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*To understand the effects of changes in election administration policies and practices on voter turnout in the 2020 Presidential General Election, this paper compares voters to non-voters from the 2020 Cooperative Election Study Data (CCES). Using the Rational Choice Theory of Voting as a framework, we assessed the impact of eight unique voting cost variables (Voter ID Cost, Wait-line Cost, Voter Registration Cost, Transportation Cost, Absentee Ballot Cost, Voter Location Cost, Voter Qualification Cost, and Covid-19 Cost). We modeled the intentions of CCES Survey respondents and their perceptions of voter suppression on voter turnout at the national level. A combination of statistical models was used to assess the relationship of each of the voter suppression cost items to voter turnout in the 2020 General Presidential Election. On every measure of voter suppression assessed in this study, we found lower voter turnout among the targeted groups. In sum, evidence of voter suppression has been found in the 2020 Presidential General Election.*

**Keywords:** Voter suppression, election administration, presidential general election, voter turnout

## 1. Introduction

America's experiment with democracy has long relied on the ideals of equal rights, general suffrage, and majority rule (Daylight, 2015). Moving from ideals to reality has been among America's greatest challenges throughout its history. Amidst the most contested ideals has and continues to be the battle of the ballot. In their efforts to maintain political power, the powerful elites often employ a variety of tactics—policy, law, state and local administrative practices, and misinformation—to suppress votes, to silence voices and to curb the political participation of historically marginalized citizens such as the elderly, low-income, minority, and disabled (Wilder, 2021).

Voter suppression can broadly be defined as any actions of practice, policy or law that make it challenging or more difficult for people to vote. Historically in the United States, such practices have their roots in the U.S. Constitution of 1778, which extended the right to vote only to white male property owners. Like many forms of racial discrimination, voter suppression is multifaceted and often changes forms to achieve the aim of preventing targeted groups of people from voting—thereby reducing their participation in democracy. In a report published by the Brennan Center for Justice, voter suppression in 2020 took the form of “new restrictive legislation, discriminatory voter roll purges, long and closed polling places, voter intimidation and misinformation, and efforts to overthrow elections through litigation or by invalidating ballots cast by mail” (Wilder, 2021, p. 3). Voter turnout in the United States has been increasing over the years with surges in the 2018 midterm and 2020 general election (DeSilver, 2022). In voting research, polling data often has observations with an excess occurrence of one particular outcome: an individual performing the act of voting. In such research, there is an emphasis placed on the motivations and behaviors of voters and non-voters. As such research data on voter turnout are multimodal, and do not consider the distinct reasons behind the non-voting group (Jacobson, 2012; Medenica & Fowler, 2021). Non-voters cannot be all summarized into a single cluster. Using the data described by the 2020 Cooperative Election Study (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, & Luks, 2021), we review the statistics of the polled groups of participants, the empirical reasons of vote decisions, and discrepancies in the decisions. Such quantifications will help mitigate and present a unique perspective for inference and broader participation in the electoral process.

This article begins by highlighting key pieces of legislation and events that affect voting. A discussion is presented on Public Choice Theory and the importance of democracy and the ability to vote unhindered. Then, we explore the impact of voter suppression on voter turnout using Chi-Square Analysis and Logistic Regression Models.

## 2. A Brief History of Voter Suppression

The history of voter suppression tactics provides a useful frame for analyzing the contemporary struggles for voting rights. Before the Civil War (1778-1865), America's democracy was established and maintained by white male landowners. The U.S. Constitution initially contained specific language that excluded Blacks and other minorities from the voting process. This was the original form of voter suppression in the U.S., and it has effectively worked to limit targeted groups from participating in America's democracy.

After the Civil War (1870-1965), Blacks were granted the right to vote with the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. For a relatively brief period, Black men were permitted to vote and hold political office; however, the threat of the ascent of Black political, economic, and social power gave rise to public and private actions to suppress the Black vote. Legislators passed restrictive laws and groups like the Ku Klux Klan mobilized to intimidate Black voters with violence. The illusion of Black male inclusion in the political process quickly dissipated with the intentional efforts of law makers, election officials and police officers. Law makers codified Jim Crow Laws and practices such as literacy tests and poll taxes to restrict the Black vote; election officials became the front-line gatekeepers of the ballot; and law enforcement officers took on the role of intimidating Black voters (Ross & Spencer, 2019). Taken together, these measures were effective in preventing most Black people from voting from the late 1880s until the 1960s when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed.

Modern voter suppression laws and tactics emerged in response to the prohibition of explicit, intentional racial discrimination in voting. When literacy tests and poll taxes were outlawed, states shifted to other methods of voter suppression that, like Jim Crow Laws, were written to appear universal, but had clearly been designed to impact targeted groups with burdens to reduce their access to voting (National Archives, Voting Rights Act, 1965). From 1965 to 1982, state and local officials implemented laws, policies and practices to continue racial discrimination in voting in ways that did not rise to the level of violating the Voting Rights Act of 1964. These actions included, but were not limited to, gerrymandering, felony disenfranchisement, voter intimidation and threats of violence, and voter identification requirements (Friedman, 2005).

Since 1982, voter suppression tactics have taken the form of changing election administration methods, spreading disinformation (more recently with social media algorithms), reducing the number of polling places, purging voter rolls, and enhancing voter ID laws (Katz et al., 2005; Wilder, 2021). Voter suppression laws have been directly linked to lower voter turnout because low-income individuals, minorities and the elderly often lack access to the documents needed to secure government issued identification (Ross & Spencer, 2019). When the number of polling places are reduced, long lines result, and voters are discouraged from voting. When otherwise eligible, voters are removed from the voter rolls. Often without their knowledge or consent, they are more likely to be denied the opportunity to vote when they show up at a polling site (Hardy, 2020).

By 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court had removed the teeth of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 with its decision on the *Shelby v. Holder* case. The Supreme Court decision on *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013 shattered safeguards to prevent voter suppression. Shelby County, in Alabama challenged the constitutionality of Section 4 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act and argued that Section 2 offered sufficient protection for minority voters because discriminatory patterns did not exist anymore. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) requires permission to change voting procedures by the federal government when local and state governments demonstrate a history of discriminatory practices in relation to voting (Hauer, 2013). On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 4 of the VRA was unconstitutional which rendered Section 5 unenforceable. This section of the VRA is crucial to the enforcement of Section 5 because “section 4(a) of the Act established a formula to identify areas and to provide for more stringent remedies where appropriate” (The

United States Department of Justice, 2020). As a result, the identification and determination of jurisdictions that have engaged in discriminatory voting practices are not subjugated to the coverage formula. The provisions under Section 4 and 5 together would require jurisdictions that were identified under the coverage formula to get preclearance from the federal government to alter redistricting plans, pass voter ID laws, change polling places, or enact any voting-related procedures or laws (Persily & Mann, 2013). Once again, the federal government's power to intervene in state actions that amounted to egregious acts of voter suppression was nullified—similar to the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877 ending the reconstruction era.

Since 2013, the battle for voting rights has intensified with expansive voter suppression laws in states with a clear history of racial discrimination in voting. Understanding the connection between voter suppression laws and practices and voter turnout is important to the aspirational goal of creating a more democratic America.

