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**AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF STRICT PHOTO ID LAWS ON ELECTION
TURNOUT: DO THEY DISCRIMINATE AGAINST MINORITY VOTERS?**

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis
Submitted in Partial fulfillment of
University Honors Program Requirements
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Abstract

Over the last 20 years, states across the nation have passed photo ID laws requiring potential voters to provide a form of identification before they can cast their ballots. These laws have generated great controversy, with opponents of the laws accusing them of being racially discriminatory. Studies attempting to analyze their effects on turnout have resulted in differing results due to different methodologies, and no consensus has been reached in the academic literature regarding this topic. Recognizing that laws do not exist in isolation and that people can react to their implementation in different ways, this paper examines the effects of strict photo ID laws on turnout over time, looking beyond the first election after their implementation in an effort to gain a better view of their true impact. Using a staggered difference-in-differences analysis, this paper finds that while turnout among all sections of the voting population declines after the implementation of a strict photo ID law, White voters begin to return to their pre-implementation levels in subsequent elections while turnout among minority voters stays reduced.

Key Words: Photo ID, Political Science, Difference-in-Differences, Voting, Voter ID

Appreciation

I would like to thank Dr. Lorenz for meeting with me regularly and helping keep me on a timeline to help ensure the completions of my thesis.

Introduction

“The right to vote is the crown jewel of American liberties, and we will not see its luster diminished.” This quote by Ronald Reagan reflects the mindset of many Americans. However, the exact manner in which the right to vote’s luster would be diminished is much more open to debate. On one side, the idea that the integrity of elections is in doubt has led to calls for increased voting regulations to ensure that only those American citizens who are truly eligible to vote are able to cast their ballots. On the other side, the idea that eligible citizens would be prevented from voting due to procedural difficulties is anathema, and the process of voting should, if anything is changed, be made easier. Standing at the center of this debate lies photo ID laws passed around the nation.

Beginning in 2005, various forms of voter ID laws have been put in place around the nation. These laws are generally categorized based on two factors. The first is whether or not the ID provided must contain a photo of the citizen or whether a non-photographic form of ID is acceptable. The second is what happens when a voter arrives at his or her polling station and attempts to cast a ballot without the correct form of ID. A law is categorized as non-strict if the voter’s ballot may eventually be counted without the voter having to perform any additional actions. It is categorized as strict if the voter must perform some other action in order to have his or her ballot counted (*Voter ID Laws*, 2023).

The history of the expansion of American voting rights has been a process mired in racial prejudice. Originally limited primarily to White male landowners, African Americans effectively only secured the right to vote throughout the nation with the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other minority groups faced difficulties in obtaining equal access to the ballot box as

well. Given this relatively recent acquisition of full voting rights, some argue that regulations such as photo ID laws are an attempt to return to these pre-universal suffrage days. They argue that these regulations effectively amount to voter suppression, decreasing minority turnout and stripping minority voters of their rights.

In order to argue that photo ID laws are discriminatory in their effect, it is first necessary to show that they do in fact suppress minority turnout. As implementing photo ID laws is a state-by-state decision, the topic is well-suited to research, and it has been debated in recent literature. However, this literature largely focuses on the effect of photo ID laws in one election, comparing turnout in the presidential election prior to the implementation of a photo ID law to turnout in the election after their implementation (Kuk et al., 2020) for example, or looking at the average of multiple elections instead of each election individually (Grimmer et al., 2018). In order to truly determine the effect of photo ID laws, it is necessary to examine their effect in each subsequent election after their initial implementation. Therefore, this study examines the effect of photo ID laws in multiple election cycles, taking into account the staggered rollout of such laws.

This paper uses the same method used in other recent studies in the literature by categorizing counties based on their racial makeup and specifically looking at states that have passed strict photo ID laws. Using vote totals and the voting-age population of the county to calculate turnout, a staggered difference-in-differences analysis is run, and the effects of strict photo ID laws on turnout can be examined.

The effect of strict photo ID laws on turnout will be a result of many different factors. The anger generated by the passage of laws seen to be racially discriminatory could help initially mitigate the decrease in turnout, and organizations formed as a response to their imposition could

work to help minority voters obtain photo IDs and get to the polls as a form of policy feedback. The simple fact that obtaining a photo ID increases the costs in terms of time on minority voters could dissuade them from voting, or it could be possible that citizens of a minority racial group who are currently willing to bear the costs of voting already have IDs or would be willing to put in the effort to obtain them and continue voting.

This study finds that strict photo IDs appear to generate a permanent penalty on minority turnout in comparison to White turnout which appears to suffer an initial drop in turnout before beginning to recover. This finding has great implications on the importance of how organizations and individuals respond to the passage of strict photo ID laws.

