

Who Participates in Local Elections? Evidence From Current Population Survey

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Local elections have had historically low participation rates in the United States. Knowing who participates in local elections is important because it will allow democracy scholars to better understand whose interests are being represented in local governing bodies and explain how and why local governing bodies make the decisions they do. I use binary logistic regression analysis on survey responses from the U.S. Census Bureau's September 2021 Current Population Survey Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement to analyze self-reported participation regarding demographic characteristics and state-level election policies. This paper finds that age, gender, education, race, homeownership, and family income are all important predictors of participation in local elections. Likewise, this paper finds that all mail elections and Same Day Registration have strong, statistically significant effects on local-level voter turnout, voter ID laws have a counterintuitive effect, the length of early voting periods has a small but statistically significant effect, and Automatic Voter Registration and direct democracy processes have no statistically significant effects on participation in local elections.

Keywords: voter turnout, local government, political institutions, election administration, public policy

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, the West Chicago Library Board held a vote on whether to remove an LGBTQ+ children's book from their collection following complaints from a socially conservative family. At the library board meeting, nearly 150 activists from both sides showed up to voice their concerns. The board voted 6–1 to retain the book in their collection.¹ However, each library board member had been elected to their positions in elections with less than 20 percent voter turnout, and many of them were elected with only around 15 percent voter turnout. Had only a couple hundred more voters participated in those elections, the composition of the board, and the subsequent vote on the fate of the LGBTQ+ children's book could have been completely different.

The low voter turnout in the elections of the West Chicago Library board members is not an isolated phenomenon. Local elections, those that take place from the county-level down, have had historically low participation rates in the United States. Previous studies have found that turnout in city council elections, one of the higher levels of local government, on average is half that of national elections, with some cities consistently seeing their turnout rates in city elections at only a quarter of the voting age population (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003). The barriers to participation at the local level are numerous, including a lack of media coverage of local politics (Hopkins, 2018), the use of nonpartisan ballots (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003), and the fact that many local elections are not held in concurrence with national elections (Anzia 2013, Hajnal 2009).

Conversely, local government itself differs from the national level for a variety of reasons, namely the small electorates that each local office is accountable for and the comparatively niche purviews that each office has—library boards oversee the functions of the public library, school boards oversee public education within the local school district, and mosquito abatement districts oversee the removal of mosquitoes within a community. Likewise, unlike Congress and the Presidency, governing bodies at the local level commonly are un-professionalized, meaning that many of these local offices are part-time. This makes elected officials generally much more accessible for the average citizen to get in contact with at the local level because there is not as much of a barrier to entry to meet with a local-level elected official as there is for a higher level of government elected official.

But the lack of participation and institutional barriers present does not mean that nobody at all participates in local elections—*voters consistently participate in local elections*. It is important to study participation at the local level because of the outsized influence that the voters who do turnout have on the local decision-making process. Local politics matter because local offices are responsible for many public services and goods. These public services and goods include: the maintenance of roads, public transportation services, access to clean drinking water, K–12 public schools, community colleges, mosquito control, fire departments, police departments, libraries, healthcare services, and general infrastructure, among many others. The decisions made by these offices are dependent on who is put into office, which is dependent on who turns out to vote.

However, understanding who participates in local elections through a demographic analysis only addresses part of the question. How easy it is to turn out to vote, or how restrictive voting laws are, may play an important role in determining who turns out to vote in local elections. Subsequently, this paper seeks to bridge this divide by analyzing the demographic characteristics of voters and the voting laws of the states where they live. This paper contributes to the ongoing research on participation in local elections by validating pre-existing research regarding key demographic variables and offering new insights into the effectiveness of state level election policy on local level turnout.

Using binary logistic regression analysis on survey responses from the U.S. Census Bureau’s September 2021 Current Population Survey Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement, I analyze self-reported participation in local elections of any kind about the following demographic variables: age, gender, education, race, homeownership, and family income; and the following election policy variables: voter ID laws, Same Day Registration, Automatic Voter Registration, direct democracy policies, all mail elections, and length of early voting periods. This paper proceeds in the following way: I briefly review the literature and theory on voter participation in local elections. Next, I present my data and methodology in detail. Finally, I present the results of my analyses and offer concluding remarks, with suggestions for future research on participation in local elections.

