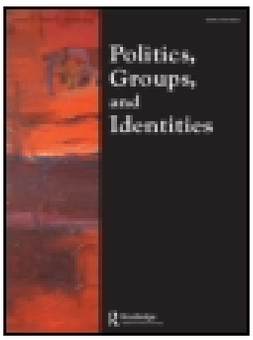

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Who is mobilized to vote by information about voter ID laws?

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ABSTRACT

Advocacy groups often work to educate the public about voting requirements following changes to election laws. These outreach efforts have the potential to mobilize partisan groups who consider the laws a threat to their party's electoral prospects. In the 2017 Virginia election, we partnered with an advocacy organization to conduct a field experiment evaluating the effects of the organization's outreach campaign. We randomized which registered voters were mailed one of three informational postcards providing details about voter identification requirements in place at the time in Virginia. Overall, the postcards had minimal effects on turnout compared to the no-contact control group. However, each version of the postcards significantly increased turnout among subgroups based on their underlying partisanship and/or vote-propensity. Democrats were significantly mobilized by postcards highlighting the potentially disproportionate impact of ID laws on demographic groups that traditionally support the Democratic Party, with approximately a two percentage point increase in turnout overall, and even higher increases among high vote-propensity Democrats. A simple, informational postcard, on the other hand, elevated turnout among low vote-propensity recipients by two percentage points. The postcard treatments did not significantly increase turnout among Republicans or mid vote-propensity registrants of either party.

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Photo ID; turnout; field experiment; mobilization; participation

The passage and implementation of photo identification (ID) laws across the United States has become a contentious issue. Public opinion on the topic has diverged along partisan lines, with Republicans generally expressing stronger support for ID requirements than Democrats (Gronke et al. 2019). Differential support for ID requirements between the parties is not surprising when election reforms are perceived to benefit one party while harming the other's electoral prospects (McCarthy 2019; Kane 2017). The gamesmanship and divisive, partisan rhetoric that is often associated with ID laws has the potential to mobilize Democrats who perceive identification requirements as deliberate attempts to hinder their participation in elections. In fact, exposure to frames highlighting the potentially negative impact of ID requirements on the turnout of groups aligned with the Democratic party has been shown to increase both anger

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(Valentino and Neuner 2017; Biggers 2019) and participation intentions among Democrats (Valentino and Neuner 2017). In this study, we evaluate whether exposing registered voters to information about photo ID requirements via postcard mailings affects participation rates.

Photo ID information campaigns are common and necessary when voting requirements change since large segments of the public are uniformed (or even misinformed) about the ID requirements in their state (Jones 2016; Stewart, Ansolabehere, and Persily 2016). State and local governments, political parties, candidates, and civic organizations engage in educational outreach when new voter ID laws are implemented (Bright and Lynch 2017). These outreach campaigns could mask potentially negative effects of voter ID laws if the campaigns effectively boost turnout, especially among the communities most likely to be disenfranchised by voter ID laws (Hopkins et al. 2017). Prior experimental evaluations of voter ID outreach campaigns have considered the effects of mail outreach exclusively on samples that have excluded high vote-propensity registrants in the 2012 (before photo ID) Virginia election (Citrin, Green, and Morris 2014), 2013 (before photo ID), 2016 and 2017 Virginia elections (Biggers 2019). Across these experiments, the overall effects of educational postcards were minimal, with the strongest treatment boosting the turnout of less participatory registrants by less than one percentage point (Citrin, Green, and Morris 2014; Biggers 2019). We extend this prior research by evaluating the impact of photo ID outreach on turnout among registered voters across the full spectrum of baseline vote propensities.

We partnered with the League of Women Voters (LWV) to test the effectiveness of a variety of informational messages delivered via postcard mailings to registered voters in the 2017 Virginia election. The messaging ranged from basic information about the photo ID requirement, to explicit mentions of the possible adverse effects for some demographic groups who traditionally support the Democratic Party. Our study enables us to examine changes in turnout overall and whether heterogeneity exists in the effectiveness of these messages by estimated turnout propensity and partisanship. As a preview, we find such communications have the capacity to mobilize voters, but not evenly across the board. The postcard treatments produced negligible changes in turnout among the full sample, but increased turnout among low propensity registrants and among Democrats, especially high vote-propensity Democrats, randomly assigned to a postcard treatment group. Only the basic informational postcard is associated with significantly higher turnout for low vote-propensity registrants, while all three treatment groups are associated with increases in turnout among high vote-propensity Democrats, two of which reach traditional levels of statistical significance.

Background and expectations

The Commonwealth of Virginia required all individuals to show a valid photo ID to cast a ballot in the 2017 gubernatorial election. Critics have warned that ID restrictions may reduce electoral participation by increasing the costs of voting for some individuals. Despite these warnings, scholars have yet to reach a consensus on the relationship between the implementation of voter ID laws and turnout. Some studies find that these restrictions have statistically insignificant and/or inconclusive effects on turnout (Grimmer et al. 2018; Erikson and Minnite 2009; Mycoff, Wagner, and Wilson 2009).

