Do Strict, Photo Voter Identification Laws Affect Young Voter Turnout?

By:

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Abstract

Voter identification laws have had an impact on voter turnout since 1950 when the laws were first implemented. While the first set of voter identification laws was relatively simple and only required a document with the voter’s name on it, the laws have become increasingly stricter with fewer forms of identification accepted at the polls. In states with the most rigorous sets of voter identification laws (states with both strict and photo voter identification laws), voters are required to present a government-issued form of identification with a photo; if the voter does not have the proper form of identification, then he or she must vote on a provisional ballot, obtain the correct form of identification and present it to his or her election commission before the ballot will be counted. These laws target specific groups such as minorities, the elderly, the poor, and the young. In this analysis, I seek to answer this question: Do strict, photo voter identification laws affect young voter turnout? I will analyze young voter turnout, which is defined as turnout among voters between the ages of 18 and 24, in presidential elections from 1996-2012 and in off-year congressional elections in 2002, 2010, and 2014.
Acknowledgments

I have so many supportive and wonderful people to thank, so here we go!

First, thank you to the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for everything these past four years. I would be lost and have nowhere to spend all my time without you. Second, thank you to the Shelby County Election Commission for taking on an unpaid intern who loved her job way too much and never wanted to leave. Third, thank you to Dr. Anthony Nownes who had to deal with my constant rambling about all things voting and elections. (He also has to read this thesis, so that is a double thanks to him.) Fourth, thank you to all my wonderful friends who helped me through this process by either expressing a fake interest in this topic (Yes, I knew) or held thesis-writing time with me. This project would not be done without it. Last, a special thanks to my wonderful family who does not care about the voting process nearly as much as I do and let me: 1). Have an internship where I only talked about voting all day and came home to tell you all about my day, 2). Spend all of my time focused on voting in everything that I do, and 3). Loves me regardless of how much I talk about this topic and how truly boring you all find it. Also, a shout-out to the Census Bureau for singlehandedly saving my thesis.

I dedicate this project to all of you!
Introduction

Voter identification laws have existed in the United States since the 1950s. However, the level of strictness of these laws has increased over the past few decades. In the past, voter identification laws called for a voter to present a piece of mail or a bill of some sort with his or her name and address printed on it. Increasingly in the last decade, states are requiring voters to present a government-issued form of identification that includes a photo. Many lawmakers cite voter fraud as a reason for strict, photo voter identification laws. In seven states, these laws have been passed: Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

In this analysis, I will address this question: Do strict, voter identification laws that require a photo affect young voter turnout? I will address this question by examining turnout rates in three states in federal elections from 1980-2016: Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee. These states have implemented strict voter identification laws that require a photo. I will be using the percent of registered voters rather than percent of eligible population that voted to measure turnout. In this analysis, I examine the effects of voter identification laws on the ability to vote in person. Voter identification laws can also affect the ability to register to vote, but I chose to focus on casting ballots in person.

I will begin with background information on voter identification laws and the history of their implementation. I will then define key terms including “strict photo voter identification law,” “young voter turnout,” and “voter turnout.” In this section, I will also examine previous research on the impact of strict photo voter identification laws. In the next section, I will explain why I have decided to collect data from the Census website, and I compare turnout rates. I will also describe the parameters for this analysis. In my fourth section, I will describe the results of my case studies, showing that voter identification laws do indeed decrease voter turnout among
young voters. I will conclude with a brief overview of my findings and implications for future research of young voter turnout.

**Background**

I will begin by defining a few key terms.

**Terms**

I will start with *strict voter identification laws*. Strict voter identification laws are laws that require a voter, if the voter does not have the proper form of identification, to vote on a provisional ballot and then take further steps after Election Day to make the ballot count. A voter might be required to go to his/her local election commission with a proper form of identification to have his/her ballot counted. Failure to show an accepted form of identification will result in the ballot not being counted (Underhill, Wendy).

A *provisional ballot* is a ballot given to a voter not found in the voting system or a voter who lacks the proper form of identification. For example, in Tennessee, a provisional ballot must include the voter’s name, address, precinct information, and three signatures—one from the voter, one from the registrar, and one from a judge. The completed paperwork for a provisional ballot in Tennessee includes: a provisional ballot envelope to seal the ballot, a manual ballot application, a voter registration form for voters not found in the system, and the voter’s signature (Shelby County Election Commission).

I define *non-strict voter identification laws* as laws that do not require voters lacking the proper form of identification to take any additional steps after casting a ballot. There are several different processes that could take place in states with non-strict voter identification laws. For example, in Colorado, Florida, Montana, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah, and Vermont, if a voter does not have an accepted form of identification, he/she may vote via a provisional ballot, and
then at the end of Election Day, the election officials will determine, usually through a signature check, if the provisional ballot will be counted. In some states, voters can sign an affidavit of identity to prove their identity, or an election official can attest to the identity of the voter. In New Hampshire, the state sends a letter to anyone who does not have an accepted form of identification, and the voter must return the letter, verifying their identity and their address (Underhill, Wendy).