### 3. Towards a Theory of Voter Suppression

From a scholarly perspective, “voter suppression” is defined as political interventions employed to restrict voter turnout in targeted groups (Hing, 2018; Overton, 2006). Political Scientists have developed a rational voter hypothesis (Downs 1957; Tullock 1967; Riker & Ordeshook 1968) that explores voting behavior using the concept of “the cost of voting” as an influential factor in determining whether an individual chooses to vote. Downs (1957) and Riker and Ordeshook (1968) developed a choice model of voting with their suggestion that voters engage in a cost/benefit analysis to reach a vote decision.

The utility model is represented in the following equation:

Vote if  $P \times B - C + D > 0$ , where

P represents the probability that an individual will cast a decisive vote in an election,

B represents the difference in benefits a person receives if his preferred candidate wins versus the benefits received if the other candidate wins,

C represents the costs associated with the act of voting, and

D represents citizen duty.

The decision rule on voting from this utility function is either: (i) vote if the cost-benefit analysis results in a value greater than 0; or (ii) do not vote if the cost-benefit result is less than 0. This model has also been discussed in Facchini and Jaeck (2019), and the equation was reduced to  $D - C$ , after dropping  $PB$ . The logic in that model simplification is that  $PB$  is close to null, since  $P$  is low, and the benefits of political actors are generally good.

According to Downs (1957), the benefits of voting (e.g., the satisfaction of civic duty, the sense of accomplishment, or the “streams of utility” from a candidate's policies) are often outweighed by the costs (e.g., the time and effort required to vote, the inconvenience of polling locations, or the

lack of information on candidates and issues). Under Public Choice Theory, the individual voter is assumed to behave rationally to advance his or her self-interest in the political arena, just as he or she would behave in the economic marketplace.

### **Public Choice Theory of Voting**

From a Public Choice perspective, individual voters are assumed to act in accordance with the Theory of Expected Utility. Under this approach, voters are expected to maximize their utility with their choice to vote or not. The cost of casting a ballot includes both objective and subjective factors such as the cost to register, transportation cost to get to a polling station, the opportunity cost of missing work, and the burdens of voter suppression tactics. Political scientists have identified voter restrictions such as gerrymandering as voter suppression tactics that discourage certain groups from voting (Biggers & Smith 2018; Neiheisel & Horner 2019; Piven et al., 2009). In more recent years, voter suppression methods have taken the form of Voter ID Laws, felon disenfranchisement, reduction of early voting options, and restrictions on registration (Brennan Center for Justice 2019; Manza & Uggen 2006; Overton 2006; Uggen & Manza 2002).

The potential benefits for voters when their choice candidate wins a contest are lower taxes, home mortgage interest tax deduction, more public services, more school choices, public transportation, health care, national defense, and countless others. Some challenges and limitations to voters under this choice model is identifying and assigning a value to the potential benefits of an election outcome because they are innumerable, unconcentrated, and only indirectly associated with the outcome of a given election.

Public Choice Theory suggests that restrictive voting policies and other voting suppression methods make it more difficult to vote by increasing the cost in terms of added time and effort to acquire documents or any other impediments. In short, the Public Choice Theory of Voting (Mueller, 2003) suggests that voter suppression tactics change the expected utility of the targeted groups by adding to the cost of voting thereby reducing their likelihood of voting.

This theory will serve as the basis for the analysis of this study. The study questions whether or not voter suppression tactics lead to lower voter turnout among targeted minority groups, specifically Black voters. We assume that in the absence of being confronted with voter suppression tactics, White voters are more likely to have higher expected utilities and would be more likely to vote.

### **Empirical Review of the Literature on Voter Turnout**

For decades, political scientists and elections scholars have studied voter turnout because of its importance to a well-functioning democracy (Aldrich, 1993; Blais, 2000; Downs, 1957; Gosnell, 1927; Ledyard, 1984). At the empirical level, researchers have explored a wide variety of factors that have been theoretically linked to individual-level decision making on political participation (Arceneaux, Gerber, & Green, 2006; Nickerson, 2008; Ramirez, 2005).

Cost-benefit factors tend to deviate voters from the electoral process. For some voters' monetary factors present a barrier, while others simply do not see the value in voting. Downs' rational choice

theory (1957) asserts that individuals are more apt to vote when the cost factor is less in comparison to the benefits anticipated from voting (p. 43). Restrictive voter ID laws, registration maintenance laws, lack of public infrastructure for transportation, long wait times to vote, absentee voting policies, lack of knowledge on polling locations, and voter qualifications create cost-prohibitive burdens that are both tangible and intangible (Downs, 1957; Wilder, 2021). In this regard, the lack of voter participation leaves a critical gap in electoral representation by denying millions a say in their government. Voting is crucial to our democracy, and any threat to it affects the democratic process of voting.

In the past few decades, the empirical literature on voter turnout has revealed that demographic characteristics influence voter turnout in significant ways. The empirical research is consistent: older, more educated, and wealthier individuals are more likely to vote than those who are younger, less educated, and have lower income levels (Pew Research Center, 2018). Similarly, race, ethnicity and gender also have been shown to affect voter turnout, such that minority groups and women tend to have lower rates of participation than men and white individuals (Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980; Leighley & Nagler, 2013).

#### **4. Voter Suppression and Voter Turnout Data: Empirical Studies**

Political scientists and election scholars have long taken an interest in studying the effects of voter suppression laws, tactics, and practices on voter turnout because such tactics have been shown to prevent eligible voters from participating in elections. Voter suppression tactics include voter ID laws, voter roll purges, the reduction of polling locations and early voting hours, and the enactment of strict voter registration requirements.

In the past few decades, some empirical studies have shown that voter suppression laws negatively affect voter turnout in significant ways. This body of research shows that voter ID laws have a disproportionate impact on minority and low-income voters because they are less likely to possess the required forms of identification (Barreto et al., 2019). Using six data sets collected between 2008 and 2014, Barreto et al. (2019) found that Black and Latino voters were less likely to possess valid identification documents than white voters. Given that they found the greatest racial difference in the rate of voter ID possession in the State of Indiana—the first state to enact a strict voter ID law in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—they suggest that such laws are politically motivated (Barreto et al., 2019).

With the more recent passage of strict voter ID laws that require a government issued photographic identification document to vote, scholars turned their attention to studies of the effect of these laws on voter turnout. Pitts and Neumann (2009) examined data from the 2008 Indiana General Election and found that of the 1,039 voters who lacked the proper identification at the polls, only 13% had their provisional ballots counted.

Using a similar method to study the effect of South Carolina's 2011 strict voter ID law, Hood and Buchannan (2019) examined data from the South Carolina midterm elections of 2010 and 2014 and found a negative effect on overall turnout, but no marked difference between Black and White voters. It is important to note that voter ID laws differ in content from state to state, and comparing the results from two elections in a single state might be too limited to detect racial variation in



voter turnout because there was a national decline in voter turnout over the same time frame, moving from 45.5% in 2010 down to 41.9% in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012, 2015).

When scholars examined the effects of Georgia's strict voter ID law, the findings were mixed. Hood and Bullock (2012) studied the voter participation rates among Black, White and Hispanic voters between the 2004 and 2008 elections and failed to detect any negative impacts of the strict voter ID law. Similarly, Gillespie (2015) in his more comprehensive study of Georgia (from 2000 to 2014) found an initial reduction in Black voter turnout after the passage of the strict voter ID law, but an increase in this turnout over time. Fraga (2016) suggested that the failure to detect an effect of Georgia's strict voter ID law on Black voter turnout could be explained by the increased motivation among Black voters to turnout for the election of President Obama in 2008 and 2012.