Literature Review

Although voter identification laws have existed in some form for decades, the recent expansion of voter ID laws began in 2005 when Indiana and Georgia passed strict photo ID laws (Highton, 2017). Laws affecting elections have both direct and indirect costs on voters. Direct costs are the tangible costs on voters, such as the time spent to secure an ID or the difficulty in getting to polling stations. Indirect costs are how the electoral changes affect other actors, such as political parties spending extra money in an effort to mobilize their voters and preparing them to vote (Burden et al., 2017).

Much of the research regarding voter ID laws has focused on their affect on turnout in states that pass such laws, particularly in regards to the turnout of minority voters. The mechanism behind the drop in turnout, if such a drop exists, has led to extensive debate in academic research. Research has shown that minority citizens are less likely than White citizens to possess IDs that would be in compliance with such laws, disproportionately increasing the

direct cost to minority voters (Sobel & Smith, 2009). Some have argued that the effect of voter ID laws has been mitigated by the anger caused by such laws, leading to the indirect effect of an increase in minority turnout that has offset the effects of the law at least temporarily after the laws initially take effect (Valentino & Neuner, 2017). If voter ID laws do, in fact, have some effect that would increase the costs of voting, particularly among minority voters, the next question becomes why such laws are passed in the first place.

Several different studies have attempted to find correlations that link the states that have passed voter ID laws, and nearly all have concluded that control of the state legislature by the Republican Party is a significant factor. In general, Republican states are much more likely to pass voter ID laws, and the states that have passed the strictest form of photo ID laws were all controlled by the Republican Party when doing so (Highton, 2017). It is believed that the Republican Party supports voter ID laws for two primary reasons. The first is the belief that voter fraud influences the results of elections and that voter ID laws could help reduce this fraud (Valentino & Neuner, 2017). The belief that voter fraud is common is held much more frequently among supporters of voter ID laws, particularly Republicans, than it is by opponents. (Wilson & Brewer, 2013). In contrast, Democratic voters are more concerned with the potential of such laws to deter legal voters from showing up to the polls (Gronke et al., 2018). The second, more calculated, reason lies in the fact that voter ID laws reshape the electorate. Drawing on research that shows that minority voters are less likely than white citizens to possess IDs and that minority voters generally favor the Democratic Party (Sobel & Smith, 2009), it is possible that Republicans believe that the voter ID laws will disproportionately affect segments of the voter population that primarily vote for the Democratic Party. Therefore, passing a voter ID law will

help the Republican Party ensure its electoral success (Hicks et al., 2015). However, although this correlation with Republican control of state government is generally explainable and understandable, many Republican states have not passed voter ID laws, meaning that further explanations must be offered as to why certain Republican states pass such laws while others do not.

Two primary factors have been offered as reasons, but both are still the subject of some disagreement among scholars. Some studies have demonstrated that one of the primary reasons Republican states pass such laws is partisan competitiveness within a state. If Republicans fear that they will lose their ability to win elections within a state, they will see voter ID laws as a way to help maintain their electoral strength (Bentele & O'Brien, 2013). Other studies maintain that Republicans are actually most likely to pass such legislation when they gain control of state government. Once in control of a state government, they seek to maintain that control to the best of their ability (Biggers & Hamner, 2017). The second proposed correlation between states that have passed voter ID laws is the size of their minority populations. However, authors have run into much more direct disagreement in this area. Some authors believe that a larger minority population makes Republicans less likely to pass voter ID laws (Rocha & Matsubayashi, 2014) or does not increase the chances that a Republican-controlled state passes voter ID laws at all (Hicks et al., 2015) while others maintain that Republicans are more likely to pass voter ID laws in such states (Bentele & O'Brien, 2013, Biggers & Hamner, 2017). Overall, therefore, these studies have not been conclusive.

However, regardless of why states might pass voter ID laws, the most important question is whether or not such laws actually do affect voter turnout, and if so, whether minority turnout is

particularly effected. On this topic, a fierce and ongoing debate continues to rage. Initially, most authors found that voter ID laws did not have a significant impact on turnout (Mycoff, 2009; Ansolabehere 2009). Furthermore, even if a study concluded that there was an effect on turnout, authors generally concluded that this effect was equally spread among all races and that minority voters were not particularly affected (Hood & Bullock, 2012; Mycoff, 2009). However, more recent studies paint a more conflicting picture. A new study argued that previous research on the subject had a flawed methodology (Hajnal et al., 2017). Using a different research technique, it found that strict voter ID laws had a statistically significant impact on the turnout of minority groups compared to White citizens. However, in turn, a paper by Grimmer et al. (2018) argued that the method used in the previous study showing a statistically significant difference was flawed and that it did not in fact show any conclusive evidence of a disproportionate effect on voter turnout. Other authors also found that voter ID laws did not have any significant effect on overall turnout or an effect on the turnout of minority citizens (Heller et al., 2019). However, In 2018, a new study was published (Hajnal et al.) arguing that even using the methodological fixes suggested in previous studies, the original study showing a disproportionate impact on minority groups would still have shown this effect on the turnout of minority voters. Furthermore, an additional study was published (Kuk et al., 2020) arguing that voter ID laws did affect minority voters to a disproportionate degree. Clearly, there is little to no agreement to be found in this field of research.