I define photo voter identification laws as laws that require voters to present a form of identification with a photo. This type of voter identification law accepts forms of identification including a driver’s license, a state-issued identification card, a tribal identification card, a military identification card, and other forms of government-issued identification with a photo (Underhill, Wendy).

Non-photo voter identification laws are laws that require voters to confirm their identity with a document that does not need to have a photo. This could include a bank statement, but the document of identity must have both the voter’s name and address (Underhill, Wendy).

Finally, I define young voter turnout as turnout among people between the ages of 18 and 24. I define voter turnout as the percent of voters who successfully cast a ballot out of those who are registered. Table 1 shows voter identification laws by states as of this writing.

**History of Voter Identification Laws**

Voter identification laws were passed for the first time in the 1950s. The first state to have a voter identification law was South Carolina. The original law requested, but did not require, voters to show a document at the polls with the voter’s name. No photo was required. Four other states joined South Carolina and passed voter identification laws later: Hawaii (1970), Texas (1971), Florida (1977), and Alaska (1980). When the laws were passed in these states,
there were steps in place to allow voters to cast a ballot without the requested, not required, documentation.

Table 1: Voter Identification Laws in Force in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo ID</th>
<th>Non-Photo ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strict</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>North Dakota [8]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin [7]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Strict</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Arkansas[1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Carolina[6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oklahoma[4]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Carolina[6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washingon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As time went on, more states began to pass voter identification laws. In fact, by 2000, 14 states had adopted some set of voter identification laws. The laws at this point requested, but did not require, voters to present some form of identification. In 2002, Missouri passed a non-strict, non-photo voter identification law. In 2003, Alabama, Colorado, Montana, and North Dakota, joined Missouri and passed non-strict, non-photo voter identification laws. However, South Dakota amended its previous voter identification law and passed a non-strict, photo identification law later. In 2004, Arizona passed a strict, non-photo voter identification law. Georgia, in 2005, attempted to amend its previous voter identification law to pass a strict voter identification law.
However, the law was not fully implemented until 2008. Indiana passed a law like Georgia’s, and like Georgia, the law was implemented in 2008. Also in 2005, Washington passed a non-strict, non-photo identification law.

In 2006, there was a move by some states to amend previous laws to make them stricter, and by others to pass strict, photo, or both kinds of voter identification laws. In 2006 specifically, Missouri amended its voter identification law that was passed in 2002 to be a strict, photo voter identification law. But the law was stuck down by the state constitution and was thus never implemented. Ohio, in 2006, passed a strict, non-photo identification law. Between 2006 and 2008, no changes or new voter identification laws were passed by states. In 2009 and 2010, some states seemed to have deviated from the laws that were being passed at the time. In 2009, Utah passed a non-strict, non-photo voter identification law. In 2010, Idaho passed a non-strict, photo voter identification law. Also in 2010, Oklahoma passed a non-strict, non-photo voter identification law. However, starting in 2011, states went back to passing stricter, photo voter identification laws. Alabama amended its 2003 law to create a non-strict, photo voter identification law. The law was not implemented until 2014. Kansas passed a strict, photo voter identification law in 2011. Also in 2011, Tennessee passed a strict, photo voter identification law, amending the original law passed in 1990. Texas, in 2011, amended its 1997 law to create a strict, photo identification law. However, in 2015, a federal appeals court found that the law could not be enforced and the case went to court, but a ruling from the court is still forthcoming.

In 2012, Minnesota tried to pass a set of voter identification laws, but failed. Rhode Island passed a non-strict, non-photo voter identification law in 2012. Mississippi passed a strict, photo voter identification law that was approved by voters in the state in 2012. New Hampshire passed its first set of voter identification laws in 2012, creating a non-strict, non-
photo voter identification law. In 2012, Virginia amended its 1996 law, creating a strict, non-photo voter identification law. North Carolina, in 2013, tried to pass a strict, photo voter identification law, but it was amended in 2015 to make it a non-strict, photo voter identification law. The law was supposed to be implemented in 2016, but an appeals court struck down the law saying it disenfranchised minority voters (Barnes and Marimow). North Dakota, in 2013, amended its 2003 law, implementing a strict, non-photo identification requirement. In 2013, the Tennessee voter identification law was amended to make the law stricter by only accepting state or federally issued forms of identification. Then, Virginia implemented a strict, photo voter identification law in 2013. In Rhode Island in 2014, the 2012 law was amended to be a non-strict, photo voter identification law.

