

Estimating the Effect of Voter ID on Nonvoters in Wisconsin in the
2016 Presidential Election

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Questions and Answers about the Voter ID Study

How did you arrive at the 9,001 and 16,801 figures?

According to data from the Wisconsin Elections Commission, there were 748,777 votes cast in Milwaukee and Dane County in the 2016 presidential election, out of 948,402 registrants on election day (from WisVote), leaving 229,625 nonvoting registrants. We estimate that 34.7% of these nonvoters were actually ineligible to vote in county, almost all of whom had moved to another state or to another address in Wisconsin outside of Dane or Milwaukee County, had died, or had been convicted of a felony, leaving 159,010 eligible registrants. The survey showed that 11.2% of respondents were deterred from voting, with the top end of the 95% confidence interval at 15.5%. 11.2% of 150,010 is 16,801. 6% were prevented from voting, which translates to 9,001 voters.

Why did you do a mail survey instead of a phone survey?

The statewide database of registered voters (WisVote) does not have phone numbers for all registered voters. It does have a mailing address for everyone. Using mailing addresses was the only way to create a random sample in which all nonvoters had the same probability of being selected, subject to the oversampling of low SES Census tracts.

Do you know who the nonvoters would have voted for?

No. The voter histories in WisVote record only whether someone cast a ballot. Because the study was funded by the Dane County Clerk, it would have been inappropriate to ask any questions about partisanship or vote preferences.

You estimated the number of people in Milwaukee and Dane Counties who were deterred from voting because of Voter ID. Do you know how many people statewide were affected?

No. The sample was drawn from nonvoting registrants in Dane and Milwaukee Counties. The estimate of the effect applies only to the total number of registrants there who were deterred from voting because of Voter ID. The 11.2% figure cannot be directly extrapolated statewide, because we do not know how people outside of Dane or Milwaukee Counties would have answered the questions about their reasons for nonvoting or whether or not they possess a qualifying form of photo ID. The statewide totals outside of Dane and Milwaukee are certain to be greater than zero, but we cannot assume that the effect was the same, 11.2%.

Couldn't people have lied about their reasons for not voting, saying that Voter ID was a reason when it really wasn't?

The survey question asking about reasons for nonvoting has been used for over 30 years by the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, and has been validated by peer-reviewed academic work. The percentages we calculated are consistent with prior research on the effects of voter ID. We are confident that the data are an accurate representation of the underlying effects, given the uncertainties inherent in polling.

Isn't your sample too small to know what the effect was on the population?

There were 229,625 nonvoting registrants in Dane and Milwaukee Counties. A sample size of 293 (the number of people who returned the survey) is large enough to generate accurate estimates of the overall effect. All surveys have a margin of error, and we take it into account in our analysis of the results. For most of the topline questions the margin of error this survey is about plus or minus 3-4% (the actual margins depend on the percentages in each question).

Why would someone say that voter ID was a reason for not voting if they actually possessed a qualifying form of ID?

Previous research has demonstrated that many voters are confused by Voter ID laws. Some people who don't possess the right ID may not realize it and give another reason for not voting, and some people who do might mistakenly think that their ID doesn't qualify (because, for example, they incorrectly believe that their drivers license must show their current address for them to use it to vote). About a third of the respondents said they had not seen information about the voter ID requirements during the campaign.