	-1.2504659	2.30086554
AAC Sum	1.17240039	0.85221565	1.37570859	0.17469818	-0.5369277	2.88172851
H Sum	-0.178928	0.49832363	-0.3590598	0.72097685	-1.1784386	0.82058263
Education						
Sum	1.84540907	0.298224	6.18799646	9.0785E-08	1.24724747	2.44357067
Income Sum	-1.4876802	2.24176257	-0.6636208	0.50980955	-5.9840865	3.0087261
Population						
Density Sum	-56.019368	61.8411812	-0.9058586	0.36911055	-180.05707	68.0183338

Figure 5.3.2

All three models had significant explanatory value. Unfortunately, the weight afforded to these models was not from the specific study matter of this research. While these results are not consistent with the theory built on significant literature, there may be explanations for this apparent discrepancy. 2020 presented our democratic process with interesting and unique challenges. Unfortunately, 21,000 polling locations were cut across the United States because of complications created by COVID-19.¹⁴ It's possible that these losses were not equal across counties. For every arena made available for voting, 10 polling places may have been lost. If this occurred during the 2020 election, potential gains from arenas may not have been registered amidst these potential losses.

Furthermore, the 2020 general election resulted in record breaking vote totals. Voters were more motivated than ever to turnout in droves. Using Downs's theory of voting, people were especially willing to overcome the costs of voting during this election. Lowering voting costs and providing psychological motivations may have had a redundant and negligible affect because of the intensity surrounding this election.

6. Discussion

While this study provides no statistical support for the proposed hypotheses, further research could provide valuable insight. Complications created by COVID-19 may make findings difficult to generalize across elections that take place under fewer extenuating circumstances. However, trends established during 2020 may continue into the future. If sports facilities and stadiums are used as polling places in subsequent elections, it may be worthwhile to

¹⁴ Joseph, Cameron, and Rob Arthur. "The US Eliminated Nearly 21,000 Election Day Polling Locations for 2020." VICE, October 22, 2020. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkdenn/the-us-eliminated-nearly-21000-election-day-polling-locations-for-2020>.

determine if their presence has any impact on turnout during an election cycle that does not have the added complications that accompanied the 2020 election (i.e. social distancing requirements and the large-scale drop-off in traditional voting locations).

It will be interesting to see if voters decide to continue the trend of early voting that increased during the 2020 election. In 2020, over 100 million voters cast early ballots, doubling the total number of early ballots recorded in 2016.¹⁵ In fact, in 2020, 5 swing states had an early vote total that surpassed 90% of their entire vote totals in 2016.¹⁶ This number was largely inflated by the sheer volume of mail-in ballots that accounted for over 64% of all early ballots cast.¹⁷ If 2020 broke path dependency for those who normally voted in-person on election day, that may be important to note for researchers who seek to study the impacts that polling locations may have on turnout. Contemporary knowledge on polling locations may not become irrelevant, but their findings may be less significant as election day voting accounts for a smaller portion of overall votes.

Additionally, qualitative research should be conducted on the 2020 voting experience. Perhaps the perceived benefits of stadium vote centers were not actualized. While this paper speculated that arenas and stadiums would provide greater accessibility and identifiability, voters could have encountered any number of issues voting at their hometown stadium. When the NBA announced their plans to offer stadiums as voting locations, they only had nine weeks to plan and

15 Smith, Allan. "Early Vote Tops 100 Million, Doubles Total from 2016." NBCNews.com. NBCUniversal News Group, November 7, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/early-vote-tops-100-million-doubles-total-2016-n1246027>.

16 Kirby, Jen, and Rani Molla. "9 Questions about 2020's Record-Breaking Early Vote, Answered." Vox. Vox, October 29, 2020. <https://www.vox.com/21527600/early-vote-explained>.

17 Ibid

coordinate with election officials.¹⁸ Voters may know the location of their hometown stadium, but election day parking and entrance locations may not have been as easy to identify.

Additionally, thousands of poll workers decided to stay home because of COVID-19 related concerns.¹⁹ Efforts at replacing these volunteers were somewhat successful. For instance, LeBron James was able to recruit 40,000 poll workers through his More Than a Vote Coalition.²⁰ However, it's uncertain whether these stadiums ended up being staffed appropriately to accommodate the large number of voters that arrived at these sites. This qualitative research would be important for highlighting immediate turnout impacts as well as potential downstream impacts. For example, Pettigrew found that increased waiting times can suppress future turnout due to a decrease in enthusiasm produced by an unpleasant and monotonous voting experience (2020). As negative experiences can affect future turnout, research on the qualitative experience of voting at stadiums may help researchers identify whether potential downstream effects exist from the use of sports facilities in 2020.

The findings in this study continue to offer the question: to what extent can celebrities leverage their platforms to influence voters? The research here does not indicate that celebrity athletes can use their team facilities to increase turnout. Perhaps athletes and professional sports teams have a more limited authority in influencing the world of politics than previously thought. The phenomenon of using sports facilities as polling places started when the NBA nearly shut down after Kenosha officers shot and seriously injured Jacob Blake. The initiative itself was intended to specifically remedy voter suppression against African Americans.²¹ Further

18 Coulter, Genya. "Perspective | Turning NBA Arenas into Polling Places Might Be a Disaster." The Washington Post. WP Company, September 25, 2020.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/09/24/nba-arenas-polling-places/>.

19 Ibid

20 Beer, Tommy. "Report: Nearly 300,000 Americans Voted In Sports Arenas"

21 Ibid

qualitative and quantitative measures may still prove that this goal was accomplished. For now, it's uncertain whether stadiums and arenas had any impact on the outcome of the 2020 election.

Arguably, the biggest takeaway here is that politicians and voting rights advocates must consider a wide array of factors if turnout is to be maximized. On its face, the movement to transform arenas and stadiums into polling locations seemed like a major victory for those wishing to increase political participation. In reality, laws and guidelines regarding the selection of polling places remain wildly unique from state to state²². Without consistent guidelines for the selection of polling locations, it's difficult to expect that a single voting location will significantly impact vote totals by county.

Of course, state-by-state variation provides researchers with a particularly promising environment for finding the ideal polling locations. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) provides various resources for helping states select the best voting locations, but recommendations are generally nonspecific and stray away from empirics.²³ For example, the EAC provides drawings and designs for making local polling places handicap accessible, and they inform election officials that EDVCs require fewer poll workers. However, the EAC does not recommend how many polling places should be available per capita, and they provide no data to demonstrate the relationship between turnout and factors such as identifiability and distance. These statistics should be gathered across states and localities and made available through the EAC so that election officials have a better understanding on how their policies may impact turnout. At the very least, the United States should seek to leverage its laboratory of

22 Polling Places. Accessed March 5, 2021. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/polling-places.aspx>.

23 "Election Management Guidelines: U.S. Election Assistance Commission." Election Management Guidelines | U.S. Election Assistance Commission. Accessed March 5, 2021. https://www.eac.gov/election_management_resources/election_management_guidelines.aspx.

democracies to ease the process of selecting voting locations for election officials and voting rights advocates.

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