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Does Extending Polling Hours Compensate for Bomb Threats?

Evidence from the 2024 Election in Georgia, USA

Introduction

- At least 227 bomb threats against polling places and tabulation centers were received on the day of the 2024 US presidential election, with threats concentrated in the swing states of Georgia, Arizona, and Pennsylvania[1].
- Voting was temporarily disrupted while law enforcement swept locations, though no bombs were found.
- Roughly a dozen ‘credible’ threats were received in Georgia in DeKalb and Fulton counties, interrupting voting at eleven polling locations.
- To remediate the effect of the temporary closures of polling places, courts ordered some polling places to remain open late.
- There are claims that the bomb threats had minimal impact [1], but we are not aware of any empirical basis for that claim
- Nonparametric permutation tests [2,3,4] using turnout data from 2020 and 2024 show that this remedy may have been inadequate.

The 2024 General Election and Bomb Threats

- There were eight credible bomb threats in DeKalb County, of which six were to active polling sites, which were closed and searched by police prior to reopening.
- The DeKalb County Law Department extended polling hours, with extensions ranged from thirty-eight minutes to over an hour.
- Thirty-two Fulton precincts received threats, of which five were deemed credible enough to warrant a response.
- The Fulton County Department of Registration and Elections extended polling hours at threatened locations after the Democratic National Committee and the Democratic Party of Georgia filed a lawsuit.
- Locations with credible threats were either evacuated and swept by police before re-opening, or just swept.

Table 1: Bomb threat locations, corresponding precincts, and closure times for Dekalb

Location	Precinct	Closed	Duration	Extended
New Bethel AME Church	Rockbridge Road	17:15–18:06	21m	19:38
New Life Community Center	Flat Shoals	17:30–18:35	65m	19:38
North DeKalb Senior Center	Chamblee	17:30–18:20	50m	20:29
Reid H. Cofer Library	Tucker Library	17:25–18:20	65m	19:38
William C. Brown Library	Wesley Chapel Library	17:56–18:08	12m	20:03
Briarwood Recreation Center	Briarwood	-	-	20:22

Table 2: Bomb threat locations, corresponding precincts, and closure times for Fulton

Location	Precinct	Closed	Duration	Extended
Etris-Darnell Community Center	UC02 A/B/E/F/G	-	≈30m	19:45
C.H. Gullatt Elementary School	UC02 C/D	8:15-8:53	38m	19:15
Southwest Arts Center	SC02 & SC02A, SC32	-	-	19:43
Northwood Elementary School	RW06, RW13	12:11–12:47	36m	19:45
Lake Forest Elementary School	SS03, SS03A, SS07A/B/C/D	-	-	19:10

Results

- In DeKalb, 2024 in-person turnout in precincts closed by threats relative to 2020 turnout in the same precincts was suppressed compared to other DeKalb polling places ($P \approx 0.01$, Fig 3).
- In Fulton, there is no statistical evidence that in-person voting was suppressed in precincts closed by bomb threats ($P \approx 0.96$, Fig 3).
- Most precincts in both DeKalb and Fulton had a higher relative in-person voting in 2024 than in 2020 (Fig 1).
- Fulton has a few notable outliers with four locations that had no in-person election-day voters in 2020 (Fig 1), which results in a large standard deviation for the relative in-person turnout statistic (Fig 2).
- The gap between threatened and non-threatened precincts in DeKalb is larger in 2024 than in 2020, possibly due to bomb threats (Fig 2).
- Fulton county shows the opposite trend, with the gap between threatened and non-threatened polling locations shrinking in 2024 (Fig 2).

