

5-5-2019

A Study of the Cost of Voting for People of Color

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Recommended Citation

Harris, Zakyrh E., "A Study of the Cost of Voting for People of Color" (2019). *Honors Capstones*. 74.
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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
A Study of the Cost of Voting for People of Color

A Capstone Submitted to the
University Honors Program
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
With Honors

Department Of
Political Science

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DeKalb, Illinois

May 2020

Abstract

The goal of this capstone is to answer the question: “Why do some states have higher cost of voting than others?” I believe that the answer to this is that Republicans try to make it harder for minorities to vote. The reason for focusing on this question is because many people believe it is a race related issue. There have been countless discussions during election season between Democrats and Republicans that claim Republicans try to make it harder for people of color to vote. These claims, which are believed by many, especially with the issues that arose in the 2018 Georgia Governor’s race, have yet to be proven. I approach this question by comparing state minority populations to a Cost of Voting Index (COVI) recently created by professors at Northern Illinois University, the University of Jacksonville and Wuhan University in China. The focus was on African American and Latinx populations from 1996 to 2016, and it was an attempt to see if there was a positive correlation between these numbers and higher values on the COVI. To determine the role that Republicans might have played Republican Party control of state legislatures was also measured and compared to the COVI. After analyzing the data, it was determined there was a positive and significant correlation between African Americans and the COVI but this was not the case with the Latinx population. When I looked at how Republican control of state legislatures correlates with COVI it was realized that there was not a positive correlation until the 2016 presidential election. Since this did not support my hypothesis, I shifted the focus to Republican Party control and African American populations working in unison. In doing so I discovered that the Cost of Voting in a state increases the most under the condition of greater Republican Party control working in conjunction with larger African American populations. In other words, the COVI is higher when the state legislature is controlled by the GOP and there is a larger African American population in the state.

Introduction

“The Republican playbook is voter suppression.”

- Tom Perez, Former Secretary of Labor in Barack Obama Administration

Throughout our history as a nation race has played a fundamental part in nearly all aspects of our country. When I look at the history of how this country came to be, or when looking at how our present government is being ran, race has played a part in it all. One of the most important aspects that race has and still does effect to this day is our voting system. After the 15th amendment was passed, many southern states began passing Jim crow laws that specifically prevent African Americans from voting on aspects other than race. This along with the intimidation tactics that were used, lead a strong increase in voter suppression and a high decrease in African Americans voting. These laws eventually ended in 1965 with the passage of the Civil Rights Voting Act. However, researchers discovered that not long after the 2008 Presidential election where President Barack Obama won, many states began passing laws that lead for a more demanding voting process.

This research lead to the idea of numerically determining the ease or stressfulness involved in the voting process, known as the Cost of Voting Index. Dr. Scot Schraufnagel a professor at Northern Illinois University, defines the Cost of Voting as a way to calculate “laws [that] either make it more difficult or easier to cast a vote on Election Day” (Li, Pomante, Schraufnagel 2018). After studying this research, I began to raise the question of why is the COVI higher in some states than in others. Alternatively, why is it harder for people to vote in some states as opposed to others? I hypothesis that the answer to this question is based on the

republican party wanting to make it harder for people of color to vote, that a higher population of minorities in certain states or a state having republican control leads to a high COVI. The reason I believe this is because of some of the statements GOP leaders have made regarding the changing of the voting laws. Don Yelton, North Carolina Republican Executive Committee member was questioned about a new Voter ID law in NC and stated on record “if it hurts a bunch of lazy Blacks. So be it,” and “the law is going to kick the Democrats in the butt.” Another Republican, Jim Greer the former chair of the Republican Party in the state of Florida, explained that the goal of the passage of restrictions on early/absentee voting and registration was to make voting more difficult and inconvenient. He stated his reasoning for this was that more convenient voting “is bad for Republican Party candidates.” However, it is important for us to note that not all GOP leaders feel this way. Republican Senator of Alaska, Lisa Murkowski has publicly stated “It is fundamentally important in our system of government that every American be given the opportunity to vote, regardless of who they are, where they live, and what their race or national origin may be” (R-AK). This shows us that not all GOP members believe in the practice of changing laws to help them win. By proving my hypothesis, I hope to finally have enough statistically significant evidence to show the blatant racism established in many of these voter registration laws that many GOP leaders and members support.

