

# Abstract

Democracy has been considered to be at the core of the American ethos since the country's founding, though the privilege of civic participation has never been equally accessible. In particular, large populations in the United States have been denied the right to vote throughout history, keeping power concentrated in the hands of a select few. The phenomenon of voter suppression has especially skyrocketed since the 2020 presidential election, and these efforts have been overwhelmingly spearheaded by the Republican party. This research explores the factors motivating contemporary voter suppression efforts as well as the effects and distribution of voter suppression legislation. Drawing on theories of party development and ideology, I propose the "party identity hypothesis:" that the support for voter suppression by the Republican party is not merely a strategy to win elections, but rather an adoption of the practice as a key element of the party's identity.

To test this hypothesis, I have created a voter suppression index tool to measure the degree of voter suppression in all 50 states. The data are then analyzed using a multiple linear regression model to determine whether index scores are significantly correlated with significant degrees of electoral competition and percentages of people of color, as the existing literature suggests. I find that the only variable significantly correlated with suppressive outcomes is party affiliation, suggesting that the Republican party has motives to suppress beyond winning elections. To further support the party identity hypothesis, I identify two case studies of Republican states where voter suppression is present without significant degrees of electoral competition or large communities of color. I conclude with implications and limitations of the study as well as areas of future research that could expand the contributions of this study.

# Strategy or Identity?

## An Analysis of the Adoption and Implementation of Voter Suppression by the Republican Party

by

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: The Landscape of Voter Suppression in America

Since America's founding in the late 18th century, voting has been lauded by political leaders and citizens alike as the backbone of democracy. Despite the emphasis placed on voting as the primary mechanism by which to civically participate in democratic societies, access to this privilege has never been equal in the United States. Ballot box restriction remains one of the most prominent political challenges of the modern era, and it is a phenomenon that has risen to prominence in the last several election cycles. While most scholars point to the turn of the twenty-first century as the beginning of contemporary voter suppression efforts, the 2020 presidential election arguably marks the highest degree of attention that the issue of voter suppression has had in political discourse in recent history. In the wake of president Donald Trump's allegations of widespread election fraud following the 2020 presidential election, 49 states have introduced a staggering number of bills that would raise the cost of voting, totaling more than 440 in 2021 alone.<sup>1</sup> While both Democratic and Republican states have entertained restrictive provisions (in other words, policies that make it harder for citizens to vote compared to existing law), 89% of these bills that have been passed and/or enacted into law are located in Republican-controlled state legislatures.<sup>2</sup> These hubs of voter suppression legislation are not

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<sup>1</sup> "Voting Laws Roundup: December 2021," *Brennan Center for Justice*, December 21, 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-december-2021>.

<sup>2</sup> "Voting Laws Roundup: December 2021," <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-december-2021>.

random, for the Republican party has demonstrated a vested interest in raising the cost of voting nationwide.

This thesis will examine the factors driving Republican-led voter suppression efforts in American states by engaging with the two dominant explanations for this phenomenon found in the existing literature. One explanation suggests that voter suppression tactics implemented by the GOP are “racially motivated” and effectively target voters of color. This hypothesis draws on the long history of discriminatory voting laws against African-Americans and other racial minorities, and it suggests that these racist practices have simply evolved over time. The other common explanation featured in the literature frames Republican-led voter suppression efforts as a strategy for electoral advantage. Though this, in effect, targets the many voters of color who reliably vote Democratic, it is distinct from the racial hypothesis in that it focuses its suppressive tactics to areas of high electoral competition. While both of these hypotheses can explain the existence of voter suppression in some cases, they fail to provide an adequate explanation for the implementation of voter suppression in states lacking significant racial minority populations and high levels of electoral competition. Thus, this thesis will argue that voter suppression has become a key facet of Republican party identity and has been implemented to enforce a conservative conceptualization of “political peoplehood.”

The remainder of chapter one will feature a detailed examination of the existing literature on the topic of voter suppression in the United States, including the heavy emphasis on racial and electoral motivations for ballot restriction. Furthermore, the literature review will detail the threat of democratic backsliding and how the phenomenon of voter suppression places democratic political systems in peril. It also explores different conceptualizations of party identity and ideology.

## **Literature Review**

Since the surge of voter suppression efforts in the past few decades, political scholars, activists, and citizens have attempted to uncover the motivations and consequences of this trend. The existing literature on the topic of voter suppression is dominated by two reigning explanations for its practical surge, which this thesis will label as the “racial hypothesis” and the “electoral competition hypothesis.” The review of the literature that follows will outline the basic principles of these two hypotheses as well as include existing statistical evidence that strengthens these arguments. The adoption of the election integrity narrative by the Republican party in the context of their voter suppression efforts will also be discussed. Next, an overview of the political phenomenon of “democratic backsliding” will be analyzed, specifically as it relates to the threat posed by voter suppression. Finally, the literature review will detail gaps in the literature that this thesis plans to address, namely explaining the numerous states where voter suppression exists and for which both the racial and partisan hypotheses do not provide an adequate explanation.

### The Racial Hypothesis

A common explanation for the rise in contemporary voter suppression instigated by the GOP featured in the literature can be summarized as being “racial motivated.” In other words, there is evidence to suggest that Republican state legislatures pass legislation that, in effect, targets people of color (POC) and disproportionately restricts their access to the ballot box. Such laws include, but are not limited to, felon disenfranchisement, voter I.D. laws, the purging of voter rolls, the prohibition of Sunday voting, and the limiting of open hours at polling locations. The book *One Person, No Vote* (2019), written by African-American Studies professor Carol Anderson of Emory University, details the specific ways in which people of color (and

specifically Black Americans) have been targeted by voter suppression legislation, particularly in the wake of the Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision that eviscerated the Voting Rights Act. Anderson identifies that the intentional, strategic practice of limiting people of color's (and especially African-American's) access to the ballot box for both political and racist reasons has been a dimension of American politics since the country's founding. Through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, Black Americans were required to pass literacy tests in order to vote, a practice not officially banned until abolished in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Politicians were unfiltered in appealing to voters using racist propaganda and campaign messages. Anderson notes that, while the 21st century marks much more covert manifestations of voter suppression tactics, they are no less racist. For example, since people of color are more likely to work low-wage jobs with less flexibility, they have a much harder time getting to the polls on Election Day, on average. Another example of how voter suppression legislation targets racial minorities, according to Anderson, is in voter I.D. laws. People of color are more likely to have names that are difficult for many white English-speakers to spell, which makes mistakes in the printing process of official identification more common. Voter I.D. laws limit the forms of identification acceptable to vote, and in some cases make it so one cannot vote if there is any discrepancy whatsoever in the name presented on official identification (such as passports or driver's licenses) and the name printed on their ballots. A final example of voter suppression laws that target voters of color is gerrymandering, a political strategy and practice whereby district lines are redrawn to cluster voters partial to a particular party in one concentrated area to reduce the impact of their votes. People of color (and Black voters in particular) are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates, and since they often live in segregated neighborhoods, Republican

legislators will often redraw district lines to reduce areas heavily populated by voters of color into as few districts as possible.<sup>3</sup>

Further support for racially-motivated voter suppression can be found in an article written for *The Negro Educational Review* titled, “Using Microaggression Theory to Examine U.S. Voter Suppression Tactics.” Authors Parker, et. al explain that laws targeting the disenfranchisement African-Americans and other minority groups passed in the 19th century have been rendered unconstitutional by the judicial process, but many more laws with discriminatory effects have been allowed to persist. They state that laws allowing practices like the closure of satellite license-issuing offices, voter purges, an increase cost of photo documents, the use of racial profiling by police and poll watchers during election times, felon disenfranchisement, changing early voting times and methods, and challenging the voter registration processes are experienced as microaggressions to Black voters and other racial minorities.<sup>4</sup> For instance, in 2015, Alabama decided to close 31 Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) locations across the state, mostly in close proximity to Black and Brown communities with large percentages of Democratic voters. An article written in *Mother Jones* by Pema Levy confirms this fact, for she writes, ““Every single county in which blacks make up more than 75 percent of registered voters will see their driver license office closed.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, voter roll purge laws often target “noncitizens,” many of whom turn out to be eligible Hispanic voters (a Florida voter purge effort in 2012 had a majority of Hispanic voters on the list).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying our Democracy*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Keith P. Parker, Komanduri S. Murty, A. Lakshminath, and Dora O. Tilles. “Using Microaggression Theory to Examine U.S. Voter Suppression Tactics,” *The Negro Education Review* 69, nos. 1-4, 2018, 106 <https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=f115a274-841c-49db-88bc-b58730f25042%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=135498524&db=aph>.

<sup>5</sup> Pema Levy, “Alabama Just Made It Harder for Black People to Vote,” *Mother Jones*, Oct. 1, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2015/10/alabama-dmv-closes-voter-id>.

<sup>6</sup> Parker, Murty, Lakshminath, and Tilles, 109.

The literature that exists as evidence of the racial motivations behind voter suppression differs on the degree to which it is explicitly stated that this is a Republican-led phenomenon. Some, as in the article by Parker, et. al, give examples from almost exclusively Republican states, leaving readers to infer which party is leading the charge in enforcing voter suppression tactics. Other authors, like Carol Anderson, make it clear that whichever party has the greatest political advantage in suppressing minority votes at any given time is the one spearheading these efforts. In the 18th century, the Democratic party with its pro-slavery agenda were the primary instigators of voter suppression measures, but later in history when Black voters started reliably voting Democratic, the Republicans became the primary party to adopt the strategy.<sup>7</sup>

### The Electoral Competition Hypothesis

Another common explanation in the literature for the rise of contemporary voter suppression induced by the Republican party can be described as being “motivated by electoral advantage.” This rationale is often discussed in tandem with the racial hypothesis, but specific attention is drawn to the argument that the presence of voter suppression legislation is more prominent in areas where there is a greater degree of electoral competition. In other words, Republican state legislatures are more likely to enact restrictive legislation that targets Democratic voters (a reliable percentage of which are people of color) in places where they fear their electoral win is endangered. In a 2020 piece for *The New Republic* titled, “A Cancer on the Ballot,” David Daley, an author and journalist who specializes in election integrity, explains that the rise in Republican-led voter suppression is due to them having become a permanent insecure minority in America. Republicans have not won the popular vote for president since 2004, and

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<sup>7</sup> Anderson, 2019.

only about a quarter of the country identifies with the party label.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 (as well as the wave of Democratic candidates elected at the state level) prompted a visceral defensive reaction from the Republican party to implement political strategies that would secure them future political wins. In 2010, an initiative led by former Republican National Committee Chairman Ed Gillespie called “Redistricting Majority Party,” or REDMAP for short, targeted 107 local races in 16 states (many of which were swing states) to redraw district lines in their favor. Coupled with actively spreading negative campaign messages about these state-level races in areas densely populated with Democratic voters of color, Democratic incumbents were defeated despite being more popular candidates.<sup>9</sup> Gerrymandering has proved to be a reliable strategy for Republicans seeking victory in competitive areas, for 1 in 5 Americans today lives in a state in which one or both chambers of the legislature are controlled by Republicans who received fewer votes than their Democratic opponents.<sup>10</sup> Data gathered by the Brennan Center for Justice shows that this phenomenon has spiked in recent years, for by 2016, 14 states had enacted voting restrictions for the first time, including many gerrymandered states like Wisconsin and Ohio.<sup>11</sup> However, no years have been as defined by Republican-led voter suppression than 2020 and 2021. State legislatures controlled by the GOP rushed to prevent the use of absentee ballots in these years’ elections, citing concern for voter fraud despite a deadly pandemic making it dangerous and difficult for voters to cast their ballots in person. In Iowa, a Republican Secretary of State sent every resident an absentee

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<sup>8</sup> Phillip Bump, “A remarkable GOP admission: Undermining the electoral college threatens our best path to the White House,” *The Washington Post*, January 4, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/01/04/remarkable-gop-admission-undermining-electoral-college-threatens-our-best-path-white-house/>.

<sup>9</sup> David Daley, “A Cancer on the Ballot: Inside the GOP’s Drive for Permanent Minority Rule,” *The New Republic*, Vol. 251 Issue 11, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Daley, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Daley, 23.

ballot during the primary and was prevented by the Republican State legislature from doing the same in the general election where there was a competitive Senate seat on the ballot.<sup>12</sup>

Another article by Hicks et.al published in *Political Research Quarterly* reinforced that electoral competition is a large motivator for Republicans to advocate and pass suppressive legislation. Analyzing a data set comprising over 1,000 introduced Voter I.D. bills (and over 100 passed bills) in all 50 states between the years of 2001 and 2012, the researchers found a higher presence of suppressive legislation in states with higher levels of partisan competition.<sup>13</sup> Put simply, the body of literature in support of the competitiveness hypothesis suggests that the Republican party seeks to suppress the votes of reliably Democratic voters because they know they would not win elections under fair, democratic circumstances.

