

Voting Limitations and its Detrimental Effects on Voter Turnout

Policy Memo

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(1000 Words)

Summary:

Who is involved in politics? Who can participate in the political contest? Is political participation accessible for everyone? Although every American has asked themselves these questions once in his or her life, the complexity of politics makes it impossible to answer them certainly. The primary purpose of engaging in politics is to represent the electorate's interests during the legislative session. Citizen participation in politics takes plenty of forms. People who want to make a difference politically donate to campaigns, volunteer, or attend campaign events. Nevertheless, perhaps the most common and distinguished form of political action is voting. Unfortunately, in the United States, the percentage of eligible voters that reach out to polls and participate in elections is relatively low. This means that only a portion of the population is considered when it comes to choosing the next president, governor, vice president, local officials, and many other important positions. McDonald (2010) estimates that 40.8% of the eligible electorate voted in November 2010, only slightly higher than the 40.4% who voted in 2006.¹ Forty percent of the eligible voters is equal to about 80 million individuals. These numbers are extremely low when considering that the U.S. population in 2017 was about 309 million.² In America, states, counties, and cities are responsible for administering elections. They not only take on the task of establishing their respective election infrastructures, they also set comprehensive election policies that shape the turnout. A clear example of policies that shape voter turnout is ID laws. These were officially implemented with the enactment of the Help America to Vote Act (HAVA) passed in 2002.³ One of the HAVA provisions requires voters to

¹ Panagopoulos, Costas. "Voter Turnout in the 2010 Congressional Midterm Elections." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 2 (2011): 317. Accessed April 14, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41319916. Excellent use of reference.

² "Decennial Census by Decades," United States Census Bureau, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade.html>

³ Kanter, Arlene, and Rebecca Russo. "The Right of People with Disabilities to Exercise Their Right to Vote Under the Help America Vote Act." *Mental and Physical Disability Law Reporter* 30, no. 6 (2006): 852. Accessed April 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20786910.

present ID in order to vote and lists photo ID as one of the acceptable forms.⁴ States imposing ID laws should consider switching these policies for a more voter inclusive one for the following reason. If that policy is modified, legislatures will no longer exclude a large part of the population who do not have a state-issued ID from general and local elections. The adoption of a more inclusive policy is necessary. The incorporation of a new provision in the HAVA that allows states to enact ID laws, only if, in the proposal of the law it is incorporated sufficient evidence demonstrating that corruption and voter fraud are highly present in the state, will higher voter turnout. Opponents see HAVA as disenfranchising voters because approximately 11% of the population does not have a state-issued ID. Considering that the US population in 2017 was about 324 million,⁵ this percentage indicates that about 35 million people in the United States, more likely minorities and low-income groups, do not possess a state-issued ID and do not vote, resulting in a low voter turnout.

⁴ Harrison, Sally. "MAY I SEE YOUR ID? HOW VOTER IDENTIFICATION LAWS DISENFRANCHISE NATIVE AMERICANS' FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO VOTE." *American Indian Law Review* 37, no. 2 (2012): 597. Accessed April 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/23594816.

⁵ "Census Bureau Projects U.S. and World Populations on New Year's Day," United States Census Bureau, accessed April 26, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-tps158.html>

Background:

It is vital to determine which groups are more affected by these laws and why. Although research has shown that minorities, the elderly, and the poor are less likely to possess IDs, political scientists find mixed evidence that this leads to a reduction in turnout for various subgroups of the electorate.⁶ The enactment of ID laws affects more prominently to the minority or low-income groups. Most of the time, Hispanics and African Americans [considered minorities and low-income groups] are less likely to possess a state-issued identification. If a state imposes a law that requires an ID when casting ballots, it in effect reduces the number of votes from minority and low-income groups. Vercellotti and Anderson (2006) report that Hispanic voters in voter ID states are 10 percent less likely to vote and African American are 6 percent less likely to vote than Hispanics and African Americans in states without ID requirements.⁷ The effect that these laws have is tremendous, and thousands of people are affected by the enactment of these laws. The most notary example of the phenomenon is in the states of Indiana with the strictest ID policy, where the electorate needs to present an up-to-date ID for voting. If voter identification requirements reduce overall turnout by 3% (Drew 2007), and there are approximately 4.5 million eligible voters in Indiana (www.census.gov), about 135,000 potential voters may be deterred from voting.⁸ Although these laws notably disenfranchise a large part of the population, states excuse these practices by mentioning that reduce voter fraud.

⁶ Bright, Chelsie L. M., and Michael S. Lynch. "Kansas Voter ID Laws: Advertising and Its Effects on Turnout." *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2017): 342. Accessed April 14, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26384946.

⁷ Ibid. p. 342

⁸ Sobel, Richard, and Robert Ellis Smith. "Voter-ID Laws Discourage Participation, Particularly among Minorities, and Trigger a Constitutional Remedy in Lost Representation." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42, no. 1 (2009): 107. Accessed April 25, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/20452382.

Analysis:

In state legislatures where there is a right-leaning or Republican majority, officials frequently institute measures that exclude voters who have opposing views. The following percentages show the support of Republican lawmakers for ID laws. For instance, in North Carolina in 2013, 100% of Democrats voted against a restrictive voter ID bill on the final floor vote, whereas 100% of Republicans voted in favor.⁹ Majority Republican state legislatures may implement these laws to disenfranchise minority voters [who trend toward supporting the Democratic party in America] and reduce their power and influence in elections. Due to opposition to the implementation of these laws, legislatures excuse this action by mentioning that it will reduce voter fraud and corruption. Proponents . . . claim that these laws will prevent ineligible voters, such as felons, noncitizens, nonresidents, and individuals who have already voted, from voting illegally (Overton 2007).¹⁰ These inputs make Hispanics and African Americans less capable of accessing the means to vote, giving them no power in local, state, and national elections, resulting in an unrepresentative government. Since the Hispanic and African American population [groups more likely to not possess state-issued ID's] is continually growing, the number of people not possessing a state-issued ID will increase in relation. Also, this will affect voter turnout, reducing the number of people voting in the United States because of ID laws, making it necessary to act against this problem.

⁹ Hicks, William D., Seth C. McKee, and Daniel A. Smith. "The Determinants of State Legislator Support for Restrictive Voter ID Laws." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2016): 418. Accessed April 22, 2020. doi:10.2307/26654458.

¹⁰ Bright, Chelsie L. M., and Michael S. Lynch. "Kansas Voter ID Laws: Advertising and Its Effects on Turnout." *Political Research Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2017): 340. Accessed April 22, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26384946.

Recommendation:

Because minority and low-income groups are continually growing, the number of individuals deprived of, freely voting, will in relation raise. This inequality will result in an unrepresentative government, with officials that only engage with a portion of the population. The execution of a new provision in the HAVA that makes it harder for states to enact ID laws will incorporate thousands of individuals in the democratic process. Also, this will cause a higher voter turnout because a large part of the electorate is no longer highly limited by ID laws. Since democracy is one of the main factors of the American political culture, the consideration of all the citizens of the nation is vital for a well-developed government. The government must guarantee equal citizenship, not impel inequality.

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Sebastian,

This is a great improvement and although you went past the recommended three sources, your recommendation is solid and your arguments flow from paragraph to paragraph. If I were to grade this today, I would give it an "A+".