

# Voter registration policy may depress minority participation in electoral politics

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An article released by *Social Forces* indicates that voter identification requirements have a substantially negative impact on the voting of all groups except for Asians. Particularly strong negative effects are seen for Blacks and Hispanics: a decrease in voting by 18 percent and 22 percent respectively. Even Whites show dampened turnout associated with voter ID policies. Yet for Asians, strikingly, voter ID has the opposite effect, boosting turnout by nearly 30 percent. This is an intriguing instance in which Asian participation patterns markedly differ from that of other groups.

The authors of the article, Brown University Professor of Sociology, John R. Logan, Jennifer Darrah and Sookhee Oh, use [national survey](#) data in federal election years from 1996 through 2004 for this study to examine voter registration and voting. It shows that racial/[ethnic disparities](#) in socio-economic resources and rootedness in the community do not explain overall group differences in electoral participation. It contradicts the expectation from an assimilation perspective that low levels of Latino participation are partly attributable to the large share of immigrants among [Latinos](#). In fact net differences show higher average Latino participation than previously reported. This research was sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation.

The authors have shown that all else equal, Blacks register and vote at higher rates than Whites. Among the largely [immigrant groups](#) with lower levels of participation, Latinos register and vote at higher rates than [Asians](#). Unexpectedly, though, they showed that these group

differences are conditional on nativity, because among immigrants Latinos participate more than either Whites or Asians and almost as much as Blacks. The study indicates that, "Although there has been speculation that the high share of immigrants in the voting-eligible Latino and Asian populations could help to explain their lower political participation, the impact of nativity is not uniform across groups and does not account for the differences between groups in participation . . . Race, Hispanic origin and immigration status apparently combine to produce distinctive collective influences on people's understanding of the political system and their engagement in it." Their results confirm that Latino and White participation were boosted, but only for registration and surprisingly with the opposite effect on voting. Minority political representation (our measure of co-ethnic public officials in the metropolitan region) is a related factor, and they found strong positive effects for Blacks along with some evidence that there may be an effect also for Latinos. Although the direction of causality in this finding is not certain and the Asian results run in the opposite direction, these findings should encourage further efforts to bring measures of group-based organizational activity into analysis of individual political behavior.

State voting rules are especially important because these are amenable to change, so the authors examined a wide range of these policies. There is a consistent effect for voter ID requirements. Some states have recently introduced new identification requirements and others are considering it. The evidence here suggests that this policy will depress White, Black and Latino participation in electoral politics—and the effect could be especially strong for Blacks and Latinos. On the other hand liberal absentee voting policies lead to higher voter turnout except, surprisingly, for Blacks. Finally there is some evidence that a stronger immigrant service safety net is associated with greater political participation—an effect which is particularly clear for Asians for both registration and voting—but again not for Blacks.

This study shows that group differences are not solely a function of the resources and rootedness of group members or a consequence of the high proportion of immigrants among Latinos and Asians. The authors suggest that attention now needs to be focused on the contexts of participation faced by each group, and how their participation is facilitated or discouraged by their shared conditions in the communities where they live.

**More information:** [sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/ ...  
9/sf.sor024.abstract](https://sf.oxfordjournals.org/content/9/sf.sor024.abstract)

Provided by Brown University

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