Others find that the laws have a disproportionate effect on minorities by increasing the turnout gap between white and non-white citizens (Hajnal, Kuk, and Lajevardi 2018; Hajnal, Lajevardi, and Nielson 2017). Still others find that ID restrictions reduce turnout among individuals who do not possess a required ID (Hood and Bullock 2012), with Democrats possessing the required forms of identification at lower rates (Hood and Bullock 2008; Rogowski and Cohen 2012; Ansolabehere 2014; Barreto and Sanchez 2014). The true effect of implementing voter identification laws, particularly photo identification laws, on turnout remains an open question, warranting further scrutiny (Burden 2018). This robust debate, as well as the difficulties of using observational data to evaluate the impact of voter identification laws on turnout, highlights the importance of conducting randomized experiments to shed light on aspects of the relationship between ID laws and turnout. Informational campaigns intended to inform the public about ID laws is one element that can be randomized.

Informational mail campaigns by state and local governments and civic groups are common following changes in voting requirements and may counteract the potentially negative consequences for turnout by simultaneously providing information on obtaining an ID and mobilizing citizens who already have the necessary identification. However, prior experimental evaluations of Virginia's more expansive voter ID laws (prior to photo ID) found that mail outreach designed to inform individuals of the newly implemented voter ID laws generally produced minor increases in turnout among low vote-propensity registrants (Citrin, Green, and Morris 2014). A parallel set of experiments conducted following the adoption of photo ID in Virginia also found minimal mobilization among low and mid vote-propensity, African American registrants (Biggers 2019). Other studies, however, suggest advertising campaigns educating the public about ID laws can mobilize registrants. A quasi-experiment in Kansas that featured an aggressive advertising and outreach campaign which included Douglas County providing information on photo identification requirements, providing photo IDs, and providing instructions on casting a provisional ballot following the adoption of the state's photo identification laws increased turnout by more than 2% (Bright and Lynch 2017). Similarly, Hopkins et al. (2017) observed a significant relationship between Department of Election mailings and turnout in their analysis of Virginia voters in the 2013 and 2014 elections.

Based on these studies, we expect informational interventions delivered by mail to produce minor increases in turnout overall. However, the existing literature suggests the mail campaigns could be more impactful for Democrats who often have a strong reaction to the implementation of voter identification laws (Valentino and Neuner 2017; Biggers 2019). In today's polarized political climate, partisanship is a potent social identity that can motivate participation in electoral politics (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Miller and Conover 2015), especially when partisans feel their group is threatened or under attack (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). Exposure to frames highlighting the intent of voter identification laws to suppress turnout among Democrats or demographic groups traditionally aligned with the Democratic Party can produce strong emotional responses, particularly anger, which has been shown to elevate intent to participate in politics (Valentino and Neuner 2017). Informational campaigns that draw attention to photo ID laws and groups that are negatively impacted (due their lack of required identification) have the potential to motivate Democrats, in particular, to

vote at higher rates on Election Day. This is not unlike the mobilizing effect observed among individuals targeted for removal from voter registration purges (Biggers and Smith 2020).

Our experiment is designed to test this hypothesis, although we concede our tests remain largely agnostic about the mechanisms that may give rise to any effects we detect. While we expect the largest turnout increases to be isolated to Democrats, we evaluate the effects of the informational campaign on all partisan groups. Republicans may not experience the mobilizing feelings of threat or anger upon receiving information about the state's photo identification requirements, but the informational interventions could mobilize these voters for other reasons. It is conceivable, for example, that Republicans, like subjects overall, could be responsive to the educational elements imbedded in the treatments or that reminders about Virginia's ID requirements may reduce perceptions about the prevalence of in-person voting fraud, which potentially mobilizes registrants. In addition to partisan differences, we further investigate treatment effect heterogeneity based on underlying turnout propensity. Some studies find voter outreach can exert heterogeneous effects by disproportionately increasing turnout among higher propensity registrants (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck 2014). In the sections that follow, we describe our experimental protocols, present the results, and summarize our findings.

Data and design

Our study is designed to assess differences in turnout rates overall, but especially among partisan subgroups, caused by random assignment to either a no-contact control group or one of three treatments groups that each received a postcard with information about the photo ID requirements in Virginia's November 2017 general election (described in more detail below). The study also included a post-election phone survey (see Endres and Panagopoulos (Forthcoming) for a description of the survey design and findings), which narrowed the eligible population of registered Virginia voters to those with a landline telephone.[1] Chism Strategies, a full-service, national voter outreach, strategy and survey research firm, provided us with a random sample of 28,000 Virginia registered voters with known landline phone numbers in October 2017. We limited our sample to one registered voter per household. In addition to the names and contact information needed to deliver the postcards, the vendor provided information available in the state's official voter file, including: age, gender, and turnout status in recent elections, as well as data-generated estimates for each registered voter's partisan affiliation and racial/ethnic group. Predictions of party affiliation and race are generally accurate (Igielnik et al. 2018).[2]

Sample characteristics

Each of the subjects in our study was randomly assigned to one of three treatment groups or to a control condition using block randomization based on age group, gender, 2013 turnout, and 2016 turnout. Regressing treatment assignment on available demographic variables and turnout history reveal balance across conditions.[3] Our sample is distinct from other experimental assessments of photo ID requirements because we include large numbers of high vote-propensity voters. In fact, a majority of our sample (53%

in each condition) can be classified as high vote-propensity registrants based on their participation in both the previous presidential election (2016) and the previous gubernatorial election (2013).[4] The sample, as shown in Table 1, also includes sufficient numbers of Democrats and Republicans to separately investigate turnout differences among each partisan group.

