

Obstacles To Estimating Voter ID Laws' Effect on Turnout

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Effect of Voter ID Laws

Voter Identification laws: require government ID to vote

- Minority voters: much less likely to hold IDs (Ansolabehere and Hersh 2016)
- What is effect of ID laws on turnout?
- Methods question: assess effect using surveys?

Survey Data and Effects of Election Administration

“Our article evaluates this research and disputes the strength of the statistical arguments used to support findings of an observable negative effect on turnout from voter ID laws. Alternatively, we adjust the models using state samples and difference-indifferences techniques and reanalyze the CPS data for the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections. While we do not conclude that voter ID rules have no effect on turnout, **our data and tools are not up to the task of making a compelling statistical argument for an effect**” (Erikson and Minnite 2009)

Obstacles to Estimating Voter ID Laws' Effect

Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson (2017) (HLN) \rightsquigarrow Voter ID laws suppress turnout of minority voters, estimate effect using CCES survey data

- General election \rightsquigarrow hispanic voters
- Primary election \rightsquigarrow hispanic, black, and asian voters

Limitations of the design

- 1) Placebo test: cross sectional designs suffer from selection
- 2) Difference in Differences in HLN reports positive effect \rightsquigarrow Merge error in Virginia (2006, 2008, and 2010) and other 2006 states
- 3) Once merge error corrected: data + designs provide positive, negative, or null effects

No reliable inference \rightsquigarrow Administrative data essential to estimate effects

“ The analysis shows that strict identification laws have a differentially negative impact on the turnout of racial and ethnic minorities in primaries and general elections”

HLN: Research Design

Data: Cooperative Congressional Election Study (2006-2014)

- Merge: Strict voter ID law in state
- Dependent Variable: General/Primary Election Turnout
- Treatment: Strict Voter ID Law

- 1) Selection on observables: cross sectional comparison
 - Effect heterogeneity by race, party ID, and ideology
- 2) Difference-in-Differences: state and year fixed effects
 - Effect heterogeneity by race, party ID, and ideology

HLN Results

Voter ID laws suppress turnout

- General election: increase gap between white and hispanic turnout (general election)
- Primary Election: Increase gap between white and hispanic, black, and asian turnout (primary elections)

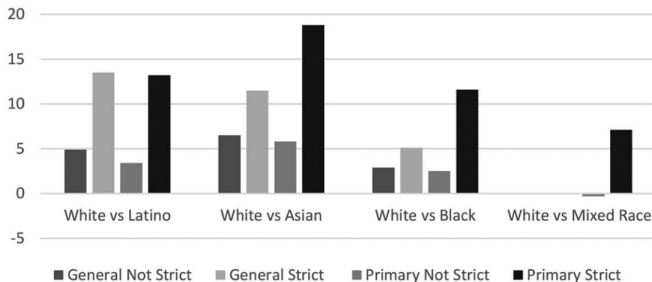


Figure 2. Photo ID laws and predicted racial gaps in turnout. Race-specific effect for white versus Asian and white versus black in general elections and multiracial effect in primaries are not significant at $p < .05$.

Assessing Cross Sectional Design: Placebo Test

- If cross sectional (selection on observables) design works:

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Assessing Cross Sectional Design: Placebo Test

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	General Elections:					
Include respondents who self-classify as unregistered	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Include unmatched respondents as non-voters	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Number of Observations	93,652	93,652	99,864	99,864	114,230	114,230
Future Strict Voter ID State	-0.368 (0.117)	-0.385 (0.141)	-0.344 (0.092)	-0.356 (0.116)	-0.253 (0.077)	-0.258 (0.097)
Black X		0.057 (0.134)		0.016 (0.142)		-0.004 (0.122)
Future Strict Voter ID State		0.077 (0.108)		0.050 (0.118)		0.088 (0.097)
Hispanic X		0.398 (0.505)		0.670 (0.382)		0.409 (0.348)
Future Strict Voter ID State		-0.219 (0.141)		-0.263 (0.128)		-0.406 (0.103)
Mixed Race X						
Future Strict Voter ID State						

Assessing Cross Sectional Design: Placebo Test

- If cross sectional (selection on observables) design works:
 - States that implement voter ID laws are (conditionally) on average similar to states that do not
 - No “effect” of being a strict voter ID law in the past
- Placebo test: assess “effect” of being future strict voter ID law state on turnout before law implemented
- Hajnal, Kuk, and Lejvardi (2018) suggest placebo test using difference in differences (state and year fixed effects): not possible to estimate this placebo test.
 - Why?: no within state variation on future strict voter ID law status.
 - Coefficients from placebo test in HKL: estimated by statistical routine automatically dropping states to fit model. Strict voter ID law reported coefficient just a state fixed effect, interaction estimated solely from within state racial composition variation
 - Does not provide an assessment of the plausibility of the design

Cross Sectional \rightsquigarrow Difference in Differences

Cross Sectional Design Fails \rightsquigarrow Difference in Differences Design
HLN: “one of the most rigorous ways to examine panel data”