In 2015, North Carolina amended its 2013 law, transitioning from a strict voter identification law to a non-strict voter identification law. Also in 2015, North Dakota amended its voter identification law, moving from a non-strict voter identification law to a strict voter identification law. A note for the North Dakota voter identification law passed in 2015: long-term care certifications from a North Dakota facility would be accepted as a proper form of identification.

The last sets of voter identification laws and amendments were passed in 2016. First, Wisconsin amended its 2011 law, adding the Veteran’s Health Care Hard as a proper form of identification. Second, West Virginia passed a non-strict, non-photo voter identification in 2016 law, which will be implemented in 2018 (“History of Voter ID Law”). As Figure 1 shows, from 2000-2016, many states adopted new voter identification laws, many of them quite strict.

_Why are These Laws Being Passed?_
Lawmakers pass voter identification laws for several reasons. First, lawmakers believe they are fighting voter fraud. These laws are being passed by lawmakers who believe that voter fraud is a problem in the American voting system. Second, lawmakers claim they are passing these laws to give the American voting system credibility. They believe: “[Voter identification laws have] given people some confidence in their election. When they go [to the polls] they know [their] vote is protected” (Shawn). Last, these laws are being passed by lawmakers who assert that voter identification laws are ensuring that the American voting system is more quick and efficient. Lawmakers have found that: “…clerks have told us that the lines move easy. You don’t have to say your name and repeat the spelling of it. It is right there on the I.D.” (Shawn). While it is not unreasonable to make the American voting system more efficient, it is not an excuse to disenfranchise voters.

**Figure 1: Voter ID Enactments 2000-2016**
Several studies have been conducted on voter identification laws and how these laws affect voter turnout among young voters. One study focused on North Dakota. North Dakota’s voter identification law was “passed in 2013, [and] is one of the strictest in the nation, given the narrow range of IDs that are accepted and the absence of a provisional ballot option” (Bauroth and Nelson 1). The law holds that a person in North Dakota must present a valid form of identification that must include name, current address, and date of birth to vote. Valid forms of identification include a driver’s license, a non-driver identification card issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles, and a university-issued student identification certificate. With the new law, voters must live in their precinct for 30 days preceding an election to be eligible to vote there. One reason that a law like this one may affect young voters in particular is that a college student may list his/her home address on his/her driver license rather than his/her campus address. Many students are unaware of the residential requirement that their address needs to be changed on their ID to vote (Bauroth and Nelson 1).

To assess the impact of the new voter identification laws on young voter turnout in North Dakota, Bauroth and Nelson conducted a study after the 2014 Midterm Election. They sent an online survey about voting routines and practices to students in the North Dakota University system. Students were selected by “officials at each campus [providing] current lists of registered students, including their emails” (Bauroth and Nelson 3). Overall, 1,797 of the 48,920 students filled out the survey. This is a very low response rate. Participants were asked “Did you vote in the 2014 election?” and were given three response choices: “Yes,” “No,” and “I attempted to vote but was unable to” (Bauroth and Nelson 4). If the participant selected the third...
option, he/she had to choose one of these three options: “issues related to residential address,” “problems with absentee ballots,” or “miscellaneous issues” (Bauroth and Nelson 4).

The results from this study can be seen in Table 2. In Table 2, Bauroth and Nelson broke down voter turnout by the colleges that participated in the survey. On the whole, 64 percent of the students or 1,033 students who participated in the survey tried and were able to cast a ballot, and 31.1 percent of students or 501 students who participated in the survey did not try to vote. This means that approximately five percent of students (79) students who participated in the survey tried to vote but were unable to do so. From here, Bauroth and Nelson examined the reasons why students who participated in the study were unable to vote.

Table 2: Full Survey Results by Type of Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voted</th>
<th>Did Not Vote</th>
<th>Tried to vote (unsuccessful)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-year Colleges</td>
<td>99 (57.9%)</td>
<td>52 (30.4%)</td>
<td>10 (5.8%)</td>
<td>171 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Four-Year</td>
<td>112 (64.7%)</td>
<td>54 (31.2%)</td>
<td>7 (4.0%)</td>
<td>173 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities (N=4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota State</td>
<td>308 (64.3%)</td>
<td>146 (30.5%)</td>
<td>25 (5.2%)</td>
<td>479 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North</td>
<td>514 (64.3%)</td>
<td>249 (31.1%)</td>
<td>37 (4.6%)</td>
<td>800 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,033 (64.0%)</td>
<td>501 (31.1%)</td>
<td>79 (4.9%)</td>
<td>1,613 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3: Student Voting Attempts by Type of Institution
Table 3 shows the ways in which the different participants could cast ballots in the 2014 Mid Term Elections. About 93 percent of students or 1,033 students were able to cast their ballots, but 3.2 percent of participants (36) students were unable to cast their ballots because of voter identification laws (specifically, residency issues). Another 1.5 percent of students (17) were unable to cast their ballots because of problems with absentee ballots. Finally, 2.3 percent of students (26) could not cast their ballots for miscellaneous reasons including residency issues.