Experimental treatments

To implement a randomized experiment that replicated prior published work as closely as possible, we designed postcards to be similar to those used in earlier studies. To that end, we partnered with the LWV to design postcards with source cues that mirrored mailers used in Citrin, Green, and Morris (2014). Postcards were standard 4" by 6" postcards with an American flag background overlaid with informational text about voting in the upcoming election. The LWV logo and return address for the LWV's Education Fund appeared on each card (images of each postcard are included in the appendix).[5]

Table 1. Demographic characteristics for each condition.

	Treatment 1: Information	Treatment 2: Rights	Treatment 3: Away	Control
Democrats	.45 (.01)	.45 (.01)	.45 (.01)	.46 (.01)
Independents	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)	.08 (.00)	.09 (.00)
Republicans	.46 (.01)	.46 (.01)	.47 (.01)	.45 (.01)
Black Registered Voters	.14 (.00)	.13 (.00)	.15 (.00)	.14 (.00)
White Registered Voters	.71 (.01)	.71 (.01)	.70 (.01)	.70 (.01)
Latinx Registered Voters	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)
Age group 18–35	.18 (.00)	.18 (.00)	.18 (.00)	.18 (.00)
Age group 36–50	.19 (.00)	.19 (.00)	.18 (.00)	.19 (.00)
Age group 51–65	.32 (.01)	.32 (.01)	.33 (.01)	.33 (.01)
Age group 66–80	.24 (.01)	.24 (.01)	.23 (.01)	.24 (.01)
Age group 81+	.06 (.00)	.07 (.00)	.07 (.00)	.07 (.00)
Male	.47 (.01)	.47 (.01)	.47 (.01)	.46 (.01)
Turnout 2016	.83 (.00)	.83 (.00)	.82 (.00)	.83 (.00)
Turnout 2015	.40 (.01)	.41 (.01)	.41 (.01)	.41 (.01)
Turnout 2014	.55 (.01)	.55 (.01)	.55 (.01)	.55 (.01)
Turnout 2013	.55 (.01)	.55 (.01)	.55 (.01)	.55 (.01)
Turnout 2012	.78 (.00)	.79 (.00)	.79 (.00)	.78 (.00)
Turnout 2011	.38 (.01)	.38 (.01)	.38 (.01)	.38 (.01)
Turnout 2010	.52 (.01)	.52 (.01)	.52 (.01)	.52 (.01)
Turnout 2009	.47 (.01)	.47 (.01)	.47 (.01)	.48 (.01)
Turnout 2008	.72 (.01)	.73 (.01)	.72 (.01)	.72 (.01)
Turnout 2007	.34 (.01)	.33 (.01)	.34 (.01)	.34 (.01)
Turnout 2006	.53 (.01)	.52 (.01)	.52 (.01)	.53 (.01)
Turnout 2017 Primary	.23 (.01)	.22 (.00)	.22 (.00)	.22 (.00)
Turnout 2016 Primary	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)
Turnout 2015 Primary	.06 (.00)	.05 (.00)	.05 (.00)	.06 (.00)
Turnout 2014 Primary	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)
Turnout 2013 Primary	.05 (.00)	.05 (.00)	.06 (.00)	.06 (.00)
Turnout 2012 Primary	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)
Turnout 2011 Primary	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.04 (.00)
Turnout 2010 Primary	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)
Turnout 2009 Primary	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)	.09 (.00)
Turnout 2008 Primary	.02 (.00)	.02 (.00)	.02 (.00)	.02 (.00)
Turnout 2007 Primary	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)
Turnout 2006 Primary	.04 (.00)	.04 (.00)	.05 (.00)	.04 (.00)
N	6,996	7,000	7,006	6,998

Note: Each cell contains the mean with standard errors in parentheses. Variables are from the Virginia voter file. Party identification and race/ethnicity were modeled by the firm that provided the voter file prior to random assignment.

We varied the message content of the informational cues to reflect three broad themes. Individuals who were randomly assigned to the first treatment group were mailed an "information" postcard that reminded subjects of the upcoming election, encouraged them to vote, provided basic details about the photo ID requirement, and listed acceptable forms of identification (exact wording follows).

> **Please be aware that Virginia law now requires all voters to show an acceptable photo ID at the polls in order to vote.** Acceptable forms of photo ID include: Virginia DMV-issued photo IDs and driver's licenses; U.S. Passports; employer-issued photo IDs; student photo IDs from a college or university located in VA; photo ID cards issued by the federal, state or local government; and VA-issued voter photo ID cards. If you don't have an accepted form of identification, a free photo ID can be obtained from any voter registration office.