Therefore, due to these ongoing disagreements, there remains research to be conducted regarding voter ID laws. One of the ways to best contribute to the existing research is to include the results of the 2020 election, as no papers focusing on voter ID laws which included the 2020

election could be found. In addition, if, as Valentino & Neuner (2016) suggest, anger over the passing of voter ID laws largely led to the relatively insignificant effect in minority turnout initially, enough time has now passed that such anger would likely have faded away. There has also been plenty of time for groups to react to the implementation of photo ID laws and work to turn out minority voters in subsequent elections as a form of policy feedback. Therefore, as some states had strict voter ID laws in place for nearly a decade before the 2020 election, the true effect of the laws themselves should now be observable.

Theory

The theory of this paper revolves around three distinct areas of past political science and psychology research. The first is psychology studies focusing on what causes someone to become angry and what leads to this anger disappearing. The second is the idea that no government policy occurs in isolation, and it can be mitigated or exacerbated by policy feedback. Finally, the basic political science theory of voting involves seeing if the benefits of voting outweigh the costs.

Psychology studies show that people become angry when their goal is being blocked or something they want is being withheld from them. In this state, they are likely to act on their impulses and attempt to achieve their initial desire. However, in order for this anger to be sustained, people must believe that they have a chance of actually obtaining their goal. If the desire appears to be unobtainable and no progress is being made towards achieving it, the intensity of one's emotions begin to fade. Eventually, people become bored with the situation that initially angered them due to the lack of change, and this boredom leads them to pursue different desires (Bench & Lench).

Any policy that a government implements, including voter ID laws, is subject to policy feedback. Policy feedback can be summarized by the phrase “policy shapes politics”, and it refers to the fact that political actors respond to policies after enactment. In some cases, new policies can mobilize new opponents of the action. If a law is passed that a segment of the population disagrees with, these opponents can then work to blunt the intended effect of such laws in order to more align with their own desires and objectives (Moynihan & Soss).

The reasons someone has for voting can be summarized as a function of someone’s perceived party differential; the perceived closeness of the election; the feeling of goodwill someone feels for having completed their civic duty; and the costs in terms of time, money, and effort that voting takes (Sigelman). If someone views the benefits of voting as outweighing the costs, a person will cast his or her ballot. If not, the person will not vote. By requiring a voter to produce an ID in order to cast a ballot, a state is increasing the costs on the voter. Although states might make IDs available for free, it nonetheless would require a voter currently lacking an ID to spend the time and effort to go to a DMV or another dedicated location to obtain one.

Applying past psychological research to voter ID laws, individual members of minority groups who are aware of the passage of voter ID laws might initially be angered by laws they perceived as targeting their ability to exercise their civil rights. In the short term, many of them would take actions in an attempt to repeal these laws: obtaining IDs, registering to vote, and showing up to the polls in an attempt to elect representatives who would act on this desire. This would effectively undo most of the additional burden placed on them with the passage of the photo ID law in the first place. However, as time passes, nearly all of these efforts would have proven fruitless. Therefore, the goal of repealing them seems more and more impractical and

unobtainable. Combined with the fact that the average American is not overly invested in politics on a day-to-day basis in the first place, members of minority groups would eventually have that anger over voter ID laws replaced by apathy. This theory of fading anger causing lower levels of turnout leads to the first hypothesis of this paper.

Hypothesis 1: Minority turnout will remain relatively similar to prior elections in the first year after a strict photo ID law is implemented before dropping in subsequent elections

As a form of policy feedback, opponents of photo ID laws will work to organize groups to help blunt the potential impact on members of minority groups. For example, Vote Riders is a nationwide organization specifically founded to help citizens make sure they have the proper ID required by their states in order to successfully cast their ballots, and state Democratic parties have worked to increase the knowledge and turnout of minority voters (Vote Riders). Furthermore, obtaining a valid ID is largely a one-time investment. Once this cost has been paid, voters will be able to use the ID they have obtained for multiple election cycles. Therefore, although the anger of individual members of minority groups might fade after the initial passage of such laws, groups and infrastructure developed at an organizational level continue to exist, and they can continue to help minority voters obtain photo IDs. As they develop over time, these groups will work to help members of minority groups be in compliance with state laws and boost turnout back to levels seen before the implementation of strict photo ID laws. This theory of policy feedback leading to an eventual return to a level of turnout equivalent to that prior to the implementation of the photo ID law leads to the second hypothesis of this paper.

Hypothesis 2: Minority turnout will experience a drop in the first election after the implementation of strict photo ID laws before rising back to pre-implementation levels.