In their recent study of the effect of voter ID laws on voter turnout, Hajnal et al. (2017) found a negative impact on Black and Hispanic voter turnout. These researchers used validated voting data from the Cooperative Election Study to assess the impact of strict photo ID laws, using a cross-state comparison. They found that in states with strict voter ID laws, Latino voter turnout fell by 10.3 percentage points in general elections, and by 6.3 percentage points in primary elections; while Black voter participation fell by 1.6 percentage points in primary elections (Hajnal et al., 2017). In addition, they found support for the political motivation of voter ID laws in their analysis that showed that voter ID laws worked to the advantage of Republican voters and against left-leaning Democratic voters (Hajnal et al., 2017).

In light of the existing and current empirical literature on the impact voter of suppression on voter turnout, we seek to investigate the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Voter suppression is associated with the race of the respondent.

H<sub>2</sub>: The effect of voter suppression on voter turnout will be mediated by race, such that the negative effect of voter suppression will be stronger for Blacks as compared to Whites.

To examine the hypotheses proposed, Figure 1 conceptually displays the pathway of our analysis. We use voter intention as a filter because it represents respondents that stated in a pre-election survey that they intended to vote in the general election to assess the impact of voter suppression costs on voter turnout.

**Figure 1**  
*The Cost of Voting*



## 5. Methods

Using data from the 2020 Cooperative Election Survey (CES), we modeled the intentions of respondents and perceptions/experiences of voter suppression on voter turnout at the national level. To examine voter turnout, we used a validated measure from the CES study which means that each voter in our study is confirmed to have a record of voting in the November 2020 election (Ansolabehere, Schaffner, & Luks, 2021). Additionally, we restricted our analytical sample to respondents who stated that they intended to vote to capture perceptions and experiences of voter suppression. In this manner, we can eliminate cases where the absence of voting was due to a lack of voter motivation. Based on this logic, we assume that respondents who intended to vote as reported in the pre-election survey which is included in the CES but did not are more likely to be cases of voter suppression. The voter suppression variables in the data set are voter identification, long wait lines, voter registration, transportation, absentee ballot, voting location, voter qualification, and Covid-19.

Using the empirical literature on the effects of specific policies and practices on voter suppression as a guide, we created a set of cost items from the CES data to measure voter suppression in the 2020 General Election. For example, voter identification laws are often associated with voter suppression (Agénor et al., 2021). The survey responses concerning election administration issues were used to estimate respondents' experiences/perceptions of voter suppression for eight (8) distinct phenomena. The voter suppression variables (8 phenomena) in the data set are voter identification, long wait lines, voter registration, transportation, absentee ballot, voting location, voter qualification, and COVID-19. Each of the variables is dichotomous and a description of the measures can be found in the Appendix.

We recognize that assessing these “8” phenomena does not exhaust all possible types of voter suppression. We also acknowledge that survey questions cannot realistically capture the full complexities of voter suppression. Nevertheless, the data provide a good picture of the widespread perceptions and experiences of the respondents in relation to voter suppression. The distribution of responses on the “main reason for not voting” variable is consistent with other surveys on election turnout in 2020 (Fabina and Scherer 2022).

Data analysis was conducted using SAS Enterprise 9.4. Descriptive statistics of the sample were obtained for voters and non-voters of the 2020 General Election. Given the interest in voter turnout and the hypothesized racial effect of voter suppression on Black voter turnout, a combination of Chi-Square tests and Logistic Regression Models were used to assess the relationship of each voter suppression cost item on race, to assess the direction of such relationships, and to model the impact of any effects on voter turnout in the 2020 General Election.

### Chi-Square Test of Independence

The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to test the following: Statistical independence or association between two categorical variables: voter suppression cost items and race. We used the Chi-Square Test of Independence because it is suitable for analyzing the association between two categorical variables that have two or more categories or groups. It assumes that the observations are independent, meaning there is no relationship between the subjects in each group.

The hypothesis to test is,

$H_0$ : Variable 1 (voter suppression cost item) is not associated with Variable 2 (race)

vs

$H_1$ : Variable 1 (voter suppression cost item) is associated with Variable 2 (race)

The test statistic for the Chi-Square Test of Independence is denoted  $\chi^2$ , and is computed as:

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^R \sum_{j=1}^C \left( \frac{(o_{ij} - e_{ij})^2}{e_{ij}} \right),$$

where,

$o_{ij}$  is the observed cell count in the  $i$ th row and  $j$ th column of the table.

$e_{ij}$  is the expected cell count in the  $i$ th row and  $j$ th column of the table, computed as

$$e_{ij} = \frac{\text{row } i \text{ total} * \text{col } j \text{ total}}{\text{grand total}}$$

The quantity  $(o_{ij} - e_{ij})$  is sometimes referred to as the residual of cell  $(i, j)$ , denoted  $r_{ij}$ .

The calculated  $\chi^2$  value is then compared to the critical value from the  $\chi^2$  distribution table with degrees of freedom  $df = (R - 1)(C - 1)$  and chosen confidence level. If the calculated  $\chi^2$  value  $>$  critical  $\chi^2$  value, then we reject the null hypothesis.

### **Logistic regressions using the race variable with each of our voter suppression cost variables, and fuller models including race and all voter suppression cost items.**

Relationships between categorical dependent (response) and independent variables (covariates) are modeled using logistic regression (LR) models. LR models are the frequently used models to describe binary categorical responses. Given the values of the covariates, LR calculates the likelihood that a level of a binary variable is observed. Here we assume that the data  $(Y_1, Y_2, \dots, Y_n)$  are independent and that they follow a distribution  $Y$  which is a binary response variable with  $Y_i = 1$ , ( $i = 1, 2, 3, \dots, n$ ) for the presence of the characteristic and  $Y_i = 0$  for the absence of the characteristic of interest. We are concerned with the presence of a vote and absence of a vote for our research work. Suppose  $\pi_i$  represent the success probability of voting. Additionally, think of the collection of explanatory variables  $x = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_p)$  as being either discrete, continuous, or a combination of both, each  $x_j$  is a vector of length  $n$ , with  $j = 1, 2, \dots, p$ . So,  $p$  is the number of independent variables in our dataset or model and  $n$  is the total number of observations. Now we can write  $\pi_i$  as,

$$\pi_i = \frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \dots + \beta_p x_{ip})}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \dots + \beta_p x_{ip})}$$

We can also write  $\pi_i$  as,

$$P(Y_i = 1 | X = x) = \pi_i = \frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \dots + \beta_p x_{ip})}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \dots + \beta_p x_{ip})}$$

And the logistic function of  $\pi_i$  is known as,

$$\text{logit}(\pi_i) = \log\left(\frac{\pi_i}{1-\pi_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \dots + \beta_p x_{ip}.$$

Here,

$\pi_i$  = success probability (probability of having a vote for  $i^{\text{th}}$  response), where  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$ .

$\beta_0$  = intercept of the logistic model.

$\beta_i$  = effect of variable  $x_i$  on  $\pi_i$ .

$Y_i$  = binary response of  $i^{\text{th}}$  individual (presence or absence of a vote)

$x_{ij}$  = response of  $j^{\text{th}}$  independent variable for  $i^{\text{th}}$  individual. Where  $j = 1, 2, \dots, p$ .

