



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

*A Series on Black Youth Political Engagement and the 2012 Election*

JON C. ROGOWSKI

CATHY J. COHEN

## **Black and Latino Youth Disproportionately Affected by Voter Identification Laws in the 2012 Election**

Thirty states had voter identification laws in effect for the 2012 presidential election. In some states, voters were requested to show some non-photo form of identification, such as a utility bill or voter registration card, while in other states voters were required to show photo identification, such as a driver's license or U.S. passport, before they could cast a valid ballot. We examined the impact that these laws had on turnout among youth (ages 18-29) in the 2012 presidential election. Our data reveal the following:

- *Voter identification laws are applied unevenly across racial groups.*
  - Black (72.9 percent) and Latino (60.8 percent) youth were asked to show identification before being allowed to vote at disproportionately higher rates than white youth (50.8 percent).
  - Black (65.2 percent) and Latino youth (57.0 percent) were also asked to show **photo** identification at significantly higher rates than white youth (42.3 percent).
  - Even in states with **no identification laws**, 65.5 percent of Black youth were asked to show identification when voting, compared with 55.3 percent of Latino youth and 42.8 percent of white youth.
  - Across and within all racial groups, we also find that young women were asked to show identification at higher rates than young men.

- *Voter identification laws appear to have racially discriminatory effects.*
  - Black youth reported that the lack of required identification prevented them from voting at nearly **four times** the rate of white youth (17.3 percent compared with 4.7 percent). Latino youth (8.1 percent) were also affected at higher rates than white youth.
  - The lack of required identification played an especially large role in reducing turnout among young Black men (30.5 percent).
  - Black and Latino youth possess official state-issued identification (including driver's licenses, U.S. passports, college identification cards, and birth certificates) at considerably lower rates than white youth.
  - Unequal access to photo identification documents indicates that voter identification laws will continue to disproportionately demobilize young people of color.
  
- *Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, currently contested before the Supreme Court in Shelby County v. Holder, plays an important role in protecting the ability of people of color to participate in elections as full and equal citizens.*

## **Identification Requirements Apply Disproportionately to Youth of Color and Women**

The increase in voter identification requirements at the state level indicates that large numbers of voters would be asked or required to show some form of identification when going to vote. As Table 1 shows, over half (56.3 percent) of all young voters under the age of 30 were asked to show some form of identification. Moreover, nearly half (48.5 percent) of young voters were asked to show **photo** identification.

However, there are substantial differences across racial groups in the rate at which young voters were asked for identification. Nearly three-quarters (72.3 percent) of young Black voters were asked for some form of identification, compared with 50.8 percent of young white voters and 60.8 percent of young Latino voters. The racial disparities are similar for the number of young voters that were asked to

show photo identification. Young Black (64.5 percent) and Latino (57.0 percent) voters were considerably more likely to be asked to show photo identification to vote compared to young white voters (42.2 percent).

**Table 1: Percentage of Young Voters (ages 18-29) Asked for Identification**

Form of ID	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Any identification	72.9	50.8	60.8	56.3
Photo identification	64.5	42.2	57.0	48.5

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

These differences hold up even while accounting for the differences in state identification laws. Table 3 below shows the percentages of youth asked for some form of identification based on the state’s voter identification laws. As expected, larger percentages of youth were asked to show identification in states that required some form of identification. But significant numbers of youth were also asked to show identification in states that do not require identification in order to vote. Once again, there are important differences by racial group. In states **with no identification requirements**, nearly two-thirds (65.5 percent) of Black youth were asked to show identification in states without ID requirements, compared with 55.3 percent of Latino youth and 42.8 percent of white youth. And in states with voter identification laws, higher percentages of Black youth (94.3 percent) were asked for ID compared with Latino (81.8 percent) and white (84.3 percent) youth.

**Table 2: Percentage of Young Voters Asked for Identification by Type of State Law**

Group	No identification required	Identification required
	(%)	(%)
All youth	48.6	86.1
Black youth	65.5	94.3
White youth	42.8	84.3
Latino youth	55.3	81.8

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

Overall, young women were asked to show ID at higher rates than young men: 59 percent of women were asked to show some form of ID compared with 53.6 percent of young men. Young women (50 percent) were also asked to show photo identification at higher rates than young men (47 percent). This pattern is consistent across every racial group. The biggest gender differences are found among Latinos, among whom 65.7 percent of young women were asked to show an ID (60.6 percent were asked for photo ID), compared with 56.1 percent of young Latino men (53.5 percent were asked for photo ID). Among Black youth, women indicated that they were asked for photo ID at considerably higher rates than men (66.9 percent compared to 61.9 percent). The biggest gender difference among white youth was seen in the percentage of young people asked for any form of ID; 53.0 percent of young white women were asked to show an ID, compared with 48.6 percent of young white men.