Individuals randomly assigned to our second treatment group, "rights" were mailed a postcard that included all the same text as the "information" postcard, but also detailed how to cast a provisional ballot (exact wording follows).

> **Know your rights**: If you arrive at your polling place without an acceptable form of photo ID, you will be given the opportunity to cast a provisional ballot that will be counted if a copy of your photo ID is delivered via fax, email, in-person submission, or through USPS or commercial delivery service to the voter registration office in which the ballot was cast *by Monday, November 13, 2017 at 12:00 noon*.

A third treatment group, "away", included all of the information featured in the "rights" version as well as a warning not to be turned "away" at the polls alongside a message explicitly noting that certain demographic groups are disproportionately impacted by photo ID requirements (exact wording follows).

> **Don't be turned away**: Many voters are not aware that they are required to show ID at the polls, and some studies show voter ID requirements disproportionately affect women, young people, the elderly, and communities of color. In the November 2014 election in Virginia, 474 people cast provisional ballots because they didn't have proper photo ID. *Unfortunately, voter ID laws are not always implemented properly, and many voters risk being turned away and denied their voting rights!*

Results

We proceed to examine the treatment effects overall and by partisan subgroups. Turnout rates by experimental conditions are presented in Table 2. Turnout among subjects in our study (60%) was notably higher than the official turnout rate for registered voters overall in the 2017 election (47.6%; Virginia Department of Elections), which is expected since more than half of the sample was classified as high vote-propensity. The treatments appear to have had little effect on the overall sample with turnout rates rounding to 60% in each condition, as shown in Table 2.

Some differences emerge when disaggregating the results by party. The "away" condition seems to have produced the largest shifts in turnout compared to the control. The turnout rate is higher for both Democrats and Independents who were assigned to the "away" treatment, with increases of 1.38 percentage points and 1.33 percentage points, respectively. The turnout rate for Republicans assigned to the "away" condition, however, was 1.71 percentage points lower than Republicans assigned to the no contact,

Table 2. Basic Experimental Results: Voted November 2017.

	Treatment 1: Information	Treatment 2: Rights	Treatment 3: Away	Control
Full Sample				
Proportion Voting	.599 (.01)	.597 (.01)	.604 (.01)	.600 (.01)
95% Confidence Interval	.588–.611	.585–.608	.592–.615	.589–.612
N	6,996	7,000	7,006	6,998
Democrats				
Proportion Voting	.569 (.01)	.574 (.01)	.590 (.01)	.577 (.01)
95% Confidence Interval	.551–.586	.557–.592	.573–.608	.560–.594
N	3,137	3,133	3,174	3,236
Republicans				
Proportion Voting	.680 (.01)	.666 (.01)	.662 (.01)	.679 (.01)
95% Confidence Interval	.664–.696	.649–.682	.646–.678	.662–.695
N	3,243	3,222	3,261	3,129
Independents				
Proportion Voting	.330 (.02)	.363 (.02)	.345 (.02)	.332 (.02)
95% Confidence Interval	.292–.367	.326–.400	.306–.384	.295–.369
N	616	645	571	633

Notes: Figures represent voting in the 2017 general election, with standard errors in parentheses.

control group. Turnout is also higher by 3.10 percentage points for Independents who were assigned to the "rights" treatment compared to Independents in the control group. We investigate these differences further using multivariate regression analysis.

We estimate the effects of each postcard on turnout using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions for the full sample and each partisan subgroup.[6] We regress turnout in the 2017 general election (1 = voted; 0 = did not vote) on indicator variables for assignment to each treatment group and available pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, and turnout in previous primary and general elections from 2006 through the 2017 primary election. The inclusion of pre-treatment covariates, in each OLS regression model, minimizes disturbance variability, which allows for more precise estimates of the treatment effects (see Gerber and Green 2012, chapter 4).

We expect all of the postcards, but especially the "away" postcard that explicitly mentions the disproportionate impact on Democratic leaning segments of the population, to have a stronger, positive effect on Democrats who are potentially angered by the existence of voter ID restrictions. Average treatment effects for each of the postcards (with 90% and 95% confidence intervals) are summarized and displayed visually in Figure 1 for the full sample, and conditional average treatment effects separately for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents (see supplemental appendix A for corresponding tables).

We begin by looking at the full sample, which is displayed in the top panel of Figure 1. It appears the treatments exerted negligible effects on turnout for the full sample. The estimated effects of the postcards among the entire sample ranged from −0.22 percentage points for the "rights" postcard to +0.41 percentage points for the "away" postcard. The remaining panels display the estimated conditional average treatment effects for each postcard separately for Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. The estimates suggest the postcards increased turnout among Democrats, had a negative (but statistically insignificant) effect for Republicans and exerted mixed results for Independents. However, only the effect of the "away" postcard is statistically different from the control group (for Democrats) at traditional levels.

