



# DEMOCRACY REMIXED: BLACK YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

*A Series on Black Youth Political Engagement*

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## The Effect of North Carolina's New Electoral Reforms on Young People of Color

In August 2013, North Carolina enacted one of the nation's most comprehensive reforms of the voting process. Under the new law, early voting will be reduced, Election Day-registration will be eliminated, and every voter will have to produce government-issued identification. The law is scheduled to take effect in 2014, except for the voter ID requirement which will be enforced beginning in 2016. Prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder*, such laws would have been subject to preclearance from the Department of Justice under the Voting Rights Act. The Justice Department is suing North Carolina in federal court to block implementation of the law; however, last week, it was announced that the lawsuit will not be heard until 2015, *after* the 2014 midterm elections. In this report, we consider the possible effects of these new restrictions on voter turnout, focusing specifically on young people of color. Our main findings are as follows:

- Shortening the early voting period in North Carolina may demobilize hundreds of thousands of people, with the consequences most severe among young people generally, and Black youth in particular.
- The elimination of Election Day-registration is likely to have disproportionately negative effects among young people, people of color, and especially Latinos.
- The new voter identification requirement may reduce turnout among people of color at substantially higher rates than whites; all told, more than 100,000 people may not have voted in North Carolina in 2012 if the voter ID law had

been in effect—considerably more people than the margin of Romney’s victory over Obama in that state.

## **Electoral Reforms in North Carolina**

In 2011, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the “Restore Confidence in Government Act”, which, among other reforms, would require voters to present a government-issued identification card, such as a passport or driver’s license, before receiving a valid ballot. Then-Governor Bev Purdue (D), however, vetoed the legislation, and the bill died as Republican legislators lacked enough votes to override her veto. The proposal, however, did not die. In 2012, North Carolinians elected their first Republican governor in decades, Pat McCrory, and in July 2013 the General Assembly passed a new version of the “Restore Confidence in Government Act.” Governor McCrory signed the bill into law in August.

The new legislation contains a far-reaching set of reforms to both the voting process and the electoral system more generally. Three components in particular stand out. First, the number of days for early voting has been reduced from 17 to 10. Second, same-day voter registration is eliminated. Same-day registration, implemented in the early 1990s, has been widely credited with increasing turnout rates in North Carolina from among the lowest in the country to the 11<sup>th</sup> highest in the 2012 election. And third, voters must display a government-issued identification card before being allowed to cast a valid ballot. As with other reforms in states such as Texas, IDs issued by colleges and universities will not be accepted as valid forms of identification for students attending those institutions.

In this analysis we consider how these reforms may affect voter turnout in North Carolina in 2016. To shed greater light on the magnitude of these potential effects, we also consider what would happen to turnout nationwide if *all* states were to adopt these sets of reforms.

# Calculating the Effects of Electoral Reforms on Voter Turnout

We rely on several prominent measures to analyze turnout and registration in the 2012 election, and to predict how these new electoral reforms would have affected turnout if they had been in place during the 2012 presidential election. First, we use the November voting supplement to the Current Population Studies to characterize levels of turnout in North Carolina and nationwide.<sup>1</sup> This dataset contains the results of interviews with approximately 150,000 U.S. residents across all fifty states. The large sample sizes within each state allow us the opportunity to examine turnout and registration in North Carolina specifically. Just as importantly, they also provide the opportunity to examine how turnout varies across age and racial groups. Our analysis focuses on differences in turnout and registration across Black, Latino,<sup>2</sup> and white respondents.<sup>3</sup> We also pay particular attention to these patterns among young people 30 years of age and younger.

Of course, not all U.S. residents are U.S. citizens, and thus not everyone who lives in the United States is eligible to vote. Thus, we use the Current Population Studies to examine citizenship rates nationwide across racial groups. Nationwide, the November 2012 Current Population Studies reports that 94 percent of U.S. residents 18 years of age and older are citizens, with variation across racial group (95.2 percent of Blacks, 98.4 percent of whites, and 66.1 percent of Latinos). We use these rates in our calculations both in North Carolina and the country as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

We gather information on the population of each racial group in North Carolina and the country as a whole using estimates for July 1, 2012 from the U.S. Census

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<sup>1</sup> These data are available here: [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).

<sup>2</sup> We recognize that the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” generally have distinct definitions and should not be used synonymously. Though the U.S. Census does not offer a “Latino” response option in its menu of racial group categories, for the purposes of this study we define Latinos as persons of Hispanic origin, and thus “white” and “black” refers to persons who are not of Hispanic origin.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, though Asian Americans are a growing community in the United States, the number of Asian Americans surveyed by the Current Population Studies is still too small to construct reliable estimates of the possible effects of these electoral reforms on turnout. Similar challenges prevent us from considering the effects among other groups, including Native Americans, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, to the extent that rates of citizenship across racial groups in North Carolina differ from those for the nation as a whole, the calculations for the effects of electoral rules turnout and registration may vary slightly.