**Table 3: Identification Requests among Youth by Race and Gender**

Form of ID	Black (%)		White (%)		Latino (%)		All (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Any identification	72.0	73.6	48.6	53.0	56.1	65.7	53.6	59.0
Photo identification	61.9	66.9	41.9	42.5	53.5	60.6	47.0	50.0

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

These data indicate that voter identification laws are applied disproportionately across racial groups and by gender. Among youth, people of color—black youth in particular—and women are considerably more likely to be asked for identification in order to vote. This is true for identification in general as well as photo ID in particular, and also applies whether or not a state has an identification requirement in place. The uneven application of these laws suggests that polling place workers exercise a high level of discretion in requesting ID from potential voters. Unless all polling places—and all poll workers—apply voting laws in a consistent manner, the very existence of identification laws implies that women and young people of color are more likely than white youth to be asked to prove their identify before being allowed to vote.

## Voter Identification Requirements Reduce Turnout

State voter identification requirements were an important reason for why many youth did not vote, as Table 4 shows. While the most common explanations for not voting were that youth were not registered to vote (55.8 percent), were disinterested in politics (19.7 percent), or because they didn't like the candidates (16.4 percent), nearly seven percent of young nonvoters said that they did not vote because they lacked the proper identification.

However, there are substantial differences across racial groups, indicating that voter identification laws have racially discriminatory effects. Fewer than five percent of young white nonvoters said that voter identification requirements deterred them from voting, while **17.3 percent** of young Black and **8.1 percent** of young Latino nonvoters said that the reason they did not vote was because they did not have the proper identification. These findings suggest that voter identification laws were especially consequential in reducing turnout among young people of color.

**Table 4: Common Explanations for Nonvoting Among Youth**  
(Nonvoters Only)

Reason for not voting	Blacks (%)	Whites (%)	Latinos (%)	All (%)
Not registered to vote	55.0	61.4	45.0	55.8
<b>Didn't have proper ID</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>6.9</b>
Disinterested in politics	13.2	23.9	13.2	19.7
Didn't like the candidates	11.3	19.8	11.3	16.4
Couldn't find polling place	11.4	4.4	2.9	4.6
Lines were too long	8.5	2.3	1.7	2.7

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

As Table 5 below shows, there are also important gender differences in the sources of nonvoting. These differences are especially striking among Black youth. Most obviously, 30.5 percent of young Black men—compared with 6.5 percent of young Black women—reported that they did not vote because they lacked the proper identification. Young Black men were also considerably more likely to say they

did not vote because of registration status (78 percent, compared with 36.1 percent of young Black women), disinterest in politics (22.8 percent, compared with 5.3 percent of young Black women), they didn't like either of the candidates (20.5 percent, compared with 3.7 percent of young Black women), they were unable to find the polling place (17 percent, compared with 6.9 percent of young Black women), or the voting lines were too long (18.5 percent, compared with 5.3 percent of young Black women).

About eight percent more young Latino women (49.5 percent) than men (41.1 percent) reported that registration status prevented them from voting, while the differences were somewhat smaller among white youth (62.4 percent of women and 60.3 percent of men did not vote because they were not registered). Lack of ID had comparable effects across men and women for both white (4.7 and 4.6 percent, respectively) and Latino (8.0 and 8.3 percent, respectively) youth. Young white women reported that they did not vote because they are disinterested in politics at more than double the rate (31.9 percent) of young white men (15.4 percent), while more young Latino men than women reported that disinterest kept them from voting (15.9 percent and 10.1 percent, respectively). Disliking both of the candidates was a more common reason for not voting among both young white and Latino men (22.8 percent and 14.4 percent, respectively) than it was among young white and Latino women (16.9 percent and 7.8 percent, respectively). Among young whites and Latinos, the gender differences were smaller in the percentages of youth who did not vote because they couldn't find the polling place or because the lines were too long. Latino men reported that they did not vote because they could not find their polling place at slightly higher rates (4.4 percent) than Latino women (1.3 percent), while long lines affected white women (4.3 percent) at higher rates than white men (0.2 percent).