PARTICIPATION, DEMOGRAPHICS, AND STATE-LEVEL ELECTION POLICY

Demographic Characteristics of Local Election Voters

While a significant portion of the research on participation in elections has been conducted at the national level, the research which has been conducted at the local level has revealed some important findings regarding the demographic composition of voters. Older residents generally dominate participation at the local level. Participation in local level school tax referenda, for instance, has been dominated by elderly voters, something which has been attributed to the timing of these specific elections (Kogan et al, 2018). In the suburban context, older voters have similarly been observed to have higher levels of interest and participation in local politics (Oliver and Ha, 2007). This trend has likewise been observed in local government meeting participation—residents who are most likely to participate in local government meetings are older, as well as male, longtime residents, participants in local elections, and homeowners (Einstein et al, 2019). And at the national level, older voters consistently have participated in elections at significantly higher rates than younger voters, although there is some evidence that this trend may be changing in different, international contexts (Smets, 2012).

Looking at gender, there has historically been a gender gap in voter turnout. Following the implementation of the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, men participated in elections at higher rates than women, a trend that persisted for several decades (Welch, 1977). However, this turnout gap reversed in the 1980s, with women registering to vote and participating in elections at higher rates than men every year since 1980, except for 1994 (Center for American Women and Politics). These studies provide an important insight—that the impact of gender on political participation has changed over time.

As mentioned previously, one of the biggest barriers to participation in local elections is a lack of knowledge about local elections (Biesiada, 2018; Hopkins, 2018). This occurs for various reasons, the most important being a general lack of media coverage on local level politics (Hopkins, 2018; Peterson, 2021). Intuitively, this would suggest that those with higher levels of education may have developed the civic skills necessary to acquire knowledge of local-level elections and issues (Brady et al, 1995). While the existence of a causal relationship between education and participation in elections more broadly has been called into question in recent years (Ahearn et al, 2022), numerous studies have demonstrated that those with higher levels of education participate at higher rates in elections than do those with lower levels of education (Leighley and Nagler, 2013; Hauser, 2000).

One of the most significant trends observed in local elections relates to the racial composition of the voters who do in fact turnout. Hajnal (2009) finds that white voters generally participate at higher rates in local elections than nonwhite voters. However, in sub-regions with higher concentrations of nonwhite residents, nonwhite voters often surpass white voters' turnout rates. This latter phenomenon has been similarly noted in other studies. Bobo and Gilliam (1990) demonstrate that Black voters in high Black-empowerment areas, which they define as areas where Black people have achieved significant political representation and influence, are more socio-politically active than are Black voters in low-empowerment areas and white voters of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, Barreto et al. (2004) find that Latino voters are more likely to participate in elections when they reside within a majority-Latino district, and conversely find that non-Latino voters are less likely to participate in elections when they reside within a majority-Latino district.

Several studies have looked at the role of homeownership and participation in local politics. As stated previously, one of the characteristics of those who are most likely to participate in local government meetings are that they are homeowners (Einstein et al, 2019). Homeowners and long-term residents alike are more likely to be interested in and informed on local politics and, subsequently, more likely to participate at the local level (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). And when controlling for length of residence within a suburban community, Oliver and Ha (2007) found homeownership to be an important predictor of participation in local level elections.

Finally, there is evidence that income may play a role in who participates at higher rates in local elections. One of the earliest studies on income and voter participation found median family income to be a significant predictor of participation in Congressional elections (Silberman and Durden, 1975). Looking at civic engagement more broadly, Brady et al. (1995) find that income and access to financial resources are all important predictors of political participation. More recently, Akee et al. (2020) found evidence that increases in unearned income increase the likelihood that children living in households receiving cash transfers will be more likely to participate in elections as adults.

Regarding demographics, I expect that local-level trends in participation will mirror those of observed participation at the national level. Specifically, I expect that older voters, women, voters with higher levels of education, white voters, homeowners, and voters with higher levels of income will be more likely to participate at the local level.

