

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Lessons from the Voter ID Experience in Georgia

*Hans A. von Spakovsky*

The latest data compiled by the Secretary of State of Georgia, Brian Kemp, about the state's experience with voter ID once again shows that the claims by opponents of voter ID are wrong.

Contrary to their assertions that there are large numbers of American voters without a government-issued photo ID, Georgia has had to issue a remarkably small number of IDs to individuals who did not already have one. The state's specific turnout data on racial minorities also shows that the claim that voter ID will "suppress" their vote lacks any foundation in facts.<sup>1</sup>

**Georgia's Experience.** In 2007, Georgia began requiring voters who cast their ballots in person to present one of six forms of acceptable photo ID. The law was precleared by the U.S. Department of Justice after

it found that the law was not discriminatory and met the applicable legal standard under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.<sup>2</sup>

The acceptable forms of ID include:

- A Georgia driver's license, even if expired, or a Georgia photo voter ID card;
- Any state or federal government-issued photo ID (which includes a student ID issued by the Georgia state college system);
- A U.S. passport;
- An employee photo ID from any branch or department of the federal government or Georgia state or local government;
- A U.S. military photo ID; or
- A tribal photo ID.

Not only did Georgia provide an extensive education program to make voters aware of the photo ID requirement, but the new law also provided a free photo ID to any voter who needed one that could be obtained from their local

county voter registrar or the Georgia Department of Driver Services. In fact, the state conducted a state-wide, multimedia education campaign prior to six elections between September 2007 and the November 2008 general election. That included sending out over 5 million pieces of direct mail and utility bill inserts to individual voters, as well as 633 packages of 57,000 brochures and other materials to chambers of commerce, churches, libraries, and other nongovernment organizations all over the state.

The state also ran over 60,000 radio public service announcements (PSAs) and 1,232 video PSAs that ran during newscasts, traffic reports, and Atlanta Braves games. Home games of the Atlanta Falcons football team even featured end-zone-to-end-zone LED banners directing fans to the state's website for more information on the voter ID requirement, and 400 ads were placed on buses operated by the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority.

It must be kept in mind that when the ACLU, the NAACP, and other organizations filed their ultimately unsuccessful suit in federal court against Georgia over its new photo ID law, one of their specious claims

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**The Heritage Foundation**  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 | [heritage.org](http://heritage.org)

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TABLE 1

### Georgians Obtaining Photo Voter ID Since 2006

Year	Photo Voter ID Cards Issued	No. Registered Active Voters	% Registered Voters
2006	2,182	4,410,738	0.05%
2007	4,229	4,440,506	0.095%
2008	12,332	5,265,606	0.23%
2009	2,473	5,010,903	0.05%
2010	2,683	5,820,148	0.046%
2011	2,071	5,771,080	0.035%
2012 (Jan.-Feb.)	536	5,804,812	0.009%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,506</b>		

**Sources:** Brian P. Kemp, Georgia Secretary of State, "Voting with Photo Identification," PowerPoint presentation made at the Conservative Leadership Conference of the Civitas Institute, March 2, 2012; and Georgia Secretary of State, Active Georgia Registered Voters, at <http://sos.georgia.gov/elections/charts/frames/totalvoters.html> (March 16, 2012).

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was that "a large number of Georgia voters lack acceptable Photo ID." The federal judge ultimately dismissed the lawsuit in part because the plaintiffs were unable to provide any evidence to substantiate those claims or "uncover anyone 'who can attest to the fact that he/she will be prevented from voting'" by the photo ID requirement.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, opponents of voter ID continue to

claim that there are large numbers of Americans who lack a photo ID.

So how many Georgians have gone to the state to obtain a photo voter ID card because they did not already have a driver's license or one of the other types of photo ID card acceptable under Georgia law to vote? Over the six years that the voter ID law has been in place, the state has issued a grand total of only

26,506 voter ID cards. The information reported by the Secretary of State is outlined in Table 1.

The number of photo IDs issued by Georgia to individuals who did not already have one of the forms of ID acceptable under state law is remarkably small, averaging less 0.05 percent in most years, and not even reaching three-tenths of 1 percent in a presidential election year. Georgia's actual experience matches other data, such as a survey conducted by American University of registered voters in Maryland, Indiana, and Mississippi. It found that less than 0.5 percent of respondents had neither a photo ID nor citizenship documentation.<sup>4</sup> A 2008 election survey of 12,000 registered voters in all 50 states found fewer than nine people who were unable to vote because of voter ID requirements.<sup>5</sup> This completely contradicts the unsupported claims of voter ID opponents that there are hundreds of thousands of voters in every state who do not have a photo ID or the claims of the Brennan Center that "as many as 11% of United States citizens ... do not have government-issued photo IDs."<sup>6</sup>