**Table 5: Common Explanations for Nonvoting among Youth by Race and Gender**

*(Nonvoters Only)*

Reason for not voting	Black (%)		White (%)		Latino (%)		All (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Not registered to vote	78.0	36.1	60.3	62.4	41.1	49.5	55.4	56.1
<b>Didn't have proper ID</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>5.8</b>
Disinterested in politics	22.8	5.3	15.4	31.9	15.9	10.1	16.2	23.1
Didn't like the candidates	20.5	3.7	22.8	16.9	14.4	7.8	19.8	13.0
Couldn't find polling place	17.0	6.9	4.8	3.9	4.4	1.3	5.7	3.4
Lines were too long	18.5	0.3	0.2	4.3	1.8	1.6	2.2	3.1

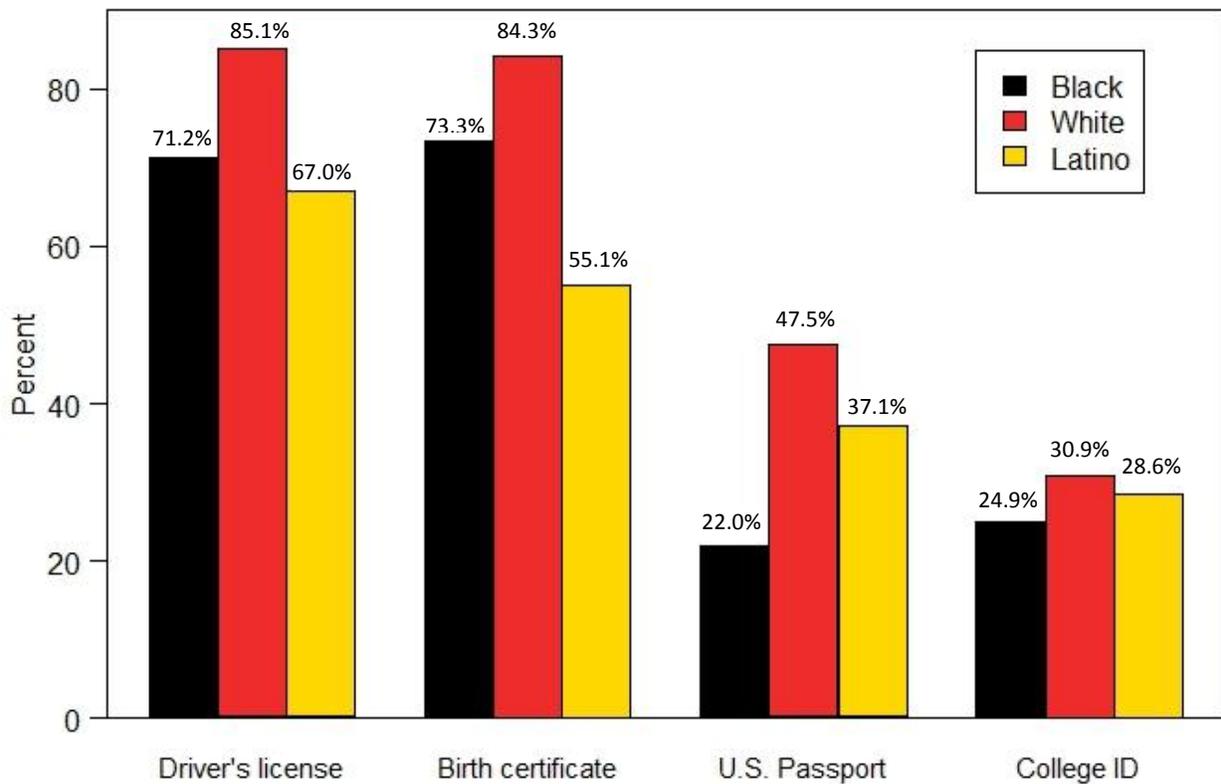
Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

## Identification Documents Are Not Distributed Equally

A key reason that youth of color are disproportionately affected by voter identification requirements is because they are less likely than white youth to possess the forms of identification that are required either to vote (such as a driver's license or U.S. passport), or to receive the kinds of identification that one must show in order to vote (such as a birth certificate). Figure 1 below shows the percentages of youth who said they had various forms of identification. Across all four types of ID—driver's license, birth certification, U.S. passport, and a college ID card that includes a photo and a signature—rates of possession were lower among Black and Latino youth than they are for white youth. Over 85 percent of white youth have a driver's license, compared with 71.2 percent of Black youth and 67.0 percent of Latino youth. The differences are similar when looking at birth certificates—which most people must show in order to receive a driver's license, state ID card, or U.S. passport: 84.3 percent of white youth have a birth certificate at home, compared with 73.3 percent of Black youth and 55.1 percent of Latino

youth. White youth also have U.S. passports at much greater rates (47.5 percent) than Black (22.0 percent) and Latino (37.1 percent) youth. The differences are somewhat smaller in examining the percentages of youth with college identification cards, yet the racial differences persist.

**Figure 1: Rates of ID Possession among Youth**



Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

Among youth as a whole, there are not many significant differences by gender in ID possession. As Table 6 shows, about equal numbers of men and women hold driver's licenses (79.3 and 79.0 percent, respectively), passports (43.5 and 39.7 percent, respectively), and college IDs (29.4 and 29.6 percent, respectively). Interestingly, the biggest difference is in access to a birth certificate—the document that we take most for granted—where 79.2 percent of young women have a birth certificate, compared with 73.5 percent of young men.

