Skewing Democracy: The Impact of State Voter ID Laws on Voter Participation
A Rhode Island Perspective

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FOR YOUR PROTECTION, WE LEGISLATORS HAVE TURNED YOUR POLLING PLACE INTO A GATED COMMUNITY!
History of voter ID

- White male landowners
- 15th, 19th, and 26th amendments → suffrage was extended to Blacks, Women, and 18 year-olds
  - Literacy tests
  - Poll taxes
  - Grandfather clause

→ Despite progress made, legislation continues to exist that actively works to suppress the ability to vote among certain constituencies...considered by some to be “modern-day Jim Crow” laws because they disproportionately impact minority voters
Research Question

Q: Are the voter ID laws in RI an outlier in the sense that they don’t have a discernible impact on voter turnout during elections? In an effort to answer this question, I have created four aims and objectives:

1. Evaluate current voter ID laws in place in RI and discuss how/why these laws were passed
2. Determine whether or not RI fits into this pattern of deterrence or does it present a different model?
3. Do voter ID laws in other states deter certain constituencies from voting?
4. Do any laws in RI deter constituencies from voting?
Current voter ID laws in RI

- January 1, 2012 → Rhode Island's first voter ID legislation was made effective
- If voter doesn’t have required ID they can cast a provisional ballot
- Major reason for passage = “voter fraud”
Do any laws in RI deter constituencies from voting?

- Anyone who is eligible to vote can register and vote.
- If a RI resident doesn’t possess necessary form of ID they can submit provisional ballot on election day.
- RI’s ID laws are far more liberal in comparison to other states.
ADULTS WITHOUT VALID PHOTO ID

- Blacks: 25%
- Asians: 20%
- Latinos: 19%
- 18-to-24-year-olds: 18%
- Seniors: 18%
- Earning less than $35,000: 15%
- All: 11%
- Whites: 8%

Source: Mother Jones/Brennan Center for Justice
Does RI fit into this pattern of deterrence?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“White” Cities and Towns</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrington</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrillville</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>.2% Black</td>
<td>.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Smithfield</td>
<td>98.3%</td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kingstown</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Minority” Cities and Towns</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woonsocket</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Falls</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>54.53%</td>
<td>14.54%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>84.1%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000)
http://censtats.census.gov/data/RI/0604400105140.pdf
Data shows that there was an overall drop in turnout between 2008 to 2012, I wanted to see if this drop in turnout could be attributed to the drop in voter turnout among minorities in RI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“White” Cities and Towns</th>
<th>2008 General Election Turnout</th>
<th>2012 General Election Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrington</td>
<td>71.22</td>
<td>69.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrillville</td>
<td>61.43</td>
<td>58.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Smithfield</td>
<td>67.27</td>
<td>62.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>67.25</td>
<td>67.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kingston</td>
<td>71.99</td>
<td>68.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total drop in turnout between 2008 and 2012: 12.79%

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<th>“Minority” Cities and Towns</th>
<th>2008 General Election</th>
<th>2012 General Election Turnout</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Falls</td>
<td>59.03</td>
<td>52.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>67.27</td>
<td>58.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>58.86</td>
<td>50.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woonsocket</td>
<td>60.85</td>
<td>50.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>70.41</td>
<td>65.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total drop in turnout between 2008 and 2012: 38.97%
Do voter ID laws in other states deter constituencies from voting?

- **Alabama** → August 2015, the *Washington Post* published, “Alabama Risks Making It Much Harder to Get Required Voter ID”
  - significant deterrence towards minority voting because one of the major forms of acceptable photo ID is a driver's license...Studies show that a lack of identification is particularly acute among the minority population, the poor, and the young (Hajnal et al, 2016).

- 2007 Houston Chronicle article → Royal Masset (the former political director for the Republican Party of Texas) is quoted as saying he believes that requiring photo IDs could cause enough of a drop off in legitimate Democratic voting to add 3 percent to the Republican vote (Mack, 2007).
Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified costs for voter identification in 17 states that require voters to present a photo or government-issued ID at the polls, and found that driver's license direct costs, for example, range from $14.50 to $58.50 (GAO, 2014).
Is it a ploy used by Red states to gain power?

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- 24 red states:
  - 10 require photo ID, 8 require either photo ID or non-photo ID, 4 require government issued photo ID card, one requests non-photo ID, and one doesn’t require any ID for voting.
  - ***95% of states that voted red in the 2012 presidential election require identification to vote***

- In contrast, 26 blue states, 10 do not require any ID and 4 require photo ID.
  - ***This means that only 15% of blue states require photo ID in comparison to the 95% of republican states***
Conclusion

- not able to definitively say strict voter ID requirements keep minorities from voting
- However, we can speculate that with more restrictive legislation (in high minority districts), the percent of minority voters will drop
Sources


Mack, Kristen. (2007). In trying to win, has Dewhurst lost a friend?. The Houston Chronicle.


