

# **Voter I.D. requirements reduce political participation, study finds**

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A new Brown University study reports that U.S. states that require voters to present identification before casting ballots have lower levels of political participation. The research also indicates that voter I.D. policies discourage legal immigrants from becoming citizens, particularly for blacks and Hispanics, reducing odds of naturalization by more than 15 percent.

The full study, released by the American Communities Project at Brown's Initiative in Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences (S4), is available online at <http://www.s4.brown.edu/voterid/>.

Since 2000, and stimulated by new security concerns after 9/11, there has been an upsurge in state requirements for voter identification. By 2004, a total of 19 states required some form of documentation of a voter's identity, sometimes in the form of photo I.D. Proponents of such requirements believe identification is a necessary tool to prevent voting fraud, such as voting by noncitizens or people who are otherwise ineligible to register. Others argue that whatever its intention, I.D. policies have the effect of suppressing electoral participation, particularly among minorities.

The report, co-authored by S4 Director John Logan and graduate student Jennifer Darrah, concludes that voter I.D. is one of many factors that negatively influence civic participation in the United States. The report states, "At a time when many public officials express regret that immigrants seem to lag in their participation in mainstream society, even

small suppressive effects on naturalization – the formal step to becoming an American citizen – work in the wrong direction and should be taken into account as people evaluate the benefits and costs of more stringent identification requirements.”

The new study extends previous research on I.D. requirements by analyzing not only voter turnout, but also voter registration and – “the key prior step for immigrants” – the decision to become a citizen, across racial and ethnic groups.

Key findings include:

- in states with a voter I.D. policy in 2000, the odds of naturalization for foreign-born residents of the United States were reduced by more than 5 percent, with the strongest impact on Hispanics;

- in election years from 1996-2004, the odds of being a registered voter among citizens aged 18 and older were higher for whites by about 15 percent in states with voter I.D. requirements. But this effect was more than counterbalanced by a reduction in white voter turnout. In 2004 alone the net effect was to reduce white turnout in these states by about 400,000 votes;

- in this same period, voter I.D. policies reduced Asians’ registration and diminished voter turnout by blacks and Hispanics, by about 14 percent and 20 percent respectively. The net reduction in minority voting in these states in 2004 was more than 400,000 votes;

- the suppressive effect of voter I.D. disproportionately affected not only minorities, but also persons with less than a high school education and less than \$15,000 income, tenants, and recent movers. While persons with these characteristics are substantially less likely to participate in civic affairs regardless of their state of residence, they experience an

additional significant reduction in participation relative to others in voter I.D. states.

“It is incredibly clear how voter I.D. requirements disproportionately affect and suppress minorities,” said Logan, professor of sociology.

“This data shows that if voter I.D. policies had not been in place in 2004, voter turnout would have increased by more than 1.6 million. That is a strong argument in itself for change.”

The constitutionality of voter I.D. provisions is now under review by the U.S. Supreme Court with oral argument scheduled for Jan. 9, 2008. The case, Crawford v. Marion County Election Board, challenges the 2005 Indiana law requiring all voters who cast a ballot in person to present a photo I.D. issued by the United States or the State of Indiana.

Source: Brown University

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