There are also several large differences by gender within racial groups. For instance, young Black men have college IDs (28.7 percent) at higher rates than

young Black women (21.8 percent). Young Latino men have driver’s licenses at considerably higher rates (70.4 percent) than young Latino women (63.4 percent). Young Latino men also are much more likely than young Latino women to have a U.S. passport (43.8 percent compared with 29.8 percent). White female youth, however, hold birth certificates at higher rates (87.7 percent) than young white men (80.9 percent). Understanding *who* has access to the various forms of ID that are commonly required in new voter ID laws sheds additional light on which populations are most affected by these laws.

**Table 6: Rates of ID Possession among Youth by Race and Gender**

Type of ID	Black (%)		White (%)		Latino (%)		All (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Driver’s license	69.7	72.4	84.4	85.7	70.4	63.4	79.3	79.0
Birth certificate	71.0	75.1	80.9	87.7	54.2	56.0	73.5	79.2
U.S. Passport	23.2	21.0	47.4	47.5	43.8	29.8	43.5	39.7
College ID	28.7	21.8	30.4	31.4	27.2	30.1	29.4	29.6

Source: Black Youth Project Quarterly Survey, November 2012.

## Voting Rights and American Democracy

Though the media made much of the fact that the 2012 election was marked by surprisingly high levels of turnout from youth, and especially from youth of color, this should not distract attention away from the disproportionate impact of state voter identification requirements. This report shows that women and young people of color were asked to show identification at considerably higher rates than white youth, which indicates that youth of color and women are disproportionately affected by the implementation of voter ID laws. These findings suggest that voter ID laws are applied inconsistently by pollworkers, who appear more likely to request or require ID from youth of color and women. Our data also show that young people of color, and especially Black youth, were considerably more likely than young whites to report that voter identification requirements influenced their decision not to vote. Finally, we report that the reason that youth of color are affected more significantly than young whites by voter identification requirements is because youth of color are less likely to hold most forms of ID—including

driver's licenses, birth certificates, passports, and college IDs. We also find significant gender differences in rates of ID possession. There are many reasons why people may choose not to turn out to vote, but enacting new laws that disproportionately affect particular populations should not be among them.

Moreover, these data underscore the importance of protecting the provisions of the Voting Rights Act that guard against states' interference with individuals' right to vote. In *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court is currently considering the constitutionality of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which requires states with a history of discrimination to receive pre-clearance from the Justice Department before implementing changes to their voting laws. As a result of this provision, new voter ID laws passed recently in South Carolina and Texas were challenged by the Justice Department and ultimately struck down due to the Department's finding that the laws would have racially discriminatory effects. Shelby County (Alabama) is arguing that this provision interferes with the ability of state and local governments to develop their own laws. However, the data presented here suggest that voter ID requirements passed by states do in fact have significant consequences for ballot access, particularly among youth of color. Protecting the ability of these populations to participate in elections as full and equal citizens should be a priority, and upholding the Voting Rights Act is an important step toward doing so.

Our data also provide empirical support for President Obama's interest in ensuring that "no citizen is forced to wait for hours to exercise the right to vote," as he declared in his second inaugural address. As anecdotes reported in the media have suggested, we find that long voting lines have disproportionately severe consequences for youth of color. Making it easier to vote is certain to increase voter turnout and enhance the representation of all voices in the electoral process.

## Methodology

The data for this project were collected by GfK Knowledge Networks. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish and was fielded between November 21 and December 5, 2012. The target population consists of non-institutionalized African American, Latino, and White adults residing in the U.S. and between the ages of 18 and 29. Households were sampled by KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel that is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. A total of 3,517 households were sampled, with a completion rate of 43.3%, yielding a sample size of 1,522 respondents.

Surveys were completed online. Households selected for the survey initially received an email announcing the availability of a new survey for them to take. After three days, email reminders were sent to those panel members that had not responded. Several days after that, panel members yet to respond were contacted by phone. Modest incentives were also offered to encourage participation. These procedures were followed until the desired sample size was achieved.

After the survey was fielded, the data are weighted so that the sample reflects the characteristics of the population of U.S. African American, Latino, and White adults between the ages of 18 and 29. These adjustments correct for any differences between the sample and the population that result from survey non-response as well as the oversampling of African Americans and Latinos. Demographic (i.e., gender, age, race/ethnicity, education, income) and geographic (i.e., census region, metropolitan area, primary language by census region) distributions from the most recent Current Population Studies were used as benchmarks in this adjustment.