Bauroth and Nelson decided to extrapolate the numbers from their study to determine how the residency requirements with the new voter identifications laws compared to a general school population. The researchers noted that “it is possible that survey respondents turned out to vote at a higher rate than the general population…the study assumes that the actual turnout rates reflected those of the county in which their campus is located” (Bauroth and Nelson 7). Their extrapolating is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Successfully Voted</th>
<th>Unsuccessful due to address problems</th>
<th>Unsuccessful due to absentee voter problems</th>
<th>Unsuccessful due to miscellaneous issues</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-year Colleges</td>
<td>99 (90.8%)</td>
<td>6 (5.5%)</td>
<td>1 (0.9%)</td>
<td>3 (2.8%)</td>
<td>109 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Four-Year</td>
<td>112 (94.1%)</td>
<td>2 (1.7%)</td>
<td>3 (2.5%)</td>
<td>2 (1.7%)</td>
<td>119 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities (N=4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota State</td>
<td>308 (92.5%)</td>
<td>12 (3.6%)</td>
<td>4 (1.2%)</td>
<td>9 (2.7%)</td>
<td>333 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of North</td>
<td>514 (93.3%)</td>
<td>16 (2.9%)</td>
<td>9 (1.6%)</td>
<td>12 (2.2%)</td>
<td>551 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,033 (92.9%)</td>
<td>36 (3.2%)</td>
<td>17 (1.5%)</td>
<td>26 (2.3%)</td>
<td>1,112 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Bauroth, and Nelson.
Bismarck State College = (5,352 students) X (0.5498 turnout rate for Burleigh County) X (0.077 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 226.6

Minot State University = (3,217 students) X (0.3892 turnout rate for Ward County) X (0.021 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 26.3

North Dakota State College of Science = (3,024 students) X (0.4724 turnout rate for Richland County) X (0.038 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 54.3

North Dakota State University = (13,332 students) X (0.4440 turnout rate for Cass County) X (0.036 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 213.1

University of North Dakota = (15,102 students) X (0.3849 turnout rate for Grand Forks County) X (0.029 unable to vote due to residency problems) = 168.6

Source: Bauroth, and Nelson.

The total from the extrapolation comes to 688.9 students who would tried to vote but were turned away due to the newly passed voter identification laws. In short, the evidence suggests that North Dakota’s voter identification laws have had an effect on young voter turnout. It may have had a small effect, but if an election were to be very close, then “the legitimacy of the election outcome [could come] into question” (Bauroth and Nelson 8). Bauroth and Nelson mention that voter identification laws could prevent voters from attempting to vote in the future: “Voting habits are set early in an individual’s voter career…additional hurdles to vote may alter the calculus for an individual who may have otherwise become a habitual voter” (Bauroth and Nelson 8). Bauroth and Nelson also consider how the type of election affected their analysis. They write: “the election examined here was a midterm election; it is reasonable to extrapolate that voting problems would be more widespread in a presidential election year when a larger, typically less-attentive portion of the population turns out to vote” (Bauroth and Nelson 8). In short, many college-age voters were disenfranchised during this midterm election, and it is likely
that the levels of disenfranchisement would be higher during an election when more people are likely to vote.

Another study by Cathy Cohen from the University of Chicago and Jon C. Rogowski, from Washington University, explored how photo voter identification laws affect voter turnout among young minority voters (i.e., Blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Pacific Islanders). In their research, they determined that young minority voters were disenfranchised more than were young white voters. They found “that between 538,000 and 696,000 young people of color may be demobilized by photo ID laws that dilute the influence of young voters of color at the ballot box, potentially shifting outcomes in competitive races” (Frisby). From this report, Cohen and Rogowski concluded that the new laws decreased young voter turnout rates in the 2008 election. In addition, Cohen and Rogowski examined how young minority voters were affected by photo voter identification laws. First, in Florida, they found that more than 100,000 young minority voters were disenfranchised by Florida’s voter identification law. They noted that this level of disenfranchisement was “far more votes than the number that separated George W. Bush and Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election” (Frisby). They also concluded that Pennsylvania’s photo identification law disenfranchises young voters of color. They estimated that between 37,000 and 44,000 young minority voters could have their right to vote denied during a presidential election. At a more general level, the rate at which minorities have the proper form of identification is very low compared to white voters. They found that “11 percent of American citizens don’t have government-issued photo identification…only 9 percent of whites lacked photo identification, compared with 16% of Latinos and 25 percent of Blacks” (Frisby). It is clear that these laws affect voters, specifically minority voters.
During the time this analysis was conducted, nine states required their voters to show a form of identification that was issued by the government that has a photo. Further, eight different states had other options for voters who did not have the proper form of identification. Some voter identification laws have been stuck down by courts. For example, in 2012, laws in South Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin were either ruled unconstitutional or rejected as violations of the Voting Rights Act. Voters are worried about the laws affecting important and close elections: “Rogowski said the new laws may impact the presidential contest, as well as at least 16 competitive House races across the country where photo identification requirements will disproportionately impact minority voters” (Frisby). In other words, voter identification laws could affect the outcome of an election and impact whether the election results represent the will of the people.