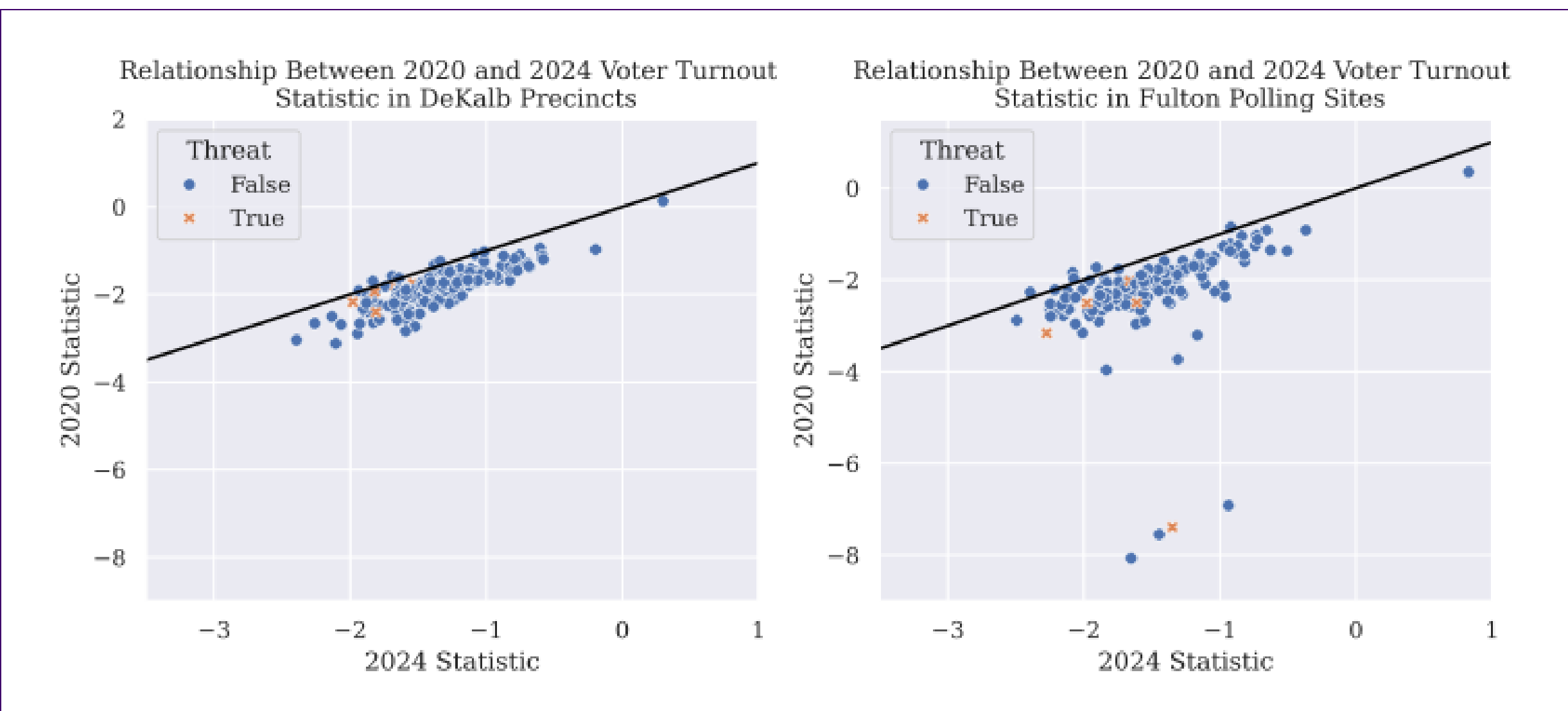


Figure 1. Distribution of relative in-person turnout statistic over 2020 and 2024 for Dekalb and Fulton counties. Precincts with a larger in-person voter turnout in 2024 than in 2020 are below the line, which represents equal ratios in the two years.