Difference in Differences Estimates, HLN

Table A9: The Impact of Strict Voter ID Laws: State Fixed Effects

	(1) General Election Turnout	(2) Primary Election Turnout	(3) General Election Turnout	(4) Primary Election Turnout	(5) Primary Election Turnout
VOTER ID LAW					
Strict Voter ID Law	0.109** (0.00754)	0.0677** (0.0105)	0.100** (0.00884)	0.0309** (0.0118)	0.0108 (0.0118)
Strict Voter ID * Black	-0.00497 (0.00841)	-0.0432** (0.00985)			
Strict Voter ID * Latino	-0.0446** (0.0133)	-0.0556** (0.0157)			
Strict Voter ID * Asian	0.0161 (0.0345)	-0.00137 (0.0400)			
Strict Voter ID * Mixed Race	-0.0263 (0.0223)	-0.0367 (0.0258)			
Strict Voter ID * White			0.00799 (0.00661)	0.0359** (0.00775)	
Strict Voter ID * Party ID					0.0115* (0.0013)
Strict Voter ID * Ideology					
POLITICAL LEANING					

Difference in Differences Estimates, HLN

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Implied Effect of Voter ID Laws from Diff-in-Diff in General Elections (All Statistically Significant)

	Estimate
White	10.9
African American	10.4
Latinos	6.5
Asian Americans	12.5
Mixed Race	8.3

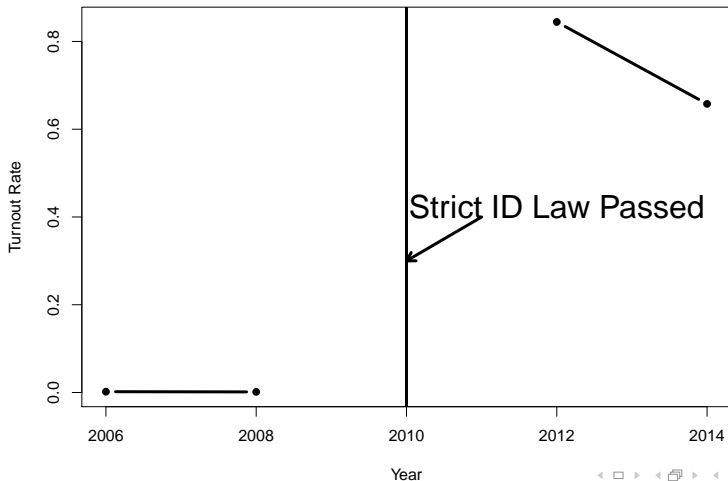
Results are not credible \rightsquigarrow due to merge error in data

WE ARE NOT ARGUING VOTER
ID LAWS INCREASE TURNOUT

What went wrong?

CCES turnout in Virginia shows 0% turnout in control period, plausible turnout levels in treatment period \rightsquigarrow “positive effect” due to merge error

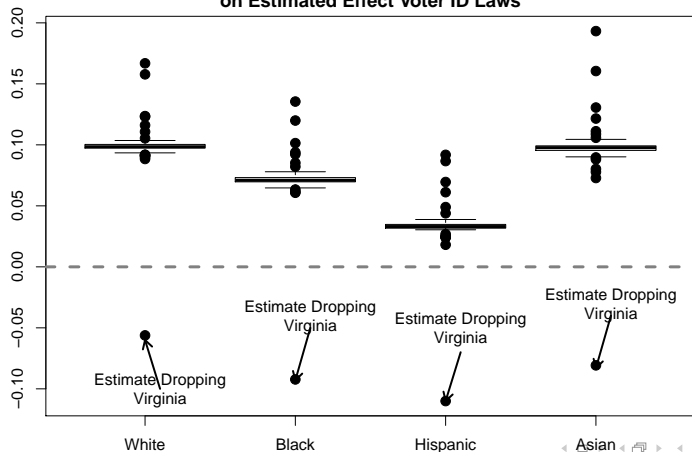
Virginia Turnout, HLN Data



What went wrong?

To see influence of Virginia, we can drop one state at a time and assess the effect on the estimated effect of strict voter ID laws on turnout, estimated using a difference in differences design

**Boxplot of Effect Estimates Shows
Virginia Exerts Substantial Influence
on Estimated Effect Voter ID Laws**



What went wrong?

This is a risk with **any** fixed effect regression

- Use within unit variation, average across units to calculate effect
- Major Errors in one unit \rightsquigarrow exercise substantial influence over estimates
- **Inspect Your Data!**

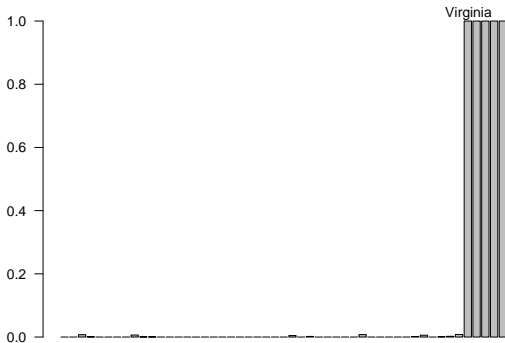
Other Explanations?