The effect of the "information" treatment is minor and statistically insignificant for each partisan group, with a small increase for Democrats (+0.54 pp; $p = .55$, two-

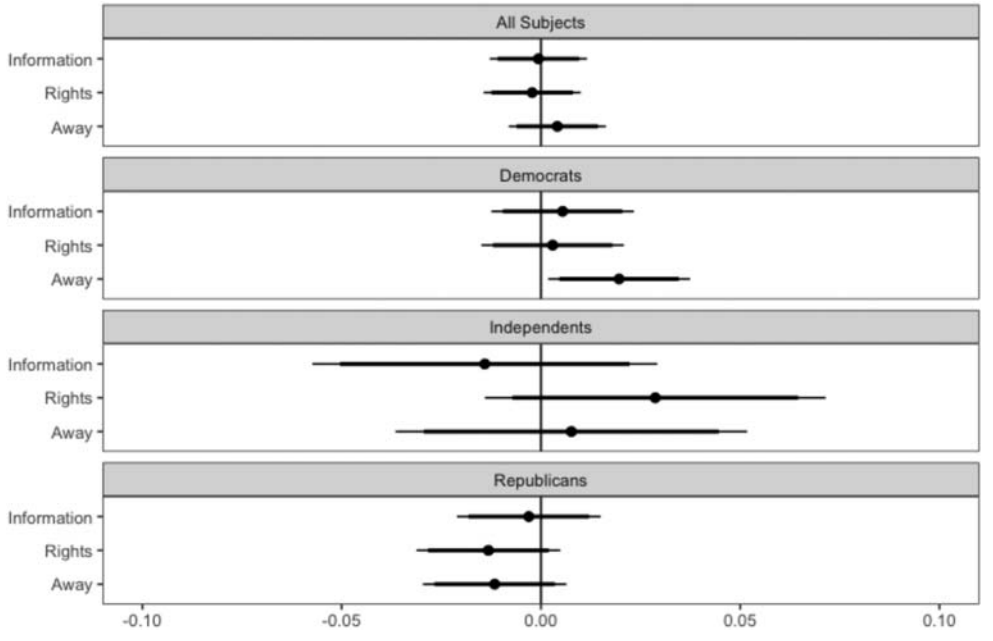

Figure 1. Average treatment effects of postcards.

Notes: The figure plots the coefficients from OLS regression model with 90% and 95% confidence intervals for the 2017 Virginia general election. Models include the following pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, and turnout status in previous general (2006–2016) and primary (2006–2017) elections.

tailed) and lower turnout rates among Republicans (−0.30 pp; $p = .74$, two-tailed) and Independents (−1.41 pp; $p = .52$, two-tailed). The "rights" postcard similarly exerted minimal effects for Democrats (+0.29 pp; $p = .75$, two-tailed) and larger but statistically insignificant effects for Independents (+2.87 pp; $p = .19$, two-tailed) and Republicans (−1.32 pp; $p = .15$, two-tailed). The estimates for the "away" treatment group demonstrate that the message alerting subjects to the disproportionate impact of ID requirements on some demographic groups exerted a statistically significant effect for Democratic recipients overall. Democrats, who were assigned to receive the "away" postcard were significantly more likely to turnout to vote, with an estimated treatment effect of +1.96 percentage points ($p = .03$, two-tailed) compared to the no-contact control group. Turnout among Republicans assigned to the "away" condition was not significantly different, compared to the control condition, noting that, if anything, it was lower (estimated treatment effect of −1.16 percentage points, $p = .21$, two-tailed). The "away" treatment exerted little effect on Independents (estimated treatment effect of +0.76 percentage points, $p = .74$, two-tailed). We further evaluate the impact of the "away" postcard for Democrats by comparing it to the "information" and "rights" treatments combined, since the "away" treatment is the only version that explicitly mentioned that "ID requirements disproportionately affect women, young people, the elderly, and communities of color." Our estimates show the "away" treatment increased turnout among Democrats by 1.57 percentage points ($p < .05$, two-tailed) compared to their counterparts who were randomly assigned to the "information" or "rights" treatment groups (see table A3 in the appendix).

We note the minimal effects, overall and for most partisan subgroups, are consistent with prior informational voter ID field experiment (see Citrin, Green, and Morris 2014). Further, the significant increase in turnout among Democrats randomly assigned to the treatment highlighting the potentially negative impact of ID laws on demographic groups associated with the Democratic Party is consistent with the findings from survey experiments documenting increases both in Democrats' anger and increases in Democrats' intent to turnout (see Valentino and Neuner 2017).