Although obtaining an ID would increase the cost of voting for someone without one, the cost on the average minority voter might not actually be measurably increased. Although members of minority groups are statistically less likely to possess an ID than White citizens, legal precedence requires all states that have passed voter ID laws to provide free IDs to their citizens (Gaskins). Furthermore, large majorities of minority groups already possess an ID, and it can be difficult to function in modern society without one. The percentage of minority voters who do not currently possess an ID might already be insignificant, and those that do not possess an ID but are already willing to pay the costs associated with voting might not let the time associated with obtaining a free ID stop them from exercising their right, especially if they become angered at the initial passing of the voter ID law. This theory that photo ID laws will not actually affect turnout leads to the third hypothesis of the paper.

Hypothesis 3: Minority turnout will be unaffected by the implementation of strict photo ID laws.

Finally, it is possible that strict photo ID laws permanently decrease turnout for minority voters. The cost of obtaining a photo ID could simply be a cost that they are unwilling to bear. Voting already imposes a cost on anyone wishing to participate, and it offers little tangible benefits in return. Although the process of obtaining a photo ID could be lessened by an organization offering rides to the DMV or other actions, it is impossible for the process to take place without the individual who needs an ID taking part. Therefore, by making the process even one step harder with the implementation of strict photo ID laws, some voters could simply be turned away from voting forever. This theory of photo ID laws increasing the cost of voting leads to the fourth and final hypothesis of the paper.

Hypothesis 4: Minority turnout will suffer a permanent drop after the implementation of strict photo ID laws.

The effect of voter ID laws on turnout, then, will be a combination of all of these different aspects, and the effect could very well differ across states based on the magnitude of different organizational responses to the passage of voter ID laws, how well the passage of the laws is publicized, and countless other factors.

Data and Methods

In order to analyze the effect of photo ID laws on turnout and expand on previous research, several different databases were used. Whether or not each state had passed a photo ID law and the elections where the law was in effect were retrieved from the National Conference of State Legislatures' website. This website is a nonpartisan resource that has information regarding a variety of different laws and initiatives at the state level, lending itself well to providing this type of information. Specifically, this paper is examining states that passed strict photo ID laws from 2008 to 2020 in order to be most in line with previous research. County level vote totals were drawn from the MIT Election Data and Science Lab. This resource contains detailed vote totals for every county in the United States for presidential elections from 2000 to 2020. Therefore, although this information is not coming directly from state governments, it will provide a consistent source that will be easily comparable.

Finally, the population and demographic makeup of each county was gathered from the United States Census Bureau's estimates in their American Community Surveys. We used the survey released in each election year except 2008. As the Census Bureau did not release such a survey in 2008, the 2009 survey was used to approximate the 2008 demographics. Specifically,

this paper will use the Census Bureau's estimates of voting-age population from each county as the denominator to estimate turnout. Although there are various other methods of estimating turnout, the United States does not track the turnout of any specific individuals. Therefore, most estimates rely on surveying individuals about their voting history, and these surveys suffer from accuracy errors due to respondents' poor memories or wishing to appear to have completed their civic duty. Therefore, using only official vote totals and estimates of the total voting-age population leaves the least room for error. Although the data regarding voting-age population is only an estimate and is not exact, no exact census was conducted in most of the election years surveyed, rendering this the best possible source.

Once this data had been collected, the relevant information was compiled into one spreadsheet. Namely, for each election year, every county's (or county-equivalent's) total number of votes, estimated voting-age population, estimated voting-age population that was White alone, and photo ID status were compiled. The one exception for this was Alaska. Alaska is not divided into counties, and it instead has a system of boroughs. However, these boroughs do not cover all of Alaska, and large portions of Alaska are part of the "Unorganized Borough". The US Census Bureau then divides this land into Census-Designated Places, but Alaska reports election results based on state legislative districts, not by borough or Census-Designated Places. As these legislative districts do not always line up with borough borders or Census-Designated Places, it would be impossible to determine the demographics of each district based on the Census Bureau's data. Therefore, Alaska was excluded from all aspects of this study.

