

Data Brief: Are Voter ID Laws Racist?

Posted on Twitter on June 30, 2023

We asked nearly 3,000 Americans to tell us whether requiring an ID to vote is a racist practice.

Since 2008, over 30 US state legislatures have considered passing laws that would require people to have an ID card to vote [1]. Today, eight states have such laws and another 27 require an ID card or an equivalent proof of identity (such as bank statements, utility bills or signed affidavits) [2].

Many activists, including prominent academics, believe requiring an ID card is a racist practice meant to prevent racial minorities from voting in elections.

Franita Tolson, vice dean for faculty and academic affairs and a law professor at the University of Southern California, for example, testified to the US Senate in 2021 that, "...these requirements have an ugly history... Voter identification laws and proof of citizenship requirements, although facially neutral, mimic the disenfranchising efforts of the pre-Voting Rights Act era...the [white] majority often takes steps to prevent minority groups from effectively utilizing their political power..." [3].

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) insists that voter ID laws are discriminatory because racial minorities are less likely to have an ID [4]. They claim that racial minorities less often have IDs because IDs cost money (~\$125), because obtaining an ID requires gathering documents (e.g., birth certificate) and because traveling to obtain an ID requires transportation. The ACLU further cites some data suggesting up to 13% of black Americans lack a photo ID.

Others disagree that voter ID laws are discriminatory; they argue that it is patronizing and condescending to presume racial minorities are incapable of obtaining \$125, a birth certificate and a mode of transportation. From their perspective, the ACLU's position is simply another example of the "soft bigotry of low expectations" [5]. Moreover, they suggest, voter ID laws are beneficial, potentially contributing to the perceived legitimacy of elections.

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Glenn Loury , an economics professor at Brown University, for example, argues that, “[If] I want people, as I would if they were opening a bank account or getting on an airplane, to present a valid ID before I let them cast the ballot, and I’m quite prepared to help anybody and everybody get it, to assume that my motivation is racist, I think, is slanderous,” [6].

In our study, most people did **not** agree that voter ID laws are racist, with one exception: those identifying as “Very Liberal.”

Share your interpretation of this data with us!

[1] [aclu.org/issues/voting-...](https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-...)

[2] [spreadthevote.org/voter-id-states](https://www.spreadthevote.org/voter-id-states)

[3] [judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/...](https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/...)

[4] [aclu.org/documents/oppo...](https://www.aclu.org/documents/oppo...)

[5] [educationnext.org/teachers-shoul...](https://www.educationnext.org/teachers-shoul...)

[6] glennloury.substack.com/p/loury-vs-mcw...

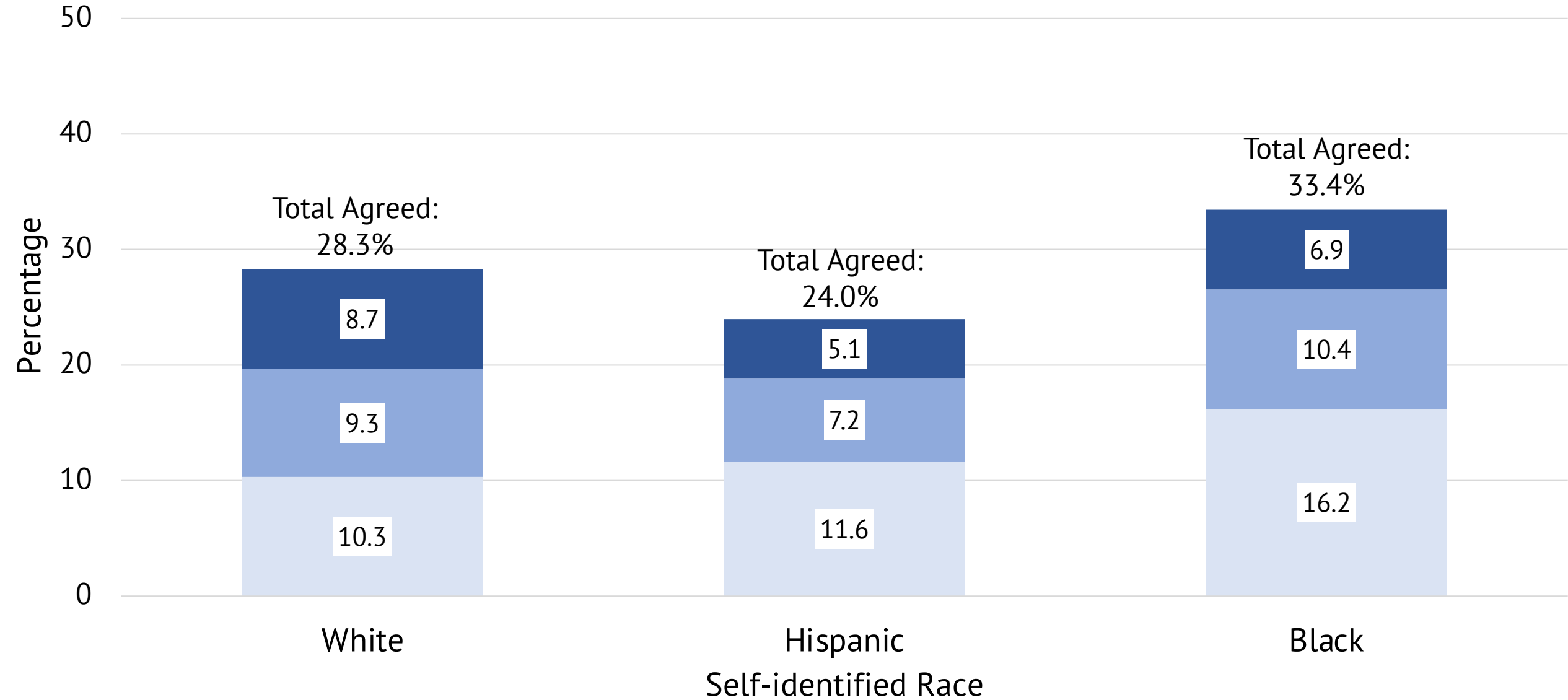
1. <https://www.aclu.org/issues/voting-rights/fighting-voter-suppression/fighting-voter-id-requirements>
2. <https://www.spreadthevote.org/voter-id-states>
3. <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Tolson%20Testimony1.pdf>
4. <https://www.aclu.org/documents/oppose-voter-id-legislation-fact-sheet>
5. <https://www.educationnext.org/teachers-should-replace-the-soft-bigotry-of-low-expectations-with-the-suspension-of-disbelief/>
6. <https://glennloury.substack.com/p/loury-vs-mcwhorter-voter-supression>