### Voter Fraud and Election Integrity

Additionally, the literature suggests that the success of the Republican party's use of voter suppression as a political strategy has been successful in large part because of the narrative presented alongside it. Put another way, the GOP has arguably won the "framing" war surrounding suppressive tactics like voter I.D. laws and prohibiting absentee voting by claiming that the adoption of such measures will prevent voter fraud.<sup>14</sup> Despite the widespread evidence that fraudulent voting practices such as double voting, dead voters, fraudulent addresses, noncitizens and/or felon voters, and fraud by election officials are extremely rare, many Republican politicians insist that strict, suppressive measures are necessary to maintain election

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<sup>12</sup> Daley, 25.

<sup>13</sup> William D. Hicks, Seth C. McKee, Mitchell D. Sellers, and Daniel A. Smith, "A Principle or a Strategy? Voter Identification Laws and Partisan Competition in the American States," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 68(1), 2015, 18, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/24371969?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24371969?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>14</sup> Pamela Johnston Conover, and Patrick R. Miller, "How Republicans Won on Voter Identification Laws: The Roles of Strategic Reasoning and Moral Conviction," *Social Science Quarterly* 99, issue 2, June 2018, 490, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ssqu.12410>.

integrity.<sup>15</sup> This rhetoric dominated the 2020 election season, for while many Democratic state legislatures were advocating for universal absentee ballots due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Republican legislatures seized the opportunity to label their opponents as threats to election security. After Joe Biden was certified as the winner of the presidential election, former president Donald Trump and his allies amplified what is commonly known as the “Big Lie,” the conspiracy theory that the election was “rigged” due to intentional miscalculations of ballots and the pervasiveness of voter fraud. A year later, polls are consistent in showing that over 70% of Republicans nationwide believe that Biden was not the legitimate winner of the 2020 election.<sup>16</sup> This statistic stands as an unsurprising comparison to a mere 6% of Democrats who believe the election results were false, according to a PRRI poll conducted in late 2021.<sup>17</sup>

### Democratic Backsliding

Voter suppression is frequently linked with the phenomenon of “democratic backsliding,” or autocratization, which refers to the decline in democratic institutions and practices induced by state-level actors.<sup>18</sup> Political scientists Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky outline a litmus test for spotting democracies in decline, including how to detect autocratic leaders and the debilitation of gatekeeping mechanisms (like the checks-balances system and voting in the United States). They pay particular attention to the legacy of voter suppression in the United States as well as the

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<sup>15</sup> Justin Levitt, “The Truth About Voter Fraud,” New York: Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, 2007, accessed May 2021, [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Report\\_Truth-About-Voter-Fraud.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/Report_Truth-About-Voter-Fraud.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Aaron Blake, “Birtherism paved the way for the ‘big lie.’ The latter is proving more pervasive and stubborn,” *The Washington Post*, January 3, 2022, Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/01/03/trump-voter-fraud-birtherism/>.

<sup>17</sup> “Competing Visions of America: An Evolving Identity or a Culture Under Attack?,” Public Religion Research Institute, November 1, 2021, <https://www.prrri.org/press-release/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/>.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy Bermeo, “On Democratic Backsliding,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 1, January 2016, 5, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/on-democratic-backsliding/>.

behavior of former president Donald Trump, citing both as clues that American democracy is not as air-tight as it may seem.<sup>19</sup>

Other scholars and research institutes have developed similar methods for testing the risk of democratic backsliding in any given country, many of which focus specifically on the democratic institution of voting. One such group is the Harvard Electoral Integrity Project, who in 2010 rated the heavily-gerrymandered boundaries of key Republican swing states Wisconsin and North Carolina as a 3 and 4, respectively, on a scale of 100 (with 0 being the most undemocratic possible). This is a score lower than the countries of Iran and Venezuela, both of which were experiencing takeovers by autocratic dictators.<sup>20</sup> To protect the United States from being vulnerable to democratic decline, scholarly sources are in overwhelming agreement that keeping elections free, fair, and secure is of utmost importance. As stated in a report on democratic backsliding done by the Brookings Institution in 2019, “Even in well-established democracies, measures must be taken to guard against partisan efforts to manipulate the vote. Conversely, governments should enact policies that promote broad access to the vote, such as automatic or same-day voter registration.”<sup>21</sup> This excerpt reinforces the notion that even well-established democracies are not as impermeable as they appear, and that the prevention of democratic backsliding requires a targeted dedication to upholding democratic principles.

### Political Ideology

While this thesis argues that party ideology is the primary motivation for Republican-led voter suppression, it is necessary to understand what exactly ideology refers to in this context, as

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky, *How Democracies Die*, (New York: Crown Publishing, 2018.)

<sup>20</sup> Daley, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Norman Eisen, Andrew Kenealy, Susan Corke, Torrey Taussig, and Alina Polyakova, “The Democracy Playbook: Preventing and Reversing Democratic Backsliding,” Brookings Institution, accessed January 7, 2022, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Democracy-Playbook\\_Preventing-and-Reversing-Democratic-Backsliding.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Democracy-Playbook_Preventing-and-Reversing-Democratic-Backsliding.pdf).

well as how it differs from the similar idea of party identity. One of the earliest and most well-known political scientists to define political ideology was Phillip Converse in his article, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” published in 1964. Converse identified ideology as a set of beliefs characterized by some form of constraint (either logical, psychological, or social), and he observed that the ideology of elites is much stronger than those of the mass public.<sup>22</sup> This idea of ideology being primarily about constraint is echoed by scholars in the subsequent decades, including Rogers Smith, who expands on the concept of ideology to define “political peoplehood.” Political peoples are those who are bonded to others over some sort of shared meaning despite pressure from other groups, and this allegiance is maintained through persuasive narratives.<sup>23</sup> These narratives directly influence people’s conceptions of political peoplehood, and by extension, political ideology.<sup>24</sup> In Smith’s view, ideology “will always be partly self-serving or partisan,” and therefore inextricably interwoven with party identity.<sup>25</sup> At the core of politics is “contestation over who governs and how,” which goes hand and hand with the persuasive nature of political ideology.<sup>26</sup>

Author Hans Noel expands on the idea of political ideologies even further in his book *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America*, emphasizing that they are a set of moral principles rather than positions on single issues. Building off Smith’s ideas of political peoplehood, Noel posits that political parties and ideologies are both ways of organizing and defining political coalitions, but are inherently distinct from one another.<sup>27</sup> According to Noel, ideology is “a shared set of policy preferences” and “structures people’s issue positions” while

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<sup>22</sup> Phillip Converse, “The nature of belief systems in mass publics,” *Critical Review*, 18,1-3 (1964): 3-10.

<sup>23</sup> Roger M. Smith, *Political Peoplehood: The Roles of Values, Interests, and Identities*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Noel. *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13.

parties are coalitions with the goal of obtaining political power. In other words, parties are about who is with whom, and ideologies are the principles that are supported by political groups.<sup>28</sup> Since ideological actors will want to shape parties and parties have a vested interest in embracing ideologies to strengthen their power, party and ideology may align with one another, but they may not.<sup>29</sup> Echoing Converse, Noel writes that most people are not very ideological, but ideological affiliation is positively correlated with the degree to which voters are informed about political issues.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps his most poignant observation related to the contemporary American political landscape is the fact that party identity and ideology have come to be one in the same for the GOP; in other words, “The conservative ideology has become the core of the Republican Party.”<sup>31</sup> This sentiment was echoed by political scientist John Gerring in his book, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*, when he claimed that political parties in the United States were more ideological than other democratic nations.<sup>32</sup>

In his book *Ideas of Power: The Politics of American Party Ideology Development*, scholar Verlan Lewis explores political ideology as it relates to party formation and voter preferences. He conceives of ideology as primarily based in rhetoric, the “mental frameworks and linguistic structures that shape the way Americans think about politics, talk about politics, and act in politics – for better or for worse.”<sup>33</sup> He emphasizes that while assuming party identity and ideology align in every case would be a mistake, he does acknowledge that the “public philosophy” shaped in large part by ideologies are often used by parties to gain electoral

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<sup>28</sup> Noel, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Noel, 7, 30.

<sup>30</sup> Noel, 68.

<sup>31</sup> Noel, 37.

<sup>32</sup> John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Verlan Lewis, *Ideas of Power: The Politics of American Party Ideology Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, xiv.

advantage.<sup>34</sup> These party ideologies are immensely powerful in shaping the behavior of leaders and citizens.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Party Identity Hypothesis: Toward an Alternative Explanation**

Without discounting the significance of race and electoral competition in the historical and contemporary manifestations of voter suppression, these hypotheses may have limited explanatory power for states that are raising barriers to the ballot but also lack significant racial minority voting populations and/or are not electorally competitive. As an alternative to these explanations for voter suppression, this thesis hypothesizes that party identity is itself a significant motivator for Republican-led voter suppression efforts. Red states across the country have mirrored one another's voter suppression policies, even when there is no strategic rationale for doing so. This phenomenon demonstrates a nationalization of Republican party identity, a claim that this thesis will explore. This thesis tests the party identity hypothesis by creating and analyzing a voter suppression index measuring the existence of various suppressive behaviors in all 50 states. The degree of electoral competition, percentage of African-American and other racial minority voters, and party control of state government were included for each state. I performed a multiple linear regression analysis on the data to determine the statistical significance of these variables in predicting voter suppression and whether there is a common pattern across different cases.

The data demonstrate that the presence of voter suppression in the two Republican states with neither a significant number of POC nor a significant degree of electoral competition fail to be adequately explained by the racial and electoral competitiveness hypothesis. Therefore, this

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<sup>34</sup> Lewis, 9, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, 169.

thesis hypothesizes that party identity alone is a more reliable indicator than these two commonly cited explanations for the presence of voter suppression legislation in a state. This thesis seeks to show that the Republican party has adopted voter suppression as part of its party identity instead of merely doing so as a political strategy.

Chapter two consists of a brief history of voter suppression in the United States, for it is essential to recognize the longevity and various manifestations of this phenomenon in order to analyze it in the modern era. Starting from the presence of colonizers on America's Atlantic coast up to the present day, this chapter will outline the characteristics of voter suppression and the mechanisms by which it was enforced throughout the decades. It will also describe how the conception of "political peoplehood" has evolved since the 17th century, an idea that has greatly influenced who has been considered to be worthy of the privilege of suffrage throughout history. In chapter three, the contemporary geography of voter suppression will be discussed, including a voter suppression index detailing the various predictors of restrictive outcomes in all 50 states. The index will serve as evidence in support of the hypothesis that party identity is the key predictor of voter suppression, above the more frequently-cited variables of racial motivation and electoral competition. Further supporting the validity of the voter suppression index, chapter three will explore the anomalous Republican states that do not fit the electoral or racially-motivated explanations of voter suppression. Finally, chapter four will feature a summary of this thesis' findings, detail limitations of the research, and state the potential implications of this research on public policy, advocacy, and future research.

## Chapter 2

### Voter Suppression: A Brief History

#### Introduction

Voter suppression in the United States is by no means a new phenomenon. Since the country's founding in 1776, unequal access to the ballot has ironically been conjoined with democracy, and it has served an ideological purpose for its supporters. According to David Bateman, author of *Disenfranchising Democracy*, voter suppression was not inevitable in America, but rather, it was the “result of deliberate choices made by elite political coalitions looking to gain and hold onto power but within institutional and ideological contexts that shaped their strategies and behavior.”<sup>36</sup> This intentional practice was codified into law as a concerted effort to “reconstitute the social basis of the state;” in other words, clearly define what sorts of people are worthy of civic participation and which are not.<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that while the mechanisms expressing ideas about who constitutes “the people of the United States” have changed throughout history, the foundational belief that only some are worthy of that distinction has remained consistent. This chapter will provide a brief history of voter suppression in America and track its evolution from the colonial era until present day in order to showcase its established relationship to democracy and conceptions of political peoplehood.

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<sup>36</sup> David A. Bateman, *Disenfranchising Democracy: Constructing the Electorate in the United States, the United Kingdom, and France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Bateman, 29.