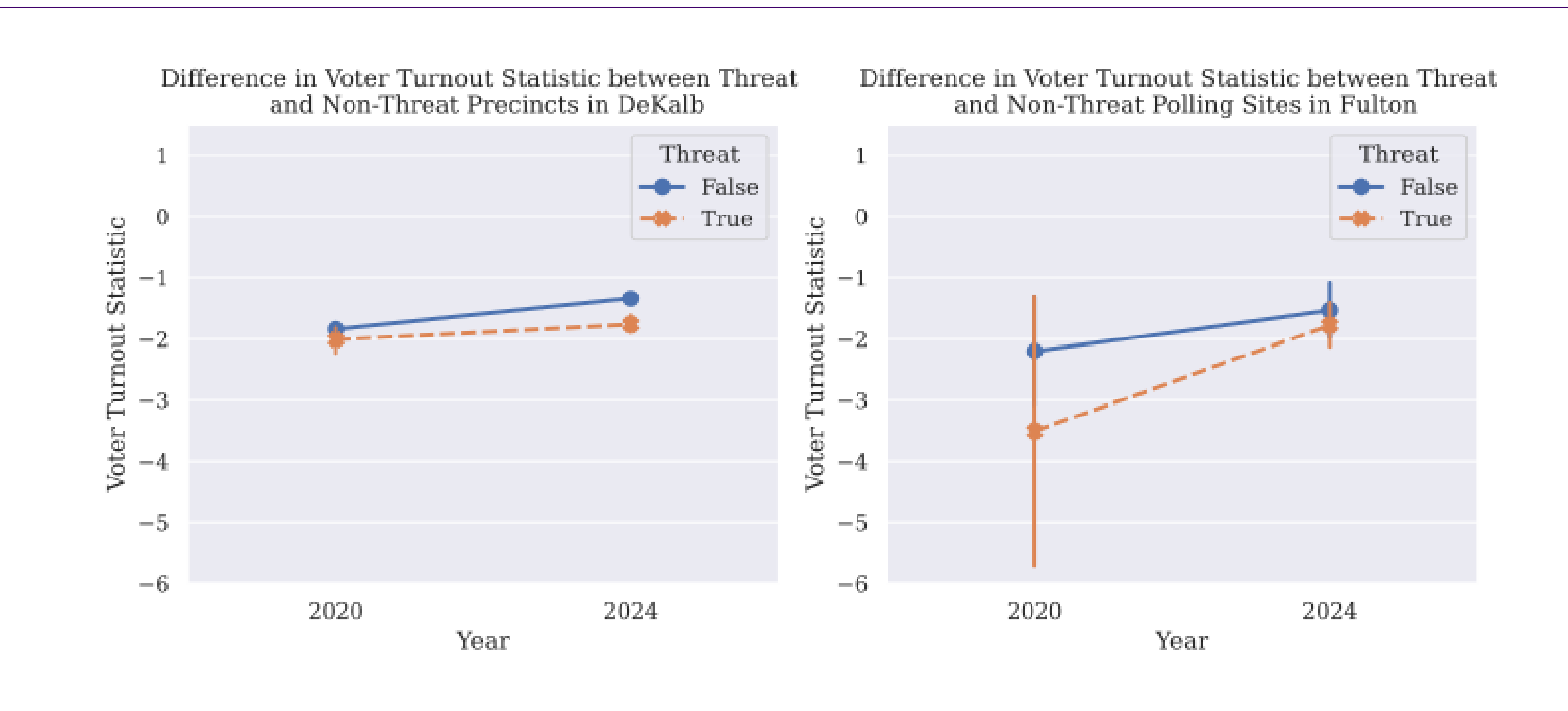


Figure 2. Average relative in-person turnout statistic with $\pm$ one standard deviation between 2020 and 2024 for Dekalb and Fulton counties.

Methodology

- We test the null hypothesis that voter turnout is the same between precincts with and without credible bomb threats using Monte Carlo permutation tests [2,3,4].
- Selecting which precincts received bomb threats at random induces a distribution of voter turnout under the null hypothesis.
- Relative in-person turnout statistic for year y :

$$m_j(y) := \frac{1 + \text{in-person voters in precinct } j \text{ in year } y}{1 + \text{early and absentee voters in precinct } j \text{ in year } y}$$