Literature Review

Many studies have been done on issue of voting laws, voter suppression, and the struggles people of color still face while voting. A collaborative paper by Quan Li, Michael Pomante, and Scot Schraufnagel (2018) dives into the variable Cost of Voting in the American states. It is their index values, which are used in this paper for the sake of comparisons. In their paper “Cost of Voting in the American States” the authors figure how to quantitatively create a system to judge the hardship or ease of voting in all 50 states. This paper provides a foundation for this research and allowed me to take the next step in the process and attempt to discovery the reason why it is harder to vote in some states compared to others. Other articles that relate to this focus specifically on the results of voter registration laws and the impacts it the laws have on the public. Benjamin Highton (2004), a professor at the University of California Davis wrote a paper titled “Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States”. He answers questions concerning how does registration laws influence turnout levels? As well as what types of people are most affected by them and what are the partisan implications of registration requirements?

Another group that has done similar research is Moshe Haspel and H. Gibbs Knotts (2005) with their paper “Location, Location, Location: Precinct Placement and the Costs of Voting” in the *Journal of Politics*. Within their paper they study the effects that the location of polling places has on the voting population. They focus on how polling place locations play into the cost of voting and go in depth as to how the distance one has to travel to a polling place can be both beneficial and destructive to some people. This was helpful for my paper because I was able to see how other factors play into the cost of voting and how those factors affect the people within those communities. Overall the key difference between this paper and ones like it is that

this paper focuses on finding demographic and political explanations for increases in the cost of voting across the American states.

Research Design

The way in which I approached this question was by gathering resources on the COVI for all 50 states into an excel document. This was needed in order to see which states had a higher COVI or lower COVI so that I could see if there was any correlation between them and their respected minority populations. My next step was first making sure there was a positive correlation between race and the COVI. I checked this by gathering the population data through a tool created by the United States Census Bureau, called “Fact Finder.” I wanted to focus specifically on the minority populations over a period of time, so I gathered data for all African Americans and Latinx people in all 50 states for the between the years 1996 through 2016. More specifically I used information from years 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016. These years were chosen because they correlated with presidential election years. I then used the total population as a control variable and a way to calculate the percent of African American and Latinx individuals in each state by dividing the subpopulations by the total populations and multiplying by 100 percent. This allowed us to see the growth or decline of these two subpopulations over the period of a decade. Below is Table 1 which shows the results from this process.

Table 1.

**Percent Minority Populations and the Variable Costs of Voting in the American States:
Select Presidential Election Years**

Pearson-R Correlation Coefficients: p-values are a two-tailed test

Years	% Black Population	% Latinx Population
1996	.43 ($p < .003$)	.01 ($p < .95$)
2000	.49 ($p < .001$)	.07 ($p < .62$)
2004	.49 ($p < .001$)	.10 ($p < .51$)
2008	.52 ($p < .001$)	.17 ($p < .24$)
2012	.44 ($p < .002$)	.07 ($p < .64$)
2016	.40 ($p < .005$)	-.06 ($p < .70$)
n = 50		

From Table 1, I can see that the positive correlation coefficients, in recent presidential election cycles suggests the cost of voting is always higher in states with a larger African American population. Moreover, this relationship is always easily statistically significant. The Latinx population, on the other hand, is not correlated with the cost of voting in any of the most recent presidential election cycles. It is important to note that the relationship between the size of the Latinx and the COVI have grown to be more strongly positively and significantly correlated over time.