Now, to use this model to predict Voter Turnout we need to estimate the parameters of the model. Although we can use the least-squares strategy, maximum likelihood is favored since it has better statistical properties for estimating  $\beta$ 's in the model. The number of  $\beta$ 's in the complete model and the reduced model are denoted by  $p$  and  $r$ , respectively. Then, the likelihood ratio yields a model test statistic as,

$$\Lambda^* = -2 \{l(\hat{\beta}') - l(\hat{\beta})\},$$

where  $l(\hat{\beta})$  and  $l(\hat{\beta}')$  are respectively the complete model's and the reduced model's log likelihoods. Here,  $\Lambda^* \sim \chi_{p-r}^2$ ;  $p$  and  $r$  being the number of parameters in the full and the reduced model, respectively. The full and reduced models are described in terms of the following hypotheses:

$H_0$ : none of the predictors are significant in predicting the response variable, here voting turnout/behavior.

$H_a$ : at least one of the predictors is significant in predicting the response variable.

Now, we have variables as,

$Y_i$  = voter turnout

$x_{ij}$  = all independent variables (e.g., **race, age, gender, education, income, employment, marital status**, and eight separate dichotomous variables that measure voter suppression.

Here,  $i = 1, 2, \dots, n = 61000$  and  $j = 1, 2, \dots, p$ .

## 6. Results and Findings from the General Election Analysis of 2020 Cooperative Election Study Demographic Data

We examined the demographic differences between voters and non-voters in the 2020 Cooperative Election Study data. As shown in Table 1, there are remarkable differences between these two groups, and most of these differences are consistent with the findings of other scholars who study the impact of demographics and voter turnout. An analysis of the sample data reveals that voters were older than 50 (Verba & Nie 1972; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980; Fabina & Scherer 2022), more educated (Verba & Nie 1972; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980; Fabina & Scherer 2022), tended to be in the middle income range (Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980;

Fabina & Scherer 2022), were more likely to be white (Verba & Nie 1972; Lien 2001; Masuoka 2006; Sanchez & Masuoka 2008; Fabina & Scherer 2022), and in a marital or domestic partnership (Kingston & Finkel 1987). One notable difference in our findings from those of previous studies is that female voters in the 2020 general election were more likely to vote than male voters (Fabina & Scherer 2022)—the opposite of a previous finding (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993).

**Table 1***Demographics of Voter Turnout*

		Percent (%)	Voter Turnout (%)	
			Voters	Non-Voters
<b>Age</b>	18-34	27.59	18.60	43.76
	35-49	22.92	21.80	24.94
	50-64	28.33	32.64	20.58
	65+	21.16	26.96	10.72
<b>Education</b>	Less< high school	03.25	01.74	05.97
	High school graduate	27.24	21.75	37.12
	Some college or less than 4 years	32.57	33.71	30.52
	4-year college degree Or Postgraduate degree	36.93	42.80	26.38
	<b>Income</b>	<\$20,000	15.12	10.97
	\$20K - \$80K	53.97	53.10	55.55
	>\$80,000	30.91	35.93	21.83
<b>Employment</b>	Full time	36.61	37.45	35.12
	Part time	10.45	09.66	11.88
	None	52.93	52.90	53.00
<b>Race</b>	White	72.34	77.63	62.84
	Black	11.40	09.22	15.31
	Hispanic	08.49	06.58	11.93
	Asian	03.00	02.08	04.65
	Other	04.77	04.48	05.28
<b>Gender</b>	Male	42.28	44.22	38.79
	Female	57.72	55.78	61.21
<b>Marital Status</b>	Partnered	52.91	57.19	45.22
	Single	47.09	42.81	54.78

To assess which factors were the most influential on voter turnout, all demographic variables were incorporated into a Logistic Regression Model. Table 2 contains the findings of this model of the 2020 General Election Cooperative Study. The results were consistent with the existing empirical literature on voter turnout. Respondents who were more likely to vote were: older respondents, those with more education and income. When the coefficients were examined, age appears to have the largest negative effect on turnout.

**Table 2***2020 CES General Election Voter Turnout Based on Demographics.*

	<b>Estimates</b>	<b>Odds Ratio Estimates</b>
<b>Race: Black</b>	-0.4918*** 0.0001	0.612
<b>Race: Hispanic</b>	-0.5103*** 0.0001	0.6
<b>Race: Asian</b>	-1.0737*** 0.0001	0.342
<b>Race: Native American</b>	-0.2755* 0.0361	0.759
<b>Race: Middle Eastern</b>	-0.228** 0.0141	0.796
<b>Education: Less than HS</b>	-1.5368*** 0.0001	0.215
<b>Education: HS Graduate</b>	-1.0228*** 0.0001	0.36
<b>Education: Some College</b>	-0.3297*** 0.0001	0.719
<b>Age: 18-34</b>	-1.9311*** 0.0001	0.145
<b>Age: 35-49</b>	-1.1897*** 0.0001	0.304
<b>Age: 50-64</b>	-0.4852*** 0.0001	0.616
<b>Income: Less than \$20k</b>	-0.5492*** 0.0001	0.577
<b>Income: \$20k - \$80k</b>	-0.2463*** 0.0001	0.782
<b>Employment: None</b>	-0.5492*** 0.0001	1.015
<b>Employment: Part-Time</b>	-0.0217 0.5445	0.979
<b>Gender</b>	0.0429* 0.0369	1.044
<b>Marital Status: Single</b>	-0.0238 0.2811	0.976

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Note. The reference group for the following are: White for Race, 4-year or Postgraduate Degree for Education, 64 or older for Age, \$80,000 or more for Income, Full-time for Employment, Male for Gender, and Partnered for Marital Status.*

Voter turnout for non-white respondents in this model was consistent with the empirical literature, all non-white respondents were less likely to vote than White respondents. The model included Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and Middle Eastern respondents as dichotomous variables in order of participation. All coefficients were statistically significant.

Of the three remaining demographic variables in the model, two were statistically insignificant (employment and marital status) while the third one—gender—offers the interesting finding that females were more likely to vote than males. This finding is among the most interesting because it contradicts the literature that suggests that women are less likely to vote because of the burdens of childcare and other household responsibilities. The positive turnout for women could possibly be explained by the issues of 2020, such as healthcare, national security, gun policy and education.