- Since different precincts have different voting behaviors, we normalize the in-person turnout statistic by the statistic from a year without threats to get the final test statistic:

$$\tilde{m}_j := \log \left(\frac{m_j(2024)}{m_j(2020)} \right)$$

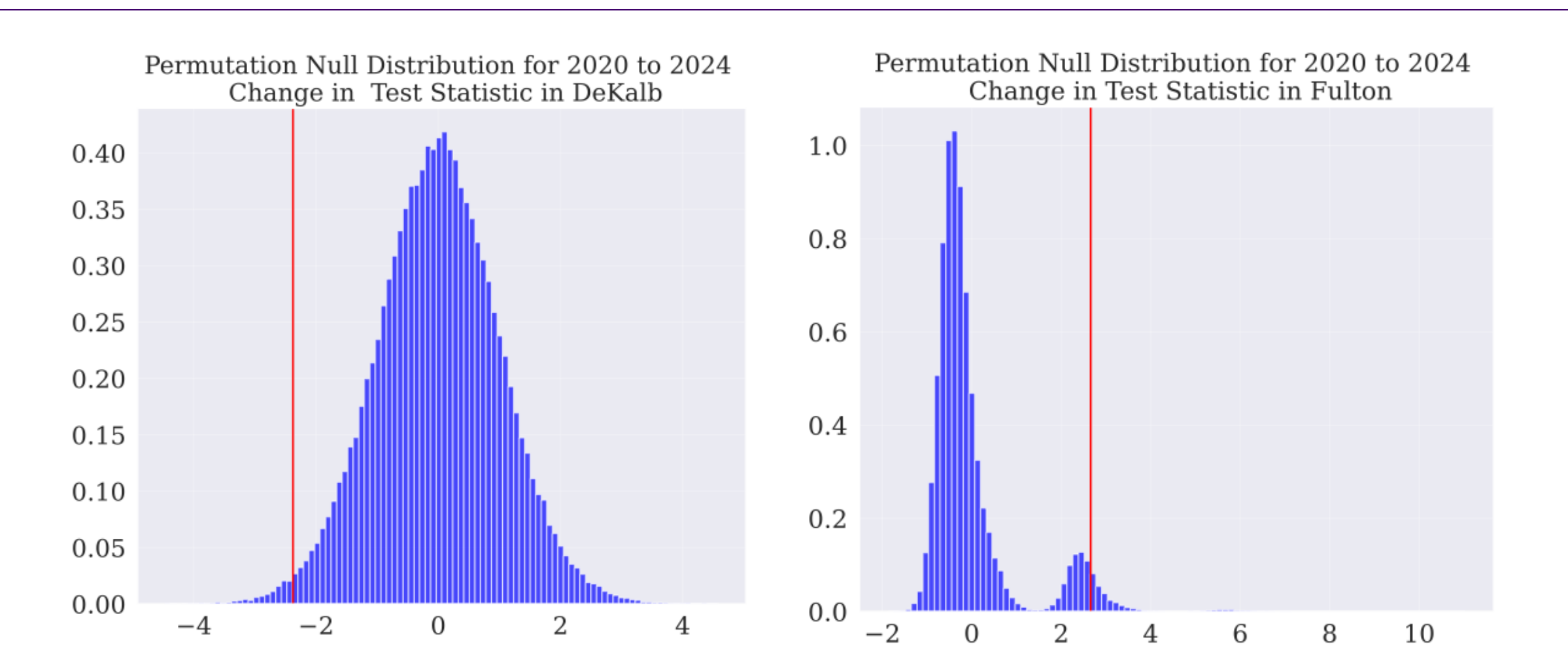


Figure 3. Permutation distribution induced by the null hypothesis, with observed test statistics marked by a red vertical line.

Conclusions

- Extending voting hours at locations that were temporarily closed due to bomb threats did not entirely mitigate the suppression of in-voter turnout.
- Precincts in DeKalb that received bomb threats had lower in-person election-day turnout than precincts without ‘credible’ threats, relative to the turnout in 2020 in the same precincts, despite extended polling hours.
- A total of 9,966 voters in ‘credible’ bomb threatened precincts did not vote across DeKalb and Fulton. Trump won Georgia by about 115,100 votes, so even if the all those voters would have voted for Biden, Trump would still have won Georgia.

References

[1] E. Howard. Preparation kept bomb threats from disrupting the 2024 elections. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/preparation-kept-bomb-threats-disrupting-2024-elections>, 2025.

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[4] A. Glazer and P.B. Stark. Fast conservative Monte Carlo confidence intervals. *Journal of Computational and Graphical Statistics*, in press, 2025.