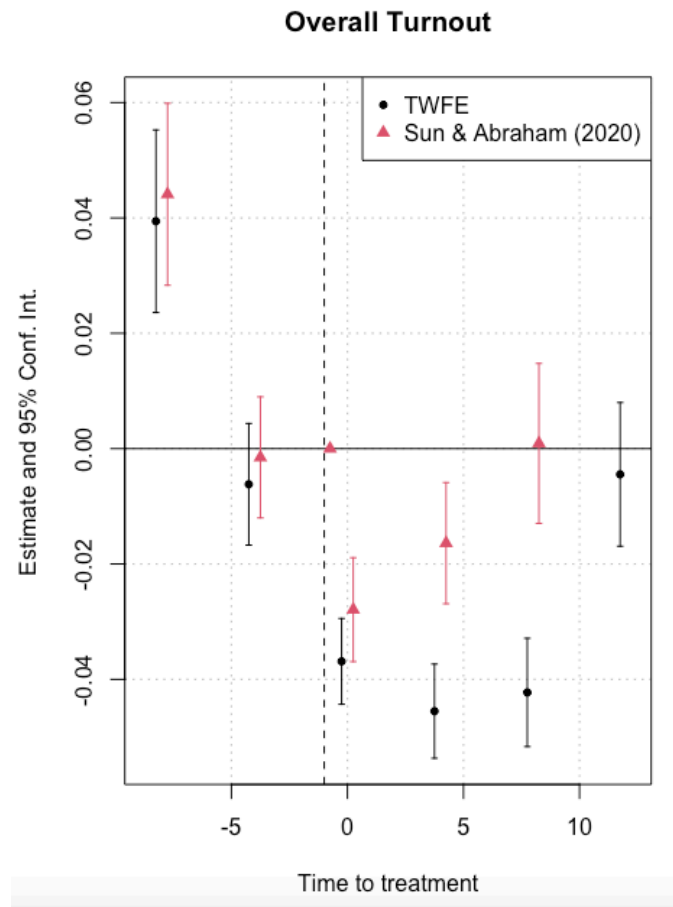
Using the data collected, the percentage turnout of each county was calculated by dividing the total number of votes in each county by the estimated voting-age population. In

addition, each county was assigned a status as being majority White, majority minority, or super-majority minority (defined as under 25% non-Hispanic White in line with recent studies using similar methodology). The average turnout among all counties throughout all of the elections examined was 61.3% with a standard deviation of 10.1%. The average turnout among the counties that are majority minority was 56.2% with a standard deviation of 10.5%. The average turnout among counties that were super-majority minority was 52.4% with a standard deviation of 10.6%

In order to examine the effects that strict photo ID laws had on turnout, a difference-in-differences test was conducted using RStudio. This difference-in-differences analysis began with a two-way fixed effects test, a test examining the outcome discrepancies between two groups when controlling for group differences and time differences. However, as not all of the states examined had instituted their photo ID laws in the same year, this difference-in-differences test needed to take into account the staggered aspect of this rollout. Therefore, this required using a method created by Sun and Abraham (2020) to modify the original difference-in-differences analysis and account for the change over time. This method involves centering each analyzed group relative to its treatment period (in this case the passing of a strict photo ID law) and then creating dummy variables that interact with each group. This means that this study is examining the difference in turnout for all states that passed a strict photo ID law in subsequent elections after the laws were passed. This methodology was based on sections from *The Effect* (Huntington-Klein, 2021) and the *Library of Statistical Techniques* page on Dynamic Difference-in-Differences (Huntington-Klein, 2019).

To illustrate an example, Indiana's strict photo ID law was in effect in 2008, and turnout in its counties will be compared to counties in all states that had not passed a strict photo ID law at this time. This will be included as zero years since a strict photo ID law was implemented. Wisconsin passed a strict photo ID law in 2016, so turnout in its counties in this year would be compared to counties in states which had not implemented strict photo ID laws in 2016. However, as this was the first election where Wisconsin had a strict photo ID law, the difference in turnout would be considered zero years since a strict photo ID law was implemented. In contrast, the difference in turnout in Indiana's counties in the 2016 election compared to counties in states that did not have a strict photo ID law in 2016 would be considered eight years since a strict photo ID law was implemented. Therefore, the years more immediately following the passage of a strict photo ID law will have larger sample sizes and thus are more likely to have statistically significant results, and the analysis cannot be performed past eight years for all counties, White majority counties, and majority minority counties or past four years for super-majority minority counties.