State-Level Election Policy and Voter Turnout

The voters' demographic characteristics only address a part of the question regarding who participates in local elections. The state level election policies under which these local elections are operated are important to consider because the laws may either make it easier or more difficult for voters to participate in local elections. What follows is a brief review of existing literature on turnout and state level election

policy, specifically regarding: voter ID laws, Same Day Voter Registration, all mail elections, early voting periods, Automatic Voter Registration, and direct democracy policies.

One of the most widely discussed state level election policies regarding voter turnout in the United States is voter ID laws. Simply put, voter ID laws require voters to present certain types of identification forms to be able to cast their votes. These laws can range from not requiring any form of identification all the way to strictly requiring a photo ID, such as a driver's license. These types of laws are controversial because of the perception that they can depress voter turnout. As Highton (2017) states: "because not all registrants have this type of identification document (ID), it is possible that these laws might lower turnout, and do so disproportionately among those for whom the burden is greater." However, studies on the effects of voter ID laws on voter turnout have found mixed results. Highton's review of the literature on voter ID laws specifically found only moderate effects on turnout and small differences across a variety of different demographic groups. Hershey (2009) finds mixed evidence in her literature review: voter ID laws can depress turnout amongst voters from lower socioeconomic statuses, but this relationship is much more ambiguous regarding nonwhite voters. These discrepancies in the literature may be due to a null effect of voter ID laws, the coupling of Voter ID laws and other types of state level election policy, or, as Grimmer et al. (2018) note, national datasets themselves may be ill-suited to observe any trends in the effects of voter ID laws on voter turnout.

Another barrier to voter turnout is that many jurisdictions require voters to register to vote. In a comparison of Ohio and New York counties which did and did not require voters to register to vote, Ansolabehere and Konisky (2006) found that there was a significant drop in voter turnout in the counties which did require voter registration in comparison to the counties which did not. However, two popular types of state level election policies have been implemented in a variety of states to make it easier to register to vote: Same Day Registration, which allows voters to register to vote on election day, and Automatic Voter Registration, which registers voters to vote whenever they come in contact with a government agency, typically with the Department of Motor Vehicles. Several studies have found that Same Day Registration does increase voter turnout, for voters at large (Brians and Grofman, 2001) and for younger voters (Grumbach and Hill, 2022), and that Same Day Registration may be taken advantage of the most by Republican voters (Neiheisel and Burden, 2012). For Automatic Voter Registration, the effects are much more ambiguous. Garnett (2022) found no statistically significant relationship between Automatic Voter Registration and voter turnout, McGhee et al. (2021) find that Automatic Voter Registration increases voter turnout even though a significant portion of the new registrants do not end up voting, and Kim (2022) found that a variation of Automatic Voter Registration, automatic reregistration, which targets existing registered voters, increases turnout by 5.8 percentage points.

Within the literature, the effectiveness of all mail elections on increasing voter turnout is fairly consistent from a broad view (Southwell and Burchett, 2000). However, there are some discrepancies regarding whose turnout is increased. Karp and Banducci (2000) find that all mail elections increase participation in traditionally low turnout elections, although this increase in turnout is mostly amongst those who are already predisposed to participate in elections more generally. Other studies, however, have found an opposite effect, both regarding registered, infrequent voters Gerber et al. (2013), as well as voters not predisposed to participate: those who are younger, hold blue-collar jobs, have lower levels of education, or are people of color (Bonica et al. 2021).

Another popular election reform that has gained traction recently is the implementation and expansion of early voting periods. The effectiveness of the policy has been mixed as to how great of an impact early voting periods have on voter turnout, although the literature largely agrees that, at the very least, there is a small increase in turnout related to early voting periods. Kaplan and Yuan (2020) find a 0.22 percentage point increase in additional turnout per additional day of early voting. Fullmer (2015) finds that early voting site density plays a greater role in increasing voter turnout than does the effect of having an early voting period at all. Finally, while Gronke et al. (2007) find a small but significant increase in turnout related to early voting periods, they conclude that the greater benefits of having such a policy lie with the increased administrative ease of operating elections rather than voter turnout itself.