"Requiring an ID card to vote is a racist practice"

Agreement by Race

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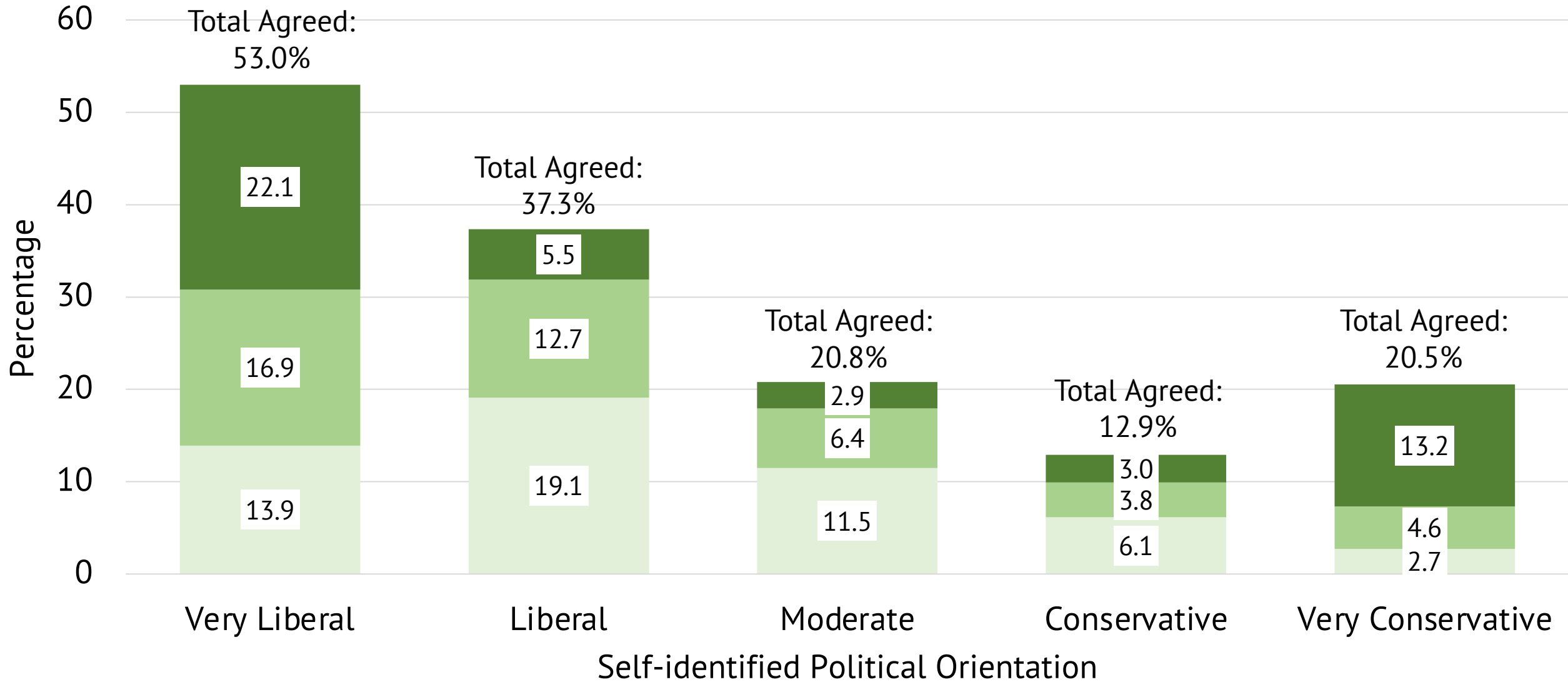
■ Somewhat Agree ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



"Requiring an ID card to vote is a racist practice" Agreement by Political Orientation

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"Requiring an ID card to vote is a racist practice" Agreement by Generation

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