Heterogeneity analyses: results by turnout propensity

The effectiveness of campaign communications designed to mobilize can be conditioned by the recipients' underlying turnout propensities. Evaluations of prior experimental studies document the challenges of mobilizing low vote-propensity registrants compared to the more-responsive, high vote-propensity registrants (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck 2014; Malhotra et al. 2011). In less salient elections, mobilizing low propensity individuals can be an impediment for even more costly types of outreach (Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009) than the postcards examined in this study. Based on both the type of election (off-year) and outreach (postcard), we investigate heterogeneity by segmenting our sample by baseline turnout propensity, with the expectation that increases in turnout will be more substantial among high vote-propensity registrants. To maximize comparability to other photo ID studies that tested the effects of voter ID campaigns, we separately estimate the treatment effects based on turnout propensity. We classify registered voters as high vote-propensity using the same criteria as earlier studies (see Biggers 2019). Accordingly, individuals who voted in both the previous presidential (2016) and gubernatorial (2013) elections are considered high vote-propensity registrants. As noted in the "sample characteristics" section, high vote-propensity registrants comprise 53% of our sample. The remaining registrants are divided into low (did not vote in 2013 and 2016) and mid vote-propensity (voted in either the 2013 or 2016 election) groups.[7]

The conditional average treatment effects are shown visually in Figure 2, with regression tables included in the appendix. Results for high vote-propensity registrants are depicted using circles, mid propensity with triangles, while findings for low propensity registrants are displayed using squares. Each of the postcards significantly increased turnout, though, for different subgroups. The basic "information" postcard is the only postcard that significantly increased turnout among low vote-propensity registrants. It is associated with a 2.12 percentage point increase in turnout among low vote-propensity registrants overall ($p = .03$, two-tailed), an increase of 2.77 percentage points among low vote-propensity Democrats ($p = .04$, two-tailed), and a 2.42 percentage point increase among low vote-propensity Republicans ($p = .20$, two-tailed), as shown in Figure 2. The remaining postcards, "rights" and "away" did not significantly impact turnout among low vote-propensity registrants. None of the postcards successfully mobilized mid vote-propensity registrants – neither overall nor among partisan subgroups. In fact, the "away" postcard is surprisingly associated with a statistically significant turnout decline of 4.6 percentage points ($p = .04$, two-tailed) for mid vote-propensity Republicans.

The postcards do appear to have mobilized high vote-propensity Democrats, depicted by circles in the middle panel of Figure 2. Significant treatment effects were observed for

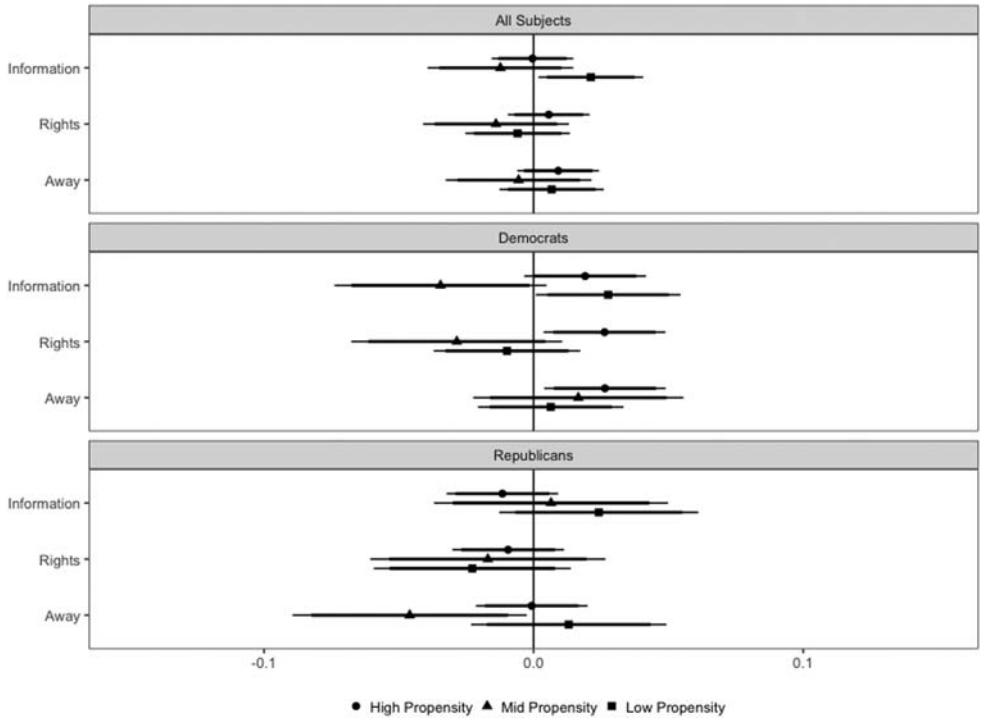

Figure 2. Average treatment effects of postcards by turnout propensity.