Finally, direct democracy processes, including initiatives and popular referenda, have shown limited promise to increase voter turnout, although there are some discrepancies to this claim in the literature. Smith (2001) finds that highly salient popular referenda increase voter turnout in midterm elections, but not in presidential election years. Childers and Bender (2016) find a similar effect, specifically finding that initiative elections have the greatest effect on voter turnout, while uncompetitive legislative referenda and popular referenda do not. While Cebula (2008) finds that initiatives and referenda have no effect on voter turnout, Tolbert et al. (2001) find that such processes do increase voter turnout.

Regarding state-level election policies, I expect that some state-level election policies will have greater impacts on voter turnout than others. Specifically, I expect that the policies with the greatest consensus within the literature regarding their effectiveness in increasing voter turnout—Same Day Voter Registration, All Mail Elections, and length of early voting period—will all be predictors for greater voter turnout at the local level. Regarding the state level election policies which have more ambiguous results regarding their effectiveness in increasing voter turnout—voter ID laws, Automatic Voter Registration, and direct democracy policies—I expect all of these to similarly be predictors for greater levels of voter turnout at the local level.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

I used the data collected from the September 2021 Current Population Survey Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement.² The United States Census Bureau conducts this survey every two years, and released the 2021 results in January 2023, making this dataset the most recent available for analysis. All data was downloaded from the Census Bureau’s website. Among numerous demographic questions, the survey asked respondents to answer the following question: “[In the past 12 months,] did [you/[NAME]] vote in the last local elections, such as for mayor or school board?” The responses to this question are used as the dependent variable of analysis.

While the national survey contains 127,873 respondents, I follow the CPS instructions to use the subset of data representing all eligible voters who completed the survey. This left me with 41,450 responses for analysis. Additionally, I follow the CPS instructions for weighting the dataset to ensure that any conclusions I draw are generalizable. All CPS instructions for the dataset are available on the CPS website.

Looking at demographic characteristics, I include data for each respondent on the following: age, gender, highest level of education attained, race, homeownership, and family income. Due to low amounts of responses for specific demographic categories, I recoded the education demographic responses to fall under one of eight categories: “Less than high school,” “Some high school,” “High school diploma or equivalent,” “Some college no degree,” “Associate degree,” “Bachelor’s degree,” “Master’s degree,” and “Professional school or doctorate;” and I recoded the family income responses to fall under one of ten categories to account for low amounts of responses for income categories on the lower end of the spectrum as recorded in the original dataset: “\$0–\$9,999,” “\$10,000–\$19,999,” “\$20,000–\$29,999,” “\$30,000–\$39,999,” “\$40,000–\$49,999,” “\$50,000–\$59,999,” “\$60,000–\$74,999,” “\$75,000–\$99,999,” “\$100,000–\$149,999,” and “\$150,000+.” Finally, I recoded race and homeownership as binary variables: “White” and “Non-white;” and “Homeowner” and “Non-homeowner,” respectively.

Likewise, given that many election policies regarding ballot access are made at the state level, I controlled for the following state level election policies in my analysis: the type of Voter ID law that a state has, if any; whether or not the state has Same Day Voter Registration; whether or not the state has automatic voter registration; whether or not the state conducts their elections entirely by mail; whether or not the state has a direct democracy process; and how many days a voter has to participate in the election, including early voting periods. The appendix contains a list of the states with their respective state-level election policies that were implemented by or before Jan. 1, 2021. Analyzing state level election policy allows me to see whether any observed effects on voter turnout at the local level may be attributable to the varying degrees of ease that the respondents may have regarding access to the ballot. While the number one predictor of voter participation in local elections has been observed to be whether or not local elections are held on the same day as national ones, I was unable to include this as a control—because primary, general,

and special local elections can happen both in-sync with national elections as well as off-cycle in every state, there was no way to determine whether a respondent’s most recent local election they could have participated in was in-sync with a national election.