Bureau.<sup>5</sup> We also gather these data for young people between the ages of 18 and 29 from the same source. Thus, by multiplying these population figures by the proportion of residents who are also citizens, we obtain estimates of the eligible voting-age population.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, to measure turnout, we use estimates obtained by the November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies, focusing on the U.S. adult citizen population. These figures are listed in Table 1 below. In the analyses that follow, we focus on how many people who actually voted in 2012 may not have voted had some of these electoral reforms been in place in that election.

**Table 1: Voter Turnout in 2012 among U.S. Adult Citizens**

<b>Group</b>	<b>North Carolina (%)</b>	<b>United States (%)</b>
All, 18 years and older	77.1	71.1
Blacks, 18 years and older	86.9	79.0
Whites, 18 years and older	75.1	72.9
Latinos, 18 years and older	64.3	59.0
All, 18 to 29 years of age	63.9	53.5
Blacks, 18 to 29 years of age	80.2	65.5
Whites, 18 to 29 years of age	60.6	54.3
Latinos, 18 to 29 years of age	41.7	43.4

Source: November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies; data available at [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).

<sup>5</sup> These data are found in the table “Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012” available from the U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>6</sup> There are other reasons why individuals may not be eligible to vote, including restrictions for incarcerated persons and convicted felons. Unfortunately, these data are not commonly available by racial group, and thus we do not include them in our calculations. We note, however, that according to the Department of Justice, as of the end of 2010 approximately 3.2 million Americans were incarcerated or on parole or probation for felony convictions.

## Reductions in Early Voting and Possible Effects on Turnout

We begin by examining how reductions in early voting may reduce levels of turnout. As mentioned above, the new law reduces early voting from 17 days to 10 days. The November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies describes the percentage of voters who cast their votes during the early voting period. These figures are shown in the figure column of entries in Table 2.

To examine how the reduction in the early voting period might affect turnout, we make several key assumptions. First, we assume that equal numbers of ballots were cast on each of the 17 days of the early voting period. Second, we assume that voters who cast ballots on a particular day of the early voting period may have been unable to do so on other days of the early voting period. Thus, in reducing the number of days from 17 to 10, a 41.2 percent reduction, we also assume that the number of early voters would be reduced by 41.2 percent.

Table 2 below shows the results of these calculations. The first column of numerical entries displays the percentage of voters from each group that reported casting a vote prior to Election Day. In general, young people cast early votes at higher rates than the general population, and young Blacks cast early votes at especially higher rates relative to the North Carolina Black population.

The second column shows the estimated number (in thousands) of total early voters in 2012 within each group. The third column displays the estimated number of early voters that would have cast votes if early voting had been available for only 10 days rather than 17; that is, the figures from column 2 are reduced by 41.2 percent. The fourth column, then, shows the reduction in turnout that may have occurred had the number of early voting days been reduced in 2012 as they will now be in 2016.

As the table shows, reductions in early voting could have substantial impact on voter turnout in North Carolina. More than 900,000 voters who turned out in 2012 may not have done so if the early voting period had been shortened, as it will be in 2016. This includes nearly 200,000 Black voters, nearly 700,000 white voters, and about 20,000 Latino voters.

The potential effects are magnified among young voters, who utilize early voting to a greater degree than older adults. Altogether, about 180,000 young people may not have voted if the early voting period had been shortened. This includes more than 50,000 Black youth, 110,000 white youth, and 4,000 Latino youth.

What is more, the reduction of the early voting period has the potential to significantly reduce the potency of young people’s voices—especially those of Black youth—in electoral outcomes. Because Black youth cast early ballots at higher rates than their more senior Black counterparts, they stand to lose disproportionately more if the early voting period had been shortened. Thus, in examining the potential effect of the reduction in the early voting period in North Carolina, turnout appears likely to decrease across the board, with the effects concentrated at disproportionately high levels among young people, and especially Black and white youth.

**Table 2: Early Voting and Turnout in North Carolina among Adult Citizens**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Early votes (% of voters)</b>	<b>Early votes in 2012 (total number in thousands)</b>	<b>Early votes if time is reduced (total number in thousands)</b>	<b>Reduction in votes if early voting is reduced (total number in thousands)</b>
All, 18 years and older	42.2	2267	1334	933
Blacks, 18 years and older	34.1	451	266	186
Whites, 18 years and older	45.0	1696	998	698
Latinos, 18 years and older	22.1	48	29	20
All, 18 to 29 years of age	45.5	432	254	178
Blacks, 18 to 29 years of age	43.6	130	76	53
Whites, 18 to 29 years of age	47.5	269	158	111
Latinos, 18 to 29 years of age	20.4	10	6	4

Sources: Columns 1 and 2, November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies; data available at [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html); columns 3 and 4, author’s calculations.