## America's Founding

A holistic understanding of voter suppression in the United States is contingent upon understanding the history and legacy of settler colonialism in the country. By 1650, the English had established a dominant presence on the Atlantic Coast of North America, sustaining themselves with assistance from Native American tribes and later, African slaves. Many had fled Europe to escape religious persecution and establish their own independent colonies across the ocean. By the early 18th century, slaves were a significant percentage of the colonial population, and the exploitation of their labor became a core element of settler society.<sup>38</sup> This demonstrates that, even before the establishment of the United States, the concepts of freedom and oppression were inextricably linked.<sup>39</sup> Realizing that disenfranchisement and exploitation was essential to maximizing their economic and political interests, voting rights in the American colonies were only granted to free white males who owned property, had independent legal status, and were naturalized citizens under the Crown. Settlers who met this description were seen as the only people in the community with a significant “stake in society,” the argument being that only men with property were meaningfully affected by laws and therefore the only ones who should be afforded voting privileges.<sup>40</sup> There was also the pervasive belief that if the propertyless were to become enfranchised, they would “constitute a menace to the maintenance of a well-ordered community.”<sup>41</sup> These restrictions resulted in a voting population of approximately 9% of all

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<sup>38</sup> “Colonial America,” Library of Congress online, accessed April 1, 2022, [https://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/colonial/jb\\_colonial\\_subj.html](https://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/colonial/jb_colonial_subj.html).

<sup>39</sup> Bateman, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 8.

<sup>41</sup> Oscar Handlin and Mary Flug Handlin, *The Popular Sources of Political Authority: Documents on the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780* (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 437; J. Allen Smith, *The Growth and Decadence of Constitutional Government* (New York, 1930), 29.

settlers.<sup>42</sup> These provisions served to instill a rigid gender and racial hierarchy that would remain intact for centuries to come.

In the wake of the American Revolution, the Articles of Confederation legally established the United States as an independent entity of sovereign states, with each state (formerly known as colonies) having its own voting laws. Many states lowered property qualifications in order to expand the franchise to more white men, primarily because the war altered public perception of the personal attributes worthy of voting rights. Rather than simply equating the right to suffrage with vast property ownership (the argument being that land is essential for independence), the American public began to see value in those who had contributed to the war effort and expressed personal allegiance to their new country.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, it was the widespread belief that expanding the franchise to the “lower orders” would increase the security of the country since poorer men would be incentivized to continue serving in the army and militias.<sup>44</sup> Already, an ideological basis for political peoplehood could be observed during this time.

When the Articles failed and the United States Constitution was ratified in 1789, the document largely left voting rights legislation in the hands of the states. According to Bateman, the Constitution “encouraged the organization of political coalitions across the country’s main geographic divisions” and would further serve to “yoke democracy and disenfranchisement together.”<sup>45</sup> Two main rival political coalitions formed: the Federalists, whose platform advocated for an increased federal government presence, including assuming states’ debts and creating a national bank; and the Republicans, who opposed a concentration of federal power and advocated for increased states rights.<sup>46</sup> The Republicans ultimately came out in favor of minor

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<sup>42</sup> Bateman, 46-47.

<sup>43</sup> Bateman, 59.

<sup>44</sup> Keyssar, 31.

<sup>45</sup> Bateman, 75.

<sup>46</sup> “The Federalist and the Republican Party,” PBS online, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/duel-federalist-and-republican-party/>.

expansions to suffrage, since they saw it as being compatible with their goals of opposing aristocratic power. This resulted in minor expansions of the franchise across the states, which guaranteed nearly 85% of the free adult male population gaining the right to vote by the mid 1800s. Since free Black men were legally allowed to vote in several states, this period marked the beginning of widespread disenfranchisement campaigns targeting Black voters. Fourteen of the twenty expansions for white men between 1789-1826 were accompanied by suppressive provisions targeting Black men.<sup>47</sup> However, it should be noted that, while it was possible for Black people to obtain freedom from bondage, it was by no means a widespread phenomenon before the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865.<sup>48</sup>

The United States Constitution left the federal government without any clear legal mechanism through which to enforce voting rights, and by extension, a nation-wide vision of democracy. In other words, individual states retained the power to define what “We, the people of the United States” meant for themselves.<sup>49</sup> It wouldn’t be until the passage of the 14th and 15th amendments in 1868 and 1870, respectively, when the federal government would begin to legally enforce widespread ideas of political peoplehood.

## **The Civil War and Reconstruction Eras**

The Reconstruction period after the Civil War brought another massive surge in voting restrictions against African-Americans, despite Constitutional Amendments Fourteen and Fifteen granting them citizenship and suffrage, respectively. With half a million Black men entering the electorate, the abolitionist Republican party saw a surge in support. Southern states, having just

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<sup>47</sup> Bateman, 85.

<sup>48</sup> “13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Abolition of Slavery (1865),” National Archives online, accessed April 1, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/13th-amendment#:~:text=Passed%20by%20Congress%20on%20January.slavery%20in%20the%20United%20States..>

<sup>49</sup> Keyssar, 21.

been forced to free their slaves, were especially opposed to integrating free Black Americans into society.<sup>50</sup> To ensure that Black men living in the region could not vote them out of office, white Southern Democrats opposed voter expansion efforts in various ways. For example, all eleven states of the former Confederacy adopted a poll tax, which originally “was intended not so much to disenfranchise the Negro as it was to place him under the white man’s domination, since failure to pay the tax was made prima facie evidence of vagrancy.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, the poll tax was initially used as a way to conveniently criminalize African-Americans. Most Black citizens were poor sharecroppers living on credit until the harvest, and white elites implemented poll taxes knowing that most wouldn’t have the cash to pay it.<sup>52</sup> Though the specific intent to limit the Black vote via poll tax didn’t come until the Jim Crow era, its origins date back to the mid 19th century.<sup>53</sup>

Another example of how African-American disenfranchisement was specifically targeted came in the form of the literacy tests. The justification for the practice was often cited wanting to ensure an informed and educated electorate, but in actuality, literacy tests were a way to disqualify Black voters. While whites were asked to recite or interpret a few lines of their state’s Constitution, for example, African-Americans would be asked to interpret long, complex passages.<sup>54</sup> A registrar in Mississippi even asked Black voters “How many bubbles in a bar of soap?” to prevent them from casting a ballot.<sup>55</sup> These tests were scored by racially-biased judges,

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<sup>50</sup> “Race and Voting,” Constitutional Rights Foundation, accessed April 3, 2022, <https://www.crf-usa.org/brown-v-board-50th-anniversary/race-and-voting.html>.

<sup>51</sup> “Disenfranchisement by Means of the Poll Tax,” *Harvard Law Review* 53, no. 4 (1940): 647, fn15.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Anderson, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Anderson, 5.

<sup>55</sup> David C. Colby, “The Voting Rights Act and Black Registration in Mississippi,” *Publius*, 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 127; *Williams v. Mississippi*, 170 U.S. 213 (1898).

and one wrong answer would prohibit an African-Americans from voting. Literacy tests were not officially banned until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.<sup>56</sup>

Amidst the aggressive efforts to restrict Black males' right to vote, women still did not have suffrage during this time. The first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848, and resulted in 68 women and 32 men (mostly white) signing a "Declaration of Sentiments," sparking a wave of activism for the next several decades. The National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, led the charge on this effort while the American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, focused on getting individual states to add women's suffrage to their constitutions. In 1893, Colorado became the first state to allow women the right to vote. In 1896, the National Association for Colored Women was formed to give a voice to the Black women who felt underrepresented in the mainstream suffrage movements. After years of lobbying, holding conferences, and engaging in civil disobedience, the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote was ratified on August 26, 1920.<sup>57</sup>

Native Americans also did not have the right to vote in the 19th century, despite the Fifteenth Amendment granting voting rights to citizens regardless of race. Steeped in the history of colonialism and mistreatment of Indigenous populations, it was still the commonly held belief by many white Americans that Native people should be removed from their communities and forced to assimilate into Western society. The Dawes Act of 1887 allowed for the dissolution of Native tribes under federal law and helped establish boarding schools to teach Indian children the social norms of white America. It was not until the Snyder Act of 1924 was passed granting

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<sup>56</sup> Katie Serena, and Silverman, Leah, "Could You Pass This Voting Literacy Test Designed To Disenfranchise African Americans?," updated September 14, 2020, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/voting-literacy-test>.

<sup>57</sup> "The Woman Suffrage Movement: The U.S. ratification of the 19th Amendment," Texas Woman's University, accessed April 3, 2022, <https://twu.edu/institute-womens-leadership/the-woman-suffrage-movement/>.

Native people U.S. citizenship that they could enjoy the privileges brought by the Fifteenth Amendment. Even in the wake of the Snyder Act, many states refused to comply with the law. Henry Mitchell, a resident of Maine in 1930, was reported as saying, “One of the Indians went over to Old Town once to see some official in the city hall about voting. I don't know just what position that official had over there, but he said to the Indian, 'We don't want you people over here. You have your own elections over on the island, and if you want to vote, go over there.’”<sup>58</sup>

## The 20th Century

The 1900s featured monumental expansions in suffrage to two key constituencies: women were granted the right to vote in 1920 with the passage of 19th Amendment, and the Indian Citizenship Act extended the franchise to U.S-born Indigenous populations.<sup>59</sup> Despite these gains, deliberate campaigns to limit the franchise persisted, consequently defining political peoplehood in the process. The poll tax was still a widely implemented tool of disenfranchisement, for despite Black citizens’ median income steadily rising, it remained 54 percent that of whites’ in 1950.<sup>60</sup> Several states, including Mississippi and Texas, required two years worth of poll tax receipts in order to vote. Another effective method of voter suppression during this time period was the “white primary,” described in detail by Carol Anderson, author of *One Person, No Vote*. Since the South was effectively a one-party region, a candidate from the Democratic party (the faction associated with a pro-slavery platform) was sure to be nominated and most likely, win in November. This process was bolstered by the Supreme Court case *Newberry v. United States*, which determined that the federal government cannot interfere with

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<sup>58</sup> “Voting Rights for Native Americans,” Library of Congress online, accessed April 3, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-native-americans/#:~:text=The%20Snyder%20Act%20of%201924,rights%20granted%20by%20this%20amendment>.

<sup>59</sup> “Timeline - Important Dates in the Voting History of the United States,” Center for Civic Education online, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.civiced.org/voting-lessons/voting-timeline>.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, 9.

the process of primary elections in the states. Even though African-American voters fought back against these racist laws with several Supreme Court wins of their own, the states were largely successful in blocking their representation at the polls.<sup>61</sup> In the rare cases where state law could not prevent Black people from voting, infuriated whites would threaten African-Americans with violence.<sup>62</sup>

Up until this point, the North had effectively tolerated voter suppression of African-Americans in the South, but the 1950s and 60s marked the beginning of a wave of direct-action protests challenging the system of white hegemony and oppression against Black Americans.<sup>63</sup> One of the most renowned moments of this Civil Rights Era occurred in 1963, when the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. headlined the “March on Washington ” and delivered his famous “I Have a Dream Speech” to encourage the continuous fight for African-American’s Constitutional rights.<sup>64</sup> Two years later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law, which made many of the discriminatory voting practices of the South, including poll taxes and literacy tests, unconstitutional.<sup>65</sup> Passing with a considerable majority in the House of Representatives (328-74) and the Senate (79-18), the implementation of the Voting Rights Act marked a considerable shift in the enforcement of voter discrimination across the country. According to Michael Waldman of the book *The Fight to Vote*, the act “thrust the federal government into the role of supervising voting in large parts of the country to protect African Americans’ right to vote, a duty it had not assumed since Reconstruction.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Anderson, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Anderson, 14.

<sup>63</sup> Keyssar, 93.

<sup>64</sup> “Timeline - Important Dates in the Voting History of the United States,” accessed April 2, 2022.

<sup>65</sup> “Voting Rights Act (1965), National Archives online, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act#:~:text=This%20act%20was%20signed%20into,as%20a%20prerequisite%20to%20voting.>

<sup>66</sup> Michael Waldman, *The Fight to Vote* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016), 149.