I use binary logistic regression analysis in Model 1 to test whether the following categories of variables significantly predicted self-reported participation in local elections: age, gender, highest level of education attained, race, homeownership, and family income, and controlled for the presence—or lack—of voter ID laws, Same Day Voter Registration, Automatic Voter Registration, all mail elections, length of early voting period, and direct democracy policies. Additionally, I run separate analyses for the following: Model 2 analyzes the demographic variables without the state level election policy control variables, and Model 3 looks solely at the state level election policy control variables.

RESULTS

TABLE 1
LOGISTIC REGRESSION OUTPUT TABLE FOR ALL THREE MODELS WITH ODDS RATIOS

<i>Predictors</i>	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>std. Error</i>	<i>OR</i>
(Intercept)	-2.69 ***	0.15	0.07	-2.64 ***	0.14	0.07	0.44 *	0.11	1.55
Homeowner	0.26 **	0.03	1.29	0.24 **	0.03	1.27			
Family Income	0.10 ***	0.00	1.10	0.10 ***	0.00	1.11			
Age	0.02 ***	0.00	1.02	0.02 ***	0.00	1.02			
Gender	-0.05 ***	0.00	0.95	-0.05 ***	0.00	0.95			
Education	0.26 ***	0.01	1.30	0.26 ***	0.01	1.30			
Race	0.02	0.01	1.02	0.01	0.01	1.01			
Hispanic	-0.20 **	0.03	0.82	-0.18 **	0.02	0.84			
Voter ID	-0.01	0.00	0.99				-0.04 *	0.01	0.96
SDR	0.12 ***	0.01	1.13				0.11 ***	0.01	1.11
Mail	0.24 ***	0.01	1.27				0.25 ***	0.00	1.28
Early	0.00 *	0.00	1.00				0.00 ***	0.00	1.00
AVR	0.02	0.02	1.02				0.06 *	0.02	1.07
Direct Democracy	0.00	0.01	1.00				-0.05 **	0.01	0.95
Observations	41450			41450			41450		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

Table 1 provides a detailed breakdown of the regression analyses for all three models. Model 1 looks at all independent and control variables; Model 2 looks solely at the demographic variables; and Model 3 looks solely at the state level election policy variables. I ran separate regression models for each category

of independent variables, alongside the model including all of the independent variables, to identify if any set of variables had a significantly stronger effect compared to any other variables, which could skew the results of Model 1. Included for each of the models are the odds ratios for each variable, which were calculated using a function in RStudio.

Model 1 provides support that most of the independent variables within each category are statistically significant. Age was a powerful predictor of participation: one's likelihood to participate in local elections increases by 2 percentage points each year they grow older. This remains consistent when excluding the state level election policy control variables. Similarly looking at gender, there was a slight gap in participation rates between women and men. When looking at both Model 1 and Model 2, men were 5 percentage points less likely to participate in local elections than are women.

Additionally, there was a slight gap regarding race. In Models 1 and 2, white voters were 2 percentage points more likely to participate in local elections than were non-white voters. However, the relationship between race and local election participation was statistically insignificant. However, what was statistically significant was the relationship between Hispanic ethnicity and local election participation. Hispanic voters were 18 percent less likely to participate than non-Hispanic voters in Model 1, and 16 percent less likely in Model 2.

Regarding education, there was a relatively consistent relationship between education-level and participation in local elections across Models 1 and 2. As one's education level increases, their likelihood of participating in local elections increases by 30 percentage points. Moving towards homeownership, homeowners were 29 percent more likely to participate in local elections than non-homeowners in Model 1, and 27 percent more likely in Model 2. Finally, regarding family income, in both models, there was a 10 percentage point increase in participation as one's family income level increased by one level of income in Model 1, and an 11 percentage point increase in Model 2.

Turning towards state level election policy, the effects of each policy on voter turnout at the local level varied significantly. For voters in states which conduct all mail elections, Model 1 suggests a 27 percentage point greater likelihood of participation than for voters in states which do not. In Model 3, this was a 28 percentage point difference. Similarly, residents of states which offer Same Day Voter Registration saw a 13 percentage point greater likelihood of participation in local elections in Model 1, and a 11 percentage point greater likelihood in Model 3.