Our next steps in this process was to focus on GOP controlled states since the quotes from Republican sources suggest I have reason to believe that COVI values will correlate positively and significantly to Republican Party control of the state legislative process. I gathered two forms of data on the republican party in legislative control during the same presidential election years as mentioned earlier. I focused first, on if the percent of GOP members in both chambers, and then second, on if there was GOP majority control in both chambers and if there was a GOP Governor. I collected this data from the National Conference of State Legislators

website. Table 2 below shows the results of our test to see if the COVI and the two data sets correlated positively and significantly.

Table 2.

**GOP Control of State Government and the Variable Costs of Voting:
Select Presidential Election Years**

Pearson-R Correlation Coefficients: p-values are a two-tailed test

	% GOP Members (both Chambers)	GOP Maj. Control of both Chambers + Gov.
1996	-.29 ($p < .05$)	-.31 ($p < .03$)
2000	-.36 ($p < .01$)	-.25 ($p < .09$)
2004	-.37 ($p < .01$)	-.21 ($p < .16$)
2008	-.14 ($p < .35$)	-.09 ($p < .53$)
2012	.02 ($p < .88$)	.16 ($p < .28$)
2016	.40 ($p < .005$)	.48 ($p < .001$)
n = 49 (Nebraska's Non-Partisan State Legislature Omitted)		

From Table 2 I learn that only in the most recent presidential election cycle (2016) that the percentage of Republicans in state legislatures correlates positively, and significantly, with COVI values. This happens in both data sets that I established which show Republican state control. This leads us to believe that only recently has it become a need for republicans to start making stricter voting laws without race being a factor.

The last step in the process of proving our hypothesis was to compare GOP controlled states with a growing black population to the COVI. Since I have already compared the two variables separately to see how they compare, it is time to see if the two variables together lead to a higher correlation rate than when compared on their own. The results of this are in Table 3 listed below.

Table 3.

GOP Control of State Government/State Black Populations and the Variable Costs of Voting: Select Presidential Election Years

Pearson-R Correlation Coefficients: p-values are a two-tailed test

	% GOP Members (both Chambers) *State Black Population
1996	.43 ($p < .005$)
2000	.47 ($p < .000$)
2004	.49 ($p < .000$)
2008	.50 ($p < .000$)
2012	.50 ($p < .000$)
2016	.50 ($p < .000$)
	n = 49
	(Nebraska's Non-Partisan State Legislature Omitted)

Table 3 shows us that there is not only a positive and significant correlation between GOP controlled states with a growing black population and the COVI, but that it is more strongly correlated together than individually. I can see that when I compare all three Tables, Table 3 has the strongest and most significant positive correlation with the past 5 President election cycles coming in around a 100% confidence level. This Table suggest that I do have enough evidence to support our hypothesis, that the GOP does make it harder for people of color to vote.

Conclusion

The question I had to answer today was why it is harder to vote in some states than others. I believe that the answer to this question was that GOP members wanted to make it harder for minorities to vote. Throughout this paper I have taken all of the necessary steps to discover evidence to see if our hypothesis was right. I began by researching the Cost of Voting Index to understand how it was created and what exactly it determines. From there I began collecting data from the United States Census Bureau on the African American and Latinx populations in all 50 states during significant presidential election years. I compared this to the COVI which shows only a positive and strong correlation with the African American population. I then compared the GOP leaders in two parts the first, on if the percent of GOP members in both chambers, and then second, on if there was GOP majority control in both chambers and if there was a GOP Governor. These results showed only a significant and positive correlation in the last presidential cycle. Finally, I compare the GOP leadership with a growing black population to the COVI and discovered a very strong, positive and significant correlation. These results show that I have enough evidence to suggest that our hypothesis is true. That when there is a state with GOP leadership and a growing African American population, it becomes harder to vote in that state. Which makes it harder not only for minorities to vote but also for everyone in that state, and as Jim Greer the former chair of the Republican Party in the state of Florida stated when discussing more convenient voting it “is bad for Republican Party candidates.”

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