- Hajnal, Kuk, and Lejavardi (2018): Argue specification is Missing Political Control Variables (Partisan control of governor, State House, and State Senate)

Other Explanations?

Originally provided political control variables had state-level missingness for states (alphabetically) from Virginia to Wyoming from 2006-2008. Figure below shows percent missing for respondents from each state for Republican governor, 2006-2008. This missingness effectively drops the problematic Virginia years from the analysis. Once corrected, political control variables do not resolve implausible positive effects

Percent Missing Data, Republican Governor HLN/HKL Variable, 2006-2008



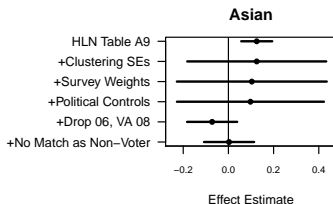
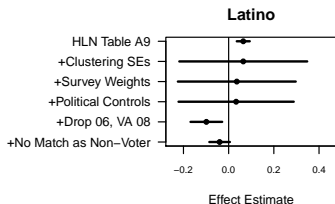
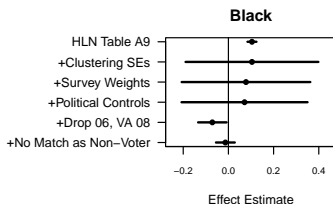
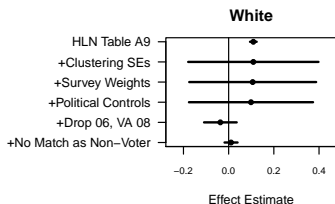
Other Explanations?

HKL (2018) Also Argue:

- No clustering of Standard Errors
- No Survey Weights

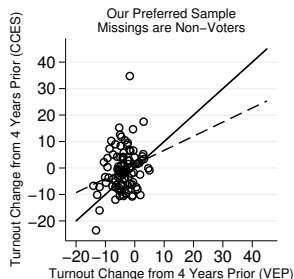
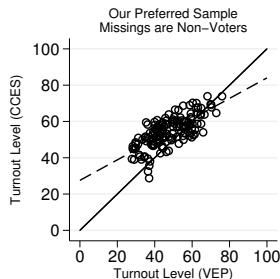
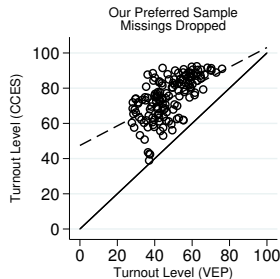
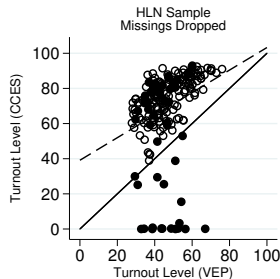
Other Explanations?

The top estimate in each figure shows original HLN estimate of strict voter ID laws on general election turnout from difference in differences model, second is the estimate after clustering standard errors, third is estimate after including survey weights, fourth after including political controls, fifth from dropping Virginia, sixth recoding turnout so nonmatches are zero

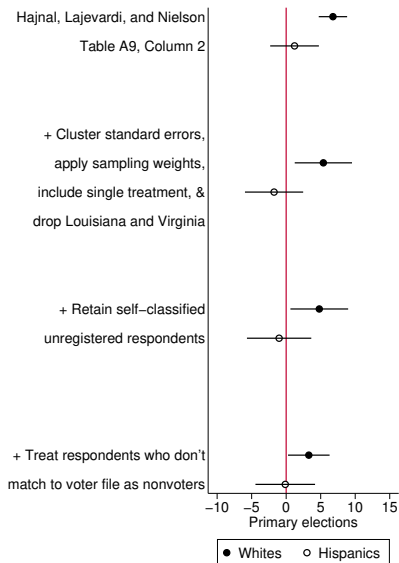
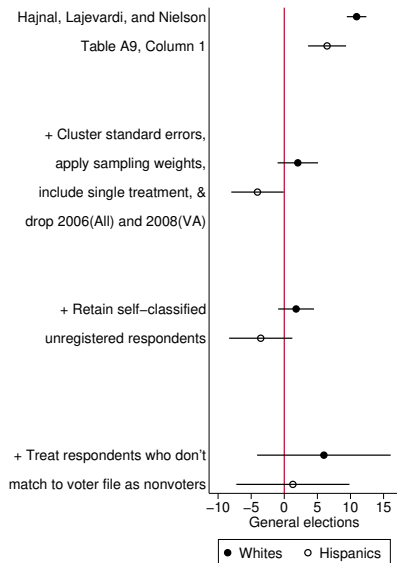


After correcting data, Survey not up to the task (Erikson and Minnite 2009)

Survey Data and Effects of Election Administration



Survey Data and Effects of Election Administration



Δ turnout percentage after strict voter ID implemented

How to Assess Effect of Voter ID Laws?

- Even with large sample CCES unable to inform debate on voter ID laws because small samples in each state
- Placebo tests: useful, but caution must be used because statistical routines drop variables to enable regression to estimate, coefficients may not reflect what you think.
- Fixed effect regression, worry about unit-level errors that exercise substantial influence on estimates