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New York Times  
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“Lower Voter Turnout Is Seen in States That Require ID.”

By Christopher Drew

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**Analysis**

This is another example of controversial headlines taking center stage, but there is little substance for the headlines to stand on. In this case the headlines imply that states are impeding the democratic process. This is followed up quickly by adding even more controversy, suggesting that minorities are being victimized more than others.

In reality, all legal voters are still allowed to vote, they just have to verify their identification. Furthermore, the policy is the same for all races. More importantly, the research upon which the statistics are based is weak and has yielded conflicting results. *The New York Times* has decided to publish these results even though the article admits that more research is necessary.

There are some obvious flaws with this research:

- First, it is based on a sample size of one election; the 2004 presidential election. There are numerous reasons why voter turnout might have decreased (including voter queuing) which have nothing to do with these identification verification policies, especially when the difference is only 3%.
- Second, the percentage decreases are never explained in this article. Was turnout 3% less than the previous election? less than the previous presidential election? less than other states during the same election? It is unclear what the data is being compared to.
- Third, the article provides some data that negates its whole claim: Of the only two states that require all voters to show photo identification (the most stringent rules), one of those had an increase in voter turn out since enacting the policy as compared to the prior election. This is not perfect data either because it compares a midterm election with a presidential election.
- Finally, the report does not tell how the percentage decreases have been tallied. Is that an average of all states with identification verification policies, or just those that have added them immediately prior to the last election? If it is an average, how many states, if any, had higher voter turnouts? Was weather a factor in any of these states? How does a single number take into account differences in policies?

Finally, this article completely ignores a huge issue. It admits that “requirements for photo identification have been hotly debated”, but it doesn’t address one of the central issues relating to that debate, which is verification that only legal voters cast a ballot. It is very possible that a drop in voter turnout could be the desired result of the ID policy. That is, fewer people may have cast a ballot because the policy prevented “illegal voters” (non-citizens, felons, etc.) from voting. That could also explain the large drop in Hispanic voters, an ethnic group that includes a relatively high percentage of illegal aliens. I am not asserting this is the case, I am only saying that it seems such an obvious question should be addressed.

The fact that the voter identification policy is hotly debated, coupled with the absence of any mention of one of the most relevant issues relating to the controversial policy, leads the reader to suspect that these weak, ambiguous, and poorly supported statistics are actually fueling the controversy more than they are providing information that will assist any meaningful assessment of the real issues.