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The studies discussed below represent some of the latest research on how the basic mechanics of elections—for example, deciding what type of ballot to use or where to set up polling stations—can have big impacts on electoral participation. The common theme here is that how states decide to regulate elections is one of the most important, and often overlooked, influences on political participation in local, state, and federal elections.

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- **Ahler, Douglas J., Jack Citrin, and Gabriel S. Lenz.** “Do Open Primaries Help Moderate Candidates? An Experimental Test on the 2012 California Primary.” Presented at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Los Angeles, CA, March 28–30, 2013. wpsa.research.pdx.edu/papers/docs/ahlercitrinandlenz.pdf.

In a highly partisan era marked by little cooperation between the parties at the federal or state level, some politicians and advocacy groups are pushing to enact changes in election law that might promote more moderate or centrist candidates. A number of studies have shown, however, that such changes in rules or regulations might have limited effect. This study, for instance, is based on a survey of nearly 5,000 California voters. It found that the state’s primary system, in which the top two vote-getters advance to the general election regardless of party affiliation, is not helping elect more moderates to Congress or the state Senate. Voters don’t seem to have enough information to distinguish properly between the platforms of extreme and more moderate candidates. Even when the top two finishers were from the same party, there were examples in 2012 of voters preferring the more ideological candidate of the pair.

- **Anzia, Sarah F.** *Timing and Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Many municipal elections are held in odd-numbered years, with fewer voters turning out when there are not major races for offices such as governor or president on the ballot. As a result, organized interest groups such as

unions or municipal workers are often able to mobilize disproportionate support for candidates of their choice. Members of interest groups with a large stake in an election outcome turn out at high rates regardless of election timing, and their efforts to mobilize and persuade voters have a greater impact when turnout is low. That both helps unions push for advantageous labor terms and helps industries that do business with local government keep contract-granting friends in power. Anzia finds, for instance, that school districts that hold off-cycle elections pay experienced teachers 3 percent more than do districts that hold on-cycle elections.

- **Herrnson, Paul, Michael Hanmer, and Richard Niemi.** “The Impact of Ballot Type on Voter Errors.” *American Journal of Political Science* 56 (2012): 716–730.

This study examines how ballot format and type of voting system (paper or electronic) influence voter error. Specifically, the researchers examined two types of error: (1) wrong-candidate error, which happens when a voter mistakenly casts a ballot for the wrong candidate, and (2) unintentional undervoting, which happens when a voter plans to cast a ballot for a particular elective office but does not. They found that there was not much difference in these sorts of errors across voting systems (paper ballots had a slightly higher error rate); however, there was a big difference between standard office group (Massachusetts) ballots and ballots that offered the option of voting a straight ticket. The straight-ticket option led to significantly more errors. For example, voters in elections using ballots with this option were more likely not to vote in nonpartisan races they had intended to vote in (such races would not be included in a straight-ticket option), and, more disturbing, they were more likely to vote unintentionally for the wrong candidate. The error rate was small, generally less than 5 percent, but it was still enough to make a difference in an election, at least in theory.

- **Hood, M. V., III, and Charles Bullock III.** “Much Ado About Nothing? An Empirical Assessment of the Georgia Voter Identification Statute.” *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 12 (2012): 393–414.