Tracie Powell discusses how young voter turnout differed between the presidential election in 2004 and the presidential election in 2008. She states that voter turnout increased exponentially between the two elections for young voters, but that some states are still passing laws that dissuade young voters from voting. Powell quotes the program director of the Student Public Interest Research Group’s New Voters Project, Sujatha Jahagirdar as follows: “Voting infrastructure, such as machines, outdated voter rolls and the number of qualified poll workers, has not kept pace with the rising number of students who want to participate in the electoral process” (Powell).

Powell also cites issues such as students fearing that their eligibility to vote will be questioned and long lines, as barriers to voting. However, she argues that voter identification laws are the biggest barriers to voting for young voters. In a report published by the Student Association for Voter Empowerment, the group found that “almost one in five students do not
possess the required state-issued identification” (Powell). Specifically, students who go to a university outside of their home state have issues with voter identification laws. Powell quotes a student to show how out-of-state students are affected by voter identification laws can be seen here: “‘If I have a Georgia driver’s license, but I attend Ohio State University, they won’t let me use my Georgia ID, even though I have the legal right to vote in Ohio because I’ve lived there for more than 30 days and I contribute to the tax base there’” (Powell). If a voter does not have a form of identification issued by the state he/she is voting in, and the state has strict, photo voter identification laws, then the voter will not be able to cast his/her vote. These laws specifically attack college students who choose to go to a university outside of their home state.

Another way that voter identification laws are being used to target young voters occurred in Blacksburg, Virginia. In Blacksburg, election administrators “released erroneous guidelines suggesting that student voters could lose their scholarships or coverage under their parents’ car and health insurance by registering to vote at school” (Powell). This information is incorrect, as voter registration does not affect scholarships or insurance. This information was given to students to make voting more difficult for them.

However, some states are making positive efforts to ensure their students can cast a ballot. At Oberlin College in Ohio, the president of the university sent each college student a utility bill that shows that service was paid as a part of the university fee. This bill can be used to show a student’s residency and allow them to register to vote in Ohio (Powell).

In sum, previous research shows that strict, photo voter identification laws negatively impact the voter turnout rate for young voters.

**Data and Methods**

*State Selection*
As stated before, I will be analyzing how voter identification laws affect young voter turnout. Specifically, in what follows I will examine the impact of strict, photo voter identification laws on young voter turnout. To reiterate, strict, photo voter identification laws require voters to present a form of identification with a photo when they cast a ballot. If a voter does not have the proper form of identification, then he/she can vote via a provisional ballot, but then must obtain an accepted form of identification and present it to the local election commission for the ballot to be counted.

Here, I will examine how voter identification laws affect young voter turnout rates in Indiana, Tennessee, and Kansas. Each of these states has a strict, photo voter identification law. Indiana passed its strict, photo voter identification laws in 2005, but they were not implemented until 2008. Tennessee and Kansas passed their strict, photo voter identification laws in 2011.

**Parameters**

For this analysis, I will analyze the young voter turnout rate in presidential elections between 1996 and 2012. I chose presidential elections because they tend to have higher voter turnout rates than midterm elections or other local elections. Further, data on voter turnout is more readily available for presidential elections. Choosing presidential elections makes it easier to control for other issues besides voter identification laws that are affecting young voter turnout, such as apathy. Voters are more likely to vote in a presidential election than a midterm or local election.

The second analysis was done on Congressional elections that are not coupled with a presidential election. Those elections include the 2002, 2010, and 2014 Congressional Elections. This choice was made for several reasons. First, Congressional elections that are coupled with presidential elections tend to have higher turnout than stand-alone Congressional Elections.
Next, there is not a separation in data between voters who showed up to vote in the presidential election and those who turned out to vote for Congressional election. Last, data has already been collected for the Congressional elections coupled with presidential elections and is in the first analysis.

Data Collection

Originally I tried to obtain data from each state election commission’s website on voter turnout data by state and by age. However, state election commissions had little to no data on voter turnout rates. If state election commissions did have voter turnout data on their websites, the data was simply total voter turnout. After this, I thought about collecting data for every county in the three states chosen, but some county election commissions did not have voter turnout rates on their websites. Eventually, I decided to look at the Census Bureau’s website to see if data was collected nationally by state and by age, and I found that for some elections, data was collected and broken down by state and age.