In the years following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, several states challenged its constitutionality. In the 1966 case *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, the state argued that the act violated their sovereignty to control their own elections. While the constitutionality of the Voting Rights was upheld in this case, other states took their shot at striking down the law. Virginia and Mississippi attempted to argue that the Voting Rights Act did not have the sweeping authority to regulate voting practices as it claimed, for the states were simply wanting to “aid the efficiency of elections” via processes like literacy tests and poll taxes. Surely these minor changes didn’t require preclearance from the federal government as the Act suggests.<sup>67</sup> The Supreme Court disagreed, for Chief Justice Earl Warren proclaimed that the Voting Rights Act, “was aimed at the subtle, as well as the obvious, state regulations which have the effect of denying citizens their right to vote because of race.”<sup>68</sup>

When states could find no way to legally overturn the Voting Rights Act, political leaders began devising loopholes in order to disenfranchise certain voters. For example, in 1984, U.S. Attorney Jeff Sessions conducted an investigation into Alabama’s elections in order to identify instances of voter fraud. FBI agents seized mail-in ballots only from counties where African-Americans had won office (which were predominantly Black areas) that they claimed were fraudulent, and Sessions put these voters to be questioned before a grand jury. This process was intended to intimidate Black voters from never voting again, and despite the judge rendering a verdict of “not guilty,” the goal was achieved.<sup>69</sup>

## **2000- Present Day**

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<sup>67</sup> Anderson, 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Allen v. State Bd. of Elections* (1969); Lorn S. Foster, “Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act: Implementation of an Administrative Remedy,” *Publius* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 1986): 17-28.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, 34-35.

Since the turn of the century, these more covert mechanisms of voter suppression have been commonplace. The two most blatant exceptions to that rule were 1) the 2000 presidential election, and 2) the Supreme Court case of *Shelby v. Holder* (2013). In November of 2000, Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Al Gore were in a virtual tie when 49 states had counted their ballots, leaving Florida to decide the winner of the presidential election. Unbeknownst to most, Florida Republicans had implemented countless covert voter suppression mechanisms to ensure the state did not turn Blue. Secretary of State Katherine Harris purged thousands of Black and Latino voters from the voter rolls, police officers patrolled majority-Black neighborhoods on election day, phone lines were blocked so that poll workers could not connect with election officials, and hundreds of voting machines across the state were defective (mostly in areas where there were voters of color). The U.S. Supreme Court intervened and declared that Florida did not have the right to recount the ballots counted in their state because the practice violated the Fourteenth Amendment equal protection clause. The result: thousands of Democratic votes left uncalled for and George Bush being granted victory.<sup>70</sup>

The other major, overt threat to voting rights in the 21st century thus far has been with the *Shelby v. Holder* decision in 2013. The case determined that states no longer had to receive preclearance from the federal government for changes in their voting practices. This eliminated sections 4 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act, which put preclearance requirements in place to prevent discriminatory voting practices.<sup>71</sup> As a result, procedures such as purging of voter rolls, passage of strict voter I.D. laws, and gerrymandering skyrocketed. Discriminatory policies that were once deemed unconstitutional under the Voting Rights Act are now commonplace in Republican states across the country.

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<sup>70</sup> Anderson, 35-36.

<sup>71</sup> “*Shelby County v. Holder*,” Ballotpedia, accessed April 2, 2022, [https://ballotpedia.org/Shelby\\_County\\_v.\\_Holder](https://ballotpedia.org/Shelby_County_v._Holder).

## **Conclusion**

As this entire chapter has emphasized, the racial hierarchy as the basis of American democracy has had profound implications for legislation, ideological development, and party identity for over two centuries, and has greatly informed the history of voting rights in this country. Ever since English colonizers set foot on this land, the pursuit of freedom has been accompanied by oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. The voter suppression mechanisms being employed in the present moment have striking similarities to the post-Civil War South and the Jim Crow era, yet have failed to be monumentally challenged. While whiteness has long been a key criterion for being considered worthy of representation, ideas about political peoplehood have increasingly become informed by political ideology and party identification. The next chapter will contain an in-depth analysis of how these two elements inform modern-day conceptualizations of political peoplehood by way of investigating the widespread Republican campaign of voter suppression, as well as make evident the ways in which America's most foundational democratic principle is under threat.

## Chapter 3

# The Geography of Contemporary Voter Suppression

### Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapters, voter suppression efforts have spiked in recent years, particularly since 2020, as a backlash against the results of the presidential election. While the literature widely agrees that the Republican party is almost exclusively responsible for the implementation of voter suppression tactics, this thesis hypothesizes that the two dominating explanations for this phenomenon, the racial and electoral competition hypotheses, fail to adequately explain the presence of voter suppression in all red states, on average (though they are likely significant in specific cases, such as Texas and Georgia in the 2020 election cycle). Therefore, as an alternative, this thesis posits that voter suppression efforts are more significantly correlated to state-level GOP control than a state having either a significant racial minority population or a significant degree of electoral competition. Furthermore, it is hypothesized that the significant correlation with party labels over these two variables implies that voter suppression has been adopted as a facet of Republican party identity rather than simply a strategy to gain power. The fact that voter suppression exists in Republican states that have no strategic reason to implement these tactics is a gap in the existing scholarship of voter suppression that this thesis aims to address.

## Methods

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the distribution and effects of voter suppression legislation across the country and test the party identity hypothesis, this thesis contributes an original Voter Suppression Index. This is a tool that allows for a comparable measure of the degree of voter suppression in each of the 50 states along multiple dimensions. The variables included in the index are as follows:

- 1) Voter I.D. Laws: refer to the laws requiring voters to show identification at the polls. States laws range in severity, with some states requiring no I.D. at all, to some having strict requirements for photo identification.
- 2) Felon Disenfranchisement laws: relate to any legislation involving the voting rights of convicted felons, past and present. Some states do not allow current or former felons to vote, while some states grant felons access to the franchise after release, parole, or probation. A small number of states allow felons to vote while incarcerated and after release, with no exceptions.
- 3) Ballot Harvesting laws: refer to the state laws dictating who is allowed to return an absentee ballot to a polling place. While some states only allow the voter themselves to return their own ballot, other states allow anyone, or specific people related to the voter, to return ballots on their behalf.
- 4) Vote-by-Mail Application Due Date: the time frame in which a voter can return a mail-in ballot application, as specified by law. Some states have no specific deadline, but other states require that the application be returned within less than a week (or over a week) of Election Day.

- 5) Sunday Voting Laws: refer to whether a state permits voting on Sundays. While several states have a general yes-or-no policy on this issue, some states leave the decision to individual county discretion.
- 6) Pre-registration for Minors Laws: these are the laws that dictate whether state's allow minors to pre-register to vote, if at all. For the states that do have pre-registration for minors, some allow it for people as young as 16.
- 7) Voter Roll Purge Laws: refer to the legal reasons why a registered voter of a state may be removed from the voting list. Reasons vary by state but can include: death, change of address, being an inactive voter, being convicted of a felony, and being deemed mentally incompetent.
- 8) Laws Banning the Distribution of Snacks and Water to Those Waiting in Line to Vote: refer to whether a state considers it a crime to give voters food and beverages while waiting to cast a ballot.
- 9) Early Voting Laws: relates to the state legal guidelines on whether one always has the option to vote early, vote early with special permission, or not vote early under any circumstances.
- 10) Voter Registration Methods Available: refers to whether registering to vote is automatic, the time frame in which someone can register before Election Day, or whether an exact match of the voter's identification to state records is required.
- 11) Polling Place Open Hours: refers to the period of time in which polling locations are open in each state. Some states leave this to the discretion of individual counties.

Each state is coded along all of these categories, which are then combined into a composite score, which can easily be compared to the other states for reference. Each variable has its own unique coding scheme depending on the spread of the data. For instance, states are coded with either a 0 or a 1 for “Banning Snacks and Water to Those Waiting in Line to Vote,” since the suppressive law is either present or absent. However, states can be coded between 0 and 4 for the variable “Polling Place Open Hours” since there is more variation in that particular data. Across all categories, a code of 0 refers to the least severe outcome and highest code (either a 1, 2, 3, or 4, depending on the category) refers to the most severe outcome. It should be noted that several variables have missing data points: “Vote by Mail Application Due Date” contains blank values because several states have universal voting by mail. The “Ballot Harvesting” category has missing data because some states do not have specific policies regarding who can return a ballot. North Dakota has no data for the category “Voter Registration Method” because there is no formal voter registration process in the state. Finally, the states with missing values for “Polling Place Hours” conduct their elections exclusively by mail, or polling place hours vary by county. (See Technical Appendix below for details.)

Following my construction of the Voter Suppression Index, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to discern whether partisan competition and percentage of minority voters are indeed highly correlated with voter suppression (as suggested by the literature), or whether party control of state government is the variable most highly correlated with voter suppression (as this thesis hypothesizes). Therefore, the independent (input) variables for the multiple linear regression were Percent POC, Percent African American, Competitiveness, and Red State. The thresholds for what qualifies as a “significant” percentage of People of Color in any given state was calculated by accessing the most recent racial U.S. Census data and calculating the

percentage of those who have identified themselves as anything other than “White alone.”<sup>72</sup> After a percentage was calculated for each state, the median result was found and used as the threshold for what qualifies as significant. This same method was used to determine what qualifies as a “significant” African-American population after obtaining the Census data for what percent of residents in each state identified as “Black or African American alone.”<sup>73</sup> The threshold for what qualifies as a “significant” level of partisan competitiveness was determined using the Competitive Index created by the non-profit organization Open Secrets.<sup>74</sup> The percentage of competitive federal and state-level races in the 2020 election (based on votes) were tallied for each state, and the median was used as the threshold for significance. Breakdown of the percentage of POC, African-American, and electoral competitiveness by state can be seen in Table 2 of the technical appendix. The dependent (output) variable was the total index score. The confidence interval to determine significance was set to the standard 95%, and the assumptions for multiple linear regression were met.

## Results

When analyzing the distribution of voter suppression index scores, it is clear that the Democratic states are clustered at the lower end of the spectrum and Republican states are clustered at the higher end. The lowest score is that of Oregon (3) and the highest score is that of Alabama and Georgia (16). The average score is 11.04, the median score is 11, and the most common score is 12 (see Figure 1).

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<sup>72</sup> “Census: Table Results,” United States Census Bureau, Accessed January 7, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=race&g=0100000US%240400000&tid=DECENNIALCD1132010.P8>

<sup>73</sup> <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=race&g=0100000US%240400000&tid=DECENNIALCD1132010.P8>

<sup>74</sup> “Competitiveness Index (CI),” Open Secrets, Accessed February 11, 2022, <https://www.followthemoney.org/tools/ci/#y=2020&f-fc=1%2C2&ffcgo=1&mc50type=1>.

## Distribution of Voter Suppression Index Scores

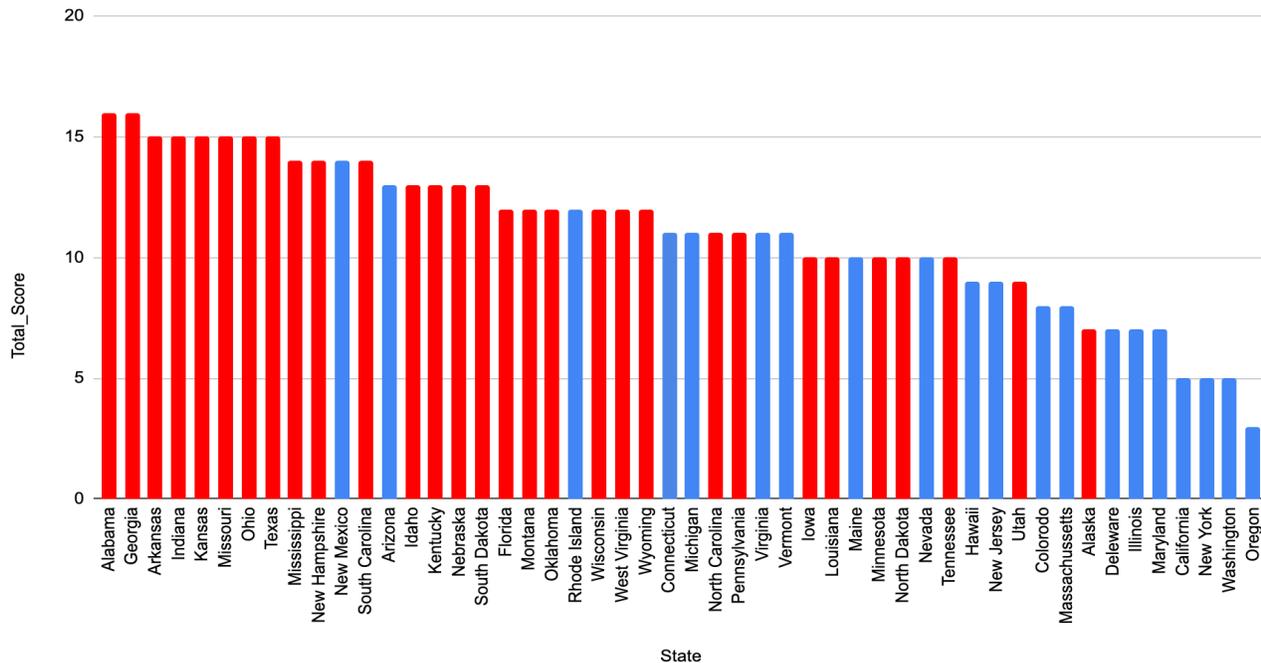


Figure 1: Distribution of voter suppression index scores of all 50 states, using 2020-2021 data. The red bars correspond to states with Republican legislatures and blue bars correspond to states with Democratic legislatures

From the p-values in the regression summary, it is clear that “Red State” is the only variable of statistical significance (see Figure 6.) Therefore, the multiple linear regression supports the party nationalization hypothesis: state party control (i.e. Democrat or Republican control of a state’s legislature) is significantly correlated with voter suppression outcomes, and the presence of electoral competitiveness and a significant racial minority population are not statistically significant correlates for suppressive behavior, as the literature tends to emphasize.