Table 3 below reports the same set of calculations for the country as a whole, assuming the reductions in the period of early voting would be equivalent in magnitude to the reduction in North Carolina across all states. The pattern is strikingly similar to those shown for North Carolina. Younger voters vote via early voting at considerably higher rates than older voters, and youth Black voters use early voting to a greater degree than all other age and racial groups. Thus, the numbers again suggest that young people in general, and Black youth in particular, could be harmed the most by reductions in the length of the early voting time period.

**Table 3: Early Voting and Turnout in the U.S. among Adult Citizens**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Early votes (% of voters)</b>	<b>Early votes in 2012 (total number in millions)</b>	<b>Early votes if time is reduced (total number in millions)</b>	<b>Reduction in votes if early voting is reduced (total number in millions)</b>
All, 18 years and older	68.2	108.2	63.6	44.6
Blacks, 18 years and older	68.0	14.6	8.6	6.0
Whites, 18 years and older	68.6	78.1	46.0	32.2
Latinos, 18 years and older	66.4	8.7	5.1	3.6
All, 18 to 29 years of age	73.5	19.3	11.3	7.9
Blacks, 18 to 29 years of age	74.3	3.4	2.0	1.4
Whites, 18 to 29 years of age	73.6	11.8	6.9	4.8
Latinos, 18 to 29 years of age	72.5	2.3	1.4	0.9

Sources: Columns 1 and 2, November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies; data available at [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html); columns 3 and 4, author's calculations.

## The Potential Impact of Election Day-Registration on Voter Turnout

A number of states, including North Carolina, have offered Election Day-registration to its voters. This significantly reduces the burden of registering in person or through the mail in advance of the election, and a variety of research indicates that turnout is higher in states with Election Day-registration. Furthermore, some research indicates that Election Day-registration is especially effective in increasing turnout among younger voters and people with lower incomes.<sup>7</sup>

Table 4 below provides some calculations to evaluate how the elimination of Election Day-registration in North Carolina might reduce levels of voter turnout. The first column of entries shows the percentages of voters in each group that registered to vote on Election Day. The second column reports the estimated number of voters in 2012 who registered via Election Day-registration. Thus, these entries in the second column suggest the total number of voters who may not have been able to vote if they had not registered to vote before Election Day 2012.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, the figures suggest that turnout would have declined if Election Day-registration had not been offered in 2012. In particular, the declines would have been most severe among Latinos, who utilize Election Day-registration at greater rates than their peers. In fact, nearly one in six Latino youth voters registered to vote on Election Day, compared with about one in twenty young Black and white voters. Thus, the elimination of Election Day-registration may demobilize up to a half million North Carolina voters, with disproportionately severe effects on Latinos.

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, Stephen Knack and James White, "Election Day Registration and Turnout Inequality," *Political Behavior* (2000), Vol. 22, pages 29-44.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, however, the CPS data do not distinguish between people who registered on Election Day *in 2012* and those who registered to vote on Election Day in earlier years.



**Table 4: Election Day Registration and Turnout in North Carolina among Adult Citizens**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Election Day registration (% of voters)</b>	<b>Number of 2012 voters who registered on Election Day (total number in thousands)</b>
All, 18 years and older	10.1	543
Blacks, 18 years and older	5.6	74
Whites, 18 years and older	11.4	430
Latinos, 18 years and older	11.8	26
All, 18 to 29 years of age	5.1	48
Blacks, 18 to 29 years of age	4.2	13
Whites, 18 to 29 years of age	5.5	31
Latinos, 18 to 29 years of age	15.4	7

Sources: Columns 1 and 2, November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies; data available at [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).

As with the analysis of early voting, we again replicate the above analysis for the entire nation. The results support conclusions that are generally consistent with those for North Carolina. Substantial numbers of voters, including young voters, are likely to be demobilized if Election Day-registration were eliminated across the nation. Interestingly, however, the effects appear likely to affect whites at higher rates than people of color. This finding, however, highlights the extent to which the changes in the North Carolina registration law have the potential to disproportionately demobilize people of color, and Latinos in particular.

**Table 5: Election Day Registration and Turnout in the U.S. among Adult Citizens**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Election Day registration (% of voters)</b>	<b>Number of 2012 voters who registered on Election Day (total number in millions)</b>
All, 18 years and older	7.9	12.5
Blacks, 18 years and older	5.8	1.2
Whites, 18 years and older	8.6	9.8
Latinos, 18 years and older	4.6	0.6
All, 18 to 29 years of age	6.5	1.7
Blacks, 18 to 29 years of age	4.9	0.3
Whites, 18 to 29 years of age	7.6	1.2
Latinos, 18 to 29 years of age	3.1	0.1

Sources: Columns 1 and 2, November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies; data available at [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).