First, I sought data for presidential elections from 1980 to 2016. However, I found that data on voter turnout was not available by state and by age until 1996. Therefore, I could not examine how voter identification laws affected presidential elections in my selected states prior to 1996. In my search for data, I could not find any data by state and age for presidential elections after 2012. The Census Bureau takes two years to post all data following an election; therefore, data is not available for the 2016 Presidential election at this point. As a result, I have young voter turnout rates for the 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 presidential elections in Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee.

Next, I searched for voter turnout rates by age and by state for Congressional Elections that were not coupled with presidential elections. I wanted to find voter turnout rates by state
and by age for these Congressional Elections starting in 1982; however, turnout data are not broken down by state and age until 2002. After finding the 2002 data, I went to find the data for 2006, but there was not any data for that 2006 congressional election that fit the specific characteristics that I needed. As a result, I moved on to the 2010 election and collected voter turnout data by age and by state for that election and the 2014 election. At the end of this data collection, I had turnout rates for Non-Presidential Congressional Elections conducted in 2002, 2010, and 2014 in Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee.

**Results**

I will now move on to my findings.

**Indiana**

Indiana passed its strict, photo voter identification laws in 2005, but the laws were held up in court until 2008. This means that both the 2012 and the 2008 election were conducted under the state’s voter identification laws. The first analysis that was run is the percent of voters between the ages of 18-24 who voted in the presidential elections of 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. The results are shown in Figure 2:

![Figure 2: Young Voter Turnout Rate in Presidential Elections, Indiana, 1996-2012](image)

*Source: Census Bureau*
The figure above shows young voter turnout in Indiana in Presidential Elections from 1996 to 2012. The horizontal line with the data points shows the specific rate at which young voters cast ballots in each election. The vertical axis of the chart is the range of different rates that young voters cast ballots in the elections. The horizontal axis is the specific years I examined in this analysis. The vertical line on the chart indicates the year Indiana passed their voter identification laws. That year is 2008, before the 2008 presidential election. This means that both the 2008 and the 2012 presidential elections were conducted under Indiana’s voter identification law.

In 1996, 39.4% of registered 18-24 year olds voted. In 2000, 31.6% of 18-24 year old registered voters cast a ballot. In 2004, there was increase in turnout, rising to 40.7%. In 2008, there was a minor increase, and 42.7% of registered voters voted. However, in 2012, there was a significant decrease in turnout rate, dropping to 36.4%.

The second analysis that was run for Indiana was for Congressional Elections that were not coupled with Presidential Elections for 18-24 year old voters in Indiana in 2002, 2010, and 2014. The results are below:

Source: Census Bureau
The chart above shows young voter turnout in Indiana in Non-Presidential Congressional Elections in 2002, 2010, and 2014. First, the horizontal line with the data points shows the specific rate at which young voters cast ballots in each election. Second, the vertical line on the chart indicates the year Indiana passed their voter identification laws. That year is 2008. This means that both the 2010 and the 2014 congressional elections were conducted under Indiana’s voter identification law. Third, the vertical axis of the chart is the range of different rates that young voters cast ballots in the elections. Last, the horizontal axis is the specific elections years I examined in this analysis.

Young voter turnout in Indiana in 2002 was 14.6%. Turnout goes down significantly after 2002, falling to 9.7% in 2010. However, in 2014, turnout rates increase to 16.3%.

Kansas


Source: Census Bureau
The figure above shows young voter turnout in Kansas in Presidential Elections from 1996 to 2012. First, the vertical axis of the chart is the range of different rates that young voters cast ballots in the elections, and the horizontal axis is the specific years I examined in this analysis. Second, the horizontal line with the data points shows the specific rate at which young voters cast ballots in each election, and the vertical line on the chart indicates the year Kansas passed their voter identification laws. That year is 2011. This means that the 2012 presidential election was the only election conducted under Kansas’s voter identification law.

Turnout for young voters was 42.8% in 1996, 34.6% in 2000, 35.1% in 2004, and 41.3% in 2008. There was a significant decrease in 2012. Turnout dropped from 41.3% in 2008 to 30.1% in 2012. This is a very substantial decrease in young voter turnout in Kansas.

Below is the data collected for Non-Presidential Congressional Elections in Kansas for young voters in 2002, 2010, and 2014. The results are below:

Source: Census Bureau
The chart above shows young voter turnout in Kansas in Non-Presidential Congressional Elections in 2002, 2010, and 2014. First, the vertical line on the chart indicates the year Kansas passed their voter identification laws. That year is 2011. This means that the 2014 Congressional Election was the only election conducted under Kansas’s voter identification laws. Second, the horizontal line with the data points shows the specific rate at which young voters cast ballots in each election. Third, the vertical axis of the chart is the range of different rates that young voters cast ballots in the elections, and the horizontal axis is the specific years I examined in this analysis.

In 2002, 20% of young voters in Kansas cast a ballot. In 2010, there was a decrease in turnout, with only 10.9% of young people in Kansas voting. However, there was a slight increase in 2014 to 13.3%.