### **The Association between Voter Suppression and Race**

Table 3 is presented for Chi-Square Tests of Independence for Race and each of the voter suppression variables to assess whether there is an association in race among the population of voters represented by the CES sample respondents. To assess the direction of any relationship, logistic regression models were run using the voter suppression items as the dependent variable and race as the independent variable. An analysis was performed on eight (8) voter suppression (cost) items. We present both Chi-Square and Logistic Regression results in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Tests of Association (Chi-Square) & Direction of Relationships (Logistic Regression)*

	<b>Chi-Square</b>	<b>Model Estimate</b>	<b>Odds Ratio</b>
<b>Race by Voter ID Cost</b>	0.1009		
	0.7507		
Race: Black		-0.0729	
		0.8096	
Black versus White Odds			0.93
<b>Race by Wait-line cost</b>	7.9452**		
	0.0048		
Race: Black		0.6891**	
		0.0057	
Black versus White Odds			1.992
<b>Race by Voter Registration Cost</b>	18.5505***		
	0.0001		
Race: Black		0.3726***	

		0.0001	
Black versus White Odds			1.452
<b>Race by Transportation Cost</b>	1.7061		
	0.1915		
Race: Black		0.3299	
		0.1935	
Black versus White Odds			1.391
<b>Race by Absentee Ballot Cost</b>	21.9857***		
	0.0001		
Race: Black		0.8449***	
		0.0001	
Black versus White Odds			2.328
<b>Race by Voting Location Cost</b>	3.2436		
	0.0717		
Race: Black		-0.7409	
		0.0783	
Black versus White Odds			0.477
<b>Race by Voter Qualification Cost</b>	1.428		
	0.2321		
Race: Black		0.3863	
		0.235	
Black versus White Odds			1.471
<b>Race by Covid-19 Cost</b>	5.6109*		
	0.0178		
Race: Black		0.3338*	
		0.0184	
Black Versus White Odds			1.396

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Note.* In Race (White and Black) ‘White’ is our reference group and the reference group for all voter suppression variables are individuals that did not state having a problem with the voter suppression variables provided in the table.

When we considered the models that show significant associations between voter suppression and race, we note that most of the voter suppression variables were significantly associated with race, except for voter ID ( $\chi^2 = 0.1009$ ,  $p = 0.7507$ ;  $\beta_1 = -0.0729$ ,  $p = 0.8096$ ), transportation ( $\chi^2 = 1.7061$ ,  $p = 0.1915$ ;  $\beta_1 = 0.3299$ ,  $p = 0.1935$ ) and qualification issues ( $\chi^2 = 1.428$ ,  $p = 0.2321$ ;  $\beta_1 = 0.3863$ ,  $p = 0.2350$ ). Of all the voter suppression variables, the strongest effect size is offered by



the Voter ID suppression item (as assessed by Phi Coefficient values in the logistic regression model containing all suppression items and demographic variables). From Table 3 we see that the percentage of Black non-voters in the full U.S. population who reported long wait lines as the main reason for not voting was higher than the percentage of White ( $\chi^2 = 7.9454$ ,  $p = 0.0048$ ;  $\beta_1 = 0.6891$ ,  $p = 0.0057$ ). In fact, Blacks were nearly twice as likely as Whites to report long wait lines as the main reason for not voting in the 2020 general election (with odds ratio estimate  $OR = 1.992$ ).

While most of the voter suppression items were related to race in the manner hypothesized in this study, four models showed somewhat contradictory results. We assessed the effects of location issues using two distinct items: those respondents who reported voting location as the main reason for not voting and those respondents who reported that voting location was a problem when they tried to vote. In both cases Blacks were less likely to report voting location as an issue (about half as likely in each case). For the items Voter ID, transportation, and voter qualification, we were unable to reject the null hypotheses under the Chi-Square Tests of equal percentages of Blacks and Whites in the U.S. Population who reported these items as the main reason for not voting.

### The Association between Voter Suppression and Voter Turnout

Table 4 displays the results from a logistic regression model designed to assess the impact of eight (8) voter suppression items from this study—voter ID, wait line, registration, absentee ballot, Location, qualification, and Covid-19. All items are statistically significant and negative, thereby supporting the second hypothesis of this study. The size of the coefficients for these variables is small, but they are statistically significant in all cases. In elections, all votes matter—so that the small size of these coefficients has some impact on turnout. The coefficients for Black respondents were negative and statistically significant, showing that a Black respondent was less likely to vote compared to a white respondent.

**Table 4**

*2020 CES General Election Voter Turnout Model Based on Black Voters*

	Estimates	Odds Ratio Estimates
<b>Race: Black</b>	-0.7822*** 0.0001	0.457
<b>Voter ID Costs</b>	-4.6773*** 0.0001	0.009
<b>Long Wait Line Costs</b>	-3.3731*** 0.0001	0.034
<b>Voter Registration Costs</b>	-3.8227*** 0.0001	0.022
<b>Voter Transportation Costs</b>	-5.3883*** 0.0001	0.005
<b>Absentee Ballot Costs</b>	-3.7906*** 0.0001	0.023
<b>Voting Location Costs</b>	-4.7850***	0.008

	0.0001	
<b>Voter Qualification Costs</b>	-3.1588***	0.042
	0.0001	
<b>Covid-19 Costs</b>	-4.5098***	0.011
	0.0001	

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Note. In Race (White and Black) ‘White’ is our reference group and the reference group for all voter suppression variables are individuals that did not state having a problem with the voter suppression variables provided in the table.

Table 5 shows the results of a logistic regression model that includes all the voter suppression variables and race, and all variables are statistically significant. Furthermore, Table 5 shows the odds of voting in estimated turnout based on the race of the respondent. If the theory that Black voters respond differently to changes in voting cost imposed by voter suppression tactics, then we would expect the odds of voter turnout for Black voters to be less than that of white voters. As Table 5 shows, the odds ratio estimates for each of the variables in the model are less the 1, except for gender. Surprisingly, the odds ratio for voter ID had the lowest value (OR = 0.008). In our Chi-Square Analysis of this cost factor, we did not find a racial difference in reporting voter ID as the main reason for not voting; however, when Black voters cited voter ID as an issue, they were the least likely to vote. Similar to this finding is the result for the voter location variable. When we examined this cost factor using a Chi-Square Test, we did not find statistically significant differences between Black and white voters; however, the results in the logistic regression model show that when a Black voter did experience a voter location issue, they were less likely to vote than white voters (OR = 0.008). Among those Black who were the least likely to vote in the 2020 General Election were those who reported Voter ID Costs (OR = 0.009). Overall, Black voters in this election were a little more than half as likely to vote as white voters (OR = 0.457).

**Table 5**  
*2020 CES General Election Voter Turnout Model*

	Estimates	Odds Ratio Estimates
<b>Race: Black</b>	-0.5118***	0.599
	0.0001	
<b>Race: Hispanic</b>	-0.5283***	0.59
	0.0001	
<b>Race: Asian</b>	-1.0614***	0.346
	0.0001	
<b>Race: Native American</b>	-0.3279**	0.72
	0.0137	

<b>Race: Middle Eastern</b>	-0.2213*	0.801
	0.0205	
<b>Education: Less than HS</b>	-1.4841***	0.227
	0.0001	
<b>Education: HS Graduate</b>	-0.9836***	0.374
	0.0001	
<b>Education: Some College</b>	-0.3112***	0.733
	0.0001	
<b>Age: 18-34</b>	-1.9125***	0.148
	0.0001	
<b>Age: 35-49</b>	-1.1543***	0.315
	0.0001	
<b>Age: 50-64</b>	-0.4527***	0.636
	0.0001	
<b>Income: Less than \$20k</b>	-0.486***	0.615
	0.0001	
<b>Income: \$20k - \$80k</b>	-0.2363***	0.79
	0.0001	
<b>Employment: None</b>	0.0354*	1.036
	0.1683	
<b>Employment: Part-Time</b>	-0.0255	0.975
	0.484	
<b>Gender</b>	0.0639**	1.066
	0.0024	
<b>Marital Status: Single</b>	-0.0181	0.982
	0.4235	
<b>Voter ID Costs</b>	-4.889***	0.008
	0.0001	
<b>Long Wait Line Costs</b>	-2.4301***	0.088
	0.0001	
<b>Voter Registration Costs</b>	-3.4386***	0.032
	0.0001	
<b>Voter Transportation Costs</b>	-3.4741***	0.031
	0.0001	
<b>Absentee Ballot Costs</b>	-4.1702***	0.015

	0.0001	
<b>Voting Location Costs</b>	-4.0259***	0.018
	0.0001	
<b>Voter Qualification Costs</b>	-3.2514***	0.039
	0.0001	
<b>Covid-19 Costs</b>	-3.2326***	0.039
	0.0001	

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$

*Note.* In Race (White and Black) ‘White’ is our reference group and the reference group for all voter suppression variables are individuals that did not state having a problem with the voter suppression variables provided in the table. Demographic variables have the same reference level as Table 2.