The length of early voting period has a statistically significant, albeit small, effect on local election participation. In Model 1 there is a 0.1 percentage point increase in the likelihood of participation in local elections per each additional day available to vote early. In Model 3, this is a 0.3 percentage point increase per additional day of early voting.

However, not all state-level election policies had statistically significant effects. Voter ID laws, automatic voter registration and the use of direct democracy policies were each statistically insignificant variables in both models, and similarly had little, if any, percentage point difference between voters who reside in states with these policies and voters who do not.

DISCUSSION

One of the key implications of this paper is the significance of demographic variables in determining participation in local elections in comparison to the mixed effects observed regarding state level election policies that determine key aspects of potential voters' experiences at the ballot box. Age, gender, and Hispanic ethnicity were all important predictors of participation in local elections, and the trends observed generally fall in line with existing research on participation in elections. Age alone is a powerful predictor—there was a 2 percentage point greater likelihood of participation in local elections between each individual year. This is similar to existing research which shows that older voters are more likely to participate in elections than are younger voters. There was likewise a gender gap, as men were 5 percentage points less likely to participate in local elections than were women. Finally, the gap in voting between Hispanic and non-Hispanic voters was significant, with Hispanic voters being 18 percentage points less likely to participate.

What was surprising regarding demographics was the statistically insignificant effect of race. This may indicate discrepancies within the dataset itself, or additional barriers to participation for different racial and ethnic groups that exist at the national level. However, one finding that may be hidden beneath the aggregate level is participation rates within different metropolitan areas with greater concentrations of nonwhite voters. Future research should analyze specific cities, regions, and neighborhoods to build upon existing race and participation theories.

As discussed previously, access to resources, both financial and informational, have been studied to affect participation at the national level. It was subsequently no surprise that education, homeownership, and family income were all significant predictors of participation in local elections. The 30 percentage point gap in likelihood to participate in local elections between each of the education levels is significant given that one of the greatest barriers to participation at the local level is an access to knowledge about local level politics. Homeowners, who had a 29 percentage point greater likelihood of participation in local elections than did non homeowners, and family income, which had a 10 percentage point gap in likelihood to participate between each of the income levels, are similarly related to one another given that those with higher levels of income are more likely to be homeowners. These two variables speak to the resources needed to overcome the barriers to participation in local level elections. Future research should likewise focus on the intersections between different variables regarding access to economic and educational resources and services, both those that voters have themselves as well as those that the community may provide.

Counter to initial expectations, not all state level elections policies were important predictors of participation in local elections. Whether or not a state had all mail elections was the most powerful predictor of any of the state level election policy variables—voters in states which have all mail elections were 27 percentage points more likely to participate in local elections than were voters in states which do not conduct their elections entirely by mail. One limitation of this variable is that only 5 states within the dataset conducted their elections entirely by mail at the time the survey was conducted. Since January 1, 2021, when the survey was conducted, 3 additional states have made the switch to conduct their elections entirely by mail. Future research should re-analyze the effect that all mail elections have on local level election participation with these new states.

Same Day Registration proved to be the second most impactful predictor of participation in local elections. Voters in states that offer Same Day Registration were 13 percentage points more likely to participate in local elections than were voters in states that do not. This is sharply in contrast to Automatic Voter Registration, which is the other most common state level election policy that has the goal of easing the effects of registration requirements on voters. Automatic Voter Registration was not a statistically significant variable, and likewise saw no difference in likelihood of participation in local elections for voters in states which do and do not have this policy in place. Future research should focus on local level efforts to ease voter registration requirements, such as the frequency of community voter registration drives and the publication of online voter registration resources.

Like previous research, there was a small but statistically significant relationship between the length of a states' early voting period and participation in local elections. Specifically, there was a 0.1 percentage point increase in the likelihood that a voter would participate in local elections per each additional day of early voting available. This is important to note, as the length of early voting days within this dataset ranged from 1, which was only offering voting on election day, to 47 days. Future research should focus on parsing out the effects of the length of early voting days in different contexts, both for state and local level elections and for special, off-cycle local elections.