Notes: The figure plots the coefficients from OLS regression model with 90% and 95% confidence intervals for the 2017 Virginia general election. Models include the following pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, and turnout status in previous general (2006–2016) and primary (2006–2017) elections.

high vote-propensity Democrats, with two of the three postcards producing statistically significant increases in turnout. The "information" postcard exerted an average treatment effect of 1.91 percentage points ($p = .10$, two-tailed) for high vote-propensity Democrats. The "rights" treatment increased turnout by 2.63 percentage points ($p = .02$, two-tailed) for high vote-propensity Democrats, while the "away" treatment produced a comparable boost in turnout, with an average treatment effect of 2.65 percentage points ($p = .02$, two-tailed) for high vote-propensity Democrats. The postcards failed to increase turnout among high vote-propensity Republicans and the overall, combined sample of high vote-propensity registrants of any party.[8]

The positive and significant effect of the postcards for Democrats warrants further investigation. There is reason to believe that, among Democrats, African Americans may react more strongly (than white Democrats) to the implementation of photo ID laws due to the perception that these laws are specifically designed to hurt the electoral prospects of Democrats by limiting the participation of people of color. The possibility of a magnified effect among black Democrats was raised in prior studies (Valentino and Neuner 2017; Biggers 2019), but these either did not have sufficient numbers of black registered voters to evaluate group differences in turnout intentions (Valentino and Neuner 2017) or excluded high vote-propensity registrants from the study (Biggers 2019). With a sample of 3,390 black Democrats, we can conduct

additional subgroup analyses to estimate the treatment effects for both black and white Democrats.

Conditional average treatment effects for each of the postcards are summarized and displayed visually in Figure 3 separately for black and white Democrats by turnout propensity (see supplemental appendix A for corresponding regression tables). The upper panel plots the treatment effects for black Democrats, while the lower panel plots the average treatment effect for white Democrats, with both 90% and 95% confidence intervals. For both racial groups, high vote-propensity individuals are shown using circles, mid vote-propensity individuals are depicted with triangles, and low vote-propensity individuals with squares. Consistent with the preceding analyses, the "information" postcard only had a significant treatment effect for low vote-propensity registrants. However, the effect is only significant for low vote-propensity white Democrats, with an average treatment effect of 4.46 percentage points ($p = .02$, two-tailed). By contrast, the average treatment effect for low vote-propensity black Democrats was +0.76 percentage points ($p = .77$, two-tailed).

Significant effects for the "rights" and "away" postcard treatments are again limited to high vote-propensity registrants, with none of the postcards significantly affecting turnout among mid vote-propensity Democrats of either race. The most substantial increase is a 5.70 percentage point effect for high vote-propensity, black Democrats in the "rights" condition ($p = .01$, two-tailed). The estimated treatment effect for high vote-propensity, white Democrats in the "rights" condition is about half the size at 2.74 percentage points ($p = .06$, two-tailed). The "away" condition is associated with statistically significant increases in turnout for both high vote-propensity black and white

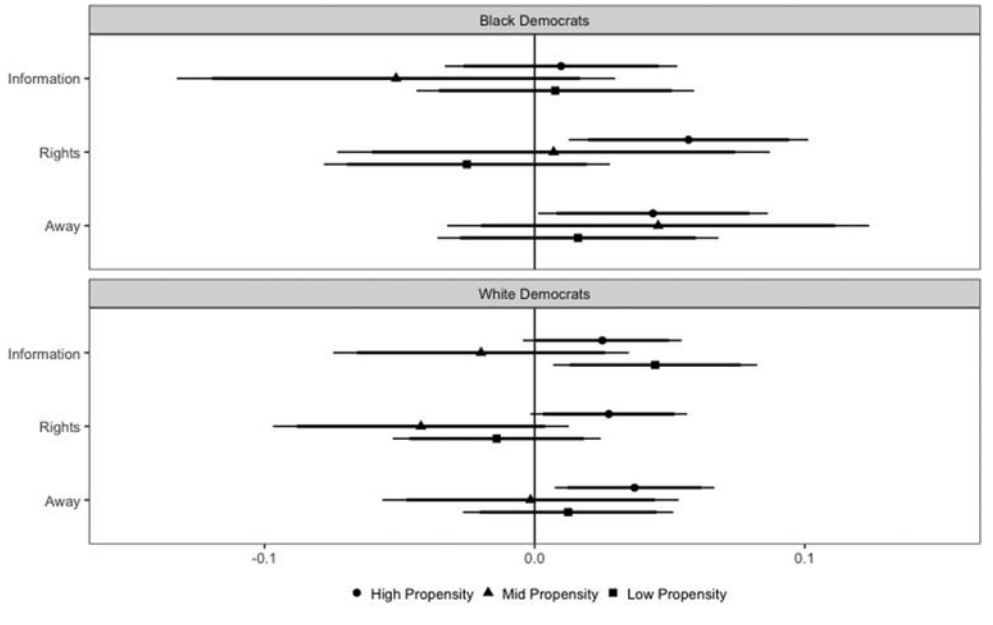

Figure 3. Average Treatment effects of postcards by turnout propensity and race.

Notes: The figure plots the coefficients from OLS regression model with 90% and 95% confidence intervals for the 2017 Virginia general election. Models include the following pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, and turnout status in previous general (2006–2016) and primary (2006–2017) elections.

Democrats at 4.38 percentage points ($p = .04$, two-tailed) and 3.70 percentage points ($p = .01$, two-tailed), respectively. The "information" postcards produced the smallest effects at +0.98 percentage points ($p = .66$, two-tailed) for high vote-propensity black Democrats and 2.50 percentage points for high vote-propensity, white Democrats ($p = .10$, two-tailed).