### Synthesis of the Analyses

The cost of voting has major implications for our democracy. Blais et al. (2019) conducted a study on the cost of voting and found that most citizens do not perceive voting as costly and that information and decision costs are more important than the direct costs of voting. The voter suppression tactics that we examined are costs that impact the voter turnout. Next, we take a closer look at how voter suppression hinders the ability or willingness of the respondents in the CES survey to vote in the 2020 General Election.

#### *Voter Identification Costs*

Voter ID laws refer to legislation that requires voters to show an identification document at the polls on election day. Proponents argue that the law is necessary to prevent the widespread phenomenon of fraud that can distort electoral results and undermine confidence in democracy (Hajnal et al., 2017, 364). Advocates of the law struggle to find incidents of voter fraud (Davidson, 2009, p. 93). Thus, voter ID laws address a problem that is either non-existent or so rare that there is little to no evidence of the law’s practical use. The United States Accountability office (2014) reviewed a series of studies and found that 5 of the ten studies reviewed indicate ID requirements did not indicate a notable impact on voter turnout, and one study showed voter turnout surged dramatically.

A Chi-Square Test of Independence (Table 3) was performed to examine the relationship between race and voter identification. Our results indicate that there is not a statistically significant relationship between race and voter identification, ( $\chi^2=0.1009$ ,  $p=.7507$ ). This result was further confirmed when we performed a logistic regression with voter identification as the dependent variable and race as the independent variable to assess the direction of the relationship ( $\beta_1 = -0.0729$ ,  $p=.8096$ ). We also performed a logistic regression and found statistical significance using voter intention as a filter with voter turnout as the dependent variable on all our voter suppression variables among Black and White voters (Table 4). We found that of the Black respondents who intended to vote, they were less likely to vote if they had a problem with voter identification with 0.009 times more than white voters when all our voter suppression variables are present. Similarly, we performed another logistic regression among respondents that intended to vote using voter turnout as the dependent variable with all our demographic variables (Table 5) and found with

statistical significance that problems with voter identification decreases voter turnout among the respondents that intended to vote, ( $\beta_1 = -4.889$ ,  $p = .0001$ ).

Our findings demonstrate that voter identification laws can serve as a barrier to voting. Kuk et al. (2022) analyzed official voter turnout data from 2012 to 2016 and found that gaps in voter turnout between racially diverse and non-diverse counties grew as states enacted strict voter identification laws. The implementation of strict voter identification laws caused many problems for voters and election administrators which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic in the 2020 election (Wilder, 2021). As a result, the people that were the most affected and burdened were individuals who were low income and minorities.

### *Long Wait Lines Costs at Voting Precincts*

Eligible voters should have equal and convenient access to voting precincts. Long wait times result in line abandonment and undermines confidence in the electoral process. Racial disparities in wait times for African Americans has been documented through self-reported and observational data (Chen, Haggag, Pope, & Rohla, 2019; Stewart & Ansolabehere, 2015). Pettigrew (2017) examined long wait times and compared voting behavior between the November 2012 election and the November 2014 midterm election and found that voters that had longer than average wait times in 2012 were less likely to vote in 2014 than people that had an average wait time of less than 15 minutes.

A Chi-square test of independence (Table 3) was performed to examine the relationship between race and long wait times. Our results indicate that there is a statistically significant relationship between race and long wait lines, ( $\chi^2 = 7.9452$ ,  $p = .0048$ ). Upon further examination, we ran a logistic regression (Table 3) with long wait lines as the dependent variable and race as the independent variable to determine the direction of the relationship and found Black voters do indeed experience long wait lines, ( $\beta_1 = 0.6891$ ,  $p = .0057$ ). We then performed a logistic regression using vote intention as a filter with voter turnout as the dependent variable and all our voter suppression variables (Table 4). We found that of the people who intended to vote, Black respondents were less likely to vote if they experienced long wait lines, ( $\beta_1 = -3.3731$ ,  $p = .0001$ ). When we modeled voter turnout with our demographic variables and all the voter suppression variables (Table 5), the impact of long wait lines among individuals who intended to vote was also great among non-voters, ( $\beta_1 = -2.4301$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ).

On election day in 2020, some states had technical and wireless Internet connection difficulties, equipment malfunctions, and limited numbers of polling places and voting machines in communities of color (Wilder, 2021). These issues created long wait times on the day of election. Our findings indicate that long wait times hindered the ability of people to vote in the November election of 2020 (Table 5).

### *Voter Registration Costs*

Voter registration maintenance laws have played a recent role in discriminatory practices. Georgia, Missouri, Texas, and Ohio have had cases brought against them for engaging in purging voter registration lists through discriminatory means. Although there are laws to prevent ineligible individuals from voting, many times eligible voters are removed from state registration lists. Purging voter registration lists disenfranchises voters because they have to make time to re-

register. Some eligible voters risk their vote not being counted when they show up to the poll and find out their name was purged from the state registration list (Hardy, 2020).

Our results indicate that problems with voter registration had a significant impact on Black respondents. Black voters encountered a problem with voter registration 1.452 times more compared to White voters (Table 3). Of the Black respondents who intended to vote (Table 4), the problems with voter registration led to a decrease in voter turnout for Black individuals, ( $\beta_1 = -3.8227$ ,  $p=0.0001$ ). Moreover, the cost of voter registration problems had a great impact on our population of registered voters who intended to vote, ( $\beta_1 = -3.4386$ ,  $p= 0.0001$ , Table 5).

In March and April of 2020, voter registration rates declined while government offices were closed, and voter registration drives were paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Wilder, 2021). These circumstances could explain why people who intended to vote did not take the initiative to vote in the November election.

### *Transportation Costs*

Insufficient public infrastructure is considered a form of voter suppression. States or localities can suppress the vote by placing polling places in inaccessible or inconvenient areas (Stambaugh, 2019). The most vulnerable populations that are affected by transportation issues are low-income individuals, the elderly, people with disabilities, and Native Americans. During the 2020 election, polling precinct closures presented challenges for individuals that did not have transportation. The people that were the most afflicted were individuals that lived in rural areas. In Texas, the availability of ballot drop-off locations was limited in diverse large counties and created additional burdens for people that did not have access to a vehicle or public transportation (Wilder, 2021).

Surprisingly, we did not find transportation to be a significant barrier among Black respondents when we examined voters who had an issue with transportation (Table 3). However, of the Black respondents who intended to vote, they were less likely to vote if they experienced a transportation issue with an odds ratio of .005 (Table 4). The cost of transportation for the whole population of this study is significant, ( $\beta_1 = -3.4741$ ,  $p=0.0001$ , Table 5). The findings in this study suggest that the logistical challenges of finding transportation prevented people from voting.