**Tennessee**

Tennessee implemented voter identification laws in 2011. Turnout rates for young voters in Presidential elections are listed below.

![Figure 6: Young Voter Turnout Rate in Presidential Elections, Tennessee, 1996-2012](image)

*Source: Census Bureau*
The figure above shows young voter turnout in Tennessee in Presidential Elections from 1996 to 2012. The horizontal line with the data points shows the specific rate at which young voters cast ballots in each election. The vertical axis of the chart is the range of different rates that young voters cast ballots in the elections. The horizontal axis is the specific years I examined in this analysis. The vertical line on the chart indicates the year Tennessee passed their voter identification laws. That year is 2011. This means that the 2012 presidential election was conducted under Tennessee’s voter identification law.

In 1996, 26.6% of young voters in Tennessee cast a ballot. In 2000, young voters in Tennessee turned out to vote at 22.9%. Then in 2004, 35.4% of young voters in Tennessee voted. Next in 2008, 39.5% of young voters in Tennessee successfully cast a ballot. Finally, in 2012, the voter turnout for young voters in Tennessee went down to 34%.

Turnout rates for young voters in Tennessee in the Non-Presidential Congressional Elections of 2002, 2010, and 2014 are shown below:

*Source: Census Bureau*
The chart above shows young voter turnout in Tennessee in Non-Presidential Congressional Elections in 2002, 2010, and 2014. First, the horizontal line with the data points shows the specific rate at which young voters cast ballots in each election. Second, the vertical line on the chart indicates the year Indiana passed their voter identification laws. That year is 2011. This means that the 2014 congressional election was conducted under Tennessee’s voter identification law. Third, the vertical axis of the chart is the range of different rates that young voters cast ballots in the elections. Last, the horizontal axis is the specific elections years I examined in this analysis.

In 2002, 12.8% of young voters in Tennessee voted. Then, in 2012, 14.7% of young voters in Tennessee casted a ballot. Last, in 2014, there was a decrease in voter turnout to 11.8% of young voters in Tennessee.

Findings

My findings are mixed. In Indiana, two presidential elections were affected by the state’s voter identification law, the 2008 and 2012 elections. In the 2004 election, young voters cast ballots at a 40.70%. In 2008, this number increased to 42.70%. However, in 2012, there was a decrease in voter turnout among young voters to 36.40%. Thus, while turnout initially increased, it then decreased. I acknowledge that voter identification laws are not the only factors in this decrease in young voter turnout, but I believe they are barriers to casting a ballot. As for Non-Presidential Year Congressional Elections in Indiana, two elections took place after the adoption of strict laws—one in 2010 and one in 2014. I have data from 2002, 2010, and 2014. In 2002, young voters in Indiana voted at 14.60%. Then in 2010, turnout dropped to 9.70%. This is a significant drop. However, without data from 2006, the picture is incomplete. In 2014, voter turnout
increased to 16.30%. Therefore, I cannot conclude that Indiana’s voter identification law negatively affected young voter turnout in these Congressional Elections.

The second state that I analyzed was Kansas. Kansas voter identification laws were passed in 2011. Only one presidential election was affected by Kansas’s voter identification laws: the 2012 election. In 2008, young voters in Kansas voted at 41.30%. In 2012, this number decreased to 30.10%. This is a decrease of 11.20%. Thus, while there is data for only one presidential election after Kansas’s voter identification laws were passed, these laws (coupled with other issues) suggests there is a negative impact on young voter turnout in Kansas. As for off-year congressional elections, only one has been held since Kansas adopted its strict voter identification laws—that in 2014. In 2010, the young voter turnout rate in Kansas was 10.90%. In 2014, the voter turnout rate increased to 13.30%. As a result, I cannot conclude that voter identification laws affected young voter turnout in Kansas Non-Presidential Year Congressional Elections.

Finally, there is Tennessee. Tennessee’s voter identification laws were passed and implemented in 2011. Data was only available for one presidential election following the implementation of the laws. In 2008, young voters in Tennessee voted at a rate of 39.50%. In 2012, this number fell to 34.00%. Therefore, the data suggest that Tennessee’s voter identification laws decreased young voter turnout in Tennessee. As for turnout in Non-Presidential Year Congressional Elections in Tennessee, it follows a similar pattern. Data for turnout in these elections was only available for one election after the implementation of Tennessee’s voter identification laws, the 2014 Congressional Election. In 2010, young voters in the State of Tennessee voted at a rate of 14.7%. In 2010, this number dropped to 11.8%. Thus,
the data suggest that voter identification laws may have contributed to decreased young voter turnout.