## Figure 2. Multiple Regression Output

Percent_POC	-0.01796 (0.3589)
Percent_African_American	0.05699 (0.04622)
Competitiveness	0.06232 (0.04311)
Red State	3.67765*** (0.74327)

*Note:* Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Figure 6: a multiple regression summary output. The p-values with \*\*\* indicate the variables of statistical significance.

## Discussion

The results of the multiple linear regression model provide a notable contribution to the existing literature. Not only does the analysis cast a shadow of doubt on the significance of the racial and electoral competition hypotheses largely focused on in the literature, it also indicates that the Republican party label alone is a more reliable predictor of suppressive behavior. This supports the hypothesis that voter suppression has become solidified as a prominent feature of Republican party identity regardless of racial or electoral circumstances. This fact is an indicator that there is another motive for raising the cost of voting in these states: the formation of a collective Republican identity and establishment of “political peoplehood.” The following chapter will present two case studies to illustrate this phenomenon, providing examples of how suppressive

legislation and rhetoric is consistent across the majority of red states, and more fully flesh out the nature of the Republican party's suppressive campaign.

## Chapter 4

# Explaining the Anomalies: An Application of the Party Identity Hypothesis

### Introduction

As explored in the previous chapter, racial animus and electoral competitiveness do not appear to be statistically significant correlates for suppressive behavior in American states. Rather, party control alone is more highly correlated with voter suppression than either of these variables. To further contextualize these results, this chapter will be exploring two “anomalous” Republican states, Idaho and Utah, that have passed restrictive legislation despite the absence of a significant POC and African-American population or significant electoral competition. The rhetoric of prominent Republican politicians and language of restrictive legislation from red states where there is a high percentage of minority voters and electoral competition (i.e. those typically highlighted in the literature) will be presented and compared to the political rhetoric and bill language from the anomalous states. The similarities in rhetoric and legislation between the two groups, as well as the existence of voter suppression in red states regardless of racial animus or electoral competition, supports the hypothesis that voter suppression is a key facet of Republican party identity.

## Party Identity

As the Republican and Democratic parties have become increasingly polarized in the 21st century, ideology has become inseparable from party labels. In other words, the conservative perspective that defines political issue positions has become an exclusively Republican ideology. Thus, the goals of political parties (to gain power) and ideologies (to influence principles of governance) have merged and become one in the same -- the Republican party gains power through the articulation of conservative ideas and policy positions.<sup>75</sup> The “Republican party identity” that will be referenced throughout the rest of the thesis refers to the set of conservative political and social beliefs that simultaneously serve to maintain a winning coalition as well as articulate a unified conception of political peoplehood.

Generally, conservative political positions include reducing the size of the federal government, stricter immigration policies, and deregulation and privatization of industries, while conservative social positions prioritize nationalism and generally reject the idea that historically marginalized groups require particular kinds of governmental support. These positions include opposing same-sex marriage, affirmative action, and reproductive rights.<sup>76</sup> Republican party identity, as defined in the context of this thesis, is the embrace of these conservative issue positions in combination with a limited view on what kinds of people should have access to voting and who should not. Through the analysis of the following case studies, this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which party identity and political ideology have become inextricably interwoven on the issue of voter suppression, as well as emphasize how the Republican party has come to support a conservative version of political peoplehood.

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<sup>75</sup> Noel, 19.

<sup>76</sup> James A. Morone and Rogan Kersh, *By the People: Debating American Government*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 313-314.

## Case Selection Methods

Anomalous states were identified through the construction of contingency tables, a representation of categorical data that shows the frequencies for variables X and Y, with each quadrant of the table featuring a mutually-exclusive combination of X-Y values (See Figure x). In this case, the variables “Significant POC Population,” “Significant African-American Population,” and “Significant Competitiveness” were combined with the variable “Restrictive Voting Laws.” The thresholds for what qualifies as a “significant” percentage of People of Color in any given state was calculated by accessing the most recent racial U.S. Census data and calculating the percentage of those who have identified themselves as anything other than “White alone.”<sup>77</sup> After a percentage was calculated for each state, the median result was found and used as the threshold for what qualifies as significant. The threshold for what qualifies as a “significant” level of partisan competitiveness was determined from the State Legislative Election Competitiveness Index created by Ballotpedia after the 2020 election cycle.<sup>78</sup> Each state was given a composite score, of which the median score was used as the threshold for significance. Breakdown of the percentage of POC and electoral competitiveness by state can be seen in Figure 1 of the appendix (page 52).. Each state was sorted into the tables and color-coded according to which party controls their state legislature (red = Republican, blue = Democrat). The contingency tables reveal that Idaho (R) and Utah (R) (bolded) are restricting voting access despite not having the racial or partisan motivations for doing so (see Figures 3-5 below).

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<sup>77</sup> “Census: Table Results,” United States Census Bureau, Accessed January 7, 2022, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=race&g=0100000US%240400000&tid=DECENNIALCD1132010.P8>

<sup>78</sup> “Annual State Legislative Competitiveness Report: Vol. 10, 2020,” Ballotpedia, Accessed January 7, 2022. [https://ballotpedia.org/Annual\\_State\\_Legislative\\_Competitiveness\\_Report:\\_Vol.\\_10,\\_2020#Decade\\_overview](https://ballotpedia.org/Annual_State_Legislative_Competitiveness_Report:_Vol._10,_2020#Decade_overview).

Figure 3: Contingency Table of Variables “Significant POC Population” and “Restrictive Voting Laws”

Xr = Sig. POC Pop. Yr = Restrictive Voting Laws	<b>Xr Present</b>	<b>Xr Absent</b>
<b>Yr present</b>	AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, NV, NY, OK, TX	AZ, IA, ID, IN, KS, KY, MT, NH, UT, WY
<b>Yr absent</b>	AK, CA, CT, DE, HI, IL, MA, MD, MI, NC, NJ, SC, TN, VA, WA	CO, ME, MN, MO, ND, NE, NM, OH, OR, PA, RI, SD, VT, WI, WV

Figure 3: Contingency table showing the presence and absence of a significant POC population as well as restrictive voting laws in each state. Red indicates that a state is controlled by a Republican state legislature and blue indicates that a state is controlled by a Democratic state legislature.

The contingency table above displays the distribution of all 50 states along the variables of “Significant POC Population” and “Restrictive Voting Laws.” States are color-coded according to which party controls the state legislature (red = Republican, blue = Democrat). Going clockwise from the top left, quadrant one contains all states that have both a significant POC population as well as restrictive voting laws, and quadrant 2 shows all states that have restrictive voting laws but lack a significant POC population. Quadrant 3 depicts all states that have neither restrictive voting laws nor a significant POC population, and quadrant 4 contains all states with a significant POC population but lack restrictive voting laws. Based on the table, it can be observed that the majority of Democratic states do not contain restrictive voting laws while the majority of Republican states do, despite a nearly equal number of red and blue states containing a significant POC population.

Figure 4: Contingency Table of Variables “Significant African-American Population” and Restrictive Voting Laws”

Xa = Sig. AA Pop. Yr = Restrictive Voting Laws	<b>Xa Present</b>	<b>Xa Absent</b>
<b>Yr present</b>	AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, NV, NY, OK, TX	AZ, IA, <b>ID</b> , KS, MT, NH, <b>UT</b> , WY
<b>Yr absent</b>	CT, DE, IL, MD, MO, MS, NC, NJ, OH, PA, TN, VA, WI	AK, CA, CO, HI, MA, ME, MN, ND, NE, NM, OR, RI, SC, SD, VT, WA, WV

Figure 4: Contingency table showing the presence and absence of a significant African-American population as well as restrictive voting laws in each state.

The second contingency table above displays the distribution of all 50 states along the variables of “Significant African-American Population” and “Restrictive Voting Laws.” Going clockwise from the top left, quadrant one contains all states that have both a significant African-American population as well as restrictive voting laws, and quadrant 2 shows all states that have restrictive voting laws but lack a significant African-American population. Quadrant 3 depicts all states that have neither restrictive voting laws nor a significant African-American population, and quadrant 4 contains all states with a significant African-American population but lack restrictive voting laws. As seen previously, this table depicts the majority of Republican states as having restrictive voting laws and the majority of Democratic states as not having restrictive voting laws. It can also be noted that more than half of all states with a significant African-American population are red states.

Figure 5: Contingency Table of Variables “Electoral Competition” and “Restrictive Voting Laws”

Xp = Electoral Competition Yr = Restrictive Voting Laws	Xp Present	Xp Absent
Yr present	AZ, FL, IA, KS, MT, NH, NV, TX, WY	AL, AR, GA, ID, KY, LA, NY, OK, UT
Yr absent	AK, CT, IL, ME, MN, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, OH, OR, VA, WA, WI, WV	CA, CO, DE, HI, MA, MD, MI, MO, MS, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, VT

Figure 5: Contingency table showing the presence and absence of significant electoral competitiveness as well as restrictive voting laws in each state.

The third contingency table above displays the distribution of all 50 states along the variables of “Electoral Competition” and “Restrictive Voting Laws.” Going clockwise from the top left, quadrant one contains all states that have both a significant degree of electoral competition as well as restrictive voting laws, and quadrant 2 shows all states that have restrictive voting laws but lack a significant degree of electoral competition. Quadrant 3 depicts all states that have neither restrictive voting laws nor a significant degree of electoral competition, and quadrant 4 contains all states with a significant degree of electoral competition but lack restrictive voting laws. It can be observed that a large percentage of Republican states suppress voting regardless of whether there is a significant amount of electoral competition. By the same token, many of the Democratic states that have high degrees of electoral competition do not restrict voting.

As demonstrated across the several contingency tables above, some Republican states, particularly Idaho and Utah, have neither a significant POC population nor high levels of electoral competition, yet *still* have recently implemented restrictive voting laws.

## **Sampling Political Rhetoric from Non-Anomalous States**

To help explain the presence of anomalous states, I highlight the similarities in political rhetoric across both anomalous and non-anomalous cases. In accordance with the literature, my research reveals that 1) Republican states engage in voter suppression more than Democratic states, and 2) electorally competitive states and those with high percentages of voters of color are likely to engage in voter suppression. While the partisan motivations for this behavior are clear, they are not being expressed in rhetoric of Republican politicians and suppressive legislation. Rather, the general party narrative in these Republican-led states has one main component: combating election fraud.

After Joe Biden claimed victory in the 2020 presidential election, Donald Trump and his Republican allies across the country began circulating what is commonly referred to as the “Big Lie,” claiming that the election was fraudulent and victory was stolen from Trump, the rightful winner. The Trump campaign requested recounts in multiple states and attempted to utilize the courts to overturn the election results, efforts which ended unsuccessfully. However, the former president and his supporters continued to profess the Big Lie through social media, public speeches, and other outlets. At a Georgia rally in September of 2021, Trump said to a crowd of supporters, “I have no doubt that we won, and we won big. The headlines claiming that Biden won are fake news — and a very big lie.”<sup>79</sup> Political ads for three Republican Senate candidates that aired in January of 2022 echo this sentiment: Rep. Billy Long from Missouri stated that

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<sup>79</sup> Melissa Block, “The clear and present danger of Trump's enduring 'Big Lie,’” *National Public Radio* online, December 23, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/23/1065277246/trump-big-lie-jan-6-election>.