Results

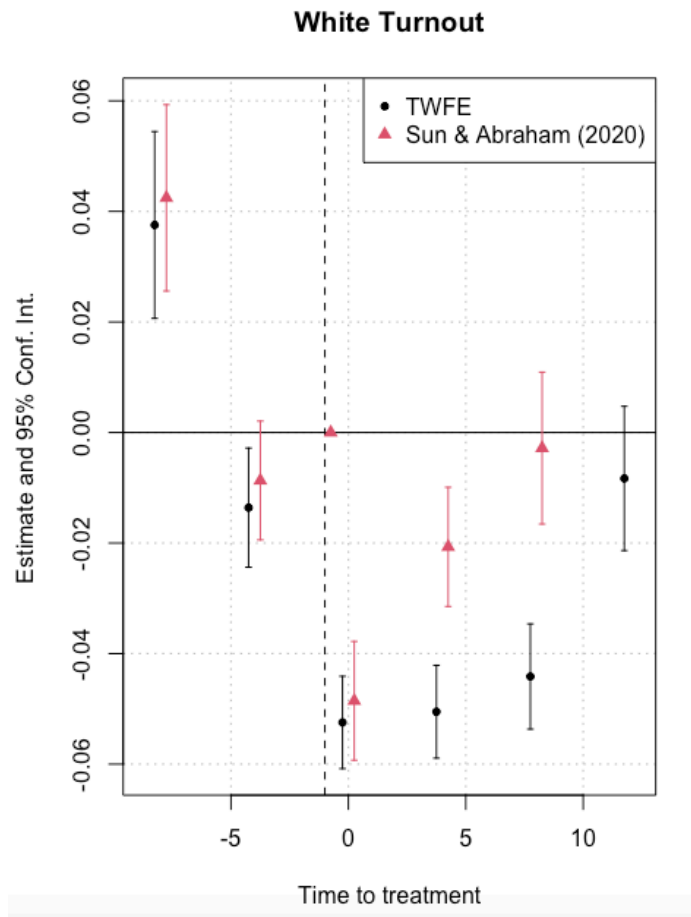


The results of the difference in differences analysis for all counties can be seen above. As the two-way fixed effects test does not account for the staggered rollout of strict photo ID laws, this paper will examine the results generated using Sun and Abraham (2020)'s adjustment. Looking at these results, the initial effect of strict photo ID laws is that turnout plummets. In states where strict photo ID laws were implemented, turnout ranged from approximately 4% higher to equivalent with states that never passed strict photo ID laws in the elections eight and four years, respectively, before the laws were implemented. After implementation, the difference originally changed so that these states with strict photo ID laws actually had turnouts 4% lower

in the year they were implemented and 2% lower four years later. Eight years after implementation, states with strict photo ID laws had the same turnout as other states.

This appears to show that there was an initial adjustment period after strict photo ID laws were put in place. Initially, perhaps voters were unsure how to deal with such laws. For example, it is possible that in the first election cycle after their implementation, potential voters arrived at the polls without their photo ID, preventing them from casting a ballot that cycle. However, after this, turnout trends upward. Likely due to the policy feedback from groups working to counter the drop in turnout from photo ID laws and from voters themselves becoming more informed, the gap in turnout disappears. Despite this, states that implemented strict photo ID laws do not see their turnout attain the pre-implementation advantage over states that did not implement such laws in the two election cycles after strict photo ID laws were put in place, making it appear that strict photo ID laws do lower turnout for a considerable amount of time.

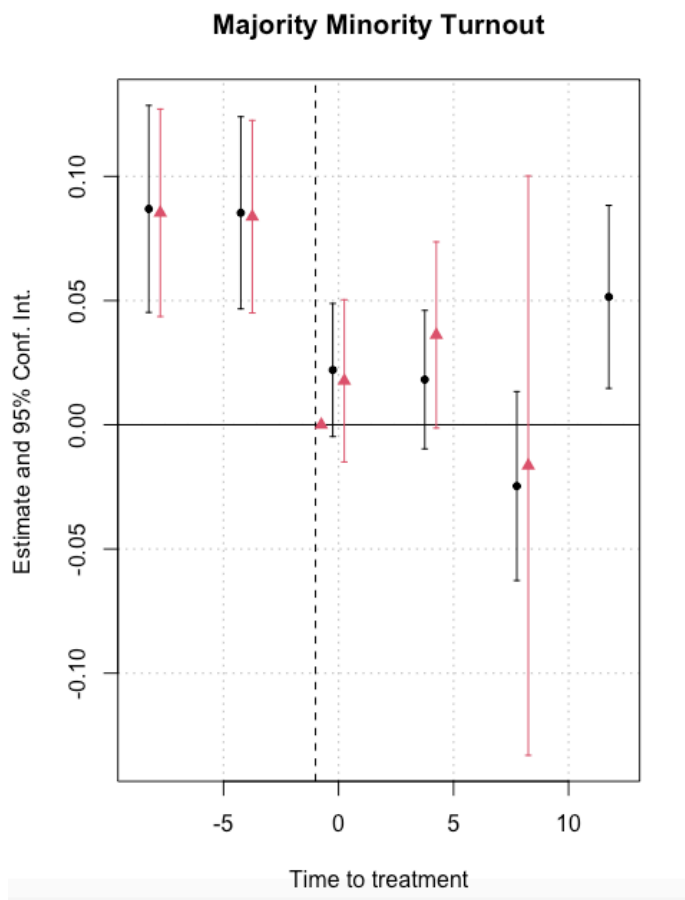
However, difference-in-differences analyses normally rely on the parallel trend assumption to hold in order to be certain that the results of the analysis are due to the applied treatment. The parallel trend assumption states that the differences between the two analyzed groups should remain constant before the start of the treatment (in this case, strict photo ID laws). However, in this case, the parallel trend assumption does not appear to hold. This may be due to the small sample size taken before the strict photo ID laws were put in place (only two election cycles) making it difficult to determine whether a difference of 4% is truly significant, and although it is not possible to tell whether these effects are solely due to strict photo ID laws themselves or if any other factors are helping cause this effect, overall turnout appears to follow the second hypothesis of an initial drop in turnout that is mitigated by policy feedback.