### *Absentee Ballots Costs*

Absentee ballots provide a convenient way to vote, especially when voters are not able to attend a voting precinct on election day. Currently, 27 states offer “no excuse” absentee voting, 8 states automatically mail ballots because they conduct elections completely by mail, and 17 states require an excuse to vote absentee (NCSL, 2022). In the aftermath of the November 2020 election, many Republicans believed that the election was stolen on the premise that absentee voting was prone to widespread fraud (Watts, 2021).

Our findings indicate that of all the voter suppression variables that we examined, Black respondents were impacted the most by absentee ballots. This means that when Black respondents requested an absentee ballot, they did not receive one and the odds of a Black voter experiencing this problem is 2.328 more times compared to White voters (Table 3). Although Black voters experienced issues with absentee ballots at a higher rate than White voters, the impact was also significant when examining voter turnout among minority voters, ( $\beta_1 = -4.1702$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 5). This finding speaks to the notion of Black voter resiliency.

There have been documented cases of suppressive practices in relation to processing and denying mail ballots among racial groups. For instance, in Georgia, the mail ballots of Latinos and Asians were rejected at twice the rate of Whites (Chen & Knapp, 2021). Although we do not examine the relationship between voter turnout and the denial of absentee ballots, our findings indicate that individuals were prevented from voting because they did not receive an absentee ballot (Table 5).

### *Voting Location Costs*

Relocating or closing voting precincts is correlated to low voter turnout. The closure of voting locations typically occurs in low income, African American, Latinx, and university communities (Portillo, Bearfield, & Riccucci, 2021). We did not find great differences among Black and White voters experiencing a problem with voting location (Table 3). However, when we examined voting location costs among all our voter suppression variables, we found that it is a significant burden among Black respondents who intended to vote ( $\beta_1 = -4.7850$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 4). Furthermore, the impact of having problems with voter location is also great among all minorities who intended to vote, ( $\beta_1 = -4.0259$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 5).

### *Voter Qualification Costs*

The ability to vote in federal and state elections is determined by citizenship, residency requirements, age, and voter registration. In contrast, non-citizens and permanent legal residents cannot vote. There is variation among state rules in terms of whether people with felony convictions can vote. We did not find any differences between White and Black voters in relation to voter qualification which means that respondents tried to vote, but they were not allowed because they were not qualified to vote (Table 3). Although there were not any differences in race, voter qualification did have an impact on voter turnout among Black respondents, ( $\beta_1 = -3.1588$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 4). Not surprisingly, voter qualification issues greatly impact all respondents in our model, ( $\beta_1 = -3.2514$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 5).

### *Covid-19 Costs*

The Covid-19 crisis created physical and material costs to voters which resulted in anxiety and perceptions of risks that impact voter turnout (Dryhurst et al., 2020). Our results indicate that Black respondents were more likely to experience COVID-19 costs 1.4 times more than White voters (Table 3). Of the Black respondents who intended to vote, the fear of being exposed to Covid-19 contributed to a decrease in voter turnout, ( $\beta_1 = -4.5098$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 4). Likewise, Covid-19 fears contributed to low voter turnout among our population of voters, ( $\beta_1 = -3.2326$ ,  $p=.0001$ , Table 5).

To summarize the findings from the analysis of the association between race and voting costs and the association between voting costs and voter turnout, we find support for the theory of voter suppression outlined earlier. In most cases, we find evidence confirming previous analysis of voting behavior—Black Voters who experience higher voting cost via voter suppression tactics tend to turn out less than other groups (wealthier people, men, and whites). Among the most important findings is the support for the hypothesis on the mediating effects of race in the voting

cost models. Among those voters who reported experiencing voter ID costs, such costs depressed turnout among Black Voters. In fact, in the set of findings discussed, Black Voters had lower turnout. The first possible explanation is because Black Voters might be more likely to be constrained by fewer resources, and such voters tend to have lower turnout. Another explanation is the opportunity cost of voting. As the cost of voting increases with voter suppression, Black respondents are less likely to be able to overcome this cost and are less able to vote in an election. For example, Blacks could have greater time constraints, such as working for hourly wages and not being able to leave work during regular voting hours, thereby making voting less practical as costs increase.

Among the interesting findings of this study is that Black Voters were no more likely to report Voter Transportation or Voter Location Costs as a reason for not voting, as shown in Table 3. One possible explanation for this could be because Blacks have traditionally higher levels of group consciousness than some other racial minority groups (Verba & Nie 1972), and they are being mobilized to vote in ways that counteract the effects of increasing voting costs. For example, when election officials change voting locations, Black Churches might respond by using their vehicles to transport Black Voters to the polls.

Also of interest is the finding that registration costs affect Black Voters more often than white voters. When they are exposed to these costs Blacks are less likely than white to vote. This finding might be less surprising if voter registration is viewed as an information cost to voting. As such, it would require that voters seek out knowledge in advance of an election and plan to participate. Some voters are more knowledgeable than others and better able to overcome this cost. This could very well be another example of the opportunity cost in turning out to vote. Those individuals with more life advantages may be less aware of this cost or better able to overcome it and turn out to vote.

## 7. Discussion

In the previous sections, the relationships among various forms of voter suppression, race, and voter turnout were examined. The assumption that voter suppression contributes to the cost of voting in ways that contribute to the intractability of the race gap in voter turnout is grounded in foundational literature linking institutional racism to voter behavior (Shook et al., 2020). In the context of this study, the construct of race is not presumed to capture any genetic or biological factor that contributes to Blacks placing a lower value on political participation relative to whites. Instead, it is assumed to be a purely social construct, produced within a society that prioritizes certain demographic characteristics over others, subjecting Black citizens to experiences that reduce their likelihood of political participation.

While the debate over the impact of voting policies on minority voter turnout continues, it would be naïve to think that such policies are not racialized—meaning that the way they are implemented and the people that are targeted are directly related to the racial threat that some whites hold about the growing population of non-whites. The weight of the evidence presented here shows that perceptions of voter suppression and experiences with election administrative practices make it harder for some people to vote—and often those who are prevented from voting are Black or



Brown. Such inequalities in access to the ballot run counter to the democratic value of the right to vote and relate it to being yet another unearned privilege based on race.

Voter suppression cost items predicted racial disparities in voter turnout in the full logistic regression model, all with negative associations. The results for the general election turnout model indicate that Black voters are less likely to overcome changes in election administration practices and this affects their ability to turnout to vote. The cost of voter identification appears to affect Black voters in more burdensome ways. This could be an example of the interactive effects of institutional racism on citizens of color. Complying with voter identification laws requires interaction with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) which can be oppressively burdensome not only because of the financial cost to renew a license, but also due the limited hours of operation—similar to the limited hours of polling places. Navigating the time constraints imposed across multiple civic institutions are more costly to hourly-paid workers than salaried workers since the former requires taking unpaid time off from work while that latter does not. In addition, the barrier of the cost of owning and insuring a car could deter some people from securing a driver's license—the most commonly acceptable form of identification for complying with voter identification laws. Previous literature (Parson & McLaughlin, 2007) reported that African Americans are half as likely to have a driver's license as Whites. As a result, voter ID laws are more likely to affect Black citizens. When the cumulative effects are considered—the burdens of interacting with public institutions that are less responsive to the needs of citizens of color, and the personal insult of being turned away from voting at the polls for lacking an ID—a psychic cost burden could be triggered.

