

# Voting restrictions stir anger, mobilize more Democrats to polls

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In recent years, many states have passed laws that make it more difficult for people to register and vote.

But while these laws may be disenfranchising some minority voters—many of whom support the Democratic Party—they also may be having the unintended consequence of angering many voters, mobilizing them to go to the polls and cast their ballot, according to a new University of Michigan study.

This effect may explain why, to date, there has been no evidence of turnout declines in states with these new laws.

Since 2002, about 32 states have enacted identification requirements intended to reduce voter fraud. Opponents argued these laws are partisan and racially biased, that is, the laws have been proposed mostly by Republican-dominated state legislatures and are intended to disenfranchise poorer and more transient voters, especially African-Americans and other minorities who tend to vote for Democrats.

U-M researchers Nicholas Valentino and Fabian Neuner created two surveys to analyze the psychological reactions to the laws to determine whether media frames about voter ID laws might trigger powerful emotions that spur turnout enough to counteract the demobilizing effects of the laws themselves.

In the first online survey, 750 white Americans were asked how angry it

would make them feel if voter identification laws prevented some eligible voters from casting a ballot, and their reaction if someone ineligible to vote attempted to cast a ballot. On a five-point scale, the response options ranged from "not at all angry" to "extremely angry."

Respondents also answered questions about their willingness to volunteer to raise awareness about voter ID laws, as well as whether they would vote in the 2014 midterm election. In both cases, response options ranged from "not at all likely" to "extremely likely" on a five-point scale.

Both sides of the debate—the law and Republican claims about eliminating voter fraud—angered Democrats and increased their commitment to vote, the study shows. Meanwhile, Republicans were only mildly concerned about voter fraud, and that concern did not cause them to turn out at higher rates.

"We found that Democrats and Republicans reacted differently to the dominant frames in the public discourse, with Republicans angry only about fraud, but Democrats angry about both frames," said Valentino, professor of [political science](#) and communication studies.

The second [online survey](#) involved 750 people who responded to one of five fictitious news articles on voter ID laws and disenfranchisement during the midterm election. The stories ranged from announcing the election without mentioning voter ID laws or their consequences to claiming voter ID laws would disenfranchise legal African-American voters. Another story claimed the laws were necessary to prevent voter fraud.

Democrats became angrier about the disenfranchisement conditions than Republicans and independents, the study indicated.

"The disenfranchisement frame, especially when it describes the impact

on African-American voters, triggers powerful anger among the Democrats in our sample," said Neuner, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science.

This anger that Democrats experienced about voter ID laws was also powerfully linked to participation among Democrats, but not Republicans.

The findings are forthcoming in *Political Psychology*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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