Trump “made America great, but the Democrats rigged the election,” and Bernie Munro running in Ohio said, “President Trump says the election was stolen, and he's right.”<sup>80</sup>

The wide acceptance of the Big Lie by Republican politicians and voters across the country has contributed to a massive surge of voter suppression legislation in red states following the election claiming to target “voter fraud” (despite robust evidence proving that voter fraud is extremely rare). For instance, Florida, an electorally-competitive state where there is a high percentage of people of color and African-Americans, passed S.B. 90 in May of 2021, imposing drastic restrictions on mail in voting. The bill was lauded by Governor Ron DeSantis as protecting the “transparency and integrity of elections.”<sup>81</sup> Montana, another electorally competitive state, passed House Bill 169 in April of 2021, ending same-day voter registration in the state. “Montana has a long history of secure, transparent elections, setting a standard for the nation,” Governor Greg Gianforte said in a statement. “These new laws will help ensure the continued integrity of Montana’s elections for years to come.”<sup>82</sup> In Georgia, one of the most electorally competitive states and one of the highest percentages of people of color in the nation, passed perhaps one of the most egregious laws claiming to prevent voter fraud: the aptly named “Election Integrity Act of 2021,” which prohibits volunteers from distributing food and water to those waiting in line to vote, among other provisions. Justification for this measure is given in Section 2 of the bill:

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<sup>80</sup> David Wright, “Republican Senate candidates echo lie that 2020 election was stolen in advertising,” *CNN* online, January 21, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/21/politics/campaign-ads-2020-election-lie/index.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Ben Kamisar, “Fla. becomes latest state to enact restrictive voting law as DeSantis signs bill on Fox News,” *NBC* online, May 6, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/gop-gov-desantis-signs-restrictive-new-voting-florida-dems-fear-n1266415>.

<sup>82</sup> Amy Beth Hanson, “Montana governor approves ending same-day voter registration,” *AP News*, April 19, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/elections-montana-voter-registration-voting-5ee83eb24b3339610cfaee3570a16e4f>.

Following the 2018 and 2020 elections, there was a significant lack of confidence in Georgia election systems, with many electors concerned about allegations of rampant voter suppression and many electors concerned about allegations of rampant voter fraud.<sup>83</sup>

In September of 2021, Governor Greg Abbott of Texas (another highly competitive state with a large racial minority population) signed S.B. 1 into law, restricting access to mail-in voting and empowering poll watchers to harass and intimidate voters. The bill describes itself as, “an act relating to election integrity and security, including by preventing fraud in the conduct of elections in this state; increasing criminal penalties; creating criminal offenses; providing civil penalties.”<sup>84</sup>

These examples depict consistent messaging of concern over election fraud in various Republican states, all of which had a significant POC population and/or a significant level of competitive elections in 2020-21. As the next sections will show, this rhetoric can be found in states for which these racial and partisan motivations are not present.

#### Case Study #1: Voter Suppression in Idaho

Despite having a POC population of only 7% (of which the Black population is 0.9%), and a mere 11% of all electoral races in 2020-21 being competitive, voter suppression is rampant in Idaho. Perhaps the most telling statistic of all is the fact that 50% of all voting-related bills introduced in the 2021 legislative session in the state contained suppressive provisions.<sup>85</sup> This legislation includes voting restriction for felons, for those that have been incarcerated may only get their right to vote restored after release, parole, and probation, resulting in upwards of 32,000

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<sup>83</sup> Georgia General Assembly, *A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT*, SB202, 156th Georgia General Assembly, 2nd session, passed March 25, 2021, <https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/legislation/document/20212022/201498>.

<sup>84</sup> Texas Legislature, *A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT*, S.B 1, 88th Texas Legislature, 1st session,

<sup>85</sup> “State Voting Rights Tracker,” Voting Rights Lab, Accessed February 21, 2022, <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/states>

citizens being disenfranchised.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, Idaho absentee ballot application deadlines are among the earliest in the country, requiring that all applications filled out in person, by mail, and online be deposited no later than 11 days before an election.<sup>87</sup> Registered voters who fail to meet this deadline and wish to vote absentee are denied the right to cast a ballot. A government-issued photo I.D. is required to vote in Idaho, a policy which disproportionately excludes low-income people, racial and ethnic minorities, the elderly, and people with disabilities.<sup>88</sup> Sunday voting is not allowed and pre-registration for minors is limited only to those who turn 18 by the next election. Voters who do not vote consecutively for four years are automatically purged off of the voting rolls.

In 2021, Idaho's House of Representatives drafted a bill attempting to outlaw ballot harvesting (HB547), which would make it a felony for a voter to drop off more than two ballots at a time, if passed (as of February 14, 2022, the bill has cleared the House State Affairs Committee).<sup>89</sup> The introduction of the bill followed the widespread allegations of voter fraud in the 2020 presidential election, mirroring the pattern across the nation. In response to widespread concern about the efficacy of the bill, House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, one of Idaho's top Republican politicians and main sponsor of the bill, stated, "So, you have to make two trips to the post office. I understand that concern. But you know what, voting shouldn't be easy."<sup>90</sup> Jason

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<sup>86</sup> "Number of People by State Who Cannot Vote Due to a Felony Conviction," Britannica ProCon.org, Accessed February 21, 2022,

<https://felonvoting.procon.org/number-of-people-by-state-who-cannot-vote-due-to-a-felony-conviction/>

<sup>87</sup> "Absentee Ballot Deadlines," Vote.org, Accessed February 21, 2022,

<https://www.vote.org/absentee-ballot-deadlines/>

<sup>88</sup> "Oppose Voter ID Legislation Fact Sheet," ACLU, Accessed February 21, 2022,

<https://www.aclu.org/other/oppose-voter-id-legislation-fact-sheet>

<sup>89</sup> Betsy Russell, "Two bills decried as 'voter suppression' for May primary clear House panel on party-line votes," Idaho Press, February 14, 2022,

[https://www.idahopress.com/eyeonboise/two-bills-decried-as-voter-suppression-for-may-primary-clear-house-panel-on-party-line/article\\_e12650dd-746e-53ce-aa1c-baaae9c0a875.html](https://www.idahopress.com/eyeonboise/two-bills-decried-as-voter-suppression-for-may-primary-clear-house-panel-on-party-line/article_e12650dd-746e-53ce-aa1c-baaae9c0a875.html)

<sup>90</sup> James Dawson, "Top Idaho Republican: "Voting Shouldn't Be Easy" In Attempt To Outlaw Ballot Harvesting," Boise State Public Radio, February 11, 2021,

<https://www.boisestatepublicradio.org/politics-government/2021-02-11/top-idaho-republican-voting-shouldnt-be-easy-in-attempt-to-outlaw-ballot-harvesting>

Hancock, an employee of the Idaho Secretary of State's office and a co-sponsor of the bill along with Representative Moyle, echoed this sentiment: "When ballot harvesting is allowed, it essentially encourages people, and we've seen this in other states, who are partisan actors to get involved in the collection and conveying of ballots. We don't think that's a good practice." In fact, the official statement of purpose for the bill admits that ballot harvesting is not currently a cause for concern in the state, instead claiming that the legislation will serve as a preventative measure:

Idaho does not currently experience significant problems with ballot harvesting. However, it has become a widespread practice in some other states, where its practice places many voters' ballots, and the sanctity of their vote, into the hands of those who may have a conflicted interest in the election's outcome.<sup>91</sup>

Another suppressive bill that has recently cleared the Idaho House State Affairs Committee is HB439, which if enacted would prohibit the more than 310,000 voters who currently are unaffiliated with any political party from affiliating on Election Day, as current law allows them to do. The bill's sponsor, Rep. Doug Okuniewicz, (R-Hayden), claims that the passage of the law is important in order to maintain election integrity and fairness: "Unaffiliated voters are allowed to change right up to Election Day," he said in the House State Affairs Committee meeting on February 14, 2022. "The folks who sort of game the system and try to switch sides when convenient, they can still do that, but they can't do it right up until Election Day. One of the primary motivations behind this is just for consistency's sake." Additionally, all unaffiliated voters in Idaho were unable to change their party affiliation online until March 9, 2022, due to a closure of the state's online voter registration system. As of the committee

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<sup>91</sup> Idaho State Legislature, House, "STATEMENT OF PURPOSE," RS28643 / H0223, 66th Idaho Legislature, 2nd sess, Introduced February 22, 2021, <https://legislature.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/sessioninfo/2021/legislation/H0223SOP.pdf>

meeting, there was no strategic plan in place to alert the hundreds of thousands of voters who may have their voting rights drastically altered, if HB439 were to pass.<sup>92</sup>

Since the majority of Idaho voters are Caucasian and Republican voters, there should be little incentive for the state apparatus to be suppressing votes, according to the racial and electoral competitiveness hypotheses presented in the literature. The degree of voter suppression in Idaho is even more absurd when one considers the voter turnout in the 2020 general elections – 68% of the voting age population cast a ballot that year, a turnout rate higher than half of all states in the country.<sup>93</sup> The party nationalization hypothesis presents an alternative explanation to this counterintuitive phenomenon. Voter suppression has become a key element of Republican party identity, which results in red states universally restricting voting access even without racial or partisan incentives. In fact, the high voter turnout in the state suggests that suppressing the votes of Idaho voters would actually be disadvantageous. Despite this potentially adverse outcome, there is a strong incentive for the Republican party to adopt a unified political identity and further distinguish their conception of political peoplehood from that of Democrats.

### Case Study 2: Voter Suppression in Utah

Compared to Idaho, Utah has a slightly higher percentage of non-white voters (9.4%, 1.4% of which are Black), but had an even smaller percentage of electorally competitive races in 2021 (10%). Despite the absence of these racial and partisan incentives for Republican states to enact suppressive legislation, Utah has still done so to a significant degree. HB0197 was signed into law on March 24, 2021, preventing registered voters from switching party affiliation before

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<sup>92</sup> Russell, [https://www.idahopress.com/eyeonboise/two-bills-decried-as-voter-suppression-for-may-primary-clear-house-panel-on-party-line/article\\_e12650dd-746e-53ce-aa1c-baaae9c0a875.html](https://www.idahopress.com/eyeonboise/two-bills-decried-as-voter-suppression-for-may-primary-clear-house-panel-on-party-line/article_e12650dd-746e-53ce-aa1c-baaae9c0a875.html)

<sup>93</sup> “Voter Turnout,” Fair Vote, accessed March 8, 2022, [https://www.fairvote.org/voter\\_turnout#voter\\_turnout\\_101](https://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101).

primary elections. According to the House Republicans who sponsored the bill, the legislation targets voters who change their party affiliation simply because they want to nominate the weakest candidate of the opposing party and give their “true” party a better chance of winning. This mirrors the argument lauded by many Republican politicians in Idaho, referring to HB439, which contains similar provisions and was in the House Committee around the same time as the Utah bill.<sup>94</sup>

Like in Idaho, Sunday voting is not allowed in Utah. Identification is required to cast a ballot in the state, either one government-issued photo ID or two non-photo IDs (such as a bank statement or utility bill).<sup>95</sup> Voter registration must be done seven days before the election if done in person and 30 days before the election if done online.<sup>96</sup> Just in February 2022 alone, five bills with suppressive provisions were introduced in the state legislature: Bill 387 would shorten the time a voter has to return a mail-in ballot, Bill 313 would require first-time voters to provide Utah driver’s license or state ID and reject ballots if their information does not match what is listed on their record (including signature matching), Bill 371 would end universal mail-in voting as well as limit access to dropboxes (this bill has since been rejected by the Utah House committee) . Bill 411 would update the classification system for voters and send mail-in ballots only to registered “current” voters and give party leaders access to voter information that is currently confidential, and Bill 219 would prohibit the acceptance of campaign donations by any

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<sup>94</sup> Bryan Schlott, “Lawmakers advance measure restricting when Utah voters can switch political parties,” *The Salt Lake Tribune* online, February 5, 2021,

<https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2021/02/06/lawmakers-advance-measure/>

<sup>95</sup> Ankita Rao, Erum Salam, and Juweek Adolphe, “Which US states make it hardest to vote?,” *The Guardian*, last updated January 21, 2000,

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2019/nov/07/which-us-states-hardest-vote-supression-election>

<sup>96</sup> Ankita Rao, Erum Salam, and Juweek Adolphe,

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2019/nov/07/which-us-states-hardest-vote-supression-election>

party other than a government entity.<sup>97</sup> With the introduction of these most recent bills, 25% of all voting-related bills introduced in Utah since the beginning of 2021 have been suppressive.<sup>98</sup>

Like in Idaho and most other Republican states, the widespread support for suppressive legislation in Utah is largely justified by defending baseless claims of rampant voter fraud. In the House Committee meeting where suppressive House Bill 371 was being debated, chief sponsor Rep. Phil Lyman (R) failed to provide evidence of the widespread fraud he so often cited as the impetus for the bill's introduction: "I don't know what the Attorney General has investigated or if he's investigated things. On a county level, every once in a while, they will flag somebody for voting twice or something like that."<sup>99</sup>

Amidst the introduction of similar suppressive bills after the 2020 election, the issue of supposed voter fraud was investigated by the Judiciary Interim Committee in Utah in October of 2021. Upon a thorough review of voting records and practices of the last election cycle, Lt. Gov. Deidre Henderson, Gov. Spencer J. Cox and Lt. Gov. Henderson issued a joint statement discrediting the allegations:

We recognize some voters have legitimate questions about our elections and we invite all citizens to be involved in our local elections to see the process first-hand. But make no mistake: There is absolutely no evidence of election fraud in Utah. Utah has long been a model to the nation when it comes to voting and voter security. County clerks and local election offices execute their duties with accuracy and integrity. Utah follows the law.<sup>100</sup>

As in Idaho, there are few logical motivations for Utah Republicans to support and enforce voter suppression legislation. The phenomenon is especially strange when one considers

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<sup>97</sup> "State Voting Rights Tracker," Voting Rights Lab, accessed February 22, 2022, <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/states/utah>

<sup>98</sup> "State Voting Rights Tracker," <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/states/utah>.