Georgia's experience with minority voters also directly refutes the

1. See also Hans A. von Spakovsky and Alex Ingram, "Without Proof: The Unpersuasive Case Against Voter Identification," Heritage Foundation *Legal Memorandum* No. 72, August 24, 2011, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/08/without-proof-the-unpersuasive-case-against-voter-identification>; and Hans A. von Spakovsky, "Voter Photo Identification: Protecting the Security of Elections," Heritage Foundation *Legal Memorandum* No. 70, July 13, 2011, at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/07/voter-photo-identification-protecting-the-security-of-elections>.
2. Section 5 is a special provision of the Voting Rights Act that applies only to nine states—Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia—and parts of seven other states. It requires covered jurisdictions to obtain "preclearance" of any change to their voting laws either from the Department of Justice or from a federal court in the District of Columbia by showing that the proposed change does not have the purpose, or will not have the effect, of diminishing the ability of any citizens on account of race, color, or inclusion in a language minority group to elect their preferred candidates of choice.
3. *Common Cause of Georgia v. Billups*, 504 F.Supp.2d 1333, 1380 (N.D. Ga. 2007).
4. Robert Pastor et al., "Voter IDs Are Not the Problem: A Survey of Three States," Center for Democracy & Election Management, American University, January 2008, at <http://www.american.edu/spa/cdem/upload/VoterIDFinalReport1-9-08.pdf> (March 18, 2012).
5. Michael Alvarez et al., "2008 Survey of the Performance of American Elections," 2008. A 2006 survey of more than 36,000 voters found only "23 people in the entire sample—less than one-tenth of 1 percent of reported voters" who were unable to vote because of an ID requirement. Stephen Ansolabehere, "Ballot Bonanza," *Slate*, March 16, 2007.
6. Vishal Agraharkar, Wendy Weiser, and Adam Skaggs, "The Cost of Voter ID Laws: What the Courts Say," Brennan Center for Justice, New York University School of Law, 2011.

TABLE 2

### Georgia Voter Turnout, by Racial Group, 2004 and 2008

Voter Demographic	2004 Total Votes Cast	2008 Total Votes Cast	Percentage Increase
Hispanic/Latino	18,000	43,000	140%
Black	834,000	1.2 million	42%
White	2.3 million	2.5 million	8%

Source: Brian P. Kemp, Georgia Secretary of State, "Voting with Photo Identification," PowerPoint presentation made at the Conservative Leadership Conference of the Civitas Institute, March 2, 2012.

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TABLE 3

### Georgia Voter Turnout, by Racial Group, 2006 and 2010

Voter Demographic	2006 Total Votes Cast	2010 Total Votes Cast	Percentage Increase
Hispanic/Latino	11,600	19,000	66.5%
Black	513,700	741,000	44.2%
White	1.6 million	1.7 million	11.7%

Source: Brian P. Kemp, Georgia Secretary of State, "Voting with Photo Identification," PowerPoint presentation made at the Conservative Leadership Conference of the Civitas Institute, March 2, 2012.

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claims that voter ID laws somehow prevent racial minorities from voting. Keep in mind that Georgia's photo ID requirement was not in place in the 2004 presidential election or the 2006 mid-term congressional elections. The law was first effective in the 2008 presidential election and the 2010 congressional elections, although Georgia has actually had at least 40 state and federal elections since September 2007 when the law became effective, not including

municipal and county elections. More than 15 million votes have been cast in those elections.

According to the Secretary of State, the turnout of black and Hispanic voters is outlined in Table 2.

The increase in turnout of both Hispanics and blacks in the 2008 presidential election after the voter ID law became effective is quite remarkable, particularly given the unproven and totally speculative claims of the Justice Department

that the voter ID requirements of Texas and South Carolina will somehow have a discriminatory impact on Hispanic and black voters.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Georgia had the largest turnout of minority voters in its history.

Georgia had the same exemplary experience in the 2010 congressional election, as outlined in Table 3.<sup>8</sup>

The large increase in turnout of Hispanic and black voters in the 2008 and 2010 federal elections far outpaced the growth rate of those populations in Georgia over a 10-year period. The U.S. Census reports that from 2000 to 2010, the Hispanic population in the state grew 96.1 percent while the black population grew by only 25.6 percent.<sup>9</sup>

#### A Common-Sense Reform.

In both federal elections held in Georgia since its voter ID became effective, the increase in turnout of Hispanic and black voters dwarfed the increase in turnout of white voters. As shown by these data—as well as the fact that federal and state courts in Georgia dismissed lawsuits filed against the Georgia voter ID law that had claimed it was both unconstitutional and discriminatory—voter ID requirements can be easily met by almost all voters and do not have a discriminatory or disparate impact on racial minorities. Georgia's experience also shows that the number of voters who do not already have an acceptable photo ID is very small.

Requiring photo IDs is a common-sense election reform. The latest Rasmussen polling shows that it is

7. The Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department objected to South Carolina's voter ID law on December 23, 2011, and to Texas's voter ID law on March 12, 2012, under Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.  
8. Because turnout is generally lower in midterm congressional elections than in presidential elections, it is important when comparing turnout to use the same type of election.  
9. U.S. Census 2010, Georgia, at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/data/> (March 18, 2012). The white population grew by only 8.6 percent.

supported by 72 percent of likely voters.<sup>10</sup> The Justice Department and other outspoken opponents of voter ID should stop standing in the way and allow states to implement reasonable and demonstrably nondiscriminatory laws that are intended to ensure the integrity and security of the election process.

—*Hans A. von Spakovsky is a Senior Legal Fellow in the Center for Legal & Judicial Studies at The Heritage Foundation. He is a former Commissioner on the Federal Election Commission and the former Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Justice.*

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10. Rasmussen Reports, “56% Oppose Justice Department’s Blocking of Texas Voter ID Law,” March 15, 2012, at [http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public\\_content/politics/general\\_politics/march\\_2012/56\\_oppose\\_justice\\_department\\_s\\_blocking\\_of\\_texas\\_voter\\_id\\_law](http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/general_politics/march_2012/56_oppose_justice_department_s_blocking_of_texas_voter_id_law) (March 19, 2012).