Each of the voting cost items in the general election turnout models indicates something unique about the pathways of voter suppression. Voting wait time could very well be the result of election officials reducing election-related resources in minority neighborhoods (Pettigrew, 2017). Such disinvestments produce unequal cost burdens on potential voters because the opportunity cost of paid work, childcare, or rest time is likely higher for Black Voters than for White voters. This scenario illuminates the direct pathway between an individual's exposure to voter suppression and voter turnout and provides evidence to support the argument presented by Lukachko et al. (2014) that racism is a tool often employed by those in power to concentrate resources and privileges for their benefit. When votes are suppressed, civic power becomes more concentrated among the powerful, and unequal civic power often results in the loss of power and resources in other arenas (Hing, 2018).

The right to vote remains contested in what is arguably one of the most democratic nations in the world. The 1965 Voting Rights Act was a step in the right direction, but since 2013 its invalidation has taken this country many steps backward with respect to pursuing the democratic value of one woman, one vote (Hauer, 2013; Persily & Mann, 2013). Beyond the policy change, there is the larger symbolic and real attack on Black voting rights—which required long and sustained battles—and the movement away from racial equity. Black voter suppression tends to reinforce the relegation of Blacks to second-class citizenship status in the U.S. The cumulative effects of institutionalized racism—the stress, the fear, the disempowerment—are likely to impact Black Voter turnout for some time to come due to feelings of hopelessness.

## 8. Conclusion

Using the trope of pervasive election fraud, Republican controlled legislatures have passed laws, such as strict voter identification laws, that reduce voter turnout, and election administrators have used their discretion to implement practices to restrict voter participation in elections (Hajnal et al., 2017). An analysis of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study data supports this claim. In every measure of a voter suppression tactic used in this study, we found evidence of lower voter turnout for the targeted groups. By definition, this is voter suppression. While the shape-shifting nature of Black voter suppression changes over time, its effect remains the same: Black voters experience a higher cost of voting than White voters and more often than not, the burden of this cost is too steep to overcome—leading to a racial gap in voter turnout. Blacks are less likely to vote than Whites when they are subjected to Voter ID issues, registration issues, long wait lines, changes in polling locations, transportation issues, voter qualification concerns and the threat of Covid-19.

Among the most surprising findings of this study is the strength and resilience of women voters. As the sample data show, women voters were more likely to vote than men voters. This finding was held under the initial regression model designed to assess the impact of demographic variables on voter turnout; and it remained statistically significant under the regression model with the voter suppression items. There should be little doubt that the female vote contributed to the record level of voter turnout in the 2020 General Election.

On the other hand, the voter identification suppression cost item had the strongest effect on voter turnout in the full logistic regression model that assessed the impact of voter suppression tactics on voter turnout, while controlling for relevant demographic variables. When non-white voters experienced issues with voter identification, they were less likely to vote. We offer evidence to support the popular claim that the new age voter suppression tactics operate in racially discriminatory ways. The racial voter turnout gap has previously been reported to be about 12.5% in 2020 (Wilder, 2021). This turnout gap has persisted for nearly a decade (Brennan Center for Justice, 2021). During the same time frame, new laws and election administration practices emerged across state and local jurisdictions that had the effect of suppressing Black votes. Some have contributed this “backlash” to the record level of Black Voter turnout for the election of America’s first Black President in 2008 (Bentele & O’Brien, 2013).

While the trends of voter suppression have been consistent throughout America’s history, the strength and resilience of Black voters has always been there to meet the challenges of the day. The greatest mystery in the American electorate is not that voter suppression is effective, but that Black voters have always displayed the fortitude to overcome their higher cost of voting. Black Americans have paid for the right to vote with time, money, labor, blood, sweat, tears—and with the ultimate price of life!

Institutional pillars of the law should help create a societal culture in which everyone is equal, including the right to vote unimpeded. When institutions fail to foster uniform voting requirements and processes, citizens tend to have a reactive response to what they perceive as partisan politics. More research is necessary to delve deeper into the implications of current voter identification and registration laws, as well as any other voter legislation or policies that may be pending. The intrinsic necessity for further research is evident by the volume of litigation surrounding the current constitutionality of the new restrictive voting laws. Laws and practices that influence voter

participation have the potential to skew election outcomes, which ultimately can have far-ranging adverse effects on our democratic process. Democracy is the bedrock of our society, and it must be protected so that the citizenry and government institutions can function cooperatively, effectively, and fairly.

When we reflect on the historical experience of Black voters, the ideals of democratic values come to mind. For most of its history, America has excluded Blacks from meaningful civic participation. Yet, Black Americans have held onto the belief that humans, while flawed, are inherently good people; that America's institutions are legitimate and can be trusted; and that Democratic values matter. Meanwhile, it appears that democracy in America has been reduced to a partisan issue. The current political climate is nothing less than an assault on America's Democracy. The new brand of Republican party loyalty appears to favor totalitarianism over democracy. Under the former, democratic values such as the right to vote get lost in a sea of arbitrariness. America's values become whimsical to the point of chaos. Under a chaotic form of governance, concepts such as voter integrity and voter suppression lose their meaning. The "high road" espoused by the former first lady Michelle Obama appears absurd and irrelevant. Instead, a gospel of tyranny take hold and a Hobbesian worldview emerges where people are believed to be selfish and seek to win at all costs. We all know where this ends—nihilism.

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## Appendix

### Measures

**Voter Suppression cost items – national level.** All voter suppression cost measures were created from dichotomous variables at the individual-level in the CES dataset.

**Voter ID Cost:** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a voter suppression tactic of requiring a valid form of Identification were assessed using a dummy variable created from the responses “I did not have the correct form of identification” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Long Wait Cost:** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a voter suppression tactic of long wait times were assessed using a dummy variable created from the responses “The line at the polls was too long” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Voter Registration Cost.** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a voter registration suppression tactic were assessed using a dummy variable created from the responses “I am not registered” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Voter Transportation Cost** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a transportation-related voter registration suppression tactic were assessed using a dummy variable created from the responses “Transportation” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Absentee Ballot Cost** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with an Absentee Ballot voter suppression tactic were assessed using dummy variables created from the responses “I requested but did not receive an absentee ballot” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Voting Location Cost** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a poll location voter suppression tactic were assessed using dummy variables created from the responses “I did not know where to vote” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Voter Qualification Cost.** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a qualification voter suppression tactic were assessed using dummy variables



created from the responses “I was not allowed to vote at the polls, even though I tried” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Covid-19 Cost** The percentage of respondents who reported an experience that was consistent with a covid-related voter suppression tactic were assessed using dummy variables created from the responses “I was afraid I might expose myself to the coronavirus” as the main reason why they did not vote were coded as “1.” Otherwise, the respondent was coded as “0.”

**Voter Turnout** A measure of voter turnout was created from the variable in the CES dataset that captured how respondents voted in the 2020 general election. This variable is considered a “validated vote” variable because individual records were matched to the Catalist database of registered voters in the United States. The 2020 Post-Election CES Survey data was matched to actual voter records in June of 2021. The Voter Turnout Measure was set equal to “1” if there was a matched record of the respondent’s vote in the general election of 2020; otherwise, the variable was set equal to “0.”