<sup>99</sup> Bryan Schott. "Utah House committee rejects baseless claims of election fraud; soundly defeats bill to end universal vote by mail," accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2022/02/23/utah-house-committee/>.

<sup>100</sup> "Gov. Cox and Lt. Gov. Henderson Defend Election Integrity," accessed March 9, 2022, <https://ltgovernor.utah.gov/2021/10/20/gov-cox-and-lt-gov-henderson-defend-election-integrity/>.

that the voter turnout in Utah is almost 70%, the 22nd highest tally in the nation.<sup>101</sup> Given that the percentage of competitive races as well as the percentage of white voters are 90% or greater, rampant voter suppression in Utah is extremely counterintuitive. The widespread existence of voter suppression in the state despite the absence of racial and partisan motivations supports the possibility that the Republican party seeks to make voter suppression a key part of its national identity. If this is indeed the case (as evidenced by voter suppression existing in red states that are majority white and would win elections in a landslide), the desire to have a unified, nationalized identity appears to be worth the risk of suppressing their own voters.

## **Discussion**

Despite an absence of these racial and partisan incentives, Idaho and Utah engage in suppressive behavior to a significant degree and produce ideological rhetoric very similar to that of the “ideal types,” lauding the false idea of widespread voter fraud. The persuasive narratives of voter fraud found in suppressive legislation and being amplified by Republican politicians, even in states where it is counterproductive, have worked to solidify voter suppression as a key facet of Republican party identity. As David Bateman discusses in *Disenfranchising Democracy*, democracy in America has always been deeply intertwined with exclusion, and this exclusion served an ideological purpose.<sup>102</sup> Throughout history, there has been a constant debate over what constitutes “the people” of the United States, and political parties are the mechanisms through which these ideas and corresponding ideologies are articulated.<sup>103</sup> Whether it be through the passage of restrictive voting laws or the circulation of election-related conspiracy theories,

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<sup>101</sup> [https://www.fairvote.org/voter\\_turnout#voter\\_turnout\\_101](https://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101)

<sup>102</sup> Bateman, p. 5.

<sup>103</sup> Bateman, 32.

Republican party leaders continue to make deliberate legislative and rhetorical choices in order to shape public philosophy regarding democracy.<sup>104</sup>

As demonstrated by the presence of voter suppression in the anomalous cases of Idaho and Utah, the conservative ideology of voter suppression and political peoplehood has been universally embraced by the Republican party, even when there is no political advantage for doing so. In fact, this practice has often been to the detriment of the party since these laws have resulted in the restriction of Republican voters. The fact that the GOP is willing to sacrifice the representation of their constituents indicates a strong investment in maintaining a consistent, national party identity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that the two common motivations for voter suppression by Republican states most commonly cited in the literature, racial animus and electoral competition, fail to adequately explain suppressive outcomes in all red states. The presence of voter suppression in red states that do not have a high level of competition or high percentage of voters color suggests that the practice is being supported not because Republicans fear a loss of political power, but rather because they seek to express a certain conservative party identity that mimics the behavior of other red states in the service of portraying a unified, national Republican identity. The next and final chapter will explore the implication and significance of this thesis' findings as well as expand upon areas of future research on the intersection of party identity and voter suppression.

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<sup>104</sup> Lewis, 26.

## Chapter 5

# Conclusion: Reflecting on the Future of American Democracy

### Introduction

This thesis has investigated and explained the use of contemporary voter suppression methods by the Republican party, hypothesizing that voter suppression has become a key facet of Republican party identity and has been implemented to enforce a conservative conceptualization of “political peoplehood.” This captures a nuance that fails to be acknowledged by the two dominant theories present in the literature on voter suppression, namely that the presence of significant percentages of minority voters as well as significant levels of electoral competition are the dominant forces motivating Republican-led voter suppression efforts. From the data gathered and analyzed in this thesis, partisan control of state legislatures is in fact more statistically significant with voter suppression tactics than the percentage of people of color and degree of competition on average, though it is worth noting that the latter two explanations are likely significant in individual cases. However, in this analysis, the data support the hypothesis that the Republican party has adopted voter suppression tactics as part of its identity rather than simply a strategy to win elections. The presence of “anomalous” cases (i.e. Republican states where voter suppression exists and fails to be explained by the racial and electoral competition hypotheses) indicates that a conservative conception of political peoplehood is being enforced countrywide, and portends an ominous future for American democracy.

This final chapter will explore the implications of this thesis' findings as well as detail the limitations of this study. Possibilities for future research will also be discussed.

## **Implications**

The data presented in this thesis have several major implications. First, understanding Republican-led voter suppression tactics as a facet of identity rather than merely a political strategy will inform the activism efforts of voting rights proponents. Understanding that voter suppression efforts are supported in most Republican states regardless of racial makeup or levels of electoral competition will ensure that resistance to this legislation is happening all across the country, not just in key battleground states like Georgia, Texas, and Florida. While the Republican party's efforts to strategically limit voting access in communities of color has been proven to exist, the data presented in this thesis show that there is another, more covert motive to these suppressive campaigns: the reestablishment of a "political peoplehood" that revolves around a set of conservative values, racial politics, and issue positions. In addition to increasing civic engagement in communities of color and racially gerrymandered districts, voting rights advocates should also focus on combating the blatant disinformation regarding voter fraud, such as widely publicizing data proving the extremely low rates of voter fraud in the United States, and encouraging voters to be critical consumers of political rhetoric.

A second implication of this thesis's research is that it will help inform the Democratic party's response to voter suppression efforts spearheaded by the Republicans, as well as influence how liberal ideology is expressed and embodied by the party. Knowing that the Republican party has successfully made voter suppression a key facet of its identity as a political coalition, Democratic candidates may be able to successfully appeal to the undecided or

ambivalent voters by utilizing pro-voting rights rhetoric and advocating for expansive voting legislation. There is widespread evidence that this is already happening, for the website of the Democratic National Committee features a lengthy description of the party’s commitment to “protecting and enforcing voting rights,” a position they explicitly say is against the interest of the GOP:

We stand united against the determined Republican campaign to disenfranchise voters through onerous voter ID laws, unconstitutional and excessive purges of the voter rolls, and closures of polling places in low-income neighborhoods, on college campuses, and in communities of color.<sup>105</sup>

Additionally, the Democrats in Congress unanimously support the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which has cleared the House and awaits approval in the Senate.

Unsurprisingly, Republican Congresspeople and their allies across the country generally oppose this legislation, citing it as a “power grab” for the Democrats to spearhead a federal takeover of elections.<sup>106</sup> In response to such falsehoods and expressions of conservative politics, the Democratic party may be persuaded to leverage their position on voting rights as a means to express their liberal ideology and win elections. In other words, they might mirror the actions of the GOP by embodying voter expansion as a key facet of Democratic party identity.

A third, more theoretical implication of this research is that it will help scholars and voters alike better understand political parties, ideology, and identity. While the goals of political parties and ideological groups are distinct (to gain power and influence behavior, respectively) the motives of modern-day parties in the United States are purely ideological in nature. In other

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<sup>105</sup> “Restoring and Strengthening Our Democracy,” Democratic National Committee, accessed March 30, 2022, <https://democrats.org/where-we-stand/party-platform/restoring-and-strengthening-our-democracy/>.

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Garber, “Debunking False Claims About the John Lewis Voting Rights Act,” last modified January 13, 2022, [https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/debunking-false-claims-about-john-lewis-voting-rights-act?ms=gad\\_john%20lewis%20voting%20rights%20act\\_575590355240\\_8626214133\\_133261743078&gclid=Cj0KCQjw\\_4SBhCgARIsAAlegrWJP9SfNnvgO4N6MqJ9L2ekGI4Hh7owRjmnPL05zPdNIiDhOSZbX08aAm36EALw\\_wcB](https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/debunking-false-claims-about-john-lewis-voting-rights-act?ms=gad_john%20lewis%20voting%20rights%20act_575590355240_8626214133_133261743078&gclid=Cj0KCQjw_4SBhCgARIsAAlegrWJP9SfNnvgO4N6MqJ9L2ekGI4Hh7owRjmnPL05zPdNIiDhOSZbX08aAm36EALw_wcB).

words, the conservative and liberal frameworks for structuring issue positions and public philosophy have been entirely embraced by the Democratic and Republican parties. While ideologies inform political stances that are used to define goals, political parties organize people to execute those goals. In the case of the GOP, voter suppression is just one of many conservative issue positions that has been enacted by the Republican party and has consequently become a key characteristic of the party's identity. The party has demonstrated a mastery of persuasive narration of this issue in particular, primarily through spreading false accusations of voter fraud and the need for greater election security. Despite being a major political party in a country that holds democracy as a core value, the Republican party has fervently shown its support for anti-democratic principles, which can be interpreted as a warning sign for democratic backsliding. Understanding that the role of voter suppression is greater than a strategy for the Republican party to win elections paints a more comprehensive picture of the state of American politics today.

### **Limitations**

There are many limitations to this study that have influenced the interpretation of its findings, and they should be noted in order to contextualize this research within the larger body of scholarship on this topic. One such limitation is the temporal scope of the research. As data was only collected from November of 2020 onward (i.e. since the last presidential election), the results do not reflect a larger longitudinal pattern in party-sponsored legislative actions or the evolution of political party ideology. The data in this thesis is a snapshot that reflects a specific moment in American political history; therefore, it should not be assumed that party strategies and identities have always had, nor will they continue to have, static characteristics as time goes

on. The research in its current form serves to give an accurate portrayal of the contemporary geography of voter suppression, and therefore cannot provide a holistic picture of American party development and positions on voting rights as they have changed over the span of several years (or even decades).

Another limitation of this study is the discrepancies between various data repositories in how they have collected and categorized information on suppressive legislation. There are many think tanks, research institutes, and non-profit organizations that have been diligent in tracking the progress and implementation of voting rights bills around the country, including the Brennan Center, Voting Rights Lab, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). As a result, different sources interpret the impact of these bills differently and therefore categorize them in inconsistent ways. For example, the Voting Rights Lab website features a database where one can search for voting legislation that has been organized by overall impact, which could be one of the following categories: “improves voter access/election administration,” “mixed or unclear,” “neutral,” or “restricts voting access/election administration.”<sup>107</sup> In contrast, the Brennan Center publishes “Voting Laws Roundups” every month that feature a running count of bills passed within a given year that are either considered to be “restrictive legislation” or “expansive legislation.”<sup>108</sup> Just as different sources categorize voting legislation in different ways, the data featured in this thesis, while informed by outside sources, reflects the researcher’s subjective conception of “restrictive” and “expansive.” In addition, the coding mechanism used in the Voter Suppression Index is just one of many methods that could have been chosen; therefore, the degree of voter suppression that

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<sup>107</sup> “Comprehensive Bill Search,” Voting Rights Lab, accessed March 31, 2022, <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/pending/search>.