The turnout in White majority counties can be seen above, and turnout in these counties appears to follow similar patterns to the turnout in all counties. In states that implemented strict photo ID laws, turnout was 4% higher eight years before their implementation and 1% lower four years beforehand. After implementation of strict photo ID laws, these counties' turnout dropped to 5% lower than counties in states that did not implement strict photo ID laws in the year the laws took effect before changing to 2% lower and nearly equivalent four and eight years after their implementation, respectively.

Much like the effect in all counties, there appears to have been an initial adjustment period in turnout in White majority counties in states that implemented strict photo ID laws.

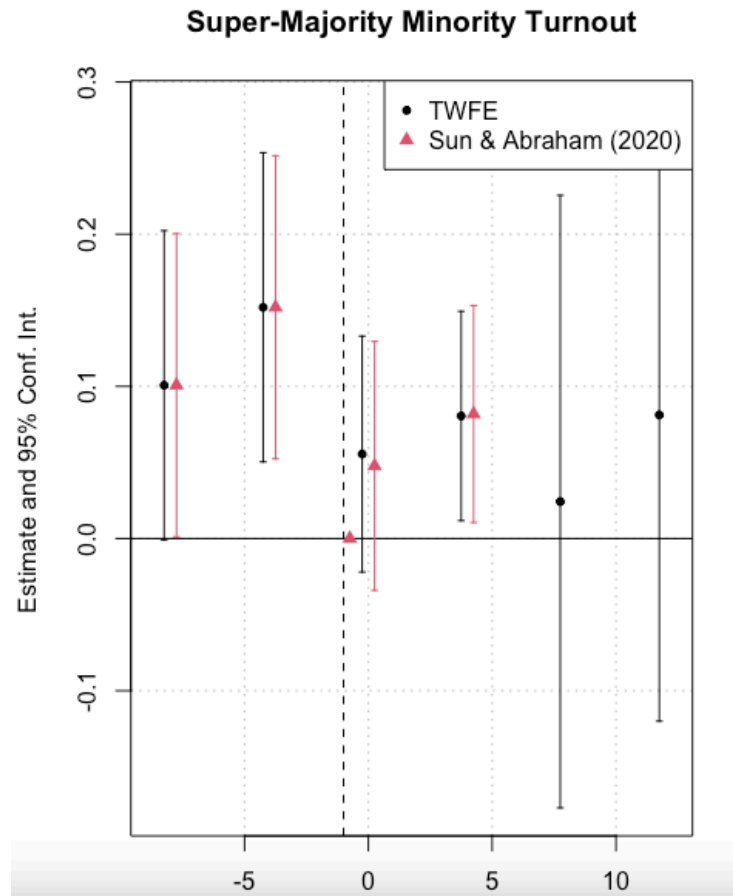
Likely for the same reasons, turnout suffers an initial steep drop before beginning to recover, and although the parallel trend assumption once again does not hold, it can be stated that White turnout appears to once again follow the second hypothesis and be largely controlled by policy feedback. These results are intuitive. As most counties in the country are majority White, it makes sense that the pattern for White counties would mirror that of the pattern for all counties.



The results of the difference-in-differences test for majority minority counties can be seen above. Eight years before strict photo ID laws were put in place, turnout in majority minority counties in such states was 9% higher than in majority minority counties in other states, and turnout was 8% higher four years before the laws were implemented. However, after the implementation of strict photo ID laws, turnout dropped dramatically. The actual gap in turnout

varied from being 2% higher, 4% higher, and 2% lower in states that implemented strict photo ID laws, a stark contrast from prior to the implementation of strict photo ID laws.

Therefore, although there is not a strict trend in the post-implementation results and the results from eight years after the implementation of strict photo ID laws have a large confidence interval due to the relatively small sample size, the analysis shows that strict photo ID laws reduce the turnout in counties with majority minority populations. Although it appears possible that turnout in majority minority counties in states that passed strict photo ID laws remained higher than turnout in majority minority counties in states that did not pass strict photo ID laws, the size of this gap decreased significantly. Therefore, this analysis appears to support the theory that implementing strict photo ID laws imposes a permanent penalty on the turnout of minority voters. Furthermore, as there was little and inconsistent change in this gap, it appears that policy feedback to the implementation of strict photo ID laws had little effect, and voters do not appear to have become less interested over time. Notably, the parallel trend assumption does appear to hold for these counties, meaning that these effects can be attributed to the implementation of strict photo ID laws with more confidence than the effects for all counties or White majority counties. This means the results for majority minority counties appear to follow the theory behind hypothesis four, namely that strict photo ID laws cause a permanent drop in turnout due to imposing a higher cost on voting.



Finally, in super-majority minority counties in states that implemented strict photo ID laws, turnout was higher than states that did not implement such laws both eight and four years prior to the laws being implemented, but the differences were not consistent, being 10% and 15%, respectively. Once strict photo ID laws were implemented, turnout in super-majority minority counties dropped. In the year of their implementation, turnout was only 5% higher than in states that did not pass such laws, and it was 8% higher four years later. Due to the relatively small number of super-majority minority counties, the test with Sun and Abraham (2020)'s adjustment could not be used for any other elections.