**Conclusion**

This analysis suggests that strict, photo voter identification laws have had a negative impact on young voter turnout in Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee. Out of the six elections that were conducted under the law, four saw a decrease in young voter turnout. I cannot conclude that voter identification laws are the sole factors in this decreased turnout, but the laws certainly should be counted as one of the factors.

In all three states, young voter turnout rates decreased in the presidential election after the adoption of strict laws. In Indiana, there was a 6.30% drop between the presidential election prior to the implementation of the laws and the election after the implementation of the laws. In Kansas, there was an 11.20% drop from the 2008 presidential election, with no presence of strict, photo voter identification laws, to the 2012 presidential election, after the laws were in place. Finally, in Tennessee, there was a 5.5% drop in voter turnout from the presidential election prior to the implementation of the laws (2008) and the presidential election following the presence of the laws (2012). Thus, the data support the conclusion that strict, photo voter identification laws in Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee affected young voter turnout in presidential elections. I am not, however, stating that the sole reason for the decreased voter turnout is voter identification laws. There are other barriers that young voters face when attempting to vote. These barriers include a lack of access to registration forms, and a lack of information about polling locations and election dates.

In my analysis of Non-Presidental Year Congressional Elections, there was an increase in turnout among young voters after strict laws were passed in each state but Tennessee. In
Indiana, there was a 6.30% increase in young voter turnout after the adoption of stricter laws. In Kansas, there was an increase of 2.4%. Tennessee saw a 2.9% decrease in voter turnout between 2010, when the laws were first implemented, and 2014, after the laws were passed. From this data, I cannot draw a conclusion as to how voter identification laws affect Non-President Year Congressional Elections.

It is interesting to note that there is a decrease in young voter turnout in presidential elections in all states with strict, photo voter identification laws, while there was an increase in turnout in two out of three states for congressional elections that were not coupled with a presidential election. I have several educated guesses as to why presidential elections saw a decrease in young voter turnout in all states while the selected congressional elections saw an increase in young voter turnout. Presidential elections tend to have first-time voters showing up to the polls who are unaware of the voting laws that could affect their ability to vote. These voters are excited about the opportunity to vote for president. In Non-President Congressional Elections, voters are not as excited to vote. Voters tend not to care about voting for representatives in the state and national legislative elections and will not vote in these elections. Thus, voters who are casting ballots in Non-President Congressional Elections will most likely be experienced voters who care about these off-year elections and will know how to properly cast a ballot.

*Implications for the Future of Young Voter Turnout Research*

States are increasingly passing strict, photo voter identification laws that are affecting young voters. This analysis suggests that voter identification laws affected young voter turnout in presidential elections in Indiana, Kansas, and Tennessee. To further address this issue, more research must be conducted to obtain data for years after the passage of such laws. Trying to
find prior research on this topic was difficult, and this indicates that people are not focusing on this topic or they do not care about it. If further research is done, it is possible that lawmakers will see how these laws negatively affect young voter turnout and will fight to stop the passage and implementation of these laws.

I have several recommendations for future research. First, I would include every state that has strict, photo voter identification laws. These states include (as of April 2017) Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Using data from all states with strict voter identification laws will show us how these laws are truly affecting young voter turnout. Another way to conduct this analysis could be to include some states that have very relaxed voter identification laws and compare them to strict states. Second, I would wait for more data to become available. (Per the Census Bureau’s website, voter turnout rates are posted two years after every election.) Updating this project with data for the 2016 election would be a necessary and great addition to this analysis. Even waiting until 2020 for the Non-Presidental Year Congressional Elections of 2018 would be very beneficial to this analysis. Third, I would seek data for the 2006 Non-Presidental Year Congressional Elections. This could be done by either requesting this information from the Census Bureau or finding the turnout rates on State Election Commission’s websites. Last, I would add more election types to an analysis of how voter identification laws affect voter turnout. This could include local elections at the county level or even special elections (which would address the level at which young voters have access to election information). Adding more than two election types would give a more well-rounded analysis of how voter identification laws affect young voter turnout.

One problem with this analysis is that voter turnout data is not readily available. I was shocked to find a lack of voter turnout information on State Election Commission’s websites. I
was also shocked to find the lack of data on the Census Bureau’s website. The fact that there is data by age and by state for every election from 1996 to 2014, but not for 2006, is concerning. Further, the fact that a state breakdown of turnout rates is only available from 1996 to the present (minus 2006) is worrisome. This data should be readily available to the public for government transparency. I would like to see data become more available for researchers (and everyone) to see the surprisingly low rates that Americans cast ballots in elections.

In the end, this analysis suggests that young voters are having their right to vote taken from them simply because they do not have the correct form of identification. This should concern more people, especially members of the government. In addition, as mentioned before, voters establish their voting habits right when they start to vote. Thus, these laws seem to be both disenfranchising voters and inhibiting them from developing a strong voting habit. Laws need to be passed to increase young voter turnout, not prohibit young voters from casting their ballots.
Bibliography