Voter ID laws presented a unique challenge, as there was no statistically significant relationship between the types of voter ID laws a state has and local election participation. There are several possibilities for why this could be the case. In line with Grimmer et al. (2018), national datasets like the Current Population Survey may be ill-suited for analyzing the effects of voter ID laws. Or there may simply be an overall null effect of voter ID laws on voters. Future research should further investigate the effects of voter ID laws, both at a national level as well as with hyperlocal case studies.

Finally, the lack of an effect that direct democracy policies had on voter turnout in local elections was like that of some research but differed from others as the effects of direct democracy policies on voter turnout at large is an ongoing debate. Within this dataset specifically, direct democracy policies were statistically insignificant and had no discernible effect on participation in local elections. Future research should look further at the role that direct democracy policies could have regarding participation in local elections, such as comparing voter turnout in elections that feature city and county-specific initiatives and referenda and elections that do not.

Who participates in local elections is an important question for further research because those who do participate have an outsized influence on the decision-making processes in local governing bodies. This outsized influence will continue to grow more important as the local level becomes increasingly more salient for ongoing debates regarding social, political, cultural, and economic issues. Researchers should keep this in mind as they continue to expand our knowledge on participation and inequality in U.S. elections more broadly.

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ENDNOTES

1. McCoppin, R. (2017). West Chicago Public Library denies request to remove gay pride book. *The Chicago Tribune*. <https://tinyurl.com/y926v5hb>
2. All data is available from the U.S. Census Bureau. <https://tinyurl.com/44z3kr2u>

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APPENDIX

Below is a list of the different state level election policies used as control variables in the analysis, as well as how each state was coded within the dataset. All states were coded regarding whether they had the state level election policy in place on January 1, 2021—eight months before the CPS survey was conducted—and all information was gathered from the National Conference of State Legislatures.

- ID - Does the state have any type of voter ID law? (NCSL)
 - 1 = No document required to vote
 - CA, DC, IL, ME, MD, MA, MN, NE, NV, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OR, PA, VT
 - 2 = Non-strict non-Photo ID
 - AK, CO, CT, DE, HI, IA, KY, NH, OK, UT, VA, WA, WV
 - 3 = Non-strict Photo ID
 - AL, FL, ID, LA, MI, MT, RI, SC, SD, TX
 - 4 = Strict non-photo ID
 - AZ, ND, WY
 - 5 = Strict photo ID
 - AR, GA, IN, KS, MS, MO, OH, TN, WI
- SDR - Does the state offer same day voter registration? (NCSL)
 - 0 = No
 - 1 = Yes
 - CA, CO, CT, DC, HI, ID, IL, IA, ME, MD, MI, MN, MT, NV, NH, NM, NC, UT, VT, WA, WI, WY
- Mail - Does the state conduct their elections entirely by mail? (NCSL)
 - 0 = No
 - 1 = Yes
 - CO, HI, OR, UT, WA
- Early - Does the state offer any type of early voting period? (NCSL) = # of days of the early voting period + 1 [for election day]
 - 1 = AL, CT, MS, NH
 - 4 = KY
 - 5 = OK
 - 8 = FL, LA
 - 9 = GA, NY
 - 10 = DE
 - 11 = DC, WV
 - 12 = UT
 - 13 = HI
 - 14 = MA, TX, WI
 - 15 = NV, SC

- 16 = AK, AR, CO, ND
- 18 = NC
- 19 = ID, OR, WA
- 21 = IA, KS, RI
- 22 = MD
- 25 = AZ
- 26 = TN
- 27 = NM
- 29 = IN, MO
- 30 = CA, OH
- 31 = MT, NE
- 41 = IL, MI, WY
- 43 = ME
- 44 = VA
- 45 = NJ, PA
- 46 = VT
- 47 = MN, SD
- AVR - Does the state offer automatic voter registration?
 - 0 = No
 - 1 = Yes
 - AK, CA, CO, CT, DC, GA, HI, IL, MD, MA, MI, NJ, NM, NV, OR, RI, VA, VT, WA, WV
- DD - Does the state offer a direct democracy process of any kind?
 - 0 = No
 - 1 = Yes
 - AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, ID, ME, MD, MA, MI, MO, MT, NE, NV, NM, ND, OH, OK, OR, SD, UT, WA, WV