## Voter ID Requirements and Potential Effects on Turnout

The new, strict voter identification requirement is perhaps the most-discussed component of the electoral reforms instituted in North Carolina. Beginning in 2016, voters will have to present an official, unexpired, government-issued identification card, such as a U.S. passport or driver’s license. Student ID cards issued by colleges and universities will not be accepted, nor will other forms of documentation such as pay stubs and social security cards.

As part of the identification requirement, the state is making driver’s licenses and state ID cards available to all residents free of charge. This does not mean, however, that no costs are involved in acquiring the proper form of identification. To receive a driver’s license or state ID card, residents must supply a birth certificate and/or other forms of documentation that themselves come at a cost—if they are available at all.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, “North Carolina voters fear new ID law will keep them from polls”, David Zucchino, *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 2013 (available at <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-north-carolina-voter-law-20130908,0,2115606.story>).

Table 6 below reports the possible effects of the new identification law on turnout in North Carolina. Earlier this year, the State Board of Elections and the Department of Motor Vehicle collected data on the number of adult citizens with a state-issued identification card. These numbers are used to calculate the percent of adult citizens and 2012 voters that did not possess the kind of identification that will be required beginning in 2016. (Unfortunately, the data were not available for Latinos separately from other racial groups, nor were they disaggregated by age. It seems likely, however, that rates of ID possession are lower for younger people than for the population as a whole.)

The numbers in the first column show that percentages of adult citizens that do not possess a state-issued ID card. Overall, 4.5 percent of North Carolina adults do not possess an official state-issued form of identification, but these numbers are especially concentrated among people of color; more than 7 percent of Black adults, for instance, do not hold a state-issued ID card, and about 9 percent of the non-white, non-Black adult population lacks an ID card. Column 2 shows the percentages of 2012 voters who did not have an official state-issued ID card. Overall, the figures are slightly lower, but Black (3.7 percent) and non-Black, non-white (5.3 percent) voters were disproportionately more likely than white adults (2.0 percent) to lack a state-issued ID card. Thus, voter identification requirements would appear set to have more pronounced effects on people of color, reducing overall levels of turnout as well as turnout from these communities. The third column reports the estimates of the reduction in turnout in 2012 if voters who do not possess the appropriate ID would have not been allowed to vote.

**Table 6: Voter Identification and Turnout in North Carolina among Adult Citizens**

<b>Group</b>	<b>No Identification (% of citizens)</b>	<b>No Identification (% of 2012 voters)</b>	<b>Reductions in 2012 turnout if voters without ID did not vote</b>
All, 18 years and older	4.5	2.6	138,425
Blacks, 18 years and older	7.1	3.7	49,261
Whites, 18 years and older	3.4	2.0	74,246
Others, 18 years and older	9.0	5.3	14,918

Sources; Columns 1 and 2, April 2013 November State Board of Election-Department of Motor Vehicles ID Analysis; data available at <http://www.democracy-nc.org/downloads/SBOEDataNoIDApril2013PR.pdf>. Calculations in column 3 are based on the November voting supplement to the 2012 Current Population Studies; data available at [http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps\\_ftp.html](http://thedataweb.rm.census.gov/ftp/cps_ftp.html).

## What to Expect Going Forward

Whatever the motivations of North Carolina’s politicians, the tables provided in this report provide a clear sense of the potential consequences from the state’s new set of electoral reforms. Statewide, voter turnout is likely to decrease and, just as importantly, it is likely to decrease among young people and people of color.

Moreover, the electoral implications from the results presented here are just as clear. Young people’s voices, and especially those from young people of color, are likely to be underrepresented in the electoral landscape when (and if) these reforms take effect. Make no mistake: in North Carolina, more so than in some other states, every vote counts. In 2008, President Obama carried North Carolina’s 15 electoral votes by a slim 14,000 vote margin, while Mitt Romney won the state by just 100,000 votes in 2012. And in the Seventh Congressional District, incumbent Mike McIntye won re-election by only 543 votes. Thus, the magnitudes of the estimates shown above should raise real concerns about how electoral reforms—couched in terms of preventing “fraud”—affect citizens’ ability to participate in the electoral process.

The analyses shown here also point to the importance of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* to invalidate Section 5 of the Voting Rights

Act. North Carolina's new laws may have a clearly discriminatory racial impact. Will this law be allowed to stand? The Department of Justice and civil rights groups are suing the state of North Carolina to block implementation of the new law. However, even though many important provisions will take effect in 2014, last week it was announced that the lawsuit will not be heard until 2015. While this may still allow the courts to strike down the voter ID component of the law before it takes effect in the 2016 presidential election, the other provisions of the bill—reduction in early voting and the elimination of same-day registration—could have significant consequences for the 2014 midterm elections in North Carolina. Unfortunately, only time will tell.