Discussion

The field experiment we describe in this study was designed to evaluate the effects of informational campaigns seeking to inform the public about photo identification requirements on voter turnout. Our study builds upon and extends previous work on this subject in several, principal ways. First, our study expands the experimental samples to include high vote-propensity registrants. Indeed, our results reveal differences in the estimated effects of the informational mail campaign based on vote propensity that prior studies cannot directly address due to the exclusion of more frequent voters. Our sample of registered voters also includes sufficient numbers of African American registrants for to us to explore the mobilizing effects separately for black and white Democrats.

Consistent with prior studies, we find that most of the informational postcards exerted minimal effects on turnout in the 2017 Virginia election overall. However, significant effects emerge when the sample is divided by partisan affiliation and turnout propensity. Among the full sample of Democrats, the postcard that explicitly mentioned the potentially adverse effects of the state's photo identification requirement on segments of the population who generally vote for the Democratic Party proved to be effective at boosting participation, with a statistically significant increase of 1.96 percentage points ($p = .03$, two-tailed) for Democrats compared to the no-contact control group and an estimated increase of 1.57 percentage points ($p < .05$, two-tailed) compared to the other postcard conditions. These postcard effects were magnified when separately considering the effects for high vote-propensity, black and white Democrats. Although limitations in our study preclude us from investigating the mechanisms that give rise to these effects directly, we contend this finding is consistent with arguments advanced in Valentino and Neuner (2017) that Democrats react with anger to electoral reforms they perceive target them and in turn express an intent to participate at greater rates.

The LWV communications evaluated in this study each appear to have mobilized some segment of the population, with the "information" postcard successfully mobilizing low vote-propensity registrants, and both the "rights" and "away" postcards increasing turnout among high vote-propensity Democrats. The effectiveness of any campaign communication is a condition of both the content of the message and the message recipient's underlying predispositions. While the study design allows us to identify which postcard messages resonated with each group, it does not allow us to confirm the mechanism. However, we can speculate that the mobilizing effect of the "information" postcard was limited to low vote-propensity registrants since the "information" postcard did not provide any "new" information for the more participatory registrants who had previously voted in a Virginia election that required a valid ID. The additional information about knowing one's rights and not being turned away included on the remaining postcards potentially provided new information for high vote-propensity registrants. Further, the "rights" and. "away" postcards may have convoluted or overshadowed the basic

informational message for low vote-propensity registrants by highlighting the more onerous process of casting a provisional ballot. In addition, any anger or other emotional response generated by these postcards could be limited to high vote-propensity voters since they are presumably more interested and invested in the electoral process than infrequent voters. While we speculate about these possibilities, we recognize that additional research is needed to explore these potential mechanisms more fully.

Overall, the evidence we uncover helps to reinforce findings that have emerged in the related, experimental literature on this topic, but it also reveals some differences that, taken together, imply some conclusions may be premature or subject to further scrutiny. Some of the novel features of the current study also facilitate more nuanced explorations. Subsequent experimentation is necessary to adjudicate open questions as well as to isolate the magnitude and pervasiveness of the information effects of voter ID laws on voting behavior with greater precision.

Notes

1. We acknowledge that restricting the study to households with a landline telephone results in a sample that is older and that votes at higher rates than households with only wireless telephones. Based on 2017 estimates, 52% of US adults live in wireless only households (Blumberg and Luke 2017). Although this design feature may constrain external validity, the estimated treatment effects it yields remain unbiased.
2. Most important for this study is estimates of which registered voters are Democrats. A recent evaluation of five firms found accuracy rates ranging from 65% to 85% for Democrats (Igielnik et al. 2018). The party estimates provided to us were highly accurate: self-identified Democrats were correctly predicted as Democrats 83% of the time and self-identified Republicans were correctly classified as Republicans 86% of the time among the subset who took our post-election survey.
3. Balance across treatment conditions is confirmed using a multinomial logistic regression model to predict treatment assignment based on pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, and prior voting history, which, as expected, is insignificant: ($X^2(75) = 48.28$, $p = .99$).
4. This high vote-propensity voter classification approach is consistent with prior studies of photo ID requirements. Biggers (2019), for example, considered individuals who had voted in both the 2013 and 2016 elections as high propensity voters and excluded them from his study.
5. We acknowledge that some subjects assigned to be treated may not have been successfully contacted, but reliable estimates of contact rates for direct mailings are unavailable. Thus, we report intent-to-treat effects throughout, noting these are likely conservative estimates of the treatment effects. Taking contact rates into account would only magnify the treatment effects we report (Gerber and Green 2012).
6. Results are substantively unchanged when running logistic regression models. Tables for both OLS and logistic regression models are included in the supplemental appendix.
7. We recognize that this classification system automatically relegates young registrants who were not eligible to vote in 2013 and/or 2016 to the low or mid vote-propensity groups. See Endres and Kelly (2018) for a discussion of voter turnout estimates and young voters.
8. We exclude Independents from Figure 2 due to the small sample size.

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