<sup>108</sup> “Voting Laws Roundup: February 2022,” *Brennan Center for Justice*, last modified February 9, 2022, [https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-february-2022?ms=gad\\_voting%20aws\\_587514441261\\_8626214133\\_130570618446&gclid=CjwKCAjwopWSBhB6EiwAjxmqDYJp1OJdkF2o0TPbACF6xeFjssfkbUbr\\_dAZBL-oVp3MUwt7mH1C-RoCfXkOAvD\\_BwE](https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/voting-laws-roundup-february-2022?ms=gad_voting%20aws_587514441261_8626214133_130570618446&gclid=CjwKCAjwopWSBhB6EiwAjxmqDYJp1OJdkF2o0TPbACF6xeFjssfkbUbr_dAZBL-oVp3MUwt7mH1C-RoCfXkOAvD_BwE).

exists in each state (according to the index) is a product of intentional, well-reasoned decisions made by the researcher. This is a limitation to the study since there were a myriad of other ways the data could have been classified.

Similar to the previous point, a final limitation of this research is the way in which key concepts and variables included in this research were operationally defined. For example, the “Competitiveness” measure includes all standard, state and federal races in the general election with competitiveness being measured in terms of votes cast. There are lots of other ways in which “competitiveness” could have been measured: local elections, special and recall elections, and primary elections could have been included. Incumbency advantage could have been factored into the metric. Rather than measure competitiveness in terms of votes, it could have been measured according to monetary contributions, individual, or non-individual support. If any of these alternative measures were used, the results of the study would have been different. Even the core concepts of “voter suppression” and “voter expansion” were intentionally operationalized in specific ways, which affected how states and individual pieces of legislation were classified. In sum, it should be noted that the conceptual frameworks of this study, as well as the operational definitions of specific terms, were intentionally chosen. Consequently, the results and applicability of this research are influenced by such decisions.

It should also be noted that the presence of several Democratic states with high voter suppression index scores (such as New Mexico and Rhode Island) as well as a handful of Republican states that have relatively low index scores (such as Tennessee and Alaska) has the potential to confound the explanation presented in the party identity hypothesis. While the trend of Republican states having high index scores and Democratic states having comparatively low scores is clear and strong, further exploration into the outliers of this pattern could add necessary

nuance to, and potentially challenge, the argument that voter suppression has become a universal aspect of Republican party identity.

### **Possibilities for Future Research**

The central questions and data presented in this thesis lead to many possibilities for future research. One such possibility is doing a more longitudinal analysis of how voter suppression has been utilized by both the Democratic and Republican parties in different ways throughout history. Not only would this larger temporal scope capture more nuance in how party positions on the issue of voting rights have changed over time, it would also provide more context into the evolution of voter suppression as a facet of party identity. This thesis hypothesizes and investigates the presence of voter suppression as an element of Republican identity, but it sheds minimal light on how this came to be. Future research could explore the evolution of voter suppression as a political strategy to how it has become utilized in other ways by both major parties in the United States.

Another possibility for future research is situating an analysis of voter suppression into the bigger phenomenon of democratic backsliding. While this thesis mentions democratic backsliding in the literature review, the research does not focus in depth on how the threat posed by voter suppression contributes to the rise of autocratization in America. Future research could explore the ways in which the adoption of voter suppression as an element of GOP identity is situated within the larger context of democratic erosion, investigating questions such as, “Is the Republican party anti-democratic?,” and “How can democratic backsliding be slowed and/or prevented?” Questions such as these prompt an investigation into the ways voter suppression and autocratization intersect with other phenomena, such as party polarization.

A final area of research that could be explored in the future would be to more deeply analyze the few Democratic states with relatively high voter suppression index scores and investigate why this is the case. Several of these states, such as New Mexico and Rhode Island, have significant populations of people of color as well as a history of Republican control.

In summary, there are a multitude of possibilities for how the research presented in this thesis can be expanded upon and/or included in the exploration of other political questions. Voter suppression is a process that has a wide impact on party ideology formation, voting behavior, and more. This thesis certainly has applicability in future research related to understanding the American political landscape as well as scholarship focused on crafting solutions to complex problems.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the adoption of voter suppression as a key facet of Republican party identity as opposed to a mere political strategy. It was hypothesized that GOP state-level control is the most reliable predictor of suppressive behavior, a prediction that stands in contrast to the racial and electoral competition hypotheses presented in the wider literature. Chapter one featured a detailed literature review on these motivations for ballot restriction as well as an overview of democratic backsliding and the development of party ideology. Chapter two presented a brief history of voter suppression in the United States, starting with the suppressive provisions outlined in America's founding documents, tracing the evolution and impact of those provisions through the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. Chapter three detailed the analytical contribution of this thesis, presenting the Voter Suppression Index as a tool for measuring the degree of voter suppression in all 50 states along various dimensions. This chapter also featured

the results of a multiple linear regression analysis on the Index data, showing that GOP state-level control was the only variable significantly correlated with suppressive outcomes (thus supporting the hypothesis). Finally, the last chapter included various implications and limitations of this research as well as several possibilities for how this research could be expanded upon in the future.

Alexander Keyssar, author of *The Right to Vote* posits, “The evolution of democracy [has rarely] followed a straight path, and it has always been accompanied by profound antidemocratic countercurrents.”<sup>109</sup> I believe that the United States is currently in the midst of such a countercurrent, for the adoption of voter suppression as a prominent feature of the Republican party identity has had severe negative consequences on American life and will continue to do so if left unacknowledged and unchecked. Understanding and exposing the myriad of both covert and overt ways that voter suppression is threatening democracy in the U.S. can influence the agendas of politicians, researchers, activists, and everyday citizens. Furthermore, the presence of voter suppression in its many forms serves as evidence that democratic institutions in this country are by no means indestructible. Cases of democratic backsliding (and even democratic collapse) can be witnessed worldwide in countries of varying levels of wealth and global influence. While the United States democracy has proven to be resilient, it is by no means immortal, and it would be a grave mistake to ignore the warning signs of autocratization that have been present for decades. Before the disastrous effects of voter suppression continue to take root into American life and further become a defining feature of our political system, it is essential that policy makers, academics, office holders, and voters alike utilize existing data to fight against this looming threat.

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<sup>109</sup> Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), xxiii.

## Technical Appendix

Table 1: Significance Data for % POC and Competitiveness by State

State	% POC	Sig. Minority Pop.	% AA	Sig. AA Pop.	% Competitiveness	Competitive?
Alaska	39.70%	TRUE	3	FALSE	20%	TRUE
Alabama	30.90%	TRUE	25.8	TRUE	0%	FALSE
Arkansas	21%	TRUE	15.1	TRUE	8%	FALSE
Arizona	17.40%	FALSE	4.7	FALSE	27%	TRUE
California	28.10%	TRUE	5.7	FALSE	15%	FALSE
Colorado	13.10%	FALSE	4.1	FALSE	10%	FALSE
Connecticut	20.30%	TRUE	10.8	TRUE	30%	TRUE
Delaware	30.80%	TRUE	22.1	TRUE	7%	FALSE
Florida	22.70%	TRUE	15.1	TRUE	19%	TRUE
Georgia	39.80%	TRUE	31	TRUE	13%	FALSE
Hawaii	74.50%	TRUE	1.6	FALSE	8%	FALSE
Iowa	9.40%	FALSE	4.1	FALSE	21%	TRUE
Idaho	7%	FALSE	0.9	FALSE	11%	FALSE
Illinois	23.20%	TRUE	14.1	TRUE	18%	TRUE
Indiana	15.20%	FALSE	9.6	TRUE	9%	FALSE
Kansas	13.70%	FALSE	5.7	FALSE	24%	TRUE
Kentucky	12.50%	FALSE	8	TRUE	14%	FALSE
Louisiana	37.20%	TRUE	31.4	TRUE	7%	FALSE
Massachusetts	19.40%	TRUE	7	FALSE	8%	FALSE
Maryland	41.50%	TRUE	29.5	TRUE	0%	FALSE
Maine	5.60%	FALSE	1.9	FALSE	20%	TRUE
Michigan	20.80%	TRUE	13.7	TRUE	14%	FALSE
Minnesota	16.20%	FALSE	7	FALSE	19%	TRUE
Missouri	17.10%	FALSE	11.4	TRUE	13%	FALSE

Mississippi	40.90%	TRUE	36.6	TRUE	6%	FALSE
Montana	11.10%	FALSE	0.5	FALSE	16%	TRUE
North Carolina	29.40%	TRUE	20.5	TRUE	26%	TRUE
North Dakota	13.10%	FALSE	3.4	FALSE	20%	TRUE
Nebraska	11.90%	FALSE	4.9	FALSE	25%	TRUE
New Hampshire	6.90%	FALSE	1.5	FALSE	34%	TRUE
New Jersey	20.90%	TRUE	13.1	TRUE	47%	TRUE
New Mexico	18.10%	FALSE	2.2	FALSE	24%	TRUE
Nevada	26.10%	TRUE	9.8	TRUE	27%	TRUE
New York	30.40%	TRUE	14.8	TRUE	12%	FALSE
Ohio	18.30%	FALSE	12.5	TRUE	17%	TRUE
Oklahoma	26%	TRUE	7.3	TRUE	11%	FALSE
Oregon	13.30%	FALSE	2	FALSE	17%	TRUE
Pennsylvania	18.40%	FALSE	10.9	TRUE	15%	FALSE
Rhode Island	16.40%	FALSE	5.7	FALSE	7%	FALSE
South Carolina	31.40%	TRUE	2	FALSE	11%	FALSE
South Dakota	15.40%	FALSE	2	FALSE	11%	FALSE
Tennessee	21.60%	TRUE	15.8	TRUE	8%	FALSE
Texas	21.30%	TRUE	12.2	TRUE	24%	TRUE
Utah	9.40%	FALSE	1.2	FALSE	10%	FALSE
Virginia	30.60%	TRUE	18.6	TRUE	23%	TRUE
Vermont	5.80%	FALSE	1.4	FALSE	10%	FALSE
Washington	21.50%	TRUE	4	FALSE	16%	TRUE
Wisconsin	13%	FALSE	6.4	TRUE	16%	TRUE
West Virginia	6.50%	FALSE	3.7	FALSE	28%	TRUE
Wyoming	7.50%	FALSE	0.9	FALSE	16%	TRUE

Table 1: A table showing the % POC and the competitiveness score for each state, as well as whether or not each state has metrics considered to be significant. Based on data from 2020-21

Table 2: Voter Suppression Index

State	Total_Score	Voter_ID	Felon_Disfranchisement	Ballot_Harvesting	Vote_by_Mail_Application_Due_Date	Sunday_Voting	Pre-Registration_for_minors	Voter_Roll_Purges	Ban_Snacks_and_Water_to_Those_Waiting_in_Line_to_Vote	Early_Voting	Voter_Registration_Method	Polling_Place_Hours
Alaska	7	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Alabama	16	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	0	2	2	3
Arkansas	15	2	1	0	1	2	2	2	0	0	2	3
Arizona	13	2	0	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	2
California	5	0	1	0		1	0	1	0	0	0	2
Colorado	8	1	1	0		2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Connecticut	11	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	2	0	1
Delaware	7	1	0		1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Florida	12	1	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	3
Georgia	16	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	3	3
Hawaii	9	1	1			2	0	1	0	0	1	3
Iowa	10	1	0	0		2	1	2	0	0	2	2
Idaho	13	1	1		2	2	2	0	0	0	2	3
Illinois	7	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	2
Indiana	15	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	2
Kansas	15	2	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	3	3
Kentucky	13	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	0	1	2	3
Louisiana	10	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	2	1
Massachusetts	8	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2
Maryland	7	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Maine	10	0	2	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	3
Michigan	11	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	2
Minnesota	10	0	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	2
Missouri	15	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	2	2	2
Mississippi	14	2	0		0	2	2	1	0	2	2	3
Montana	12	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	2

North Carolina	11	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	3
North Dakota	10	2	1	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	3
Nebraska	13	0	1	0	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	3
New Hampshire	14	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	0	1	1	4
New Jersey	9	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	0	2	1
New Mexico	14	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	2	3
Nevada	10	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
New York	5	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
Ohio	15	2	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	0	2	4
Oklahoma	12	1	1	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	2	3
Oregon	3	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pennsylvania	11	0	1	0	1	2	2	0	0	1	2	2
Rhode Island	12	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	0	1	2	2
South Carolina	14	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	0	1	0	3
South Dakota	13	1	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	3
Tennessee	10	2	0	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	0
Texas	15	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	0	0	2	3
Utah	9	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	2	2
Virginia	11	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	2	3
Vermont	11	0	2	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
Washington	5	1	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Wisconsin	12	2	1	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	2
West Virginia	12	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	2	2
Wyoming	12	2	0	0	1	2	2	1	0	0	1	3

Table 2: A voter suppression index measuring the suppressive nature of all 50 states across various criteria based on data from 2020-21.

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