

NATIONAL REVIEW

Stop Complaining about Voting-Law Changes

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Walter Olson, in a [recent post for the Cato Institute](#), writes about a study of the effects of changes in voting laws on turnout and on partisan performance. It turns out that changes in voting laws have virtually no effect one way or the other.

“That goes for (to name a few) the availability of mail and lockbox voting as an alternative to in-person Election Day voting, voter registration through motor vehicles offices, and the dropping of inactive voters from registration rolls,” Olson writes. It’s also true of voter-ID laws, which Democrats say will be used to suppress votes, and of felon-enfranchisement laws that Republicans say will help Democrats. The [study](#) is by political scientists Justin Grimmer of Stanford University and Eitan Hersh of Tufts University.

The recent example of Georgia is illustrative. The Democratic Party, with the media as an accomplice, accused Republicans of suppressing black votes, with [President Biden](#) comparing the state’s policies to Jim Crow. In the midterm elections after the reforms were enacted, Georgia set a [midterm-election-turnout record](#), and zero percent of black voters in Georgia had a poor experience voting, [according to a University of Georgia survey](#). Long-term black-voter participation in Georgia has been [steadily increasing for decades](#). And Democrats won the Senate election in the state while losing the gubernatorial election.

Of course, Donald Trump’s complaints about changes in voting rules having cost him the presidency are another example. Drop boxes and voting by mail are not schemes that help Democrats.

The one aspect of voting law that does affect turnout and results is whether local elections are held on the same day as federal elections. “Ironically, that particular reform has been the subject of hardly any national partisan controversy,” Olson notes.

Olson draws two conclusions from the research:

First, a clear implication should be “to lower the temperature [yes!] on election administration policies. . . . The media should not portray every change in an election law as a red-alert scenario that will determine future elections.” I’ve [argued that the most serious challenge to](#)

democratic norms is likely instead to come from a different direction, namely from some groups' refusal to accept as legitimate the outcomes of elections held in ordinary and regular form. Their second point is also on target: a turn away from the relentless search for partisan advantage should not mean setting aside these issues of election procedure as unimportant. It should instead mean seeking to resolve them on their merits. Getting election procedure right can have major benefits for administrative efficiency, voter convenience, detection of bad practices, speed of tabulation, and the restoring of public confidence in outcomes, to name only a few of its legitimate goals. Let's get on with it.

To which I'd add a third: Stop complaining about the rules and try winning over voters instead.