These results might indicate that there was an adjustment period for super-majority minority counties as well and that policy led to turnout trending towards reaching pre-strict photo ID levels. Although the parallel trend assumption cannot be verified prior to the implementation of such laws and the small sample size meaning that the analysis could only be run for two elections after their implementation, these results once again appear to follow the second hypothesis related to the theory of policy feedback.

Conclusion

This paper investigated the effect that strict photo ID laws had on turnout, specifically focusing on how they affected turnout in minority communities. By using county vote totals and government estimates of the voting age population, it was able to estimate turnout without having to rely on people self-reporting turnout in surveys. Conducting a difference-in-differences analysis, it was found that minority turnout suffered a permanent penalty from the imposition of strict photo ID laws, a fact that was not true for White turnout.

Analyzing these results, strict photo ID laws appear to cause steep drops in turnout in both White and minority turnout when first implemented. This impact on turnout shows that strict photo ID laws seem to impose an additional cost on all voters, regardless of race, that some voters are unwilling to bear. However, although some caution is necessary as the parallel trend assumption might not hold for counties that are majority White, White voters appear better able to overcome the imposition of an additional cost when it comes to voting. White turnout begins to increase in subsequent elections and is trending towards pre-photo ID levels at the end of this study's period of analysis, but turnout in majority minority counties does not. Instead, minority

turnout appears to remain similar to the level it fell to once strict photo ID laws were implemented.

These results could likely be used by proponents on either side of the photo ID debate. On one side, advocates for photo ID could argue that due to all groups suffering a turnout penalty from strict photo ID laws, these laws are not racially discriminatory in nature. On the other side, opponents of photo ID laws could make the case that the laws ultimately appear to impose a penalty on minority voters that disappears for White voters. Therefore, although both sides of the debate in the current academic literature could point to some aspects of this paper in support of their theories, this paper cannot be said to truly support either. Instead, the results appear to point out that groups reacting to the imposition of strict photo ID laws have failed to effectively mobilize minority voters to return to the polls whereas there is much greater success in returning White voters to the polls. If the results would remain as they appear in this paper even after an additional focus on turning out minority voters, opponents of photo ID laws will likely be able to point to this result as showing the discriminatory nature of such laws, but as it stands, we believe that the data currently does not definitively show that photo ID laws are discriminatory. The results of this paper also present an excellent opportunity for future research in the subject: why has such a disparity occurred between the two groups?

Photo ID laws lead to passionate opinions on both sides, and it is unlikely that the results of one more study in the field would be able to change many people's minds about the issue. However, it is vitally important that Americans are aware of how these laws are affecting the nation. Nearly all Americans would agree that American citizens who are eligible to vote should not be deprived of their right to do so. By identifying a potential area of future research in the

subject of photo ID laws, this paper hopefully will have helped shed light on how the nation can work to make it so every citizen is able to execute one of their most precious rights.

Appendix

Years Since Strict Photo ID Implemented	Difference in Turnout for All Counties	Difference in Turnout for Majority Minority Counties	Difference in Turnout for Super-Majority Minority Counties	Difference in Turnout for White Counties
-8	.04***	.09***	.10*	.04***
-4	0.00	.08***	.15*	-0.01
0	-.04***	0.02	0.05	-.05**
4	-.02**	0.04	.08*	-.02***
8	0.00	-0.02		0.00
	*: p-value <.05	** : p-value <.01	***: p-value <.001	

Identical coding used for other R coding with exception of which csv file uploaded and title of

graph

```

1  dats <- fread("Thesis Data R.csv", header=T)
2  #Uploading spreadsheet with all data
3  library(fixest)
4  library(did)
5  library(data.table)
6  #Uploading packages used for running Dynamic DID
7  str(dats)
8  dats[, time := ifelse(Yes ==1, year - `Enact`, 0)]
9  #Creating a variable so that the treatment of enacting
10 #a strict photo ID law is relative for all treated states
11 #and 0 for all states that did not
12 modtwfle = feols(Turnout ~ i(time, Yes), data = dats)
13 iplot(modtwfle, xlab = 'Time to treatment',
14 main = 'Event study: Staggered treatment (TWFE)')
15 #Creating a two-way-fixed effects test for this model
16 dats[, year_treated := ifelse(Yes==0, 10000, `Enact`)]
17 #Using Sun and Abraham's method of giving states that did not enact
18 #Strict photo ID laws a fake treatment
19 mod_sa = feols(Turnout ~ sunab(year_treated, year), data = dats)
20 iplot(list(modtwfle, mod_sa), sep = 0.5, ref.line = -1,
21       xlab = 'Time to treatment',
22       main = 'Overall Turnout')
23 legend("topright", col = c(1, 2), pch = c(20, 17),
24       legend = c("TWFE", "Sun & Abraham (2020)"))
25 #Running an analysis using Sun and Abraham's method
26 summary(mod_sa)

```

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